Neo-characterisation of the female protagonist in John Fowles's The french lieutenant's woman (1969), Michel Faber's The crimson petal and the white (2002) and Sarah Waters's Fingersmith (2002)

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THÈSE

En vue de l'obtention du
DOCTORAT DE L'UNIVERSITÉ DE TOULOUSE
Délivré par l'Université Toulouse 2 - Jean Jaurès

Présentée et soutenue par

LILIA LOUATI

Le 16 septembre 2022

Neo-Characterisation of the Female Protagonist in John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), Michel Faber's *The Crimson Petal and the White* (2002) and Sarah Waters's *Fingersmith* (2002)

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Laboratoire CAS (Cultures Anglo-Saxonnes)

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Le 16 septembre 2022

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Dedication

In memory of my late aunt and grandfather whose eternal love for the arts has instilled in me a lasting passion for literature.

Olfa and Ali Baklouti, this is for you!

Introduction

Towards the second half of the twentieth century, emerged a literary and artistic tradition based on the revival of all that is Victorian. General consensus contends that the productions of this nascent neo-Victorian practice resemble, revitalise and are reminiscent of Victorian culture between the 1860s and the early nineteenth century, hence the prefix neo-. Tracing the origin of neo-Victorianism, Christian Gutleben concurs with Matthew Sweet (xvii), Sarah Edwards and Heilmann and Llewellyn (8)[1] and argues that "neo-Victorianism is then already (or also) a modernist practice, which has been pursued, developed and perfected by postmodernism" (Gutleben 2015: 224). He precisely goes as far as to praise the "persistence or permanence of the movement", for the "neo-Victorian impulse has survived into the twenty-first century" (Gutleben 2015: 224). Neo-Victorian fiction then manifests of a long-standing tradition of literature in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries which revisits the nineteenth-century.

The manifold attitudes as to the definition of neo-Victorianism also touch on the investigation of its motivations and objectives. In fact, neo-Victorianism may be considered as an aesthetic and literary practice which combines Victorian aesthetics with modern perspectives in order to revisit, reinterpret and reconstruct the past. Indeed, a number of authors re-created the Victorian past in their fiction using narrativity by reproducing similar settings, along with historicity through the depiction of actual facts of the time like Cholera, the Crimean war, the invention of photography, the discovery and study of fossils, the death of the Queen among many others. Kate Mitchell in her book *History and Cultural Memory in Neo-Victorian Fiction: Victorian Afterimages* (2010) aptly makes an inventory of the various techniques by which neo-Victorianists revisit the Victorian past. The first is the allusion to or re-invention of Victorian writers in novels such as Peter Ackroyd's *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde* (1983) and Colm Tóibín's *The Master* (2004) which tell the life of Henry James. Another practice is the re-creation of Victorian characters in Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs* (1997) "which explores the character of Magwitch from Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* (1860–1)", and Emma Tennant's *Tess* (1993) "which imagines a lineage for Thomas Hardy's Tess from *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891)". Another tendency is the re-writing of Victorian novels like Valerie Martin's *Mary Reilly* (1990) "which reworks *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) from the perspective of a housemaid", and Carlo Fruttero and Franco Lucentini's novel

[1] Sweet, Matthew. *Inventing the Victorians*. London: Faber, 2001.

Edwards, Sarah. "The Rise and Fall of the Forsytes: From Neo-Victorian to Neo-Edwardian Marriage." *Neo-Victorian Families: Gender, Sexual and Cultural Politics*. Eds. Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben. *Neo-Victorian Series* 2. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2011. 197-220.

Heilmann, Ann, and Marc Llewellyn. *Neo-Victorianism: The Victorians in the Twenty-First Century, 1999-2009*. Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

The D Case: The Truth About The Mystery of Edwin Drood (1989) "in which fictional detectives, such as Sherlock Holmes, attempt to solve the mystery of Charles Dickens' unfinished novel *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*". Another trend is the completion (prequel/ sequel/ paralellquel) of Victorian novels like in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) "which explores the shadowy figure of Bertha Mason, both central to and marginalised" in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Emma Tennant's *Adele* (2003) "which shifts the narrative focus to Rochester's daughter" (Mitchell 2010: 2).

If, by their length, their themes and their popular success, neo-Victorian novels weave obvious links with their Victorian counterparts, they also subtly differ from them in order to mobilize the Victorian prism to rethink the post-modern world. Thus, the neo-Victorian genre is mainly interested in informing the past by means of its return to the Victorian era borrowing its setting, context and cultural aspects, inspired by Victorian stylistic and aesthetic aspects of Victorian fiction. Thus, it follows from this emphasis on the factual dimension that neo-Victorianism is often compared to the genre of historical fiction, and very often defined as a subgenre of historiographic metafiction, an association which further establishes the link between the two genres in terms of their relation with the past. Furthermore, terms such as 'memory' and 'nostalgia' are often prominent in discussions of neo-Victorian fiction, which again closely links the genre to historical fiction. For example, Graham Huggan argues that "the commodification of memory" is among the functions of historiographic metafiction adding that "historical consciousness has been eroded by nostalgia" (Huggan 2007: 61). One of the questions this study will aim to answer is the following: to what extent is this "looking back" on and to the past, an expression often repeated by Mitchell to point out one of the primary functions of neo-Victorian fiction, politicized and highly engaged with ideology?

Though Gutleben accepts neo-Victorianism's "versatile, changeable and adaptable properties" (Gutleben 2015: 224) as one of the reasons behind its persistence in the twenty-first century, this same quality poses a problem as to the attempts to restrict the genre. In fact, the proximity between historical and neo-Victorian fiction makes the distinction a rather challenging task. For instance, though Andrea Levy is usually associated with historical fiction, and particularly with war stories, Gutleben considers that narrativizing the colonial history of Jamaica and representing the "traumatic historiography" of slavery aligns her novel with the neo-Victorian tradition. Such consideration further widens the scope of neo-Victorian fiction and blurs the boundaries with historical fiction. Furthermore, the critic posits

> Admittedly, to consider *Cloud Atlas* as a neo-Victorian novel might seem inappropriate or restrictive, but, as Celia Wallhead and Marie-Luise Kohlke have convincingly demonstrated, the neo-Victorian frame of the novel "could be said to 'haunt' the rest of the novel, resurfacing continuously like the return of the repressed or an involuntary flashback to an originary traumatic scene" (217). (Gutleben 2015: 226)

Read in this light, haunting becomes a technique to allude to the past, and so legitimizes the consideration of David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004) a neo-Victorian novel. What follows from Gutleben's list of 'Four Tentative Neo-Victorian Answers' is an axial question: what novels are to be considered neo-Victorian?

Both Mark Llewellyn and Ann Heilmann contend that "the text [has] to display a metafictional and metahistorical concern with the process of narrating/ re-imagining/ re-visioning histories, and [has] to be self-conscious about its own position as literary or filmic reconstruction" (Llewellyn and Heilmann 2013: 24). Furthermore, neo-Victorianism can easily be associated with archiving, for the neo-Victorian genre by definition, revisits Victorian archives and re-collects traces of history. When asked about the historicity of his novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), John Fowles admits having recourse to various Victorian sources:

> (…) the reason it turned historical may be that I have collected Victorian books all my life. I have a poor academic knowledge of the age, but I do know quite a lot about the byways of Victorian life just because I happen to collect Victorian books. So I didn't have to do much research, although I did have that very useful book by E. Royston Pyke, *Human Documents of the Victorian Golden Age*, which in my opinion is the best of all anthologies about the nineteenth century. Another thing which I used a great deal was *Punch*. *Punch* was a great magazine in Victorian times, and that does all your work for you: you get your food details from it, and all your clothes details, and a lot of dialogue. (Campbell 1976: 464).

Michel Faber's technique is a bit different, especially considering the time lapse between both authors, for he relies heavily on the Internet. In an interview, he notes: "I found the Internet especially helpful. In particular, a Listserv I belong to. (…) Just anything that you wonder about,

somebody out there has written a book about it or knows exactly where to find the info" (Faber 2002a: n.d.). Indeed, the digital advances have allowed Faber to diversify his sources for he adds:

> A lot of these scholars are working with dusty old tomes. But they have access to information. That's something that's really new with people writing historical fiction. Because you used to be bounded by what you yourself had managed to find in your local libraries or what you had thought of researching. But when you're a member of an Internet site like this you're getting like 30 e-mails a day about all sorts of topics to do with the 19th century and that in itself is interesting. (Faber 2002a: n.d.)

Faber has turned into an archiver in order to write *The Crimson Petal and the White* (2002). Thus, it is possible to suggest that neo-Victorian productions ultimately constitute contemporary archives of the nineteenth-century. Barbara Braid even goes as far as to note that neo-Victorianism may be metaphorically read as "a heterotopic and heterochronic archive of the spectres that rarely stay buried in their narrative tombs" (Braid 2022: 1), for neo-Victorian productions revive the nineteenth-century "thus pinpointing the agency of neo-Victorian creators of texts as excavators of the buried past" (Braid 2022: 5).

The nomination 'neo-Victorianism' inherently weaves an inextricable link with the Victorian period, and evidently with the British context. Thus, one may wonder whether this phenomenon is purely British or has managed to cross the geographical boundaries of Great Britain. Although I will not attempt to take on the whole range, for a survey of all neo-Victorian novels may prove to be an impossible task, a closer look on the scholarly attention to and academic articles on neo-Victorian fiction leads to the conclusion that authorship is not exclusively, though predominantly, British. Kate Mitchell's above-mentioned list enumerates English, Irish, Australian, American and Caribbean novelists, thus foregrounding the link between neo-Victorianism and the British Empire, and the subsequent Commonwealth of Nations. Gutleben's list features three British names and a Dutch-born novelist. In her 2022 article, Braid studies Audrey Niffenegger's *Her Fearful Symmetry* (2009) and Tracy Chevalier's *Falling Angels* (2001) as neo-Victorian novels. Interestingly, Niffenegger and Chevalier are American, though the latter is American-British. Such diversity not only features the genre's allure to a non-British authorship and readership, but also its openness to a multitude

of perspectives. What makes the neo-Victorian tradition highly appraised and extremely appealing?

Two modes of production stand out in particular in neo-Victorianism: the novel and visual adaptations. Despite the increasing neo-Victorian scholarship on literature, little attention has been afforded to how poetry might (re)interpet, (re)discover and (re)vision the Victorian in ways that accord with or diverge from the workings of novels. For instance, John Morton examines how contemporary poets return to nineteenth-century poetry, as he considers the critically neglected work of Scottish poet Mick Imlah, and English poet Alan Hollinghurst drawing out the ways in which they expand the nineteenth-century model as they ventriloquise Tennyson (Morton 2013)[2]. In fact, fiction writing seems to be the dominant and most popular literary form in both neo-Victorianism and neo-Victorian studies. One may suggest that the secondary position poetry occupies in neo-Victorian literature may also be triggered by the tastes of contemporary readership. In contrast, the popularity of the novel may also mirror the same success it witnessed in the nineteenth century.

Neo-Victorian fiction developed, seizing a respectable position in the contemporary literary market, especially thanks to developments in marketing and publicity. Chris Louttit goes as far as to contend that "the marketing, cover-art and physical appearance of neo-Victorian texts has not been completely neglected by critics in this fast-developing field" (Louttit 2014: 107). Indeed, a number of critics of contemporary neo-Victorianism have directed their attention to the marketing of neo-Victorian fictions. In *Neo-Victorianism: The Victorians in the Twenty-First Century, 1999- 2009*, for instance, Heilmann and Llewellyn notably include illustrations of the covers of novels by Belinda Starling, Jane Harris, Barbara Chase-Riboud and Diane Setterfield. Louttit notes that "[t]he authors' discussion of the striking cover-art produced for Starling's *The Journal of Dora Damage* (2007) and Harris's *The Observations* (2006) is representative of its sensitivity in handling the material as well as aesthetic features of texts" (Louttit 2014: 106). In a similar vein, Louisa Hadley also touches upon the appearance of neo-Victorian novels and notes that attention given to "the marketing of neo-Victorian fiction" not only "emphasizes its connection to Victorian fiction, [but] often encourages readers to view it as a replica of Victorian fiction" by publishing covers with "images which clearly identify the texts as concerned with the Victorian era, such as the Pre-Raphaelite images on the cover of *Possession*" (Hadley 2010: 141/142). Indeed, it seems that the focus on the pleasurable aspect of the book cover reflects a greater interest in its materiality.

[2] Morton, John. ""No one remembers you at all": Mick Imlah and Alan Hollinghurst Ventriloquising Tennyson". 2013. Neo-Victorian Studies 6:1 (2013) pp. 22-40

As Kiene Brillenburg Wurth, Sara Rosa Espi and Inge van de Ven have noticed, "since the 1990s, authors have […] gone back to books and paper. They have reinvented the literary as a hybrid genre that hovers between the verbal and the visual, and foregrounds its paper-based 'analogue' materiality" (Brillenburg Wurth, Espi and van de Ven 2013: 93). Ultimately, some critics claim that neo-Victorian fiction as "made-up' fiction is reserved for entertainment" (Mitchell 2010: 15), once again echoing the Victorians' desire "to be entertained with what was familiar, to pretend that what was found in books did really happen, that literature was journalism and fiction was history" (Radu 2021/2022). Though such argument highlights the entertaining dimension of neo-Victorianism, it equally foregrounds its commercial aspect and may injure the respectability of the genre.

Besides this thirst for entertainment, new printing technologies have undeniably facilitated quick and cheap dissemination of images—illustrated books, periodicals, cartoons, comics, and ephemera—to a mass readership. This Victorian visual turn prefigured the present-day impact of the Internet on how images are produced and shared, both driving and reflecting the visual culture of its time. Molly Clark Hillard notes that recently, "twenty-first century critical study has broadened the definition of neo-Victorian: now virtually any literary, filmic, or cultural text may signal our contemporary investment in Victorian modes, ideologies, and problems" (Hillard 2018: 780). Accordingly, Anna Maria Jones and Rebecca N. Mitchell's *Drawing on the Victorians* (2016) sets out to explore the relationship between Victorian graphic texts and today's steampunk, manga, and other neo-Victorian genres that emulate and reinterpret their predecessors. Furthermore, we notice an increasing interest in neo-Victorian adaptations which have gained an unprecedented popularity and success in the digital marketplace and online platforms among an eager viewership. Recent productions of neo-Victorianism on screen include Guy Ritchie's *Sherlock Holmes* films, TV series such as *Sherlock* (2010), *Ripper Street* (2012), *Whitechapel* (2009), *Murdoch Mysteries (2008)* and *Penny Dreadful* (2014), miniseries like *Alias Grace* (2017), and manga series like Naoko Moto's Japanese *Shōjo* series *Lady Victorian* (1998). Yet, quite curiously, Margaret D. Stetz claims that, as a promotional term, neo-Victorian is "largely unused by writers, readers, reviewers, librarians, or booksellers outside of academe" (Stetz 2012: 340). Indeed, seldom do we hear the label neo-Victorian in the contemporary market, for both critics and scholars often use the term 'contemporary'.

While I take Nadine Boehm-Schnitker and Susanne Gruss's focus on the relationship of mimicry and challenge between Victorian and neo-Victorian texts as a point of departure (Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss 2014), the core of this study is not simply the interfaces of

(dis)continuities between Victorian and neo-Victorian novels, but more importantly the characterisation of the female protagonist in contemporary sensation fiction. The aim is to investigate an aesthetics of neo-characterisation in neo-Victorian fiction. This project then, is broadly interested in studying character as a narrative component of the novel, and more specifically in analysing how female protagonists are constructed in neo-Victorian novels of sensation in John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), Michel Faber's *The Crimson Petal and the White* (2002), and Sarah Waters's *Fingersmith* (2002).

It seems highly important to explain the motivations that have driven me to study the interfaces of (dis)continuities between Victorian and neo-Victorian female protagonists. Central to the neo-Victorian genre and archetypal in its Victorian predecessor is the character. Thus, this study pays primary attention to the character, notably the female character and attempts to investigate it from different angles. Modern and postmodern theories of literature have repeatedly proclaimed the demise of author, character and even plot. When in 1965 W. J. Harvey wrote *Character and the Novel,* he devoted appendices to the "retreat from character" and the "attack upon character" (qtd. in Price 1989: 389). More recently, critics such as John Frow, Seymour Chatman, Willem G. Weststeijn and Roger C. Schlobin have recognized the continued decline of character these past decades, but they have also lamented a gap in critical thinking. Frow, for example, claims that "[t]he concept of character is perhaps the most problematic and the most undertheorized of the basic categories of narrative theory" (Frow 1986: 227). Jonathan Culler even goes as far as to note that

> Character is the major aspect of the novel to which structuralism has paid least attention and has been least successful in treating. Although for many readers characters serve as the major totalizing force in fiction – everything in the novel exists in order to illustrate character and its development – a structuralist approach has tended to explain this as an ideological prejudice rather than to study it as a fact of reading. (Culler 1975: 230)

Indeed, character has been thwarted with the rise of structuralism which reduced it to a narrative component. For example, G. Wilson Knight remarked in 1930, that "[t]he persons, ultimately, are not human at all, but purely symbols of a poetic vision" (Knight 1930: 16). In a similar vein, C. H. Rickword claims that "character is merely the term by which the reader alludes to the pseudo-objective image he [composes] of his responses to an author's arrangement" (Rickword 1933: 31). In this sense, character has been reduced to linguistic, artistic or rhetorical

phenomena. In modern criticism, characters no longer take a central position inside the text, but have been pushed to the periphery.

However, with the renewed interest in narratological studies over the past decades, as Alison Booth points out in a recent essay, "[c]haracter has had a revival" (Booth 2018: 119). Departing from Seymour Chatman's structuralist narrative model which focuses on the study of story and discourse and inspired by James Phelan's narrative model which includes other variables such as author and audience, Booth argues that characters need to be welcomed back and that the study of the narrative must consider different character typologies: round/flat, factual/fictional, authorial/characterial agency, the link between the realist dimension and type/individual among others. In other words, character is no longer to be regarded simply a being of paper, but an agency inside the narrative.

Furthermore, some thinkers like Chatman have frankly acknowledged that, for readers, character development is part and parcel of their reading experience. In their defence of character, they have blamed structuralism for its lack of interest in characterisation, for structuralism seems to have contributed to dissolving such ties. Indeed, some thinkers decisively dissolve the link between literature and the world, and between fiction and reality claiming that characters are mere literary, formal and thematic concerns. On this, Chatman concludes in *Story and Discourse*, "characters do not have lives; we endow them with personality only to the extent that personality is a structure familiar to us in life and art" (Chatman 1978: 138). Accordingly, defenders of the character like Chatman emphasize the link between art/ world, and fiction/ reality, through the process of identity formation and characterisation.

What follows from these remarks is a list of additional questions which this study will explore: What are the reasons behind the neo-Victorian revival of character? And what are the factors which may explain the endurance of character as a key component of neo-Victorian fiction? Furthermore, as previously argued, neo-Victorianism is often associated with a return to the past, hence, the multiple claims of its nostalgic tendencies. Accordingly, if neo-Victorian fiction simply retrieves Victorian characters, to what extent does nostalgia play a part in the process of recuperation? How much of it comes from a basic need for mimicry and repetition?

In the nineteenth-century, proliferated the genre of sensation fiction which appealed to a constantly-growing readership claimed to be essentially female. The sensation novel celebrated a female heroine, both rebellious and transgressive in her quest for subjective identity. Unsurprisingly, such incompliant character did not gain much critical appreciation and thus, the genre was severely critiqued for its amorality and looseness. This type of character

may well be one of the motivations behind its resurrection more than a century later. I take as a point of departure Kelly Marsh's claim that a wave of 'neo-sensation' emerged in the late 1980s and 1990s, a neo-literary tradition which traces plot similarities with Victorian sensation. Accordingly, the selected neo-Victorian novels of this corpus may initially be read as neo-sensations which equally put the female character at the centre, a heroine much like her predecessor: both subversive and limitless. I argue that neo-Victorian novelists revisit the sensational past from a contemporary vantage point, supported by advances in diverse fields of literary studies around feminism, gender studies, and materialist studies, among many others. Thus, one may wonder what role gender plays in the characterisation of the female protagonists of such novels. In other words, to what extent is neo-characterisation a re-visitation of the past for the sake of exploring a future of empowerment for the female protagonist?

Furthermore, while studying the Victorian female protagonist, one cannot but stop at the New Woman figure of the *fin-de-siècle* which shocked both readers and critics and brought about an enticing yet, controversial debate around sexuality which put to the fore the 'Sex Question'. In fact, one may suggest that the sensational protagonist developed into a New Woman heroine who exhibited an even more transgressive voice which spoke up her sexuality and called for a total liberation from heteronormative patriarchy. Since the neo-Victorian novel is interested in the Victorian character, the questions of how, why and for what objectives the two Victorian literary traditions most often associated with female emancipation – the sensation novel and the New Woman novel – are mobilised in the novels of this corpus, legitimately arise.

Because of its investment in characterisation, neo-Victorian fiction provides a good testing ground for theories of character. In my research, I build on Weststeijn's argument that contemporary fiction is primordially constructed around character, for various reasons that may be ideological, didactic, or aesthetic. If character plays a crucial role in the neo-Victorian text, it also constitutes its main appeal for many readers. In fact, the proximity between reader and character is deliberately strengthened through various authorial devices so that, as Marie-Laure Ryan notes, "once we become immersed in fiction, the characters become real to us, and the world they live in momentarily takes the place of the actual world" (Ryan 1991: 21). Indeed, not only are neo-Victorian protagonists highly complex and varied, but character identification and character formation are major aspects of neo-Victorian novels. Female neo-Victorian characters in particular offer new role models and values to contemporary readers and thus contribute to a new form of 'heroinism' to use Ellen Moers' term – an expression of literary feminism. This may be one of the reasons why neo-Victorian fiction derives much of its inspiration from the subversive nineteenth-century genre of the sensation novel. As Sally

Shuttleworth points out, in neo-Victorian fiction "the presiding genius seems less George Eliot and more Wilkie Collins" (Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss 2014: 182).

Towards the end of the century, the New Woman character not only became more transgressive, but engaged in a quest for a liberated independent identity: sexual, artistic, financial, and so on. These same motivations can be noted in the neo-Victorian character who no longer hesitates to cross the boundaries once put in place by Victorian patriarchy. Thus, we read the contemporary New Woman seeking freedom from masculine control, pursuing her literary vocation for financial independence, and exploring the potential her body has to offer. Thus, one may wonder what role more recent fields of study like materialist studies and phenomenology for example, have played in the construction of a new more corporeal female identity.

This study is centred on the female character in the neo-Victorian novel. To this end, the primary corpus under study is composed of three neo-Victorian novels: John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), Michel Faber's *The Crimson Petal and the White* (2002), and Sarah Waters's *Fingersmith* (2002). The secondary corpus which is wider comprises a number of Victorian novels published between 1860 and 1900. The choice of the primary corpus was partly driven by generic and stylistic motivations, since this study will explore to what extent the above-mentioned novels may be broadly considered revisitations of the Victorian tradition and particularly sensational novels. It is worthy of note that the intertextual link between Victorian and neo-Victorian fiction by no means presupposes a general artistic aesthetics bringing the two subgenres together. Thus, the aim of this study is both to test and challenge the initial idea about the continuum between Victorian and neo-Victorian fiction. Furthermore, a brief overview of Victorian literature serves to detect one mode of neo-Victorian rewriting of the Victorian: the re-presentation of Victorian thematic concerns from modern and contemporary perspectives. It follows that the choice of the corpus of this study is partly driven by the same motives as the three novels to be studied, illustrate common thematic links between the Victorians and the neo-Victorians. In addition, the three novels I have selected are woman-centric, which would allow me to discuss the question of the neo-Victorian female character. Finally, my choice of corpus basically relies on a comprehensive survey of the neo-Victorian genre from its emergence to the contemporary era. John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* which is considered by many to be among the genre's foregrounding works is published in 1969. More recently, Michel Faber's *The Crimson Petal and the White* and Sarah Waters's *Fingersmith*, both published in 2002, have declared themselves to be part of this literary genre. Both the time gap between the novels and the choice of works written by both male and female

scholars are stimulated by a desire to trace the evolution and variations of the genre from its early beginnings to more recent works of fiction.

Though this study is at the crossroads of Victorian and neo-Victorian studies, the primary corpus under study is but a limited part of a vast genre. Thus, one may wonder what place these novels occupy in the literary and critical landscape of neo-Victorianism. A second question which arises is what place these novels occupy in the production of each of these authors. John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* witnessed an unprecedented and unexpected success, especially since the author himself confessed having suffered from depression for not being able to publish some of his earlier works, notably a travel book, and disappointment as well for not winning the Booker Prize. It is one of his six major novels, and the only one set in the Victorian period. His other works comprise mystery novels, *Bildungsromane*, reworkings of myths and existential questionings. Similarly, Michel Faber's *The Crimson Petal and the White* is his only neo-Victorian novel, for his other works include science fiction, and mystery novels. Though it was generally well received by critics, Kathryn Hughes particularly called it "supremely literary" and described the quality of the writing as "dizzyingly accomplished" (Hughes 2002: n.d.). Waters on the other hand, is a bit more accustomed to the neo-Victorian tradition in comparison to the other two novelists. In fact, *Fingersmith* is the third and last novel in the neo-Victorian tradition to-date. It was preceded by *Tipping the Velvet* (1998) and *Affinity* (1999), both set in the Victorian period. Though *Fingersmith* was shortlisted for the Booker Prize and the Orange Prize, Waters revealed that "[she] wanted a change from the 19th century; [she] felt like [she]'d got to the end of a cycle of interest and so deliberately wanted to move period to see what would happen to [her] writing" (Waters 2006: 117). And so, her later novel *The Night Watch* (2006) leaves the Victorian era behind and is set in the 1940s.

The success of these novels may entail a broad audience. As Anne Reus suggests, "As a popular genre, the Neo-Victorian speaks to (and for) a wide readership" (Reus 2020: n.d.). Indeed, John Fowles admits having "a large international readership" (Campbell 1976: 461), about whom he cares deeply. He confesses: "Readers' letters I do regard. You can tell from them far more accurately than you can from the critics whether there is something there" (Barnum and Fowles 1985: 191). Relying heavily on reader reception, he is particulary interested in knowing "how the book is actually seen and read by a wide range of people, from university professors to lonely housewives" (Barnum and Fowles 1985: 193). Similarly, Faber goes as far as to voice his insistence on sharing a relationship of trust with his readers in an interview with Peter Wild:

> I do want readers to trust me. And yet I don't want to offer them a safe, predictable ride. (…) I want to earn the reader's trust while remaining unpredictable. I take the reader to some dark and emotionally uncomfortable places but never just for the sake of it. And I do care about how you're feeling on your journey. Many people have remarked on how readable and engaging they found *The Crimson Petal* despite its great length. That wasn't accidental. I thought very carefully about how to keep the reader intimate and awake. (Faber 2002b : n.d.)

When asked in an interview about the type of readers to whom she writes her novels, Sarah Waters notes

> (…) if I'm imagining a reader at all, it is somebody with a similar collection of interests to me; which is someone who is a big reader, because the books often have references, either semi-submerged or more overt, to other novels, or perhaps to other traditions of writing, because a novel like *Fingersmith* was very deliberately written in the tradition of the Victorian novel of sensation, and *The Night Watch* invokes 1940s British Wartime fiction as a kind of backdrop. So, I suppose I'm imagining a reader who will 'get' that (though that's not to say you couldn't read the book in a completely different way). (Waters 2006 : 117)

Seen from Waters's perspective, neo-Victorianism demands a well-informed readership because of its inextricable link with the nineteenth-century literature and culture which is elucidated by the text itself. In a similar vein, Fowles describes his readers as a ""compound familiar ghost", to quote Eliot"" emphasizing this proximity between author and reader (Barnum and Fowles 1985: 193). By means of these neo-Victorianists' testimonies, it is possible to conclude then that neo-Victorian novelists are rather very careful about their readership's tastes and preferences. This concern about readers may explain the three novels' international success as books and their subsequent adaptations on screen: Fowles's novel inspired a movie in 1981, Waters's, a serial for BBC One in 2005 and Faber's, a serial in 2011, thus foregrounding the inextricable link between paper and image in a constantly-digitalized contemporary world.

As previously mentioned, what brings these novelists together in my choice of corpus is not only the similarities in their plots, but also the focus they put on the female protagonist who is at once a Victorian heritage and a neo-Victorian innovation. While neither resembles the other, this thesis argues that they share the same tendencies to breaking with some Victorian models of stereotypical women. In fact, even though Sarah in Fowles's text and Sugar in Faber's represent the figure of the fallen woman – a quite renowned symbol in Victorian representations of womanhood – to varying degrees, the innovation of their characterisation lies in the way they evolve throughout the narrative journey. The former is transformed into a symbol of an approaching new age and nascent modernist values. The latter tests the roles of novelist, governess and a mother-figure as maternalism eventually proves to be a culminating force in the construction of an empowered identity. In addition, these neo-Victorian novels shed a different light on female sexuality that has for so long been condemned to be a source of impurity and amorality. In fact, the texts allow the protagonists the narrative space in which sexuality is to be treated differently by highlighting its potential in their liberation. In Waters's text, Maud and Sue as two lesbian protagonists, prove to be literary means to shed light on the quite debated and controversial phenomenon of lesbianism in the Victorian age. Ultimately, each of the three novels under study devises a particular means for identity construction for its female protagonist. While John Fowles opts for different forms of freedom, narrative, existential and social, for his protagonist to symbolise the turn of the age and the changing values, Michel Faber investigates the potential of motherhood as an innate capacity which allows women to encompass the people around them, and establishes a new model of female bodily relationships based on mutual nurture and protection. Sarah Waters re-writes lesbianism by allowing it to become a space for her protagonists not only to discover their lesbian identities, but also to voice their sexual desires and promote a female-friendly erotic discourse which breaks with male patriarchal pornography.

To analyse the female protagonists of this neo-Victorian corpus, I will adopt an eclectic methodological approach insofar as my study draws on several theoretical tools. For the study of the relationship between Victorian and neo-Victorian novels, this thesis adopts a principally qualitative approach to study the previously mentioned neo-Victorian novels. This study focuses on studies of genre, notably postmodern theory marked by stylistic conventions such as imitation, parody, intertextuality, and pastiche. Central to my theoretical approach is the concept of deconstruction, a key tenet in postmodern literature. For the study of character as a narrative component, my investigation will make use of structuralist, post-structuralist theory and feminist narratology in order to track the evolution of character from the nineteenth

throughout the twenty-first centuries, and to consequently demonstrate its central position in the novel in neo-Victorian fiction. I will principally construct my research around ideas by contemporary thinkers such as Willem Weststeijn, Seymour Chatman, David Herman, and Roger C. Schlobin to name a few. Aided by their critical thought, I will argue that Sarah in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, Sugar and Agnes in *The Crimson Petal and the White*, and Sue and Maud in *Fingersmith* are the backbone of the novels. Indeed, the neo-Victorian novel pays special attention to the characterisation of its female protagonists as it dramatizes their multi-dimensionality, their journey of maturity, and their psychological and emotional depth. As a result, female characters are complex narrative constructs which dictate how other characters evolve, the narrative moves forward and the plot is resolved.

My method to approach and discuss the female quest for selfhood and self-knowledge in neo-Victorian fiction is a comprehensive one, ranging from intertextuality and deconstruction to explore the interfaces of (dis-)continuities between neo-Victorian and early- and late-Victorian female characters, feminist and gender theories of Judith Butler, Marianne Hirsh, Julia Kristeva, Simone de Beauvoir, Adrienne Rich, Luce Irigaray, Nancy Chodorow and Elaine Showalter to dwell on woman's (gendered) role, feminist geography and its perspective on the inextricable link between female consciousness and physical space in the process of identity formation, to phenomenology – I draw in particular from Elizabeth Grosz's considerations of corporeality – by means of which I study the bodily experience of the female character through its senses. These theoretical notions illuminated my analysis of the female characters' process of identity formation in relation to the discourse of patriarchy.

Since neo-Victorianism has been highly criticized for simply bringing back the past and being outdated, the claim of this thesis is that character in neo-Victorian fiction returns in order to not only refute claims of its death, but also reject the contention of the repetitive dimension of neo-Victorianism and foreground the inextricable link between the Victorian and contemporary ages all the while signalling the fresh critical perspective. Thus, the first part of this thesis is centred on both genre and character. The first chapter presents an overview of the genre of neo-Victorianism, for it explains its emergence and attempts to situate it between historicism and fiction. It also investigates the (dis)continuities between neo-Victorian and Victorian sensation by means of a focus on strategies of imitation, adaptation and revision. Moving from the general to the specific, the second chapter is interested in the character. It first presents an overview of the history of rise and death of the character in the novel. Then, it approaches it as a narratological element, a combination of realist, modernist and postmodernist

techniques. Finally, it stops at the position of the female character with a focus on its genderization process.

It follows that the second part of this study focuses on the political engagement of the female character in relation to its matrilineal heritage from the vantage point of feminism. In the third chapter entitled "Feminist heritage: rewriting (*fictional*) female histories", I will turn my attention to exploring how the neo-Victorian female protagonists are closely linked to their matrilineal heritage, their Victorian foremothers, for they both recuperate and deviate from the Victorian type, in order to establish (alternative) female relationships. Chapter four entitled "Voice and Authorship" focuses exclusively on the female character's literary creativity and authorial capacities, for the neo-Victorian heroines of this corpus are to varying degrees linked to the notion of (authorial) voice. Thus, it proposes an analysis of multiple instances of the novels where the protagonists are seen as character-narrators and/or character-authors.

The third part of this thesis revolves around the materiality of the female body. The fifth chapter entitled "Writing the materiality of the body" is interested mainly in exploring how contemporaries have specifically accentuated the materialisation of the female body in the literary text in order to re-write it and allow it alternative potential(s). The sixth chapter of this thesis "Bodily subjectivity: a phenomenological and Somaesthetic approach to female bodily experience" is devoted to the study of material subjectivity focusing mainly on bodily experiences, be it sensorial, or affective. It also establishes the link between the senses of the female body and the senses of the reader. By means of this somaesthetic approach, I explore how the neo-Victorian novel pushes the contemporary reader to participate in the construction of the Victorian character by interacting with and reacting to her, and thus re-establishes the genre of sensation which flourished mainly to appeal to the senses of the reader.

Part I: Genre and Character

Chapter 1: The Neo-Victorian Novel, Historical Fiction and Sensation Literature

1. Neo-Victorian Fiction and Victorian Culture

As mentioned in the introduction to this study, neo-Victorianism is a relatively recent field and there is no consensus on its origin or the emergence of the label 'neo-Victorian' for that matter. Though Margaret Stetz claims that the term remains the least preferred term for it is unused by scholars of the field (Stetz 2012: 340), she traces its emergence to Dana Shiller's 1997 article "The Redemptive Past in the Neo-Victorian Novel" or perhaps Daniel Candel Bormann's *The Articulation of Science in the Neo-Victorian Novel: A Poetics (and Two Case Studies)* (2002).

The label neo-Victorian however, was probably promoted following two major events: the 2007 conference held at the University of Exeter "Neo-Victorianism: The Aesthetics of Appropriation" and the establishment of the online journal *Neo-Victorian Studies* in 2008 by its founding editor Marie-Luise Kohlke who declared that

> the necessary discussions and debates around 'neo-Victorian' – as term, as genre, as 'new' discipline, as cultural happening, as socio-political critique, as reinvigorated historical consciousness, as memory work, as critical interface between the present and past – urgently require an appropriate forum, both to be brought more fully into focus and to facilitate a long-term productive exchange of ideas on the neo-Victorian's nature and purpose with suitable intellectual rigour. (Kohlke 2008: 1)

Yet, despite academicians' attempts to establish the label 'neo-Victorian, Stetz claims that "titles that might fall under this designation tend to get classified instead by these other literary communities as "historical fiction"" (Stetz 2012: 340). Thus, as a point of departure to this study, the first section is devoted to the study of the interfaces of discontinuities between neo-Victorian and historical fiction.

1.1 Historicism and Fiction

Critics differ as to what constitutes a historical novel. The Historical Novel Society reads on their website: "To be deemed historical (in our sense), a novel must have been written at

least fifty years after the events described. Or written by someone who was not alive at the time of those events, and therefore approaches them only by research" ("Defining the genre"). Critic Sarah Johnson is more precise when she proposes that such novels must be "set before the middle of the last century in which the author is writing from research rather than personal experience" (Johnson S. 2005: 1). The question of time is paramount in both definitions. Historical fiction has a long tradition in world literature which can be traced back at least to the early fourteenth-century. But it rose to prominence in Europe during the early nineteenth-century through Scottish author Sir Walter Scott's series of Waverley Novels, including *Waverley* (1814), *The Antiquary* (1816), and *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818), or Australian Rolf Boldrewood's *Robbery under Arms* (1882/1883)[3] influencing later authors such as Marguerite Yourcenar or H. F. M. Prescott (Rodwell 2012: 24). In fact, it is the Romantics' reaction to the Enlightenment which punctuated this tendency to reflect on the literature of the past. William J. Long confirmed that "The romantic movement was marked, and is always marked, by a strong reaction and protest against the bondage of rule and custom, which, in science and theology, as well as in literature, generally tend to fetter the free human spirit" (Long 2014 ebook: 274). In this sense, in their rejection of Enlightenment ideas of logic and reason for the sake of emotions, the Romantics diverged from their past.

In the mid-nineteenth century, Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), George Eliot's *Romola* (1863), and William Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1848) to name but a few, may well be considered historical novels. Dickens's narrative, set in Paris and London before and during the French Revolution, revolves around the French Doctor Manette and unveils the story of his long imprisonment in the Bastille and his release to live in London with his daughter Lucie. As Eliot revisits the fifteenth century, for her text takes place following actual historical events during the Italian Renaissance and includes in its plot several notable figures from Florentine history, she reflects on life in Florence from intellectual, artistic, religious, and social points of view. Thackeray's text, though mostly seen as a satire of the early-nineteenth century British society especially because of its many illustrations, may be considered historical since it follows the lives of Becky Sharp and Amelia Sedley along with their friends and families during and after the Napoleonic Wars.

The historical novel continued to gain much popularity both in Britain and abroad. Georgette Heyer established the historical romance genre and its subgenre Regency romance,

[3] We read in Grant Rodwell: "Rolf Boldrewood was the pen-name of Thomas Alexander Browne (1826-1915), failed squatter in colonial Victoria and New South Wales, then police magistrate, goldfields commissioner and part-time writer of serialised novels" (Rodwell 2013: 158).

a broad category of mass-market fiction focusing on romantic relationships in historical periods. She collected reference works and kept detailed notes on all aspects of Regency life, thus following in Walter Scott's same footsteps a century earlier.

Graham Huggan explores the reasons for the persistence and popularity of historiographic fiction and confirms that "At its best such [historiographic] fiction allows for a spirited re-engagement with the past that is both ethically responsible and aesthetically satisfying" (Huggan 2007: 61). In other words, neo-Victorian fiction does not simply revisit the Victorian period in order to recount the lived history of the time, but rather to push the reader to reflect on this history. In a similar vein, both Linda Hutcheon and Peter Widdowson agree that any type of fiction which retells the past is part of historiographic metafiction. Thus, one may contend that neo-Victorian fiction can be defined as a subgenre of this historiographic metafiction. It encourages the reader to examine the link between fiction and a specific period of history, a retelling of history which is also an investigation of the past. For example, Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969) is very much interested in geology, a science which inherently deals with the physical structure and substance of the earth, their history, and the processes which act on them, notably by means of the male protagonist who is constantly seen preoccupied with the search for fossils throughout the narrative. This interest in geology may be a metaphor for one of the emblematic issues of the neo-Victorian novel: its retrieval of and reflection on the past. In a sense, Charles is like Fowles himself, interested in retrieving the traces of history. Fossils and geological strata are, like the neo-Victorian novel itself, a solid mass whose textures and layers represent/crystallize the passing of time.

On the other hand, some critics point out that the neo-Victorian novel may in part be considered a nostalgic return to the Victorian period. In fact, in their introduction to their field-defining book *Neo-Victorianism: The Victorians in the Twenty-First Century, 1999-2009* (2010), Heilmann and Llewellyn offer multiple interpretations as to neo-Victorianism's return to this specific historical period. The notion of memory is essential to neo-Victorianism since it necessarily entails a return to the past. This return as a nostalgic reminiscence of the past was first associated with an attempt to "recover and heal" from the loss of the past in novels such as Charles Palliser's *The Quincunx* (1989) and A. S. Byatt's *Possession* (2000) which mainly attempted to re-establish the links with the Victorians. Then, it manifested the "romantic longings" for the glorious Victorian era (Letissier 2016: 3) in novels such as Wesley Stace's *Misfortune* (2005), Sarah Blake's *Grange House* (2000), Diane Setterfield's *The Thirteenth Tale* (2006) and John Harwood's *The Ghost Writer* (2004).

George Letissier points out that the return to the Victorian past may be equated with 'trauma' since it reveals "the difficulty of coming to terms with the Victorian colonial past" (Letissier 2016: 3). Though the neo-Victorian novels under study do not explore a heritage of colonialism, they are often marked by a return to the past which is triggered by a movement backwards of recollection. Hence, the narratives depict the female protagonists of this neo-Victorian corpus constantly engaged in acts of remembrance. Fowles's Sarah recounts her story with the French lieutenant by means of long monologues addressed to Charles. In Faber's novel, Sugar's recollection is written in the form of a crime novel where she thinks back on the people who illtreated her, notably her mother and male clients, and fantasizes about revenge. Agnes remembers her past as an unmarried girl and devout Anglican in her diaries and book of recollections. In Waters's novel, Sue and Maud alternate narration in order to tell the stories of their distressing childhoods and scarring relationships with their families and mothers. In this sense, it is possible to contend that the female protagonists' reminiscence of traumatic incidents from their pasts which inhibit their presents may be read as a metaphor for the genre of neo-Victorian fiction, not in its recollection of a past of colonialism, but one of trauma. Such reading echoes Kohlke's remark that there is "the tendency of neo-Victorian works to focus on the nineteenth century's darker traumatic aspects" (Kohlke 2020: 208). In other words, by focusing on their protagonists' agonizing pasts, Fowles, Faber and Waters symbolically uncover various manifestations of nineteenth-century pain.

Interestingly however, though these different instances of reminiscence of trauma may be read as acts of individual remembrance, one may suggest that they can be regarded as suggestive of a communal dimension to this act of recollection. Indeed, Llewellyn argues that "neo-Victorian studies aim to tap into the potential for re-reading, re-voicing, and re-imagining the collective memory of a global cultural moment" (Llewellyn 2008: 80). In the same vein, Mitchell explores how "contemporary historical fictions that return to the Victorian era stylistically and/or thematically critically engage the past" (Mitchell 2010: 14). She points out that historical recollection of memory is a polemical use of memory. She argues that the act of recollecting does not result from a feeling of nostalgia of the past but rather emerges as a means for a critical movement. She concurs with Hutcheon who argues that "the past is always placed critically – and not nostalgically – in relation to the present" talking of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (Hutcheon 1988: 45).

Hutcheon distinguishes postmodernism's approach to the past from recuperation, nostalgia, and revivalism and considers nostalgia an impediment to dealing critically with the past. Echoing Hutcheon, David Lowenthal believes that nostalgia expresses "modern malaise"

(Lowenthal 1985: 4). It does not allow for engaging with the past but rather retrieves the glorious side of it. However, one may also argue that nostalgia can be a means to re-produce history insofar as it gives voice to cultural memory, regardless of whether such memory is real or false. Ann Colley claims that nostalgia "[can become] a creative tool for remembering the past and mapping present identities" (Colley 1998: 4-5). Svetlana Boym posits that nostalgia implicitly, in the movement back, critiques this same past it longs for. It has a subversive function. Mitchell argues that "[n]ostalgia is inveterately linked to both history and memory as a mode of reaching back into the past" (Mitchell cited in Boym 2001: 17). Indeed, nostalgia links memory to history for it "is about the relationship … between personal and collective memory" (Boym 2001: xvi). Mitchell ponders this act of recollection in neo-Victorian fiction and claims that

> these fictions are less concerned with *making sense* of the Victorian past, than with offering it as a cultural memory, to be re-membered, and imaginatively re-created, not revised or understood. They remember the period not only in the usual sense, of recollecting it, but also in the sense that they re-embody, that is, re-member, or reconstruct it. As we shall see, the dis(re)membered pieces of the past are reconstituted in and by the text, and also in the reader's imagination. The reader thus literally embodies (re-members) the reimagined past. (Mitchell 2010: 18, emphasis in original)

Mitchell points out the active role one must assume in reading neo-Victorian fiction, for writing is not a simple act of historicity and reading is not about being informed on history. Neo-Victorian fiction is a repository to an alternative history, presented not from the vantage point of a historian, but rather from an engaged author who wishes to re-write the past. Thus, in their rethinking of their past, it is possible to argue that the postmodernists, are "the new Victorians" (Llewellyn 2008: 180). "For neo-Victorianism is as much about criticism and critical thought as it is about the creative, re-visionary impulses towards the historical found in contemporary literature" (Llewellyn 2008: 179). Mitchell argues that historical fiction does not "corrupt" history, but rather constitutes "memory texts: constructed accounts of the past that emerge from and participate in contemporary memorial practices" (Mitchell 2010: 43). In their article "Feminism and Cultural Memory: An Introduction", Marianne Hirsch and Valerie Smith see these texts as "acts of performance, representation, and interpretation" (Hirsch and Smith 2002: 5). In other words, historical fiction is a personal reaction which serves to interpret and re-

present the past and consequently leads to a form of collective response. Thus, Mitchell stresses how the historical novel is "an act in the present designed to communicate and construct cultural memory" (Mitchell 2010: 43).

The Victorian period is re-created in the novels of this corpus first at the narrative level by means of elements such as the spatial and temporal settings which aim to reproduce a recognizable Victorian environment, and numerous references to events which are linked to the period by means of important pieces of legislation passed by British Parliament as well as key technological advances for example, and second at the ideological level, through particular cultural and political debates of the time like discussions on sciences and faith, and the position of woman within society.

In this neo-Victorian corpus, the spatio-temporal setting is presented by means of direct or indirect references to dates as well as specific places. Fowles's narrator, in the first lines of the first chapter, asserts that the novel is set "in the late March of 1867" in Lyme Bay; an area off the south coast of England (Fowles 1969: 2). The date may be pertinent in reference to John Stuart Mill's eventual motion to give women the right to vote on the 18th of May of the same year, which would be later decisively rejected by an all-male House of Commons. The year then, marks the flourishing social movement in the interest of women, along with electoral reforms which enfranchised part of the urban male working class in England and Wales for the first time. Hence, no other date could be more appropriate for the protagonist Sarah who shows constant signs of free speech and liberated womanhood, as would be analysed later in this study. Fowles may have deliberately chosen this date in order to refer to the formation of the National Society for Women's Suffrage on the 6th of November of the same year, thus foregrounding the fight for female voice and subjectivity. Indeed, it seems that the intersection between real and fictional time is not arbitrary, since the fictional time paves the way for the plot to move forward in accordance with real time. This authorial artistry echoes Paul Ricœur's belief that the author's role is to create a fictional world as a "projection" of the real world in which the fictional characters are subjected to their own temporal experience, not very much different from those of the real world.

> C'est dans ce monde projeté qu'habitent des personnages qui y font une expérience du temps, aussi fictive qu'eux, mais qui n'en a pas moins pour

> horizon un monde. […] la fiction ne peut rompre ses amarres avec le monde pratique d'où elle procède et où elle retourne. (Ricœur 1983: 142)[4]

The dyad History/fiction, like *monde*/*monde projeté* serves to make the difference between real time' '*temps réel'* and 'fictional time' *'temps fictif'* insofar as the first is related to time as it is perceived and lived in the real world (it is sometimes referred to as 'lived time' *'temps vécu'* by Ricœur), while the second is related to the time in which the fictional characters experience the narrative. In other words, 'fictional time' is a reference to the temporality of the character, temporality of the story or otherwise temporality of the narrative. Yet, Fowles's novel blurs the boundaries between historical and fictional time since Sarah's journey towards freedom as a New Woman by the end of the narrative may echo women's fight for the right to vote in late nineteenth-century Britain.

Michel Faber opts for a less explicit technique as he includes different dates at diverse points in the narrative: the publication of a specific book "the Winter 1874 catalogue of Rackham manufactures" (Faber 2002: 176), a reference to the Christmas of one particular year "To my valued Friend Henry Rackham, Christmas 1874" (Faber 2002: 237) and Sophie's age for example. Indeed, he leaves it to the reader to determine the exact temporal setting, based on utterances like "Can I interest you in a diary? It's for 1875, sir, what's comin' upon us fast as a train" (Faber 2002: 69). The novel is then set in late 1874; a date which is presented at an advanced stage of the narrative without further details about the month or day. The decade between 1870 and 1880 nonetheless, signals the rapid advance of much legislation for the sake of women. For example, the Property laws for women, particularly the Married Women Property Act, and the different Laws on prostitution, namely the Contagious Disease Acts are emblematic of the fight for women's rights. Accordingly, the question of the inferior position of the woman found its way into the literature of this period as well, for 1870 signals the publication of Wilkie Collins's *Man and Wife* in which he precisely reflects on the delicate status of women under the Scots marriage law, as well as the legal disadvantages of married women.

What is interesting to note, however, is that though the general temporal setting of the novel is presented vaguely by means of clues, Faber's narrator stops at important dates which

[4] Paul Ricœur argues: "It is in this projected world that we find characters who have their own experience of time, as fictitious as they are, but which nevertheless has a world as its horizon. […] fiction cannot break its moorings with the practical world from which it proceeds and to which it returns" (Ricœur 1983: 142; my own translation).

impact the course of the events. The most important example is probably the day Rackham signs the contract of his ownership of Sugar "on this, the twenty-fourth day of November, 1874", a most important day which signals the actual start of the plot (Faber 2002: 126). As in realist tradition which attempts to represent subject-matter truthfully, avoiding speculative fiction and supernatural elements, the use of a precisely-determined date brings factuality and makes this event seem as if it were indeed real. Seen from this perspective, Faber's neo-Victorian novel may in part be an emulation of the reality as well as the realist literature of the Victorian age. One may further claim that the novel imitates mid-century realism which meant to give "a picture of real and ordinary people and events" (Vanfasse 2004: para. 4). Furthermore, Sugar's centrality in the transaction can be seen as an allusion to various Victorian works of art which put the figure of the prostitute at the centre, such as William Holman Hunt's *The Awakening Conscience* (1851/1853), Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *Jenny* (1847/1860), or Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848) and *Ruth* (1858), and drew a compassionate portrayal of a fallen woman all the while recognizing how society would condemn her.

Faber's minute description of numerous places such as Church Lane, Greek Street, and Regent Street, is meant as an overt critique of some 1875 Acts such as the Factory Act and the Public Health Act passed by British Parliament. In fact, in his references to the past, the choice of the year 1874 is intentional to allude to the Factory Act which aimed to further regulate the conditions of industrial employment especially for children, following the Act of 1844. The same year also prepares for the 1875 Public Health Act which represented an important step in the advancement of public health in England and aimed at combating obscene urban living conditions, which caused various health threats, including the spread of many diseases such as cholera and typhus. Church Lane, St. Giles is a real place in London, where immigrants established their homes as early as the nineteenth-century. The novel stresses the poor living conditions: no basic hygiene, no water, much pollution, extreme poverty and absence of education, hence the 1870s Education Act which aimed to provide schools in areas where none existed. Thus, in its focus on the social conditions of its characters, the novel may well be a literary wink to the works of Henry Mayhew, Charles Booth and Gustave Doré for it emulates the tradition of documenting social reality. Like Mayhew who was interested mainly in studying the poor, Booth and Doré contributed to the knowledge of social problems and to the rise of a literature of poverty. Faber's focus on the misery of this place is to legitimize prostitutes' choice of/obligation to such a profession. For example, as early as the narrative's first pages, Faber includes a testimonial of one of his secondary characters, and his protagonist's closest friend Caroline in which she explains her decision to leave her work at the factory because of

inhumane conditions such as extremely long working hours for so little pay. Furthermore, it foreshadows some of the characters' motivations to improve their life conditions for the plot follows Sugar's determined plans to escape these abominable conditions. It is because of such despicable circumstances that she is ambitiously resolute to change her life and ascend the socio-economic ladder. Yet, despite the reality of the spatial setting, it is possible that some elements are fictionalised. For example, readers cannot be certain that the bar where Sugar and William meet for the first time did exist and was indeed called the Fireside, even though Historical records of mid-Victorian London confirm the prevalence of this type of places. Though Faber attempts to paint a real picture of the place, its description as "an unpretentious but convivial place for Nocturnals, and [where prostitutes] will leave with any suitable Escort at a time of mutual choosing" is not time-specific and can be valid for a contemporary space (Faber 2002: 66).

Like Faber, Waters presents the temporal setting of the novel by means of indirect references. She includes rather vague dates, especially years that refer to particular events based on Sue's recollections of childhood memories, for example her mother "[coming] to Lant Street on a certain night in 1844" (Waters 2002: 10). It is possible to argue that this ambiguity serves to intensify the mystery around Sue's past and matrilineal heritage, two main axes of her characterisation process and identity formation. Accordingly, it is not surprising that the only specific dates included in the narrative involve the denouement of the story. In fact, the letter/ will written by Marianne Lilly wherein she retells the events of the girls' swap foregrounds that Sue's adventure starts "on this day 18th of September 1844", and the secret must be revealed "on the day of her eighteenth birthday, 3rd August 1862" (Waters 2002: 534). The reader is then left to guess the temporal setting of the novel until its last pages. Conversely, the narrative presents the spatial markers from the beginning: Sue lives "at Lant Street, in the Borough, near to the Thames" (Waters 2002: 2). Though the location of Briar is not specified, the narrative tracks Sue on her way to the mansion stopping at the town of Marlow. Combined with later references to the Thames and the characters' eventual escape by the river, the narrative alludes to the factuality of the place since Marlow is indeed located near the River Thames. Furthermore, when Maud wanders around London, Gentleman mentions Paddington terminus, the Regent's park, and the placing of the Thames.

In bringing together both historicism and fiction, and reality and imagination, one may contend that this neo-Victorian corpus participates in establishing a tradition of neo-historical fiction. In fact, though the neo-Victorian novels attempt to imitate the Victorian past by emphasizing the aspect of reality, this same past is to be re-constructed by readers themselves.

In his "definition" of the historical novel, Grant Rodwell borrows Richard Lee's dyad "*accuracy"*/ "*illusion"* which he considers as characteristics of the relationship between the two facets of historical fiction (Lee cited in Rodwell 2013: 49, emphasis in original). According to Lee, the genre is, to use Dixon's terms, "a fiction somehow grounded in fact – a lie with obscure obligations to the truth" because it seeks authenticity all the while being a piece of fiction (Lee cited in Rodwell 2013: 49). The term historical fiction then, is problematic insofar as it embodies a tension between factuality and fictionality, reality and its fictionalisation process, and truth and lies. Undoubtedly then, the dichotomy fact/ fiction makes the essence of the neo-Victorian novel, all the while leaving a margin for interaction between author and reader: the former is free to blur the boundaries between reality and fiction thus counting on the reader's task of participation as interpreter.

Another characteristic which links neo-Victorian fiction to historical fiction is the multiplicity of subgenres, for the latter is recognized as a broadly-ranged genre:

> We also consider the following styles of novel to be historical fiction for our purposes: alternate histories (e.g. Robert Harris's *Fatherland*), pseudo-histories (e.g. Umberto Eco's *Island of the Day Before*), time-slip novels (e.g. Barbara Erskine's *Lady of Hay*), historical fantasies (e.g. Bernard Cornwell's *King Arthur Trilogy*) and multiple-time novels (e.g. Michael Cunningham's *The Hours*). (Historical Novel Society, n.d.)

The Historical Novel Society acknowledges the complexity of the task of defining historical novel because of the wide span of the genre and so the multiplicity of possible definitions, but argues that the simplest definition would be that it is "fiction set in the past" even though such a definition "brings up a number of questions" according to Johnson (Johnson S. 2002: 1). More particularly, the historical fiction writer Jill Paton Walsh argues that "a novel is a historical novel when it is wholly or partly about the public events and social conditions which are the material of history, regardless of the time at which it is written" (Walsh 1977: 221). Seen from this perspective, the neo-Victorian genre equally exhibits manifestations of this social account considered historical by Walsh. For example, Fowles's narrative is a report of the Victorians' moral and ethical beliefs which started to witness some change and diversity because of nearing modernity. The novel sheds light on the conservative lives of the aristocratic Freemans who show no tolerance vis-à-vis amorality and lack of chastity, as well as on another social group represented by Mrs Poulteney who seems more open-minded towards Sarah's reputation. This

clash in beliefs between conservatives and modernists situates Sarah at the centre of a feud of values, where the topic of female virtue is paramount. Besides, the novel also draws a thorough comparison between two models of Victorian women: the perfect lady and the fallen woman: Ernestina and Sarah respectively, portrayed from a (patriarchal) masculine eye, that of Charles. His portrayal of both female characters equally reflects the contradiction between a traditional and a more modern perspective. In addition, Fowles critiques some new values of the Victorian age: people have become focused more on appearances than on essence, and have developed an ambivalent feeling of disillusion and boredom. Ernestina is absorbed by her longing to a perfect fairy-tale and disregards the disharmony with Charles to preserve her social image of a perfectly-established lady. Charles is described constantly wandering in his search for fossils with no clear vision of the future. Indeed, among the critics who value the genre of historical fiction, MacKinlay Kantor for example praises its awareness of the past which can help the general reader confront the fear and perplexities of the present and future and to profit from the lessons of the past with its agonies, its triumphs, its dreams, its disillusionments (Kantor 1967: 2 cited in Herz 2010). In other words, the historical novel – much like the neo-Victorian novel one may argue – gives the opportunity to look afresh at history from a subsequent perspective with the benefit of hindsight.

Through this brief comparison of both genres, neo-Victorian fiction puts on view multiple characteristics, shared with the broader genre of historical fiction. I will turn my attention now to the study of the specificities of neo-Victorianism, especially in its inextricable link with Victorian culture and literature.

1.2 Revision and Intertextuality in Neo-Victorianism

While defining neo-Victorianism, Letissier evokes principles of "adaptation", "appropriation", "revival" and "translation" that link the literary movement to its predecessor, Victorianism (Letissier 2016: 2). He believes these principles to be crucial to the contemporary process of Victorian re-reading, which aims at creation and innovation. While Historical fiction is not period specific, neo-Victorian fiction designates fiction having as its temporal setting Queen Victoria's reign between 1837 and 1901. Nonetheless, Victorian culture did not end by 1901 or 1914 as some historians link it chronologically with the end of the Edwardian rule[5], but is a culture that continues to shape the present of our modern times. Indeed, Victorian literature

[5] though once again the Edwardian reign ended in 1910, but is sometimes expanded to 1914 by some historians

is not defined by the nineteenth-century only, for it is still relevant in both twentieth- and twenty-first centuries. In the course of contemporary debates about what constitutes this new genre, different critical terms have been posited to describe it, including Post-, Retro-, Neo- and Victoriana. The term 'neo-Victorian' has become the most frequently-used term over the last twenty years.

Insisting on a "knowing" engagement with the period, scholars and thinkers have argued that setting fiction in the Victorian period may not be sufficient for the work to be identified as neo-Victorian. Indeed, in an attempt to examine the origins of the genre, various critics locate the 1960s as the period in which the literary genre emerges, citing mainly Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) and John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969) as the first neo-Victorian novels. However, as the genre has continued to expand, Jessica Cox acknowledges that there has been a reconsideration that its origins may be earlier than this. Other neo-Victorian works may well include Robert Graves's *The Real David Copperfield* (1933), Virginia Woolf's *Freshwater* (1935), Michael Sadleir's *Fanny by Gaslight* (1944), and Marghanita Laski's *The Victorian Chaise-Longue* (1953).

Thus, while the exact time of its emergence remains uncertain, neo-Victorianism as both a literary genre and academic discipline establishes a tight link with the Victorians. Neo-Victorian studies is a whole realm to deal with issues of gender, heritage, class, and identity from a new perspective, that of the modern times. Neo-Victorian novels are set in a Victorian setting, the most recognizable common feature with historical fiction as previously explored, but re-expose various Victorian themes like prostitution, hysteria and transgression of boundaries from a contemporary standpoint. Neo-Victorianists' objective then is to renovate and re-appropriate Victorian culture in order to test the continuity between our twenty-first century images of them and their earlier representations of themselves, as well as their relevance to the contemporary. All seek, to varying extents, to investigate the nature of the relationship between contemporary and Victorian culture. The neo-Victorian novel, mainly because of its postmodernist form, allows authors to discuss themes that the Victorians could not approach so openly and had to conceal within their texts. These include especially themes related to sexual openness and liberation from the shackles of genderization such as lesbianism for example in Waters's debut neo-Victorian novel *Tipping the Velvet* (1998), as well as more recent problematic themes looked at from a twenty-first century perspective, such as nineteenth-century colonisation as a focal theme in Matthew Kneale's *English Passengers* (2001). In a similar vein, Mark Llewellyn points out neo-Victorian fiction's "desire to re-write the historical narrative of that period by representing marginalised voices, new histories of sexuality, post-

colonial viewpoints and other generally 'different' versions of the Victorian" (Llewellyn 2008: 165). He points out the necessity of critically re-studying the Victorian, a study that will raise to the surface multi-dimensional interpretations that stand in contrast with "the stability of a presumed hegemonic historical narrative" (Llewellyn 2008: 165). For example, in an interview with Lucy Armitt, Sarah Waters admits to having chosen lesbianism as the means to re-enter the Victorian world with a different perspective. She claims that "[f]or [her], entering the past via telling queer stories is a great way of finding a slightly new way of talking about familiar periods like the Victorian era or wartime" (Waters 2006: 121). In other words, neo-Victorian studies allows for plurality and diversity in deciphering the Victorians, in contrast to hegemonic interpretations of them. Critical creativity epitomises a feeling of anxiety and a process of questioning one's position in the present world and how it could have resulted from the past. Neo-Victorian studies come to reflect on this relationship by recalling the past and thinking about it from a new perspective. Indeed, subsequent literary movements emerge only when scholars and critics look back to the literatures of the past. Thus, it is possible to argue that neo-Victorianism is an aesthetic, cultural, socio-political and literary response to Victorianism.

In studying the rationale behind neo-Victorianism's return to the nineteenth-century, Nadine Boehm-Schnitker and Susanne Gruss point out that it is "an ongoing cultural and academic venture to analyse the manifold overlaps and intersections, the continuities and the breaches between 'us' and 'them'" (Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss 2014: 1). In this sense, it is possible to argue that "neo-Victorian texts as cultural *doppelgängers* of the Victorian age both mimic and challenge the discourses of the nineteenth century" (Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss 2014: 2). Because of its return to the past, the neo-Victorian text partly re-creates the Victorian one, especially theme-wise. Hence, imitation is most definitely inevitable in the process of intertextual re-reading. As Thomas Hardy argued: "in fiction there can be no intrinsically new thing at this stage of the world's history" (Hardy 1888: 78).

In a similar vein, in his article "What is Neo-Victorian Studies?", Llewellyn aims to investigate the areas of intersection and interaction between neo-Victorian and Victorian studies. His focal point is how different Victorian aspects of life are at the heart of neo-Victorian studies, and fiction. He builds on Dinah Birch's claim that contemporary education, good or bad, can be traced back to the Victorian age, to works of Matthew Arnold, John Ruskin and other key Victorian educationalists, as she proposes that "Victorian ideas can give us a clearer understanding of the origins of our present problems, showing how our tangles over education and class, gender and religion took root in the first place" (Birch 2007: 144). Thus, a look back into the past can facilitate the understanding of the problems of the present.

The realist novel which encompasses different subgenres such as the industrial novel, problem novel, and condition-of-England novel, emerged as the favoured and dominant literary form of the time probably because of its capacity to portray reality. In fact, Henry James argues that in the Victorian novel, there is "an air of reality" and that the merit of the novel lies in the novelist's capacity to reproduce the "illusion of life" (James 1884: 202). George Eliot's narrator in *Adam Bede* (1859) vows "to give a faithful account of men and things as they have mirrored themselves in my mind … I feel as much bound to tell you as precisely as I can what that reflection is, as if I were in the witness-box, narrating my experience on oath" (Eliot 1859: 174). Furthermore, in his study of the Victorian novel, David Deirdre argues that the Victorian novel translates the socio-cultural characteristics of life in the Victorian period. He explains:

> The Victorian novel participated energetically in the construction of individual and national identity, […] it assisted in the making of powerful ideologies of gender, sexuality, and race, and also how it engaged actively in debates about the value of reading, the proper aesthetic rules for fiction, the appropriate integration of changing ideas about religion into the national life[.] (Deirdre 2001: 2)

As a form of literature, the Victorian novel was often considered a mirror of society which not only reflected the status quo, but also depicted the signs of change and evolution. Thus, the novel discusses different interests of the era such as "provincial politics, ecclesiastical infighting, city squalor, repressed sexuality, making money, losing money, imperial adventure, angels in the house, frightening New Women, scientific challenges to established religious beliefs, the value and the function of the aesthetic life in a materialistic society (to name a few)" (Deirdre 2001: 5). The diversity of thematic concerns can be explained by the fact that the period in which Victorian novels emerged and evolved was quite long, signalling radical changes with the Industrial Revolution, the pressures of Empire and the growth of capitalism, to the rise of pauperism and the exclusion of women (made legally official as of 1832). Indeed, this was a period of revolutions as well, which foregrounded the disparities on all levels, be it political, societal or economic. Besides, the enormous growth of population in England in this period led to a change in both life style and conditions, especially with regard to rural and urban areas, agriculture and industry, working and middle classes, social and political reforms and the expansion of 'civilisation' to the Empire, mainly to the colonies. Consequently, the novel was established as the literary form of the age with a set of defined and shared features such as

"sentimentalism, unambiguous narrative voice, and straightforward narrative structure" (Deirdre 2001: 7).

Nonetheless, the novel witnessed some changes throughout the period. Deirdre notes that the changes between the start and end of the period are closely associated with the moral and aesthetic nature of the novel. By comparing Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist* (1837/1839) and Joseph Conrad's *Nostromo* (1904), Deirdre notes that "Dickens's novel registers a sincere commitment to fiction as a morally transforming force and a palpable belief that its form emerges naturally from its moral imperatives, whereas Conrad's novel expresses an authorial self-awareness that suggests the painful struggle to create appropriate aesthetic form for a dense and complicated narrative" (Deirdre 2001: 7). While Dickens's goal was to portray life as it was from a morally-engaged perspective, Conrad was more interested in writing to raise readers' awareness at the changing conditions especially by means of his focus on the battles of a fictional South-American republic like Venezuela. The novel proved to be more than simple adventures which readers used to read and enjoy at the start of the century, through its political engagement. Hence, the two novels – chronologically separated – seem to be both thematically and aesthetically distinct as well, thus translating the progress which took place across the two periods.

The contemporary approach to Victorian culture provokes a questioning and consequently, a defiance of the Victorian text. 'Re-vision' is at the heart of neo-Victorian fiction. This term was coined by Adrienne Rich to refer to "the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction" (Rich 1972: 18). Both Heilmann and Llewellyn establish a parallel between the two eras: the nineteenth-century represents all that is "the comfort of inclusiveness with a common purpose", while the twenty-first century is "an age of fragmentation and disintegration" (Heilmann and Llewellyn cited in Letissier 2010: 3). The risk of such a view however is to fall in the traps of "[construing] the Victorian as a homogenized identity, a single monological signifier, through what would amount to cultural iconization" (Letissier 2010: 3). Both critics consider the neo-Victorian as "more than historical fiction set in the nineteenth century". It is "self-consciously engaged with the act of (re)interpretation, (re)discovery and (re)vision concerning the Victorians" (Heilmann and Llewellyn 2010: 4). In this sense, reflexion on nineteenth-century fiction presupposes a process of metafictionalization of the genre. Metafiction as defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* refers to "[f]iction in which the author self-consciously alludes to the artificiality or literariness of a work by parodying or departing from novelistic conventions […] and narrative techniques; a fictional work in this genre or style". Neo-Victorian novelists take the nineteenth-

century as their point of departure in order to produce fiction which imitates, pastiches and parodies Victorian fiction. The objective behind such process is, as has been pointed out by many scholars from Huggan to Heilmann and Llewellyn, to reanimate the past in the present, to detect the (dis)continuities and to reflect on the aesthetics and politics of both epochs. Hence, the objective of this study is to explore to what extent the novels of the corpus interact with the Victorian culture and our own. What common aspects are there between Fowles, Faber and Waters on the one hand, and their predecessors' texts on the other? How do these texts challenge their precursors? How useful are contemporary (postmodernist) aesthetics and politics for the re-investigation of Victorian themes? And conversely, how does a neo-Victorian approach illuminate the twentieth- and twenty-first century debates? Finally, to what extent do later neo-Victorian texts by Faber and Waters challenge earlier ones such as Fowles's?

If we approach this neo-Victorian corpus from the same perspective as Deirdre's, one may suggest that the time lapse between Fowles's 1969 text on the one hand, and both Faber's and Waters' 2002 novels on the other can explain the shift from an existentialist discussion of personal freedom to a debate centred on (sexual) identity. This thematic variation may also echo the evolution of the feminist movement in both periods. In fact, Fowles's text marks the second wave of feminism which sought equal rights and opportunities and greater personal freedom for women, while Faber's and Waters's texts may manifest the rising interest in gender and queer studies, emerging research areas which explore the impact of sexuality on identity formation. In fact, these various thematic interests attest not only to the neo-Victorian novel's plurality, but also to the intrinsic link between text and reality. Like Dickens and Conrad who wrote texts reflecting their respective realities, the neo-Victorian novels similarly reflect the interconnection between the Victorian narrative content and contemporary socio-political context.

The Victorian novel gradually exhibited its openness, for while it mainly revolved around the domestic sphere and national concerns at the time of its emergence, there was progressively more interest in metropolitan concerns which led to the widening geographical scope of the novel to include other European nations, Americans and the East. The neo-Victorian novel reproduces the same aspect of openness of the Victorian novel, for it is both domestic and international, individual and collective, internal and external. Hence, Fowles first exposes the interiors of the English home and society and then hints at the New World's growing influence on the English by means of Sarah's eventual association with America, thus combining domestic, national and international interests. Besides, the complexity of the concerns which the novel discussed also led to changes at the level of narrative structure. While

it used to be straightforward through the use of journalistic techniques and the focus on details in order to make literature closer to real life with facts and general remarks on human nature, the authors at the turn of the century continued to explore the problems in English social life, but with more focus on the inner lives of characters, paving the way for the psychological novel of early Modernism. In the same vein, both Faber and Waters invest in postmodernist techniques such as stream of consciousness, interior monologue, and first-person narration to picture their characters' inner lives which are extremely complicated and turbulent.

Focusing his investigation of neo-Victorianism on the notions of inter-disciplinarity and multi-disciplinarity, Llewellyn posits that the neo-Victorian text is of a "palimpsestuous" nature, for it offers looking at the Victorian text afresh from a postmodern perspective in order to trace its deficiencies and highlight its merits. Building on Kamilla Elliot's claim that Robert L. Mack's considers the neo-Victorian as a representation of the "avidity of the Victorian collector and the expansiveness of the Victorian intellectual in a postmodern ethos and framework" in his novel *The Wonderful and Surprising History of Sweeney Todd: The Life of an Urban Legend* (2008) (Elliott 2008: 48), Llewellyn claims that neo-Victorianism is not simply about writing contemporary texts set in the Victorian period, but rather about "the simultaneous existence of both narratives on the same page, occupying the same space, and speaking in odd, obscure, and different ways to one another" (Llewellyn 2008: 170) for the purpose of "[re-freshing] and [re-vitalising] the importance of that earlier text to the here and now" (Llewellyn 2008: 171). In fact, the innovation of the neo-Victorian text lies in its capacity to welcome both cultures, all the while engaging them in a constant dialogue insofar as the time gap between both times is completely erased. The outcome is not a simple matter of addition, but rather of interaction and dynamic interplay.

In the same context of historiographic metafiction, re-visionary fiction is based on a set of "inter-, intra- and transtextual relationships with a significant ability to "write back to – indeed, rewrite – canonic texts from the past, and hence call to account formative narratives that have arguably been central to the construction of 'our' consciousness" (Widdowson cited in Yates: 190). This re-reading of canonical narratives has been defined by Peter Widdowson as a form of "re-visionary fiction" (Widdowson 2006: 491). This subgenre welcomes dualities, brought together in a relationship of tension between past and present, old and new. Thus, the notion of "re-vision" presupposes a process of recovery and creation, assimilation and reproduction. Linda Hutcheon's study of historiographic metafiction serves to establish a theoretical framework for the subgenre of neo-Victorianism. Hence, we can define neo-Victorianism in Louisa Yates's terms as "a self-reflexive literary engagement with history and

theory" (Yates 2009: 187), in which the text establishes a "totalizing order, only to contest it, by its radical provisionality, intertextuality, and, often, fragmentation" (Hutcheon 1988: 116).

Indeed, in neo-Victorian fiction as well as in any form of historiographic metafiction, there is a presupposition that the narrative is in a dialogue with another text. Thus, "in the context of re-visionary fiction, nineteenth century texts serve as a point of departure, existing only to be disrupted" (Yates 2009: 193). A pre-text or a "hypotext" to borrow Gérard Genette's term is essential to a revisionary text. However, not all neo-Victorian texts have singular defined pretexts. Hutcheon points out that "the adapted text can be plural" (Hutcheon 2006: xii). It is for this reason that many of neo-Victorian novels re-write, adapt and reinvent a multiplicity of Victorian novels.

As Widdowson claims, the general inclination of re-visionary fiction is rather selective in its choice of canonical texts, for it is only canonical literature which merits study, reflection and challenge. In the same vein, the authors of this corpus also admit to revising renowned Victorian titles. Fowles acknowledges the parallels with Hardy (Fowles 1990: 146). Faber imitates "Dickensian richness" (Hale 2002: n.d.). Waters is interested in the "underworld that Dickens writes a bit about" (Waters 2021: n.d.). However, Letissier claims that neo-Victorianism comes to "[blur] the gap between high and low culture" (Letissier 2010: 2). In other words, it involves a process of contemporisation and "commoditization" of the Victorian, regardless of the hypotext in the contemporary literary marketplace (Letissier 2010: 2). While the Victorian marketplace of early century was presumably reserved to the social elite and well-educated upper-class readership, contemporary culture is more comprehensive and the marketplace is made popular and more accessible. Indeed, this led to dichotomous reception for neo-Victorian literature is often either highly praised or severely critiqued because of its 'populist' dimension.

Silence imposed upon female characters and the repression of their voices in Victorian hypotexts may well be another reason to justify contemporaries' choice of intertext. In fact, Victorian texts *can* be silent, particularly in relation to the representation of the roles of women in the nineteenth century. It is worthy of note that silence may have been an instrument of censorship demanded by Victorian publishers or a manifestation of prudery on the part of Victorian authors. Interestingly, while it has often been examined as a lack, these same 'silent' novels complicate this idea, for Rich admits that "[i]n a world where language and naming are power, silence is violence" (Rich 1995: 204). Indeed, this perspective has commonly been the view of literary scholars who have focused on the exclusion of women from these texts. Thus, Fowles exposes the dilemma of the fallen woman and her in-between position within society.

Faber speaks for the prostitute's constant struggle against a masculinist domination. Waters uncovers a woman's, lesbian's and author's battle for self- and altero-recognition. Kohlke argues that neo-Victorian fiction approaches repression "through acts of uncovering", "[u]ncovering secrets, scandals, or the nakedness beneath crinolines" (Kohlke 2011: 86/ 87). Waters fittingly uncovers her female protagonists' hands, for Sue and Maud ultimately get rid of the gloves imposed upon them by the patriarch Mr Lilly. Faber often uncovers female genitalia insofar as his female characters deliberately and consciously display their sexual organs. The gaps and silences in the Victorian literary tradition represent an axial point of departure for the neo-Victorians who work to re-establish alternative interpretations of the Victorians' techniques of (deliberate) silences.

What is of major importance to this investigation is not simply the nature of the intertext, but rather the relationship between the Victorian intertext and the later neo-Victorian text. Yates signals the difference between mere allusion and concrete re-writing. She borrows Genette's definition of allusion as an "enunciation whose full meaning presupposes the perception of a relationship between it and another text, to which it necessarily refers by some inflections that would otherwise remain unintelligible" (Genette 1997: 2). Neo-Victorian fiction is at the intersection of the dyad re-vision/ reproduction. In fact, Yates argues that in order to succeed in revisiting a text, one must necessarily recover the original text. She claims that "[in] order to critique, revise, respond, or pay homage, one must inevitably imitate" (Yates 2009: 203). Hence, re-vision necessarily entails pastiche. On the other hand, Widdowson decidedly refuses any association of re-visionary fiction with Hutcheon's notion of adaptation insofar as he considers the act of re-vision based on a desire and project of "challenging" the pretext. He claims that the revisionary act is of worth only when it aims at questioning. Otherwise, this would "not be *challenging* the original pre-texts in a way, as we shall see, revisionary fiction crucially does" (Widdowson 2006: 500, emphasis in original). Challenging the pre-text is not a simple re-reading or a revisit of its aspects. Thus, he calls for "[keeping] the pre-text in clear view, so that the original is not just the invisible 'source' of a new modern version but is a constantly invoked *intertext* for it and is constantly in dialogue with it" (Widdowson 2006: 502).

Authenticity is one of the main reasons why neo-Victorianism is repeatedly questioned. In his book *Victorian Afterlife: Postmodern Culture Rewrites the Nineteenth Century* (2000), John Kucich argues that the nineteenth century is the historical "other" of contemporary culture. Our historical difference from the Victorian age allows us a more distanced evaluation of the Victorians, while at the same time, contemporary concerns influence the truths and certainties

of the past. Thus, neo-Victorian postmodern fiction cannot be disassociated from Victorian life, be it in subject or in style. Christine L. Krueger protests that "[n]o matter how vociferously we protest our postmodern condition, we are in many respects post-Victorians, with a complex relationship to the ethics, politics, psychology, and art of our eminent – and obscure – Victorian precursors" (Krueger 2002: xi). Insisting on the return of the Victorian inheritance, Llewellyn argues that "these texts by Victorianists inform the neo-Victorian approach to the nineteenth century not because of neo-Victorian fiction's belatedness (in the sense of being written about a past that is now distant), but because they bring to the forefront of the debate a set of very *presentist* discourses that are part of that older, inherited tradition" (Llewellyn 2008: 172, emphasis in original). Nonetheless, Letissier warns from the risk of falling in the traps of "artificially [recreating a] vision of a fake Victorian culture" because of this "presentist" dimension (Letissier 2010: 5). In other words, neo-Victorian novelists must detach themselves from Victorian culture in order to avoid producing simple imitations, based on their presentist perception or essentialization of the past. Yates who refuses to associate re-visionary fiction with a nostalgic look on the past claims that "the revisionary process strongly rebukes any charge of nostalgia; in common with historiographic metafiction" (Yates 2009: 205). A reaction entails both a desire and an engagement to compare, alter, revise, and even improve. Thus, in order to deal with the past from such a critical standpoint, an author of historical fiction must suppress personal feelings of nostalgia. Otherwise, the revisionary process would systematically fail and the past would simply be preserved as it is. Accordingly, Hutcheon strongly affirms that re-vision "is not a nostalgic return; it is a critical revisiting, an ironic dialogue with the past of both art and society" (Hutcheon 1988: 4).

Though this overview of the aesthetic and thematic characteristics of the Victorian novel is an attempt to identify a few features which are transferred to the neo-Victorian novel, over a century later, the latter must by no means be reduced to a number of limited features. Furthermore, because of its examination of Victorian society and questioning of its moral and ethical codes especially with regard to representations of social minorities and especially women, neo-Victorianism is often labelled as a politically engaged genre in which woman occupies the central role. The following section is devoted to exploring to what extent neo-Victorian fiction can be associated with a fourth-wave of feminism or post-feminism.

1.3 Politics of Gender in Neo-Victorian Fiction

Nancy Armstrong explores how the Victorian novel is engaged in "Gender and the Victorian Novel" (2001) and notes that in the nineteenth century, population grew younger and social life changed drastically. This demographic increase led to the emergence of courtship rituals inciting women to marry for both romance and financial purposes and eligible men to find suitable wives. These rituals paved their way to novels of Charlotte Brontë, Elizabeth Gaskell, Charles Dickens, George Eliot, and Thomas Hardy. Furthermore, unlike the eighteenth-century that advanced the individual – mainly upper-class – and defended their right of inheritance, wealth and individual qualities of reason, morality, and individual will, the nineteenth-century sought to normalize this individual in ways to create a new social classification which led to the emergence of the middle-class having its own values and customs and believing in its own principle of fate depending on biological reproduction.

Furthermore, Armstrong's hypothesis is that female sexuality was always portrayed as the threat to the nation, thus creating constant tensions between natural desire and prevailing gender norms. In fact, she argues that "middle-class sexuality – its moral norms, family structure, household organization, and marriage rules – grew uniquely capable of travelling almost anywhere the novel could, both up and down the social hierarchies organizing the modern metropolis" (Armstrong 2001: 100/101). Thus, in the light of exploding demographic and socio-economic changes, Armstrong claims that woman's sexuality had to be controlled since she was responsible for procreation. She explains that curbing woman's sexuality in the Victorian novel may reflect the reality of the time.

Like the Victorian novel, Sally Shuttleworth argues that neo-Victorianism emerged out of the need and desire to "give voice to women, or the racially oppressed that have been denied voice in history" (Shuttleworth 1998: 256). Thus, it is politically engaged in the project of speaking what was both unspoken and unspeakable, and giving voice to those who were marginalised and silenced in patriarchal discourse, notably woman. Building on Shuttleworth's claim, Widdowson posits that "at the very least, what the contemporary text does is 'speak' the unspeakable of the pre-text by very exactly evoking the original and hinting at its silences and fabrications" (Widdowson 2006: 506). The protagonists of this corpus are part of social categories that were not given the right to speak and be heard: the fallen woman was simply chastised or ignored, the prostitute taken advantage of and never recognized, the mad woman caged and forgotten, the lesbian considered inexistent except for sexual pleasure, and finally the transgressive woman author severely critiqued and even punished. Such figures occupied

limited narrative space inside the Victorian text. By making them central characters, the neo-Victorian authors attempt to 'right the wrongs' of the original texts as an endeavour to allow these marginalised characters the literary space to tell their struggle and compensate for the unfairness they were subjected to in repressive patriarchal discourse. Furthermore, neo-Victorian fiction has the power to raise awareness among readers who become not only conscious of the injustices caused against minorities in the past, but also mindful of the possible dangers so as to attempt to prevent them from happening again in the future. Rich affirms: "We need to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition, but to break its hold over us" (Rich 1980: 35). What knowledge does the neo-Victorian novel offer to contemporary readers for them to challenge patriarchal discourse?

The neo-Victorian novel is politically engaged when it discusses the position of the "other" for it gives back to the marginalised characters their voices and attempts to defeat the binary stereotype of the self and the "other", the "subaltern" of colonial discourse. All female protagonists of this corpus may be considered *others*, when compared to the ideal norms of Victorian society. One may wonder if the choice of such central character systematically makes the corpus politically engaged. Llewellyn confirms that contemporary culture does not function "as a substitute for the nineteenth century but as a mediator into the experience of reading the 'real' thing; after all, neo-Victorian texts are, in the main, processes of writing that act out the results of reading the Victorians and their literary productions" (Llewellyn 2008: 168). Because of chronological distance and diverse forms of contemporary culture, neo-Victorian fiction offers a different way into the Victorians. Both fields, that is neo-Victorian and Victorian studies, are about investigating the social and cultural tropes of the Victorian age within literature. Thus, it is possible to argue that though separated in time, both fields are centred around similar thematic concerns yet from different perspectives. Indeed, Llewellyn concludes that "the neo-Victorian is about new approaches to the Victorian period rather than an attempt to indulge in escapism masked as historical narrative" (Llewellyn 2008: 169). In others words, the neo-Victorian novel's objective is not to detach itself from its Victorian precursor by creating an alternative discourse, but rather to re-interpret and assess the Victorians' achievements and failures. Thus, in its focus on marginal female characters, the neo-Victorian corpus might remedy – even partly – the lacks of the Victorian novel, by reading and breaking the silences.

Furthermore, the neo-Victorianist project is often implicated in dealing with moral issues which were either disregarded or implicitly discussed in Victorian fiction, by different means of excesses, ellipses, inconsistencies, absurdities, and other forms of concealment in the

texts. It promotes the voice of marginalised categories, mostly female ones, especially and not exclusively in relation to issues of gender, and sexuality. Thus, we often find neo-Victorian narratives with voyeuristic chapters about sexual matters. All three novels of this corpus – though to varying degrees from the least to most explicit, comparing Fowles to both Faber and Waters – have this thematic and stylistic characteristic in common. Fowles's Charles fantasizes about Sarah's attractively dominant sexuality. Seeing her both strong and passive, sexual and innocent, domineering and fragile, this duality is so intense that it eventually leads to their sexual union. Though Charles does not utilize overtly sexual images in his description of Sarah, his thoughts are often carnal when he is in her company. Furthermore, Faber's choice of prostitutes as the targeted social group in his novel and his focus on their daily lives and practices with client makes the narrative revolve around sexuality as the dominant theme, ranging from mere references to explicit and minutely described scenes of sexual intercourses. Waters's lesbian protagonists open the door to highly suggestive passages of detailed actions and feelings, a journey at the end of which they recognize their sexualities. Accordingly, Cora Kaplan points to Sarah Waters as one of the most prominent neo-Victorians "[contributing] to this explicit exhibition of taboo sex through her modern depiction of same-sex relationships" (Kaplan cited in Letissier 2010: 4). Waters's novel may be the most explicit of this corpus because of its focus on lesbianism and forthright examination of lesbian (sexual) identities, thus challenging the morally and ethically guided and conservative imagined Victorian society. In fact, Heilmann and Llewellyn argue that "Victorian sexuality and the way we re-imagine it, its contradictions, excesses, dissimilarities from or correspondences with our diversity of experience holds an irresistible appeal for the neo-Victorian imagination" (Heilmann and Llewellyn 2010: 107). Though this fascination with Victorian sexuality is one of the reasons behind the contradictory reception of the neo-Victorian genre, both appreciated and depreciated, this explicit investment in sex matters links the neo-Victorian fiction to New Woman fiction of *fin-de-siècle* which also exhibited numerous manifestations of transgression, notably in matters of sex insofar as it brought about a controversial debate on the 'Sex Question' and eventually an equally contradictory critical reception.

Accordingly, Sally Ledger claims that the sexual openness in New Woman fiction led to the dismay of many critics who opposed such representations and labelled them as "sickening" to borrow James Ashcroft Noble's term (Noble 1895: 494). She argues:

> Citing *The Heavenly Twins,* Sarah Grand's best-selling novel from 1893, and George Egerton's *Keynotes* and *Discords* from 1893 and 1894, James

> Ashcroft Noble, writing in the *Contemporary Review* in 1895, complained that the 'fiction of sexual sensualism which has lately made itself such a nuisance to ordinarily decent and wholesome readers' distorted reality, presenting us with 'a series of pictures painted from reflections in convex mirrors', which unnaturally promotes 'the sexual passion' as the mainstay of all social action. (Ledger 1997: 13)

Building on Noble's claim, could we not posit that neo-Victorian fiction's investment in "sexual sensualism" is a re-iteration of New Woman discourse which called for sexual liberation?

Interestingly, looking back on the past represents "an act of survival for women" to borrow Rich's expression (Rich 1972:18). Looking back on their past, New Woman fiction writers noted the absence of a feminine mode of discourse implicated in the Woman Question. Hence, the wave of transgressive New Woman authors strived to re-appropriate this past from which they were excluded. In this sense, the action of looking back expresses their "refusal of the self-destructiveness of male-dominated society" (Rich 1972: 18). Looking back is equally an act of looking forward for women as authors, characters and readers. As neo-Victorianists revisit the past and focus on the question of woman as character or author, they highlight the opportunity to heal from and move past the feelings of resentment and scorn against canonical patriarchal literature which excluded them, in order to envision and conceive of a future world in which they occupy a respectable position, especially as writers and as textual tradition. In fact, neo-Victorian re-visionary works of fiction attempt to evaluate women's roles in the nineteenth century which were circumscribed by patriarchy, in order to remedy and push forward a project of valorisation and inscription.

Thus, from a feminist perspective, neo-Victorianism serves to re-write women's past in an empowering way so as to allow them the chance at a subjectivity they were denied in Victorian fiction. Tara MacDonald and Joyce Goggin enumerate the different waves of feminism of the nineteenth-century and explore how the evolution of the political engagement of women authors impacted the evolution of these waves. They ultimately argue that there is in fact a fourth, post-feminist, phase in the twenty-first century as they consider neo-Victorianism a new feminist politics of "survival", of re-birth which aims at allowing them to know themselves not only by accepting their past, but also promoting a future in which plurality and multiplicity are possible and no longer denied. I nonetheless posit that the neo-Victorian novel manifestly combines all phases of feminism: it is implicated in re-evaluating the position of woman, challenging an exclusive patriarchal literature, re-valorising a feminine mode of

discourse for the sake of establishing a stronger subjective female identity. By means of its marginal protagonists, approached themes and contemporary perspective, this neo-Victorian corpus may be regarded as the continuation of the feminist fight for the Woman cause.

Conversely, MacDonald and Goggin highlight the different views critics have vis-à-vis post-feminism. Some critics signal the ambivalence of the term and highlight the diversity of feminist contemporary movements. Stéphanie Genz believes the term "is indicative of the diversity of contemporary feminisms and the changes in feminist thinking, activism and politics over the last 40 years" (Genz 2009: 22). Others praise neo-Victorianism's continuous engagement in feminist fights despite the progress woman has achieved over the last two centuries. Judith Kegan Gardiner claims that feminism "is a utopian discourse of an ideal future, never yet attained" (Gardiner 2002: 10). She believes that the fundamental mission behind the rise of feminism i.e. empowering women in a masculine world, is still valid and hasn't yet been achieved. It is neo-Victorianism, through its post-feminist political engagement, that must strive to reach such goal.

A recurrent argument in favour of neo-Victorianism is the close link between neo-Victorian fiction and New Woman fiction. Not only does neo-Victorianism borrow the didactic function from New Woman fiction known initially as 'novel with a purpose', since they both aim at raising awareness of social perils, MacDonald and Goggin argue that "neo-Victorian cultural production could offer readers and audience members the kind of reawakening imagined by Rich" (MacDonald and Goggin 2013: 6). Indeed, much neo-Victorian fiction narrates the female protagonist's awakening to feminist consciousness and her own self-worth, a case in point is the neo-Victorian corpus under study. For a contemporary readership, female self-exploration for the sake of self-recognition is still a valid concern; Sarah's quest for liberation from a prejudicial society and traditional masculinity, Sugar's determination to have financial security and succeed personally as an appropriate mother-figure breaking with the stereotypes of the prostitute, the married mother, and biological motherhood, as well as Sue's sexual awakening to a lesbian identity and Maud's double awareness of her lesbian and authorial identity in a masculinist world are samples of not only a Victorian, but also a contemporary woman's constant struggle for a subjective identity.

By contrast however, Imelda Whelehan critiques the outdatedness of neo-Victorianism's supposed post-feminism and claims that it no longer has serious issues to deal with. She highlights the fact that it has been turned into a sort of "free market feminism" which co-opts ideas of choice and empowerment and sells women a fantasy narrative of unachieved progress for merely financial reasons (Whelehan 2000: 100). In the same vein, Angela

McRobbie sees post-feminism "as superficial feminism" or "a kind of substitute for feminism" (McRobbie 2009: 1). She claims that the postfeminist agenda is motivated by populist and consumerist objectives for the sake of profit.

Indeed, there may be as many understandings of neo-Victorian feminism as there are waves of feminism. "Over-sexed" neo-Victorian novels examine sexual liberty and liberation from a twenty-first-century perspective, thus investigating issues related to homosexuality, rape, child abuse, and pornography to inspect Victorian concerns about "sexism" and uncover the parallels with the contemporary present (MacDonald and Goggin 2013: 10). Didactic novels or novels of education that recall Victorian fiction, work to raise moral awareness among contemporary generations by foregrounding similitudes between Victorian and neo-Victorian fictional characters. Sensational novels which foreground woman as transgressor exhibit how the personal becomes political: Sugar's novel which displays the female protagonist as a perpetrator in a hunt for male victims is not simply meant as an act of abhorrent violence, but an expression of resistance against subjugation and control. These different understandings of the peculiarities of postfeminist neo-Victorianism serve to discuss the relevance of this contemporary fiction that nostalgically, yet rebelliously "looks back" to the past for the purpose of understanding how patriarchal Victorian discourses (may) have imposed gendered social roles and positions. Indeed, there always exists this dynamic relationship between past and present in neo-Victorian fiction since it travels back to the past in order to re-read it and understand how it affects the present. One may wonder to what extent neo-Victorian novelists are inspired from their predecessors in their construction of neo-protagonists. In what ways does the neo-Victorian novel borrow and re-use Victorian feminist politics?

Though some thinkers like Whelehan and McRobbie question the relevance of neo-Victorianism in the twenty-first-century and critique the outdatedness of some of the questions posed by this political project, namely the interest in the status of women of minorities, notably fallen women and madwomen, these marginal figures precisely link neo-Victorian fiction to Victorian sensation which was similarly critiqued for its transgressive and rebellious female protagonists. The point I would like to raise in the following section is the role of Victorian sensation as an inter-genre for neo-Victorianism.

2. The Neo-Victorian Novel and the Literature of Sensation

2.1 The Allure of Victorian Sensation in Neo-Victorian Fiction

Kelly Marsh discussed the appearance of a wave of 'neo-sensation' in the late 1980s and 1990s with a special focus on plot similarities and characteristics that can be traceable in the contemporary text. Her study sets out the theoretical framework for exploring how neo-Victorian fiction displays multiple common grounds with Victorian sensation both thematically and stylistically. It allows to test the interfaces of (dis)continuity between this neo-Victorian corpus and Victorian sensationalists, their texts and female protagonists, and to investigate the motivations behind this return to sensation, since both axes are of high relevance to this study centred on the link between past and present.

In order to understand the motivations behind such re-emergence, critics like Jonathan Loesberg and Pamela K. Gilbert go back to the definition of the genre. In his article "The Ideology of Narrative Form in Sensation Fiction", Loesberg traces back the emergence of the appellation of the genre to the years of 1859 and 1862 when Wilkie Collins, Mrs Henry Wood and Mary Elizabeth Braddon published their most renowned sensational novels (Loesberg 1986). In the introduction of her book *A Companion to Sensation Fiction*, Gilbert suggests: "Sensation fiction emerged in Britain as a distinct genre around 1860, though the term had been in common use to describe exciting, uneventful stories in the US a few years prior" (Gilbert 2011: 2).

Defining the word 'sensation', Victorian critics like Margaret Oliphant, often claimed that the word had two meanings: the first entails that the genre is based on something shocking, extraordinary and exaggerated, while the second evokes that the genre has a physical effect on the senses. Oliphant wrote:

> It is a simple physical effect, if one may use such an expression. It is totally independent of character, and involves no particular issue, so far as can be foreseen at this point of the story. The scene itself is as tranquil as can be conceived-two young people indoors in a lighted room, with a pretty girl outside passing and repassing the uncovered window- yet the sensation is again indisputable. The reader's nerves are affected like the hero's. (Oliphant 1862: 572)

Accordingly, the genre may have a double meaning since it refers directly to sensation i.e. a display of feeling and emotion, while also being derived from the word 'sense', thus highlighting the genre's capacity to arouse sensory reactions, giving rise to somaesthetic readings. Consequently, the genre became inextricably linked with adjectives like sensorial and sensational. Hence, we talk of a wave of sensationalism intended mainly to provoke public interest and/or excitement. H. L. Mansel shared Oliphant's view claiming that "[e]xcitement, and excitement alone, seems to be the great end at which they aim-an end which must be accomplished at any cost by some means or other...." (Mansel 1863: 482). Indeed, the genre seemed to appeal more to the nerves of the reader than to reason or judgement. Building on both Oliphant and Mansel's views, Gilbert more recently claimed that sensation fiction indeed stimulates a physical response within the reader: "The new genre was distinctively transgressive in that it was thought to appeal directly to the "nerves", eliciting a physical sensation with its surprises, plot twists, and startling revelations" (Gilbert 2011: 2).

The current wave of neo-Victorian fiction draws inspiration from such sensation novelists. In an interview with Lucy Armitt, Waters states:

> I was hooked on the "sensation novels" of writers such as Wilkie Collins, Sheridan LeFanu and Mary Elizabeth Braddon: novels whose preoccupation with sex, crime and family scandals had once made them runaway bestsellers. Tentatively, I began to piece together a melodramatic plot of my own, drawing on all those aspects of Victorian culture which still fascinated and intrigued me: asylums, pornography, bibliophilia, the world of servants, the world of thieves. (Waters 2006, n.d.)

Indeed, in a plot of secrecy and mystery, Waters's novel unfolds the story of Susan Trinder, a fingersmith raised in a thieves' den by Mrs Sucksby, employed by Gentleman to trick a rich girl, Maud Lilly into marrying him, imprisoning her in a lunatic asylum and taking over her inheritance. Unexpectedly, both girls develop affectionate feelings for each other and discover sexuality through their lesbian identities. Maud, a secretary to her uncle the pornographic collector[6], emerges as a writer of erotica at the end of the narrative. The plot unveils twists in relation to mixed identities and mothers, reality and lies, and honesty and schemes. Set in 1861 London, the novel sheds light on the contradictory lives in Victorian London opposing the

[6] Maria Teresa Chialant notes that Maud's character is "reminiscent perhaps of two copyists in *Bleak House* (Captain Hawdon and Caddy Jellyby)" (2011: 48).

slums to the upper middle class. Sue and Maud represent these classes respectively, their life styles, their manners and their viewpoints on life in general.

Fowles's main plot unfolds in 1867 and tells the story of the beautiful Sarah Woodruff, who is rumoured to have engaged in a romantic liaison with a French officer who later abandoned her. Far from trying to hide her alleged shameful past, Sarah however seems to take pride in it. This is interpreted by the people around her as a sign of mental instability or madness. One day, Ernestina Freeman, a rich middle-class young woman, tells her fiancé Charles Smithson about the disgraced woman's story. As he hears about Sarah and watches her, Charles becomes intrigued with her mystery, tries to help her, gradually develops affectionate feelings towards her, and ultimately becomes obsessed with her. In other words, the Victorian Charles becomes caught in a forbidden love triangle, wondering whether he should or should not keep his engagement to Ernestina, who is a rich and beautiful heiress but a rather shallow young woman who does not share his intellectual interests in science and geology and his taste for transgression. The novel gives a glimpse of the Victorian frame of mind vis-à-vis issues in direct relation with women, notably sexuality and society's view of female virginity and the institution of marriage by means of the figure of the 'fallen' woman. It also very briefly yet intentionally exposes complex Victorian female relationships, notably lesbianism, by means of a scene of two girls sleeping side by side in the same bed. While general presuppositions about the Victorian age associate it with moral values and chastity, contemporary studies demonstrate the controversial debate around the matter. In fact, there are two opposite positions regarding lesbianism in the Victorian age; some thinkers claim that such phenomenon simply did not exist and eschew such possibility because of the absence of the theme in the literature of the time, while others insist that it was indeed quite recurrent in reality, but forbidden in fiction.

Echoing John Fowles's thematic interests, notably bringing out the contradictory realities of everyday life in the Victorian period and investigating the status of the 'fallen' woman at the time, Faber's *The Crimson Petal and the White* (2002) unfolds the story of William Rackham, an heir to a perfume manufacturer, married to pure and psychologically instable Agnes. He meets the young and particular prostitute Sugar who amazes him with her intelligence, determination and ambition. William, initially quite uneager but then pushed by Sugar, takes over his father's business and aids Sugar in her social ascension from prostitute to governess in his house. The narrative simultaneously follows the evolution of William and Sugar's sexual/romantic relationship, as well as the camaraderie that develops between Sugar and Agnes, and the motherly bond between Sugar and Sophie, William's daughter. The story ends with Sugar rescuing Agnes from William's cruel decision to incarcerate her in a lunatic

asylum, and escaping with Sophie leaving William a lonely and crippled man on the verge of bankruptcy.

Like the Victorians, neo-Victorian novelists are conscious of the importance of the plot in order to appeal to their readership. In fact, Pykett notes that sensation novels were often labelled as "fast novels", "crime novels", "bigamy novels" or "adultery novels". Thus, the three neo-Victorian novels of this corpus share the same four narrative aspects which Thomas Hardy deemed essential to the sensation novel: "mystery, entanglement, surprise, and moral obliquity" (Hardy cited in Pykett 1994: 4). At the centre of Collins's *The Woman in White* (1859), is a woman – or more – with a hidden secret. Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) is aptly entitled. Isabelle Vane in *East Lynne* (1861) is similarly tormented by her hidden past. Like these Victorian protagonists, Fowles's Sarah is associated with a mysterious past with the French lieutenant. Sugar constantly attempts to hide her literary vocation from both her mother and Rackham, as well as her identity as prostitute in Victorian street and public circles. Both Maud and Sue share a secret past of swapped mothers and false histories, as well as false presents wherein each impersonates another character. Thus, the notion of secret identity is central to the novels of this corpus: all female protagonists struggle to (un)-cover and discover their real identities in the midst of plots centred on mystery and confusion. The uncovering process is made long and intriguing to satisfy the expectations of the readership. The neo-Victorian plots postpone the denouement to the final pages to enhance the mystery and puzzlement.

Since Marsh's early study of the neo-sensation novel, several works have investigated the connections between the sensation novel of the 1860s and 1870s, and that of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Since the novels of this neo-Victorian corpus are aptly located in this temporal frame, a period where sensational literary forms as the novel and painting, flourished, one may suggest that they allude to particular sensational works by means of symbols and tropes. For example, Collins's *The Woman in White* (1859), as well as John Whistler's depictions of this same woman, notably in *Symphony in White, No. 1: The White Girl* of 1862 may be considered archetypal figures to the neo-Victorian protagonists, with their auburn hair, their solitary attitude and their centrality in the work of art.

Figure 1: James Whistler, *Symphony in White no 1 (The White Girl), (*1862)

Just like poor and mad Anne Catherick in Collins and Joanna Hiffernan, the long-time muse, model, and mistress of James Whistler, we find Sarah in Fowles's novel, Agnes and Sugar in

Faber's, as well as Maud in Waters'. Besides the flagrant physical appearance foregrounded by the paleness of skin and redness of hair, these protagonists have in common traits such as loneliness and melancholy, as well as artistic creativity often associated with passion, hysteria, and madness.

As he explores the reasons behind the allure of Victorian sensation, Loesberg praises the genre's reflection of the ideology of the time. Similarly, Winifred Hughes refers to one of the *Quarterly*'s reviewers who wrote that

> The sensation novel, be it mere trash or something worse, is usually a tale of our own times. Proximity is, indeed, one great element of sensation. It is necessary to be near a mine to be blown up by its explosion; and a tale which aims at electrifying the nerves of the reader is never thoroughly effective unless the scene be laid in our own days and among the people we are in the habit of meeting. (Hughes 1980: 18)

For example, class fear was a topic for discussion between the 1850s and the 1860s. A case in point is how Victorian sensation is often concerned with identity and its loss. In fact, such anxiety translates Victorian people's anxiety about the loss of a class identity due to the merging of the classes between the 1850s and 1860s. The centrality of loss, disguise and change of identity are elements which are recurrent in the three genre-establishing novels of Collins, Braddon, and Wood, similarly find their way to Waters's *Fingersmith*. This loss is expressed by means of the multiple names for one character. Like Helen Talboys who becomes Lucy Graham and then Lady Audley in Braddon's novel, Sue and Maud's names in Waters's text are constantly swapped. What is worthy of note is that loss of identity in Victorian sensation is not tackled from the perspective of psychology, but rather from a legal and social dimension, for the fear is entailed by leaving one's class and losing its subsequent advantages, and entering another one governed by different rules. Like Lady Audley who experiences the loss of aristocracy as she becomes a patient in a lunatic asylum and Isabel Vane who loses both her social and class identity as an aristocrat and wife of a lawyer and becomes a governess, the neo-Victorian protagonists go through the same process of class estrangement. In Fowles's novel, Sarah laments her situation as woman, governess and fallen woman in a society where no class would accept her. "You cannot [understand], Mr. Smithson. Because you are not a woman. Because you are not a woman who was born to be a farmer's wife but educated to be something ... better. (…) And you were not ever a governess, Mr. Smithson, a young woman without

children paid to look after children" (Fowles 1969: 72). Similarly, Maud's in-between position, for she is raised in an aristocrat's house to become a secretary of pornography, along with her physical transformation to look like working-class, may be read as manifestations of class-estrangement. Conversely, Sue's conditioning from a thief to a lady's maid in her passage from the lower to upper classes raises the question of which identity is constructed for the character in the midst of this process of inter-class mobility. In Faber's novel, Sugar's journey of social ascension from prostitute, to mistress of a gentleman to a governess also reflects the same dilemma of loss of class identity. Interestingly however, Sugar's versatile class identity is triggered by her own desire, insofar as loss is intentional for the sake of socio-economic evolution.

In the Victorian era, the sensational touched every genre of literature, notably fiction, poetry and theatre, as well as every aspect of social life: sensational advertisements and products, sports, popular science. In her survey of the genre, Pykett notes that it was called the "era of the spectacle" (Pykett 1994: 2) in which the "mode of amplification and excess" became "a mode of producing the *material* world" to borrow Thomas Richards's expression (Richards 1991: 55, empahsis in original). In fact, the period witnessed an increase in consumption, not only of basic goods, but also of products which started to be marketed by means of innovative types of advertisements engaging all senses: the focus on colours to appeal to the eyes, and radio and television commercials. Rackham's determination in Faber's text to revolutionize his manufacture calendar with catchy slogans and attractive colours to sell his perfumes is a case in point. Indeed, this new way of producing the world affected how fiction was written at the time since readership demanded more material subject matter insofar as the novel turned into a form of real-life drama.

The representation of the female character was a major element which caused Victorian sensation to be severely criticized. Central to the sensational plot, woman was represented either in the image of the passive and angelic or the form of the *femme fatale,* thus embodying either heroine or villainess. We find this trope revisited in Fowles's, Faber's, and Waters's novels insofar as their female protagonists are unorthodox, unconventional and rebellious. The female protagonist who shows signs of assertion and outspokenness caused much controversy at the time because her display of passion represented a significant threat to feminine morality as envisioned by patriarchy and thus, to the respectability of English society. This new protagonist seemed inextricably linked to the women of the 1860s who became more politically aware in their fight for suffrage. Margaret Oliphant notes that sensational heroines were:

> Women driven wild with love for the man who leads them into desperation … Women who marry their grooms in fits of sensual passion … who pray their lovers to carry them off from husbands and homes they hate … who give and receive burning kisses and frantic embraces, and live in a voluptuous dream … the dreaming maiden waits. She waits now for flesh and muscles, for strong arms that seize her, and warm breath that thrills her through, and a host of other physical attractions … [W]ere the sketch made from the man's point of view, its openness would at least be repulsive. The peculiarity of it in England is that this intense appreciation of flesh and blood, this eagerness of physical sensation, is represented as the natural sentiment of English girls, and is offered to them not only as the portrait of their own state of mind, but as their amusement and mental food. (Oliphant 1867: 209)

Oliphant deplored these women of passion, whether within fiction or in female readership, for these "women driven wild with love" were an affront to the domestic ideal of the genteel heroine of mainstream fiction cherished by the literary establishment. Sensation focused terribly on this model of femininity represented by an aggressive woman of intense desires secretly hidden underneath the pristine, desexualized angel of the house of the domestic novel. By doing so, it openly challenged the caricatured femininity posited by Victorian ideals. One many wonder to what extent most of the female protagonists of this neo-Victorian corpus would be considered 'wild women' and how these neo-Victorian novels challenge the mainstream representation of femininity caged within stereotypical limitations. The point I will raise in the third chapter is how the neo-Victorian female protagonist precisely evades sensational typological representations.

Though the genre of Victorian sensation quickly lost its popularity, was thought to be a genre with a "short life span" (Loesberg 1986: 115) and was "spoken of as a phenomenon of two decades" (Allingham 2016: n.d.), its re-emergence as a neo-Victorian genre proves its value as a form in which issues of gender and identity can be discussed. Indeed, the different reviewers I cited have grouped the above-mentioned authors Collins, Braddon and Mrs Henry Wood as sensational writers, based on a common political and/or cultural context. While the themes of these novels are not the same, what binds them together in the same genre is the common formal structure and its political implications. Indeed, though neo-Victorianism has come to be known as flexible and multiple, it is possible to make a first attempt to establish some of the codes that led to the re-emergence of sensation. Arguably, in her discussion of its

survival and the different forms of its re-emergence, Pykett notes: "Seen by many commentators as a hybrid form, combining realism and romance, the exotic and the everyday, the gothic and the domestic, the sensation novel was also deemed to be a mutant or mutating form" (Pykett 2006: 51). Thus, one may wonder how the neo-Victorian corpus re-visits the Victorian genre of sensation, either by emulation, adaption or revision, particularly at the levels of narrative structure, stylistic devices, and thematic interests. In order to answer some of the questions posed about the intertextual relationship between sensation and neo-sensation and the politics of the neo-sensational project, I will focus on the different manifestations of narrative, stylistic and thematic transfer, by means of a comparative study of the neo-Victorian corpus I propose and a number of the genre-establishing novels.

2.2 Neo-Victorian Strategies: Imitation, Adaptation, Revision

2.2.1 'Making It Seem Like'[7] Victorian Sensation: Narrative Structures, Stylistic Devices and Thematic Concerns

Since neo-Victorian sensation is inextricably linked to Victorian sensation, examining the various manifestations of this process of imitation may illuminate the debate on the motivations behind its resurgence. Because of this inextricable link between Victorian and neo-Victorian sensation, the points I would like to raise in this section revolve around how neo-Victorian novelists make their texts look like Victorian sensation through intertextual references, the use of particular narrative structures, namely plot and setting, stylistic devices as the gothic tradition, realism and romance, and finally, thematic concerns around woman.

In the scope of intertextuality, neo-Victorian texts are often inspired from their Victorian precursors. Interestingly, most of these references relate to the genre of Victorian sensation, for Linda Hutcheon claims, for example, that works of William Thackeray, George Eliot, Charles Dickens, and Thomas Hardy are direct inspirations to Fowles in this respect (Hutcheon 1988: 45). For example, stylistically, Fowles's abundant use of epigraphs at the beginning of each chapter imitates George Eliot's recurrent authorial intervention by means of "mottoes" as she chose to call them. The latter is registered to have used 225 of them in her work. Fowles even quotes her in his text: "God is inconceivable, immortality is unbelievable, but duty is peremptory and absolute" (Fowles 1969: 21). Furthermore, besides quoting Hardy in the very

[7] This expression is borrowed from Kate Mitchell's chapter 'Making it seem like it's authentic' in *History and Cultural Memory in Neo-Victorian Fiction* (2010), pp. 117–142.

first epigraph to the novel along with numerous other chapters (17, 18, 22, and others), Fowles stops midway in chapter 35 to reflect on his precursor's influence on his peers. He steps into the action of his narrative and states: "I have now come under the shadow, the very relevant shadow, of the great novelist who towers over this part of England of which I write" (Fowles 1969: 116). He rapidly digresses about how Hardy, a "pale young architect" returned to his hometown, engaged in a romantic relationship with his "illegitimate" cousin, and ultimately married another girl (Fowles 1969: 116). In addition, he explicitly refers to Dickens as "a great artist" (Fowles 1969: 125)

Similarly, *The Crimson Petal and The White* explicitly refers to Collins as one of its secondary characters. "As a matter of fact, he [Rackham] has an appointment to see his old chum Wilkie—Wilkie Collins--in ... (he pulls his silver watch into view) four hours from now.." (Faber 2002: 122). In contrast to Fowles who personally steps into the text as its author and refers to his precursors in his epigraphs, Faber relies on the intermediary of his main female character. Sugar has read *The Moonstone*, which allows her to develop a detective culture and facilitates her operation of observing the Rackham residence: "she knows nothing about detectives beyond what she's read in *The Moonstone*" (Faber 2002: 506). Following Agnes's disappearance, she suggests that William hire a detective, "[hoping] the bumbling Seagraves outnumber the clever Cuffs" (Faber 2002: 506). In *The Moonstone*, Seagrave is the overconfident but not-too-meticulous local police superintendent who fails to uncover any clues because of his unperceptive and unsurprising methods of detection and makes Sergeant Cuff's job much harder. By means of this intertextual reference to Collins's text, Faber blurs the boundaries between both texts, and their subsequent characters. Furthermore, Sugar's stream of consciousness unveils some of the numerous sources of inspiration for her novel, as she confesses: "She could aim to tread a middle ground between this gush of bile, and the polite, expurgated fictions of James Anthony Fronde, Felicia Skene, Wilkie Collins and other authors who've timidly suggested that prostitutes, if sufficiently deserving, should perhaps be excused hellfire" (Faber 2002: 309). In fact, her novel which may be deemed shockingly explicit because it revolves around the murderous tendencies of a prostitute, may be seen as a direct critique to the above-mentioned novelists who, according to her, failed to deliver "a stronger message than that" (Faber 2002: 309).

Though *Fingersmith* does not explicitly refer to any Victorian sensationalists, it quotes from and/or pastiches a popular Victorian novel, Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* (1859), insofar as it features numerous plot parallels. First, there is a young woman living in a large lonely house with an uncle who spends most of his time in the library: Laura and Frederick

Fairlie may be read as the doppelgängers of Maud and Christopher Lilly. Besides, both Frederick Fairlie and Christopher Lilly have problematic friends and acquaintances. Like Count Fosco who conspires with Sir Percival to trick Laura and Anne, Gentleman conspires with Maud to deceive Sue. Furthermore, like Collins's text which discusses how woman's fortune becomes the legal property of her husband through Laura's imprisonment, Waters's novel dramatizes how the wrong woman, Sue in this case, is locked in an asylum for inheritance. In fact, the plot of deception concocted by Maud and Gentleman is a strategy to overturn Victorian laws since Maud eventually intends to keep half her fortune. In addition, *Fingersmith* may also be read in reference to Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist* (1839). Like Oliver, an orphan, who was born in a workhouse and later trained by Fagin to pick pockets, Sue is in the same situation for she is raised by Mrs Sucksby and Mr Ibbs in their baby farm, and trained as a fingersmith from an early age. Casaubon and Dorothea in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1872), though they eventually marry, may also recall the scholar Mr Lilly aided by his niece Maud.

Besides the intertextual references to Victorian sensationalists, there are similarities between neo-Victorian sensation and its precursor at the level of its form. In fact, Victorian sensation novels comprised in average more than 300 pages: Collins's *The Woman in White* comprises 503 pages in the Wordsworth edition, Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* 455 pages in the Oxford University Press edition and Mrs Wood's first volume of *East Lynne* is composed of 342 pages in Leipzig Bernard Tauchnitz edition. Neo-Victorian novelists like Faber and Waters are aware that a neo-Victorian novel's success is determined by its positioning in print culture: the longer the text is, the more engaging it becomes to a thirsty readership. Faber writes more than 800 pages and Waters almost 500 pages, which shows their awareness of the importance of print. Fowles opts for a relatively shorter text. Besides, in order to make their novels more known, and thus more successful and profitable, Faber and Waters invest in the modern technologies of proliferation: both make use of book festivals, interviews, internet access and artistic (filmic) representation to promote their novels.

Furthermore, the sensation novel depended on different forms of print. Collins, in *Armadale* (1866), relies heavily on the newspaper. His novel is serialized in the *Cornhill Magazine*. In contrast, in *Lady Audley's Secret*, there is a demand for proof of death rather than an announcement of it in the newspaper. It is in response to such a demand that the sensational plot is initiated. Furthermore, in both texts, the sensation novel is depicted as the most important reading of the time. In *Lady Audley's Secret*, sensation wins against Robert Audley's French novels. He abandons them for the sake of uncovering Lady Audley's secrets which he finds more compelling. In *Armadale* too, Allan's reading of adventure narratives is too boring that it

makes Midwinter go to sleep, unlike the more sensational adventure itself. Furthermore, sensation is inextricably linked to particularly popular forms of press like criminal broadsides which reached their apogee during the first half of the nineteenth century before giving way to the popular press. All a writer of a sensation novel needed to do, wrote Mansel, was to "keep an eye on the criminal reports of the daily newspapers", which would provide enough material for the plot (Mansel 1863: 501). Indeed, because they both target plots of criminality and violence, both essential to satisfying the audience's expectations, broadsides and the sensation novel witnessed an exceptional success among a readership eager for intrigue. When *The Times* criticized Charles Reade's *A Terrible Temptation* (1871), partly for its "scarlet Woman" Rhoda Somerset, he wrote two letters to the editor proclaiming that he had simply "dramatized" facts reported by the newspaper itself. Indeed, he said that all of his best novels were inspired by articles: "For 18 years, at least, the journal you conduct so ably has been my preceptor" (Reade 1898: 377/378). Sensation fiction also becomes a means to adapt to new situations in real life. Robert Audley in *Lady Audley's Secret* states that he knows how to react to George's ghost thanks to his readings of Collins and Dumas. This reference not only shows the educational role of sensation fiction, but also how Braddon distinguishes herself and her fiction in the literary field. So, one may ask how the presence of paper is manifested in the neo-Victorian corpus under study, especially with regard to some protagonists' proximity to paper by means of their literary vocation.

Neo-sensation, like Victorian sensation, invests in paper. Faber combines different forms of print in his text: ads, newspapers articles, diaries and even fiction. In the beginning of the narrative, Rackham is described looking through his father's letters announcing the start of his business. Agnes writes different types of diaries and memoirs, everyday events and spiritual thoughts throughout the narrative. The news of her presumed death is published in the newspapers. Sugar is described not only while reading some passages of Agnes's writings, but also when writing and correcting her own novels. Similarly, Waters's text is the result of the coming together of different diaries narrated by Sue and Maud. Besides, the letter written by Marianne Lilly and hidden by Mrs Sucksby unveils the secrets of the girls' mixed identities and origins. In addition, Maud and Lilly closely associated through the collection of the pornographic archive. Fowles as well, resorts to journals and newspapers. Charles is often engaged in reading the latest news especially about the scientific advances of the time. Indeed, the nineteenth-century scientific discourse is heavily present in Fowles's novel. As early as the first pages, the author refers to Darwinian thought in Charles's commentary as he states: "I tried to explain some of the scientific arguments behind the Darwinian position" (Fowles 1969: 3).

He makes multiple references later throughout the narrative in many epigraphs like in chapters 3, 19 and 50. He also interrupts Charles and Dr Grogan's conversation and invades the narrative space to express his opinion about Lyell: "Lyell, let me interpose, was the father of modern geology" (Fowles 1969: 68). By means of these various examples from this neo-Victorian corpus, one may suggest that the recourse to diverse forms of print is an emulation of the Victorian tradition of sensationalists and thus foregrounds a relationship of legacy between Victorian sensation and neo-Victorian fiction.

Like Victorian sensation which is a "generic hybrid" combining "realism and melodrama, the journalistic and the fantastic, the domestic and the romantic or exotic" (Pykett, 1994: 4), neo-Victorian sensation uses different types of discourse typically associated with the nineteenth-century, namely romanticism, the gothic tradition and realism. In their focus on the individual, neo-sensational novels display romantic influences. The most explicit romantic influence in Fowles's text may well be his celebration of nature. Not only is the novel set in a rural landscape where there is recurrent description of wild and unbound nature, cliffs, mountains, and woods, but the link to nature is further foregrounded by means of the characters' relationship with their natural surroundings. Sarah constantly wanders in wilderness, while Charles is fervently immersed in the natural landscape of East Lyme. In their turning to nature, both characters also turn inward valuing their individual experience with nature.

Another romantic element is the characters' obsession with and constant search for truth. Their quest acquires a metaphysical dimension as the characters contemplate the essence of life, happiness, love and freedom, contrasted with their reality.

> Thus to Charles the openness of Sarah's confession—both so open in itself and in the open sunlight— seemed less to present a sharper reality than to offer a glimpse of an ideal world. It was not strange because it was more real, but because it was less real; a mythical world where naked beauty mattered far more than naked truth. (Fowles 1969: 75)

Though the passage ponders the significance of truth and individual in the world giving the text a melancholic and moody tone, it simultaneously exposes the gothic dimension in the novel. While Charles in Fowles's text is portrayed as a pragmatic man of science interested in the search for truth by means of evidence and analysis, he sometimes finds himself lost questioning the essence of life and what it means to be a human being entangled in the dyad free will/obligation.

> And so, leaning on free will quite as much as on his ashplant, he descended the hill to the town. All sympathetic physical feelings towards the girl he would henceforth rigorously suppress, by free will. Any further solicitation of a private meeting he would adamantly discountenance, by free will. All administration of his interest should be passed to Aunt Tranter, by free will. And he was therefore permitted, obliged rather, to continue to keep Ernestina in the dark, by the same free will. By the time he came in sight of the White Lion, he had free-willed himself most convincingly into a state of self-congratulation ... and one in which he could look at Sarah as an object of his past. (Fowles 1969: 80)

Such metaphysical passages not only tend to mystify the narrative and captivate the reader, but also foreground the gothic inspiration. Indeed, in the three novels though to different degrees, traces of the nineteenth-century gothic mode of writing can be detected. In Fowles's novel, there is a mysterious aura around Sarah, which pushes most people away, but fascinates and attracts Charles. He is entangled in her mystery and determined to probe her secret. In Faber's novel, both protagonists Sugar and Agnes are mysterious. While the first's combined androgynous sexuality and literary knowledge are a constant source of amazement to William, the second's more complicated psychological state and agitated thoughts keep the reader in a state of continual confusion. Similarly, in Waters's novel, Maud and Susan are a mystery to themselves and to each other as they attempt to habituate themselves to their nascent romantic feelings, as well as to the reader who is intrigued by the evolution of the plot and the outcome of the conniving scheme originally set by Gentleman and Mrs Sucksby.

Channelling the nineteenth-century gothic, the neo-Victorian novelists of this corpus often rely on the motif of mental diseases and psychological instability. Faber's text makes this connection explicit through the character of Agnes who eventually becomes associated with a spirits and angels. She has many episodes of visions about and apparitions of angels in the Convent of Health.

> Agnes doesn't stir: her journey has vaulted forward to its end. Two old men are carrying her stretcher from the railway terminus, deep in the heart of the countryside, to the gates of the Convent of Health. A nun rushes to open the gates, giant iron gates that rustle with ivy and hollyhock. The old men gently put the stretcher down on the sunlit grass and doff their caps. The nun kneels

> beside Agnes and lays a cool palm on her brow. “Dear, dear child,” she chides in loving exasperation. “What are we going to do with you?” (Faber 2002: 130)

The passage blurs the boundaries between fact and fiction, reality and vision, materiality and metaphysicality. By means of its minute description of the setting, the text gives the allusion that Agnes is transported to the Convent, and thus transcends the limits of the narrative. Emmeline Fox and Henry Rackham’s dialogues also give the narrative an air of metaphysicality, as they discuss the complicated relationship between humans and God, the human being’s duty towards his fellowmen, the torment between duty and desire, and the significance of time. For example, Emmeline, both enigmatic and obscure, “sighs, “There’s no stopping what has been begun; you know that, don’t you?” “But-begun?” “The march of progress. The triumph of the machine. We are on a fast train to the twentieth century. The past cannot be restored.” (Faber 2002: 136).

The third stylistic influence is nineteenth-century realism which crawled its way into the neo-Victorian sensation. Because it is set in a familiar domestic context, the sensation novel emulates reality and gives the illusion of factuality. In an interview with Fowles about the novel, he confesses: “I’m much more interested in experiencing the world as it is. Realism interests me increasingly in fiction-the problems of realistic technique” (Campbell 1976: 459). This may be the reason why he often finds himself using an omniscient narrator, a major characteristic of nineteenth-century realism. He even goes as far as to contend that the novelist is God and “the fact is that when you write a book you are potentially a tyrant, you are the total dictator” (Campbell 1976: 463). Interestingly indeed, the epigraph in chapter 13 wherein Fowles quotes Tennyson “For the drift of the Maker is dark, an Isis hid by the veil” (1851), shows him to be the Maker, and to have a divine power by which he controls everything and everyone in the text. Who actually controls the narrative, the reader is encouraged to ask? To answer this question, Fowles’s narrator shifts to first-person narration in a direct address to the reader in which he openly compares nineteenth-century narrators and novelists and himself. While the former seem to be very much God-like in their control of the narrative, the latter is a twentieth-century narrator/ author who seems to be omniscient yet claims to be different from his predecessors.

> The novelist is still a god, since he creates (and not even the most aleatory avant-garde modern novel has managed to extirpate its author completely); what has changed is that we are no longer the gods of the Victorian image,

> omniscient and decreeing; but in the new theological image, with freedom our first principle, not authority. (Fowles 1969: 41)

Interestingly, he quickly retorts and confirms: "No. My characters still exist, and in a reality no less, or no more, real than the one I have just broken" (Fowles 1969: 41).

Furthermore, as previously argued, all three neo-Victorian novelists to varying degrees are very much interested in depicting social reality in their texts. As they focus on themes such as the decline of the institution of marriage, the definition of motherhood and femaleness, and social mobility across classes in English society, the texts display some journalistic features of the realist mode. Besides, like Victorian realism which is chiefly visual in its depiction of the minute details of everyday life, the neo-Victorian novelists give special attention to detailed description. We read in Faber's text long descriptive passages of the most common elements of the city for example, "On either side of it, grimy rented lock-ups for costermongers' barrows and, all along the street, slimy remains of fruit and vegetables too far gone for scavenging" (Faber 2002: 146), or "At street level, a door swings open and two urchins run out, quick as rats. One is dressed only in his father's boots, a pair of ragged knickerbockers and a large shawl, the other runs barefoot, in a night-shirt and overcoat. Their hands and feet are brown and tough as dog's paws; their infant physiognomies ugly with misuse" (Faber 2002: 9). As if meant to give an authentic report of the reality of life in 1870s London, these passages manifest Roland Barthes's "*effet de réel*", for description is not merely imitative of reality, but rather connotative of the despicable conditions due to poverty and pollution.

Similarly, Waters's narrative focuses early on, on different social members involved, to varying degrees, with criminality. Mrs Sucksby raises orphans to become pickpockets. Mr Ibbs employs the kids for theft and then shares business with Gentleman in stolen goods. One may establish parallels with Charles Dickens's fiction in general, and *Oliver Twist* in particular in which "he prided himself on having recycled a topic drawn from Newgate novels but on dealing with it in a realist manner. In this novel, Dickens claimed to have managed to depict the criminal underworld in its true colours, without any idealisation", but not without the recourse to "sensationalist techniques very similar to those used by Newgate novelists" (Vanfasse 2004: para. 7/ 8). Like Dickens, one may suggest that Waters re-invests in a nineteenth-century-theme in order to construct a brand-new plot of criminality with multiple sub-plots of mixed identities, pornographic writing and sexual discovery, using "the highly melodramatic dialogue, the extremely violent action, and the stress on gruesome details" (Vanfasse 2004: para. 8).

Yet, among the risks of imitation is the reproduction of a faithful account of Victorian life. Indeed, the neo-Victorian novel is often either praised or blamed for its historicity, since it offers a detailed overview of Victorian England in the nineteenth-century in its typical activities, aspects of life in urban and rural England as well as in its debates on the science, politics and economics of the time. In fact, while reading a neo-Victorian novel, the reader is immediately transported to the Victorian world by means of the minute description of Victorian life. Fowles's text may be the most imitative in this neo-Victorian corpus because of its proximity in time to the Victorian period. Indeed, in his "Notes on an Unfinished Novel", he imagined the sort of criticism which his book might elicit: "'a clumsy pastiche of Hardy', 'a pretentious imitation of an inimitable genre', 'pointless exploration of an already overexplored age'" (Fowles 1990: 146). The author himself suggested that the retrieval of the period was the task of a researcher and a historian. "In the matter of clothes, social manners, historical background, and the rest, writing about 1867 is merely a question of research" (Fowles 1990: 138/139). Though the term research associates the neo-Victorian novel more with the task of the historian than to that of the novelist, one may suggest nonetheless that Fowles manipulates his readers by maintaining a delicate balance between the illusion of reality and fiction.

Faber as well resorted to all forms of historical media to research the Victorian age and produce his own fictional account of it. He claims in an interview with Julie Hale:

> We're very lucky that the Victorian era was the first age of photography, because photographs capture so much, including things that the photographer never meant to capture. Victorian painting has also helped me enormously, plus of course I've read hundreds of books. In the later rewrites of *Petal*, I joined an online forum called VICTORIA, which was superbly helpful. (Hale 2002: n.d.)

Photography, as the art, application, and practice of creating durable images, and painting as the skill of creating pictures, images, and portraits, entail notions like likeness, and sameness. Faber's statement may be the reason why some critics like Mitchell claim that neo-Victorian novelists adopt simulation and imitation by effacing the difference from Victorian antecedent insofar as they adopt an "authenticating strategy" (Mitchell 2010: 118).

When re-writing sensation, neo-Victorian novelists alternate between intertextuality and distance. On the one hand, by means of constant references to Victorian literature, "Waters remembers – and re-members – this novelistic tradition *and* the extra-textual reality with which

we associate it" (Mitchell 2010: 121/122, emphasis in original). On the other hand, neo-Victorian novelists rather tend to create their own vision of the Victorian. For example, Fowles claims:

> (…) but I soon get into trouble over dialogue, because the genuine dialogue of 1867 (in so far as it can be heard in books of the time) is far too close to our own to sound convincingly old. It very often fails to agree with our psychological picture of the Victorians – it is not stiff enough, not euphemistic enough, and so on; and here at once I have to start cheating and pick out the more formal and archaic (even for 1867) elements of spoken speech. It is this kind of 'cheating', which is intrinsic to the novel, that takes the time. (Fowles 1990: 138/139)

When research proves insufficient, Fowles must adapt the Victorian sensation novel in order to create his neo-Victorian version of the Victorian tradition. Faber builds on Fowles's argument: "In the end, though, the Victorian London in my story is a *vision* from my imagination, in the same way that the Scottish-highlands in my earlier novel, *Under The Skin*, were a personal vision. Every writer uses the "real" world as raw material for *creating his or her own universe*" (Hale 2002: n.d., emphasis added). Likewise, Mitchell claims that discussing homosexuality in the Victorian era in *Fingersmith* for example, is inserted forcefully in the cultural memory contemporaries have of the Victorian, and concludes that the novel rethinks the Victorian past in Waters's way, in order to shape the way that we reflecy on it today. In other words, *Fingersmith* is Waters's contemporary adaptation of the Victorian. These alterations are precisely why Mitchell calls neo-Victorain novels 'faux-Victorian', an expression she aptly chooses as a title to her essay. Building on these novelists and critics' claims, I turn my attention in the following section to exploring how neo-Victorianism adapts the genre of Victorian sensation by means of introducing postmodern narrative techniques, contemporay thematic concerns and an alternative version of the gothic tradition.

2.2.2 Adaptive Strategies: (post-)Modern Narrative Techniques, Contemporary Thematic Concerns and Neo-Gothic

Neo-Victorian novelists adapt Victorian sensation by introducing twentieth- and twenty-first centuries postmodernist traditions at the levels of literary style and culture. In other words,

sensation re-emerges in the contemporary age under a new postmodern(ist) form. Beth Palmer establishes a parallel between postmodern fiction that is engaged with revisiting the ideological and cultural conditions of the past and neo-Victorian fiction that reinterprets the past from a postmodern perspective. In fact, she claims that "[i]f, as Linda Hutcheon argues, postmodern fiction reveals the past as ideologically and discursively constructed, then the neo-Victorian sensation novel depicts the past it pastiches as the self-conscious construct of print and paper" (Palmer 2009: 87). In order to adapt Victorian sensation, neo-Victorian novelists choose to focus on specific aspects that are particular to Victorian culture and contemporize them. They accommodate some narrative aspects such as the narrator and the ending, refashion their thematic interests so as to suit contemporary readership, and ultimately adjust some stylistic devices insofar as they introduce a contemporary version of the Victorian gothic tradition.

Neo-Victorian fiction changes the stylistic codes of fiction by recalling the Victorian past all the while introducing modern techniques. Among the twentieth-century narrative techniques used by Fowles is the interruption of events' sequence. He often disrupts the progression of the narrative to create more suspense and appeal to the sensations of the reader. For example, he pauses the text and devotes chapter 13 to engage in a one-sided conversation with the reader on the status of the novelist. Besides, though he uses a mostly omniscient narrator, the innovation he introduces to this narrator is the fact that he recognizes his limitations. At certain points in the narrative, the narrator refuses to intrude and claims that characters are free to do whatever they want. This may reflect Fowles's view that "freedom of will is the highest human good" (Fowles 1969: 22). Besides, this twentieth-century narrator is physically present in the nineteenth-century text. This is a stylistic play on Fowles's part to blur the boundaries between fact and fiction, reality and imagination. In addition, looking back at the past enables him to understand how the century has evolved until reaching the twentieth-century, especially by investigating the impact of scientific progress on the ideology and culture of the time. Thomas Docherty in his exploration of Fowles's novel claims there is a process of manipulation of narrative points of view. Fowles's text is a multiplicity of texts: there is often the presence of more than one "surrogate author" providing their own *texte*, there are many texts present within the text either by quote or allusion, and the characters are often presented as "free" characters who create their own *textes*. Fowles, as the god-like novelist, is a proponent of "the freedom that allows other freedoms to exist" (Fowles, 1969: 86). These techniques are for the purpose of accentuating characters' individuality. The author argues that Fowles's "characters cannot become merely a fluid function within a textual pattern or plot, but remain spatially distinct and free to exercise a subjectivity" (Docherty 1981: 120). He adds that "[the]

multiplication of *textes* allows the reader to see the existing relations between characters, and gives each character an individual history, that is, a personal construction of reality, and history seen in terms of their own subjectivity" (Docherty 1981: 121, emphasis in original).

Fowles foregrounds his fiction in freedom insofar as it becomes constantly open to change and modification. He makes his characters authors within the text. Through a fiction pretending to be self-autonomous and a heightened self-consciousness that proves to be ironic, Fowles uses an "author-persona, a godgame player" who questions the previously thought-to-be master-slave relationship between author and character, reinforces the authenticity of the creation and forces the reader to participate in meaning-making (Eddins 1976: 208). Dwight Eddins in "John Fowles: Existence as Authorship" claims that Fowles looks for "a degree of resolution" for himself and his characters, between the "Collector" who imposes a system of existence in which he is bound to characters and the "Liberator" who leaves his existence to "hazard" (Eddins 1976: 206). The movement from one to another is essential. For this reason, Fowles uses a parodic structure, through which the author-personae and the reader are in communication. He writes a piece of fiction about fiction. The novel is a Victorian novel, which is a contemporary novel, about the Victorian novel. Fiction with both of its dimensions of fictiveness and reality becomes a thematic concern in the text, not only a stylistic one. This multiplicity makes the reader self-conscious of the relationship that exists "between himself, the author-persona and the characters; [of] the relation between Victorian history and contemporary realities" (Eddins 1976: 217). The author invades the boundaries of the fictional work to the extent of becoming a character within the text, like the reader who also enters the text. The omniscient narrator reflects how characters are puppets controlled by an author, a puppeteer. Through parodying such intrusion, Fowles claims to do the opposite. In other words, by claiming to have no authority at all over his characters and allowing them freedom, the gap between the author, the reader and the character diminishes. Author and reader are less real and more fictive, just like the characters they write/read respectively. The reader identifies with the author because they share the same dilemma of anxiety on how to keep the characters' freedom, and with the characters because they are both victims of the author's manipulation. At the end, the reader becomes so involved in the text that he is the one playing "the existential godgame" (Eddins 1976: 219).

Fowles metaleptically inserts himself in the text as a stranger across from Charles in the train carriage referring to himself as "the face, only too familiar to me, of the bearded man who stares at Charles" (Fowles 1969: 173). Metalepsis is a narrative technique whereby the author breaks the boundaries between reality and fiction, and intrudes upon the fictionalized space

separated from him/her in terms of space and time coming together along his/her characters. In *Narrative Discourse*, Gérard Genette defines metalepsis as "any intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe (or by diegetic characters into a metadiegetic universe, etc.), or the inverse" (Genette 1980: 234/235). It is a "deliberate transgression of the threshold of embedding" (Genette 1988: 88). Debra Malina writes:

> Metalepsis dramatizes the problematization of the boundary between fiction and reality endemic to the postmodern condition. More specifically, because it disrupts narrative hierarchy in order either to reinforce or to undermine the ontological status of fictional subjects or selves, it provides a model of the dynamics of subject construction in an age that has witnessed…the deconstruction of the essential self in favor of a subject constituted in and by narrative. (Malina 2002: 2)

Though indeed Fowles's narrator blurs the boundary between text and reality, metalepsis is also utilized to manipulate and even deceive his readers. He insists that he remains an outsider to the text with no power to exercise over Charles or the rest of the characters, asking: "Now the question I am asking, as I stare at Charles, is not quite the same as the two above. But rather, what the devil am I going to do with you?" (Fowles 1969: 173). He pretends a loss of control over his characters simply to foreground the ingenuity of his novel and emphasize his characters' freedom. Yet, one may suggest that metalepsis goes counter to his original aim, for it conversely underlines the narrator's, who eventually turns out to be Fowles himself as the bearded man, absolute authority. As a matter of fact, though he expresses uncertainty as to Charles's future, he eventually prescribes two possible endings on which Charles must act.

In *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, the manifestation of metalepsis is not clearly defined as either modernist or postmodernist, as either bending or breaking. Fowles's narrator claims:

> It is not only that [Charles] has begun to gain an autonomy; I must respect it, and disrespect all my quasi-divine plans for him, if I wish him to be real. In other words, to be free myself, I must give him, and Tina, and Sarah, even the abominable Mrs. Poulteney, their freedoms as well. There is only one good definition of God: the freedom that allows other freedoms to exist…The novelist is still a god, since he creates (and not even the most aleatory avant-

> garde modern novel has managed to extirpate its author completely); what has changed is that we are no longer the gods of the Victorian image, omniscient and decreeing; but in the new theological image, with freedom our first principle, not authority. (Fowles 1969: 97)

The freedom Fowles insists to give his characters creates multiplicity and plurality. In fact, he believes that the text should not be written or/and read as a static thing, a "fossil", but rather an active fluid one. In other words, the traditional narrative elements such as time, plot and characters are not merely fictional static elements: time eludes the conventional limitations, and characters "disobey" the author and force him to re-read them thus leading to unpredictable plot. This process from 'thingness' to 'activity' is what leads to meaning-making. In this process, two actions take place: the reader as author and the author as reader. The act of re-reading is what turns the fossilised text into a fluid one, and allows for re-construction.

As Fowles experiments with theme when he discusses modern notions such as existentialism and human freedom through the characters of Charles and Sarah, he thus creates a "time-travel" (Eddins 1976: 208). In his journey of discovery, Charles has to go different stages, which Fowles develops subtly throughout the narrative. Sarah, too, emerges at the end of the narrative as the New Woman, fulfilled and independent, still in her enigma and mystery. Richard Costa believes that this is an attempt to "un-crucify Charles and truly liberate Sarah" (Costa 1975: 6). It is possible to claim that Charles achieves a kind of existential freedom in the text insofar as he is followed throughout the narrative torn apart between two completely opposite lives within the limitations of the Victorian society: the life of a respectable scientific man bound to marry an aristocrat girl and the life of wild passion and mystery in the light of modernity and progress. Others like Richard Lynch argue however that *The French Lieutenant's Woman* "reflects a movement from a search for personal authenticity (or existential freedom) to poststructuralism, in which freedom becomes a "chimera", or an "endlessly deferred goal"" (Lynch 2002: 67). The double ending is an act of deferring closure, and thus, finding what existence really is. Lynch equally notes that considering this double ending a manifestation of the suppression of an author-God who brings finality and closure to life in the narrative, is what makes existentialism at the core of the narrative. The double ending thus, consolidates the sense of individual freedom and so, establishes a sense of authenticity in both closures. Either way, that the novel raises awareness of one's self is undeniable. This again puts no claim to its search for existentialism and authenticity.

The French Lieutenant's Woman is a metafiction, the writing of fiction about fiction. Patricia Waugh argues that is the "fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality" (Waugh 1984: 2). It is fiction to examine the link between the fictional and the real world. It is not an imitation of reality, but an examination of it in a fictional way. The novel can also be considered a historiographic metafiction; a rewriting of history in a work of fiction and critically dealing with it. Linda Hutcheon offers her definition of works of historiographic metafiction as "those well-known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflective and yet paradoxically lay claim to historical events and parsonage" (Hutcheon, 1988:105). The novel looks back on the Victorian past with a critical eye. It alternates between a realist nineteenth-century setting and a contemporary narrative voice examining this reality.

In brief, Fowles's text is a palimpsestic reworking of multiple Victorian sources. Hence, the novel is a combination of Victorian and (post-)modern narrative techniques, which transforms it into a contemporary work of art reflecting on the novel in the past and thus acquiring a historiographic metafictional dimension. Though accused of mimicking Victorian literary traditions, Fowles reinvests them in order to produce a novel which is not a copy, but rather an "exploitation of the form" according to Thomas Foster. He claims that Fowles "returned to an early form of fiction as a way of constructing his novel" (Foster 1994: 67).

Similarly, Faber's *The Crimson Petal and the White* combines Victorian and (post)modern characteristics to adapt to the requirements of the time. Though the text is quite long imitating its Victorian precursors, notably the three-volume novel, it is fast-paced and the language is both rich and not verbose. When Hale asks him about the combination of the richness of Victorian prose with some of the effects that have been rendered possible in modern fiction, Michel Faber claims:

> The pace and density of the prose varies according to how fast I want the narrative to move. If you read Victorian pulp fiction, the so-called 'penny dreadfuls' you'll find they're still a lot more verbose and ponderous than the spare, swift narratives of modern thrillers. In *Petal*, I could move from Dickensian richness to Chandleresque sparseness, as long as I handled the transition so smoothly that it wasn't obtrusive. (Hale 2002, n.d.)

In other words, the text in terms of style and language is the product of Victorian and modern fusion. Yet, while the triple-decker was a popular format supported by publishing firms in quest

for more material gain, the library system was strictly regulated at the time. Novelists had to abide by a set of rules on what subject matter to include. A case in point is George Moore's crusade against the library system following the publication of his book *Modern Lover* (1883). The novel was initially rejected by Bentley and Sons, and later deemed "immoral" by Charles Edward Mudie who claimed: "two ladies from the country wrote to me objecting to that scene where the girl sat to the artist as a model for Venus. After that I naturally refused to circulate your book" (Moore 1884: 30). Conversely, Faber uses a similar format to show absolutely everything the Victorians tried/ had to ignore or conceal. Because of its double capacity to channel the Victorian and establish the neo-Victorian canon, George Letissier labels it as "a Neo-Victorian Classic" in one of his articles "*The Crimson Petal and the White:* a Neo-Victorian Classic". According to him, the novel not only allows for the return of the nineteenth-century canon and establishes a defined aesthetics of the genre of neo-Victorianism, but also "enlarges the canon through its own idiosyncrasies and specificities, by opening up new tracks, as it were" (Letissier 2005: 1).

The novel sheds light on the contradictory life conditions in late nineteenth-century England. While they are described to be the best times for wealthy and prosperous classes, the last decades heightened the deprivation of the lower ones, which led to the boom of prostitution. Faber paints a vivid picture of the reality of the time. He brings out the realities of everyday-life in 1870s England; details that are quickly – if ever – mentioned in literature. He does not hesitate to describe in absolute vividness repulsive scenes to the modern reader, such as prostitutes cleaning their bodies after a client leaves:

> you find her squatting over a large ceramic bowl filled with a tepid mixture of water, alum and sulphate of zinc. Using a plunger improvised from a wooden spoon and old bandage, she attempts to poison, suck out or otherwise destroy what was put inside her only minutes before by a man you've just missed meeting. As Caroline repeatedly saturates the plunger, the water becomes dirtier--a sure sign, she believes, that the man's seed is swirling around in it rather than in her. (Faber 2002: 5/6)

While the scene to a Victorian reader is unimaginable, it only materializes the Victorian world which Faber imagines, to the contemporary reader. Faber describes dirty children urinating and drunkards sleeping in the streets, and stops at the filth which fills dark alleys of London. He simultaneously exposes aspects of early modern life especially by peering into his characters'

thoughts, worries and aspirations with life changing ahead of them. Thus, the grotesque is made useful to highlight and accentuate the terrible conditions in which prostitutes, and lower classes in general, lived.

The narrator, like the text itself, is the result of an amalgamation process. He is the nineteenth-century omniscient voice which controls the text and the plot, and which addresses the modern reader directly "Watch your step. Keep your wits about you; you will need them" (Faber 2002: 3). With respect to the narratorial point of view, Maria Teresa Chialant argues for a "Dickensian resonance" as she establishes a parallel between Faber's and Dickens' narrators: "Hovering about the scene, he resembles Master Humphrey or the Uncommercial Traveller, the persona behind which Dickens conceals himself in order to control his narrative" (Chialant 2011: 45). It follows that from the beginning of the text, the author uses the pronoun "you" as he engages in a one-party conversation with the reader aiming to bring them inside the text, exciting them and arousing their senses:

> And yet you did not choose me blindly. Certain expectations were aroused. Let's not be coy: you were hoping I would satisfy all the desires you're too shy to name, or at least show you a good time. Now you hesitate, still holding on to me, but tempted to let me go. (…) Sleet stings your cheeks, sharp little spits of it so cold they feel hot, like fiery cinders in the wind. Your ears begin to hurt. But you've allowed yourself to be led astray, and it's too late to turn back now. It's an ashen hour of night, blackish grey and almost readable like undisturbed pages of burnt manuscript. You blunder forward into the haze of your own spent breath, still following me. (Faber 2002: 3/4)

The playful narrative voice teases and engages the reader. However, what differs from Fowles's narrator is the direct insinuation to the erotic and sexual in the novel. The reading act is the outcome of "expectations […] aroused" where the reader must not be "coy" and "all the desires [they are] too shy to name" are to be satisfied. What follows is that the reader becomes an active participant in the narrative process and probably in the reception or/and creation of characters. Furthermore, the narrative voice claims to bring the reader inside the fictional world of the text and to get them in direct contact with the characters. For example, he encourages the reader to enter Caroline's room as she sleeps. "I'm about to leave you. Yes, sadly so. But I'll leave you in good hands, excellent hands. Here, in this tiny upstairs room where the feeble light is shining,

you are about to make your first connection. She's a sweet soul; you'll like her" (Faber 2002: 5). Then, he even asks the reader to lie beside her.

> Make yourself comfortable, for the room is utterly dark, and will remain that way until sunrise. You could even risk, if you wish, lying down beside Caroline (…) [.] Lift the blankets and ease your body in. If you are a woman, it doesn't matter: women very commonly sleep together in this day and age. If you are a man, it matters even less: there have been hundreds here before you. (Faber 2002: 7)

As if controlling both narration and text, the voice is almost made material and its presence is felt in its monologue addressed to the reader. This is a narrative game on the part of the narrator/author. Faber is an author-God because he has the power to bring the reader in and out of the text as he wishes. However, he admits he controls his characters no more than he does the readers, thus maintaining a constant interplay between nineteenth-century and twenty-first-century characteristics of the narratorial voice in the text. Letissier describes the narrative voice in these terms: "the double temporal perspective, with the twenty-first century looking back on the nineteenth century, with the benefit of hindsight, as it were, leads to what could be called hyperomniscience" (Letissier 2005: 6/7).

Furthermore, the third-person omniscient narrator has access not only to physical places, insofar that he is able to get inside locked rooms and behind closed doors, but also to characters' thoughts and feelings. He seems to be everywhere in the narrative enjoying the power to see everything from above and within, which makes of him an all-encompassing narrator. As he follows each character from one place to another, he takes the reader with him. While the omniscient narrator is a realist motif *par excellence*, parading him throughout the text is a modern narrative technique which enables him to have a multi-perspective eye. At one point in the narrative, when Sugar starts inspecting William's house, and then following him and the members of his household around, narration shifts momentarily to her. Sugar takes control over narrating characters' movements, describing their gestures and behaviours, and even reporting their speeches. The narrator steps down and allows Sugar a momentary control over the role of third-person narrator. Asked by Hale about this exchange of narrative voices and its participation in the development of characters, Faber responds:

> It's actually not so easy to figure out whose voice it is that's addressing you at the start—whether it's the author, or a lady of the night, or the book itself. Whatever it is, it lures you into the world of 1875 until you're in too deep to pull out, and then leaves you to fend for yourself. I use the metaphor of a novel being like a prostitute, promising the reader a good time, promising intimacy and companionship. Ironically, even though you feel at first that you're being strung along by this beguiling voice, you do end up getting everything it promised you. And more, I hope. (Hale 2002, n.d.)

Paul Dawson proposes "four permeable and overlapping modes of narrative authority" (Dawson 2009: 148) which he locates in numerous contemporary novels, among which *The Crimson Petal and the White* whose narrator he claims to be "the literary historian" (Dawson 2009: 153). It is possible to argue however, that Faber's narrative voice combines all four modes. He emerges as "the ironic moralist" (Dawson 2009: 152), when he claims some sort of authority over the reader "When you first picked me up, you didn't fully appreciate the size of me, nor did you expect I would grip you so tightly, so fast" (Faber 2002: 3), and even expresses his own opinion "Until such a novel is published, prostitutes will continue to be smothered under the shroud of The Great Social Evil, while the cause of their misery walks free" (Faber 2002: 249). He equally assumes the role of "the immersion journalist and the social commentator" (Dawson 2009: 155), for he claims to record the reality of the time as if by a journalistic approach of observation, explanation and comment, notably vis-à-vis the situation of prostitutes in mid-nineteenth-century London. Faber's narrator also emerges as "the literary historian" (Dawson 2009: 153), since he both relies on facts and the capacity of literature to re-imagine history, when he claims for example "Religious publishers from Pennsylvania to Rome are no doubt positive that the world's devoutest Christian is to be found right here in Silver Street, London" (Faber 2002: 212). Finally, by means of his ironic comments and satirical tone, it is possible to claim that he is "the pyrotechnic storyteller" (Dawson 2009: 153).

Such a narratorial relegation finds its way equally in Waters's *Fingersmith*. Though it deals with Victorian London, the novel is composed in a postmodernist tradition. The narrative is a combination of three key parts told by different narrators. The narrative is multi-layered in the sense that there are different plots going on at the same time. The reader's attention is always drawn to the tight plotting, complex characterisation, and speedy pace. The twists that Waters introduces are surprising and breath-taking. Mysterious and full of enigmatic tropes, the plot is a combination of subplots wherein each character, notably Mrs Sucksby and Gentleman

towards the beginning of the narrative, creates a story of their own. Mrs Sucksby invents a story about Sue's mother who is supposed to be a murderess, while Gentleman invents a story about him growing up with a nurse and her grief about her dead sister's daughter, in this case Sue. There is fiction inside fiction, another dimension of metafiction where not only authentic literature is revised and reproduced, but also fake literature. This poses the question of authorship and authenticity later to be developed further through the characters of Mr Lilly and Maud.

In the narrative, the narrator shifts with the viewpoint. There are two first-person narrators: Sue and Maud. The plot starts with a first-person narrative voice presented by Sue. In a *Bildungsroman*-like style, Sue recollects memories of her past to give an overview of her origins and her upbringing. Sue takes over the narration of the first and third parts. In the second part, it is Maud who controls the narrative voice and reports events which marked her, thus allowing the reader access into her psyche. She describes how such events affected her and what thoughts and feelings they evoked in her. She also narrates habitual scenes of exchanging goods and bargaining prices between Mr Ibbs and his different fingersmiths. Such scenes are ordinary and part of their everyday-life in their thieves' den. Waters presents such scenes as normally as possible, which reflects the lifestyle these people share at Mrs Sucksby's and relates to the realist dimension of her text. Using different perspectives – since part one and three are narrated from Sue's point of view, while part two from Maud's – permits the revelation of information previously withheld from certain characters. According to Llewellyn, the presentation of the same events from different perspectives reflects a "need to re-read and rewrite the story at every turn" (Llewellyn 2007: 197), which is a significantly postmodern gesture. Furthermore, as its precursor in Fowles's text and peer in Faber's novel, the narrative voice in Waters's text addresses the reader directly, "Do you follow" (Waters 2002: 14), aligning the three novelists with regard to their choice of narrative voice(s).

Waters experiments with narrative structure and intertextual references, which aligns her work with postmodern historiographic metafiction. Hutcheon claims that historiographic metafiction is a genre that draws attention to the narrativity of the past by exposing "both history and fiction [as] discourses, human constructs, signifying systems" (Hutcheon 1988: 93). There is then a tendency to read history as textual and neglect questions which concern its materiality. Yet, Katharina Boehm argues that Waters is precisely interested in "the affective and disruptive ways in which tactile encounters with architectural places and material objects shape our investments in the past" so as to bring to the fore the materiality of history (Boehm 2011: 238). Waters's explicit focus on material sexuality and lesbian desire is probably the most

controversial element of her novel. Her picture of Victorian London, Kaplan shows, is a "simulacrum" based on revisionist historiography and the "combined scholarship [of] historians of sexuality, together with feminist, gay, lesbian and queer studies" produced in the late twentieth-century (Kaplan 2007: 111). Hence, such work would not have been possible if it weren't for the progress made in contemporary critical literary theories. So, the novel embodies the spirit of revision entailed by adapting the Victorian to a contemporary perspective. Waters's novels, Kaplan points out,

> are underwritten by the post-war social and cultural history of nineteenth-century London in particular, with its emphasis on gender, on the poor, on popular culture and on the pseudo-sciences, especially spiritualism. The novels fold those historical accounts back into nineteenth-century fictional forms: the picaresque, melodrama and ghost story of Victorian fiction, borrowing also from the pornographic subliterature revealed in *The Other Victorians*. (Kaplan 2007: 111)

In other words, the Victorian world as Waters imagines it, is partly influenced by postmodernism for the contemporary is integrated in her vision of the Victorian. Abigail Dennis sums up Waters's approach as "the skilful appropriation of Victorian plotting and stylistic techniques, combined with embedded references to twentieth-century literary, cultural, and queer theory" (Dennis 2008: 41).

Neo-Victorian novelists also revise Victorian sensation at the level of its ending. While realist texts offer linearity and cohesion and their endings are about clarity and closure, neo-Victorian texts are often about abrupt, ambiguous and even incomplete closures. Fowles offers three possible endings to his narrative: a reunion, a separation and a loss of lovers. By means of a multiple-ending narrative, the novel resists the closure, finality and fixedness of nineteenth-century realism. This multiple-ending plot echoes Barthes's theorization of "death of the Author", whereby the author is no longer the sole authority in the text. In return, there is the birth of the reader, who is pushed to be active, and construe their own truths vis-à-vis the narrative and opt for the ending which suits them best. Similarly, Faber opts for vagueness, "[a]n abrupt parting" in his narrator's expression (Faber 2002: 628). The narrative does not definitively announce Agnes's successful arrival to the Convent nor Sugar's and Sophie's whereabouts following their escape. Likewise, Waters's ending arouses opposite views on whether Maud ends up conforming to heteropatriarchy or creating a moral pornographic

discourse of their own. Nonetheless, it shows in both cases that such postmodernist ending is open to different interpretations. Waters then, ruptures narrative hegemony, to borrow Jane J. Lee's expression used in the title of her article (Lee 2018). Does this split not entail eventual possibilities of breaking with, challenging and even subverting Victorian fiction?

In neo-sensation, the gothic tradition is transformed, made ordinary and part of everyday life. What is worthy of note are the early signs of the contemporisation of the Gothic. We no longer read of dark and sombre haunted mansions with ghostly apparitions and lunatic women in the attic screaming in the middle of the night as in the nineteenth-century tradition. The gothic in the neo-Victorian novel is adapted to the expectations of contemporary readership. Rohan McWilliam argues that the gothic in Waters's text is revived by means of "a complex plot, a foregrounding of female characters and desires, its dark landscapes and underworlds, and its shocks and hysterical emotions" (McWilliam 2009: 109). In other words, the gothic does not emanate from places, but rather from within people themselves. Fowles ironically signals an outdated perception of monstrosity, by means of a personification as he mockingly describes the kitchen at Mrs Poulteney's, "Though the occupants in 1867 would have been quite clear as to who the tyrant was in their lives, the more real monster, to an age like ours, would beyond doubt have been the enormous kitchen range that occupied all the inner wall of the large and ill-lit room" (Fowles 1969: 8). Thus, Fowles hints at the changing perceptions and the new requirements of the modern age.

Fingersmith is a postmodern pastiche *par excellence*, for it plays with different narratives and subgenres of Victorian tradition. It sets up traditional, popular nineteenth-century literary expectations in order to disappoint them. In fact, it mimics and inverts its own form because it manipulates and alters the genres that compose the work. It is a combination of gothic fiction, domestic melodrama and sensation novel. The narrative illustrates numerous gothic spaces such as the old mansion in Briar and the madhouse, as well as characters embodied by the villains and the antagonists: Mr Lilly, Gentleman and Mrs Sucksby as the most influential ones. Nonetheless, Waters revolutionizes the gothic by means of a constant interplay between presence and absence according to Boglárka Kiss. The latter argues that the madhouse in Waters's text does not surmount to the expectations since it turns out to be the space where Maud feels in security among people she trusts and considers mother-figures, she was raised in the asylum as if it were her home (Kiss 2013: 236). Contradictorily, Sue expresses her fear of the madhouse which seems to look like an ordinary house but provokes horror within her:

> it had once been an ordinary gentleman's house; the walls had used to have pictures and looking-glasses on them, and the floors had used to have rugs; but now, it had all been made over to madwomen […]. And I can't say why, but somehow the idea was worse and put me in more of a creep than if the place had looked like a dungeon after all. (Waters 2002: 408)

By means of the contrast in imagery of ordinariness and danger, Kiss concludes that "the dreadfulness of the place does not only derive from the fact that its inhabitants are supposed to be insane, but rather from the supposition that every average home can be turned into such a threatening space" (Kiss 2013: 237). On the other hand, Sue's home in the Borough, which is not typically gothic, turns out to be the locus of danger, because it's where most secrets are hidden, where the mischievous plot is concocted, and where the murder happens. Overall, in contrast to gothic tradition, danger lies in the most ordinary places, while the typically gothic ones are rather hazardless. In this sense, in Waters's novel, every ordinary place can be turned into a threatening one. On the other hand, Kiss argues that Lilly's mansion Briar turns out to be "rather a disappointment: the only peculiarity of the building is that the roof needs fixing" (Kiss 2013: 236). Sue, who has a "warm imagination" (Waters 2002: 6) and is drawn to romances and fictitious stories of all kinds, is decidedly underwhelmed by the place" (Kiss 2013: 236). Thus, in Waters, the same place may evoke opposite feelings in the protagonists, since each has her own view of the madhouse. By means of such contradiction, one may suggest that the gothic in Waters's text comes from within oneself rather than from the place itself. Both protagonists participate in the creation of gothic and non-gothic places in the narrative. One may also add that the gothic is subjective in Waters's novel, since it is transformed not only by the author herself from a contemporary perspective, but also from the characters' vantage point in regard to the significance of each place.

Among traditional gothic elements is the monster. Originally, a monster is a mythical creature which is part animal and part human, or combines elements of two or more animal forms, and is frequently of great size and ferocious appearance. Later, more generally, it included any imaginary creature that is large, ugly, and frightening. While the Victorian monster was infamous for its tangible forms of madness as in Jack the Ripper or Spring Heeled Jack and thus, reflected Victorian society's attempt to define their crazy world, neo-Victorian monsters are more common insofar as they are seemingly normal and thus, less shocking. McWilliam notes that while "the past was appropriated as a site for horror", contemporary authors deal with vampires differently (McWilliam 2009: 109). The monsters of the nineteenth-

century have turned into figures of romance. In other words, the thematic figure remains the same, but the way it is approached has evolved to adapt to both the aesthetic requirements of the contemporary age and readers' expectations. Accordingly, Faber introduces an alternative version of the Victorian monster. He appropriates objects, texts and contexts from the long nineteenth century and combines them with a very twenty-first century monster culture by unleashing the monstrosity which is inevitably naturally embedded within all human beings. Commenting on John Barton's plummeting fate upon his wife's death, thus unleashing the monster within him, Gaskell tells us: "One of the ties which bound him down to the gentle humanities of the earth was loosened, and henceforward, the neighbours all remarked he was a changed man" (Gaskell 1848: 58). Similarly, Sugar's connection with humanity is loosened the moment her mother forces her into prostitution as a child. In other words, the traumatic experience of losing one's innnocence launches Sugar on a journey where her love for her mother and self is replaced with a desire for vengeance and cruelty. Indeed, her fiction precisely dramatizes the process of the creation of the monster within her. Enraged at the Victorian doctor who repeatedly harasses Agnes, Sugar is overwhelmed with the desire for vengeance:

> Another silence falls, and Sugar fills it with a fantasy of knifing this Doctor Curlew to death in a dark cul-de-sac. (…) Oh! What a monster [William is] caressing ...! What terrifying ichor flows through her veins; what hopelessly foul innards she has, poisoned by putrid memories and the bitterness of want! If only she could drive a blade into her heart and let the filth spurt out, let it gush away, hissing, into a crack in the floor, leaving her clean and light. (Faber 2002: 314)

Sugar herself recognizes being a monster and confesses that this monstrosity comes from within. The dyad interior/ exterior is meant to dramatize this human conflict. Faber posits that monstrosity is incarnated in human bodies. A contemporary monster needn't be an actual criminal: slash people's throats and display an excess of violence and criminality. Sugar's fiction – violent as it is – reflects this state of monstrosity. Hence, crossing the boundaries of reason and morality in order to present excessive and viciously improper scenes and characters, descendants of Dracula and Frankenstein is no longer a requirement. Instead, the focus on stream of consciousness is meant to uncover this rather-humane dimension of monstrosity.

Like Sugar, Maud as well can be read as a contemporary monster who loses connection with humanity because of her uncle's upbringing. Constantly subjected to offensive material,

she learns to be a sadist herself. She takes pleasure in tormenting her maid Agnes both physically and psychologically. Gentleman manages to read through her appearance of lady of Briar, when he states: "I think you are half a villain already—" (Waters 2002: 222). Embracing the monstrosity within her, Maud accepts Gentleman's proposal and does not hesitate to manipulate Sue in order to break free from Briar. She finally confesses "And then: *I think you are half a villain already*. He was right. If I never knew that villainy before—or if, knowing it, I never named it—I know it, name it, now" (Waters 2002: 231, emphasis in original).

Neo-Victorian texts often draw attention to the constructed nature of the self and the problems inherent in contemporary representations of identity and otherness. Monstrous others have stood in for racial, sexual, and social minorities for hundreds of years, but in the words of Judith Halberstam, in contemporary Gothic, the monster is no longer totalising: "The monstrous body that once represented everything is now represented as potentially meaning anything – it may be the outcast, the outlaw, the parasite, the pervert, the embodiment of the uncontrollable sexual and violent urges, the foreigner, the misfit. The monster is all of these" (Halberstam 1995: 27) [.] Halberstam poignantly remarks that the monstrous is everywhere in contemporary times. In gothic Victorian sensation, the Victorian monster is doomed and bound for destruction, for it is a constant reminder of excess and loss of control. Whether equated with madness or criminality, it must be restrained or eliminated. Yet, the monstrous from a contemporary perspective is an innate part of one's identity as a human being in constant evolution. Sugar's revenge novel initially portrays her as monstrous, "The heroine of her novel has just slashed the throat of a man" (Faber 2002: 148). Maud's well-thought decision to take deceive Sue for her own benefit foregrounds her villainess. Yet, both Faber's and Waters's narratives allow their respective protagonists to ponder the journeys they have taken. Though monstrous characters, they are not simply doomed, but given a chance at self-questioning. Like an ordinary human being likely to err, both Sugar and Maud redeem their mistakes as they eventually detach themselves from evil. Sugar lets go of her fiction of vengeance, and Maud attempts to right the wrongs done by the plot of fraud.

Fingersmith presents another model of contemporary monster, one in a constant quest of riches in an increasingly-materialist society, represented by both characters of Mrs Sucksby and Gentleman. Both resolute and blindly determined to ensure their financial prosperity, they show no reluctance to take advantage of characters around them in order to reach their objectives, especially Sue. As soon as the plot of fraud is presented to Sue, she immediately associates Gentleman with the figure of the devil and refers to him as "the clever devil" or simply the "Devil" (Waters 2002: 42). Later, when Mrs Sucksby's involvement in the scheme

is uncovered, she, as well, becomes an embodiment of monstrosity. Both Mrs Sucksby and Gentleman are the contemporary versions of Victorian monsters, for they are ordinary characters, partially driven by socio-economic changes of twentieth- and twenty-first-centuries capitalist society. In neo-Victorian novels then, the monster is no longer a gothic creature, but an ordinary human being living amongst others.

2.2.3 Revision at the Heart of the Writer-Reader-Character Bond in Neo-Victorian Sensation

Neo-Victorian fiction presupposes an engagement in the project of revising Victorian fiction, challenging its codes and rewriting a discourse often equated with masculinist patriarchy. Thus, the act of revision entails a process of rethinking, looking at something – here the previous Victorian works – from a fresh critical perspective and introducing changes for the sake of improvement and amelioration. Though the acts of adaptation and revision have in common the principle of introducing a new perspective on the intertext(s), one may suggest that revision advocates the notions of challenge and subversion. There is a stronger critical tendency which surpasses the mere act of adaptation, for neo-Victorianism's essence lies in its project of subversion.

The act of revision in neo-sensation is both stylistic and thematic. The author, reader and character are all engaged in this process of revision. In fact, in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, Fowles establishes revision as a moral imperative as he aligns freedom and life for both Charles and Sarah as characters, and himself respectively, with the willingness to review, rethink and reassess. In other words, if there is no revision, the text would be devoid of its essence. Hence, the narrator in the novel blurs the boundaries between the author and the reader, and authors and readers more generally. Fowles himself asserts that there is no such thing as the dichotomy fact/fiction or writer/reader. The act of writing for Fowles involves the acts of constructing, de-constructing and re-constructing. This necessitates an act of revision, an act of re-reading. In this sense, in order to write, there must be reading. Thus, this presupposes an active desire on the part of the reader to revise. The act of revision is a shared task between writer and reader. Similarly, in order to make meaning, the reader must perform an act of critical reading. Revision takes place when reading and writing intersect. Patricia Hagen in her "Revision Revisited: Reading (And) *The French Lieutenant's Woman*" claims that the novel promotes the moral imperative to raise consciousness through the act of re-reading and revising, as it "[informs] the historical setting, the characters, the authorial self-reflexiveness, and the

reader's participatory role" (Hagen 1991: 441). In other words, meaning is only made when the writing and the reading processes come together, joining the roles of both writer and reader to the point of blurring the boundaries between the two. Thus, the author highlights the necessity and inseparability of both acts of reading and writing in meaning-making in general and in fiction in particular. Fowles posits that all people are creators of their worlds by constructing and deconstructing, revising the past in the light of the present, analysing the present in the light of the past and even, fictionalising their future.

Characters also participate in the act of revision. But their willingness to revise is relative and quite different from one character to another. In *the French Lieutenant's Woman*, Mrs Poultney and Charles's uncle are portrayed as stiff Victorian characters that resist change and thus, oppose revision. On the other hand, Sarah and Charles – among others – are the epitome of revision. They are both readers and writers, especially in Sarah's case. She is a reader of the rest of characters, which allows her to write her present as a fallen woman, and re-write her future in a way which does not imprison her in Victorian social codes that marginalise her, a future of freedom. Her reading of Charles results in her refusal to tie her life to his, a life in which she would not be happy. "[It] is because of her readings that she is led to revisionary construction" (Hagen 1991: 445). Similarly, Charles sees Sarah as a text to be read. His readings of her change and evolve throughout the narrative. In parallel, as he reconstructs her, he too is reconstructed. His revisions of her allow him to revise his view of self within a society that imposes and circumscribes. He too, acquires a freedom, though to a lesser degree in comparison to Sarah's. "Thus, the relationship between Sarah and Charles functions as a sort of intra-textual model of the relations between writer, reader, and text" (Hagen 1991: 447).

The spirit of revision that feeds the narrative translates Fowles's ambition to "alter the society [he] live[s] in" (Barnum and Fowles 1985: 188). This is possibly why revision takes place at the levels of both style and theme. The three endings proposed in the narrative also serve to revise the conventional literary style. In the first ending, where Charles marries Ernestina, he rewrites himself falling back into the traps of Victorian conventions. It is for this reason that both he and author admit it is not an acceptable ending. Likewise, Ernestina is also a reader of characters and writer of her own life by writing her diaries. However, it seems that she doesn't write to herself but rather to another audience, Charles. She lacks authority of her own, possibly one of the reasons for which she is unable to rewrite herself, in addition to her unwillingness to revise the status quo, as she adheres to the norms.

The other two scenarios proposed in the endings are equally real and plausible, as they offer a multiplicity of interpretations to be signalled by the reader who will find themselves

undecided on which side to take, which reconstruction to choose. It is possible to read Sarah's acceptance of Charles as her conviction that they could share a life on an equal basis. It is equally possible to read her rejection of him as her rejection to be owned and possessed as an ornamental object. In fact, Charles's reading of her highlights his desire to take her to Paris, to dress her and to have her at his arm. It is in both endings of the narrative that the ultimate act of revision on the part of the reader is to be made. It seems that Fowles teases his readers and challenges them in their constructivist quest.

In Fowles's novel, it is possible to argue that the most revolutionary innovation takes place at the level of characterisation in the person of Sarah. He chooses to keep her as a mystery, an enigma even to himself. He admits not to understand her, when she says "I am not to be understood even by myself" (Fowles 1969: 452). Sarah sums up modern existence with all its anxieties, doubts and Darwinist influences.

Though Fowles is often critiqued for de-sexualising Victorians in comparison to contemporaries who are sexually liberated, Sarah, the Victorian character with a postmodernist perspective and an avant-gardist mind, is the icon of the sexually-erotic figure. Conversely, by means of the sexually-frustrated and repressed Ernestina and Mrs Poultney, Fowles reinforces the gap between both ends of the spectrum. Male sexuality, however, is put forward through Charles's previous sexual experiences, night life, and interactions with prostitutes. Fowles seems to critique the Victorian double standard between women and men. Sexuality is also a key in Sarah's liberation. By admitting and accepting her sexuality, she refuses to give Victorian society the power to construct her as a sexual object. In addition, it is this same sexuality that enables her to possess Charles instead of him possessing her, and thus reversing the misogynistic implications of gendered sexual relations. In his study *Male Mythologies: John Fowles and Masculinity* (1984), Bruce Woodcock aptly notes that "Men as a species are very much under scrutiny in Fowles's third published novel. It suggests that unless the species is ready to adapt to new social conditions, which include the emancipation of women, then, like the aristocrat and the gentleman, certain kinds of men may find themselves becoming evolutionary dinosaurs" (Woodcock 1984: 81). Thus, Fowles brings masculinity under the scanner as a supplement to his feministic exploration in the novel.

In the same manner, Sugar in *The Crimson Petal and the White* is intent on re-writing her history and that of her fellow prostitutes morally humiliated and physically abused by male clients. She engages in an act of writing a piece of fiction where she attempts to re-write the figure of the prostitute as a strong, active and efficient woman who refuses degradation and fights for her right to dignity. Thus, Sugar revises the traditional monolithic masculinist

discourse which regards woman as inferior and prostitute as even worse because of her moral and ethical defiance. Usually perceived as a symbol of decadence and deviance, Sugar's 'new prostitute' epitomises rebellion and survival in a world where woman rules and man is turned into a prey. Sugar's fiction – though lost at the end of the narrative – serves as an alternative discourse which aims at filling in the gaps of history in which a prostitute was deprived of her voice. It is then possible to read her book as revisionary fiction within fiction.

Though absorbed – both by obligation and choice – in a different fictional genre, pornography, Maud engages in the same project as Sugar of speaking the unspoken. Women were merely objects in pornography and never producers or consumers. They served as figurines in men's most erotic sexual fantasies. Up until an advanced stage of the narrative, Maud is imprisoned in the same position of passivity vis-à-vis producing pornography. Later, as she emerges as a writer in her own right, she revises masculinist history and occupies the position of agency. Her fight takes on an even more rebellious dimension, when considering her lesbianism. Indeed, until a later period in the Victorian age wherein some women overtly assumed their lesbian identities, History remained silent on lesbianism. It simply ignored lesbians because they were considered on the margins of society and did not represent heteronormativity. Maud comes to challenge phallogocentricity, not only by writing pornography, but also by writing as a lesbian herself. Briefly, the genre picks up on and reinforces the prevalence of gender issues, especially as related to women's suppression in patriarchal Victorian society, in both neo-Victorian literature and scholarship.

Indeed, neo-sensation evinces an interest in the connection between women and art. The focus is put on the idea of imprisoning or arresting women in art to overwrite their autonomous identities. Sugar is very often described while attempting to hide her novel from the masculine eye – notably William's. In other words, in William's presence, she is metaphorically imprisoned in her own room. In the same manner, Maud's creativity is equally arrested by Mr Lilly who detains sole power of artistic creation. In their re-writing acts, both Sugar and Maud – as women artists – are granted a certain amount of agency when they attempt to (at least temporarily) reclaim their sense of self.

Unquestionably, the revision act in neo-sensation principally concerns woman. While I dealt in the previous sections with the imitation and adaptation of the gothic tradition, now I will turn my attention to its revision. In fact, neo-sensationalists often turn to the genre's recurrent tropes such as imprisonment and haunting when dealing with woman's position in both household and society. While it is often a physical haunting in the literal sense in Victorian gothic fiction, in neo-sensation, it takes on a more psychological dimension. For example, in

Waters's novel, both Sue and Maud are haunted by their traumatic pasts constantly limiting them to an already-dictated identity: daughters of killers and mad women.

Female representations in the novels of this corpus are inspired from sensation fiction and particularly its gothic mode of writing. For example, we observe in neo-sensation the presence of the figure of the woman amateur detective. Sugar in Faber's text assumes this identity as she takes on a serious surveillance operation of the Rackham household where she displays her skills of planning, prowess and lucidity, she" begins each spying day with a bun or an apple bought from a streetseller on her way here. (…) on these first few mornings of her surveillance of the Rackham house. The gardener is constantly poking around in the grounds, (…) another reason why Sugar can't loiter too long in the same spot" (Faber 2002: 256). Neo-Victorian sensation-detective fiction tends to equip its female detective with greater transgressive potential, for Sugar operates in the male public sphere and experiences moments of empowerment. Closely observing the Rackham residence allows her access into their private lives and entry into their secrets all the while remaining invisible and impenetrable. Yet, Jessica Cox claims that female detectives' agency is only momentary as they occupy "a paradoxical position: temporarily escaping from the confines of the feminine role, only to subsequently return to it in the narrative conclusion" (Cox 2019: 81). Their return to the proper domestic sphere and their motivations thus partially undermine "the proto-feminist implications of female detection" and reinstate patriarchal authority and control (Cox 2019: 80). She further explains:

> sensation heroines go some way towards subverting society's power structures and in their roles as detectives place under scrutiny those patriarchal forces which have formerly sought to contain them, paralleling women's rights protestors calling into question the laws which disempowered them. (Cox 2019: 80)

Nonetheless, one may suggest that even though Sugar goes back to the domestic space, her role in it remains partly associated with agency rather than passive domesticity, a point I will discuss later in this study.

In brief, the act of revision in neo-Victorian fiction focuses primarily on the representation of woman by insisting on the acts of (re-)reading and (re-)writing when telling their stories. Hence, all neo-Victorian heroines of this corpus are inextricably linked with notions of type, voice and authorship, and channel important literary figures such as the New

Woman of *fin-de-siècle*. This short section is nothing but introductory and so, the second and third parts of this investigation will be devoted to the study of the neo-Victorian female character, both revisionist and subversive.

Neo-Victorian fiction imitates, adapts and revises sensation fiction, thus foregrounding the interfaces of (dis-)continuity between both genres. Thus, the novels of this corpus may legitimately be considered neo-Victorian versions of sensation, novels of neo-sensation, for they combine both Victorian and contemporary characteristics of the subgenre in question. Nonetheless, this study has equally shown the centrality of the figure of character in both generic discourses. Though separate in time and different in style, character has maintained its axial position within the plot in both subgenres. We may then wonder what status character undertakes especially in terms of narrative construction in the light of studies of narratology and (post-)structuralism. Furthermore, since this study is centred on the female protagonist, what implications does the contemporary age – advances in gender studies and feminist narratology – have on female characterisation?

Chapter 2: Reading Character and Gender in Neo-Victorian Fiction

1. The History of Character in the Novel

1.1 "Death of [the] Character"[8]?

Contemporary theories notably within the postmodernist tradition announced the death of the character. Focusing her attention on theatre, Elinor Fuchs notes: "the 'death of character' idea started out of a spark of insight ignited in alternative theaters and fanned by the various poststructuralists 'deaths' announced in the late 1970s and 1980s (of Man, the Author, the Subject, the Work, the Book)" (Fuchs 1996: 9). This expression became widely used by many scholars of other forms of literature whose works explore this death such as Baruch Hochman and Roger C. Schlobin. The latter argues that "[a]nyone who has even dabbled in contemporary narrative theory is aware that there has been a blood bath. The author is dead; plot is dead. Amid this carnage, perhaps the most painful is the assassination of character" (Schlobin 2003: 257). Nonetheless, character is in fact central in the neo-Victorian sensation novel notably in the corpus I propose. Hence, I shall start my overview of character by contextualising the claim of the death of the character.

Willem G. Weststeijn in *Towards a Cognitive Theory of Character* (2004) notes how character has been understudied and deprived of attention in literary theory since the 1960s, while other elements of narratology such as plot, narrator, point of view and discourse have been emphasized. As noted by Seymour Chatman, "[i]t is remarkable how little has been said about the theory of character in literary history and criticism" (Chatman 1978: 107). Such view echoes Patrick O'Neill's comment that "[t]he multifarious ways in which characters emerge from the words on the page, in which story-world actors acquire a personality, is one of the most fascinating and least systematically explored aspects of narrative theory and narrative practice" (O'Neill 1996: 49).

In analysing the reasons behind the effacement of character in structuralist and poststructuralist discourse in *Character: Under Erasure?* (2006), Hochman claims that it is due mostly to the emerging formalist aesthetic approaches of New Criticism in the United States and Russian Formalism, which voided character from its personal/personalized dimension. This claim echoes Barthes's theorization of *jouissance* as the pleasure of reading a text which no longer stands for the same pleasure readers felt when reading Woolf or Joyce. In formalism,

[8] This expression is borrowed from Elinor Fuchs's empirical work *The Death of Character: Perspectives on Theater after Modernism* (1996).

Jouissance became associated with a highly intellectual capacity to assess and reflect upon a character, insofar as the approach is more scientific and less literary. Characters were no longer seen as literary products of entertainment, but scientific objects of discussion from a structuralist and formalist point of view. Hochman notes that "in the work of Propp, characters are not seen as virtual or implicit subject[ivitie]s, to be read in terms like those used in speaking of the human subjects who people the world, but rather as instrumentalities – agents, as it were – in the text's realization of its purposes" (Hochman 2006: 96). In other words, character was no longer an artistic production meant for the "*plaisir du texte*" (Barthes 1973). Consequently, there was "a turn away from sentiment and the loss of interest in the representation of human subjectivity" (Hochman 2006: 96/97). From a socio-historical perspective, Richard Taylor concurs with Hochman and claims that the decline in characterisation is due to the move from aesthetic to scientific or sociological approaches. In fact, "the form [the novel] had creatively exhausted itself", and therefore, characters along with it have been sentenced to demise (Taylor 1993: 629).

Some thinkers like Jonathan Culler, in their defence of character, blame structuralism for its lack of interest in character and notes:

> Character is the major aspect of the novel to which structuralism has paid least attention and has been least successful in treating. Although for many readers characters serve as the major totalizing force in fiction – everything in the novel exists in order to illustrate character and its development – a structuralist approach has tended to explain this as an ideological prejudice rather than to study it as a fact of reading" (Culler 1975: 230).

In a similar vein, Cohan condemns structuralism for the demise of character which reads it "as part of the verbal structure of the work (which) assigns to it the same textual status as rhetoric, and this designation claims to eliminate from the human figures its representation as *human* status entirely" (Cohan 1990: 116, emphasis in original). While defenders of characters emphasize the link between art and the world, and fiction and reality through the medium of character, structuralism aims to dissolve such tie.

From a pragmatic perspective, Ellen E. Berry claims that characters have ceased to amaze and move readership. Unlike in nineteenth- and twentieth-century novels where the character occupies a central position namely because of its engagement of the reader, mass culture has executed character. She notes "character as unique personality is replaced by the

immediacy and transitory appeal of the public icon, an image created by mass media such as cinema, widely available to a heterogeneous audience and capable of unlimited reproductivity" (Berry 1992: 177). In the same vein, Robert Higbie claims that characters have become redundant, and lack creativity and freshness insofar as they no longer stir sensation or arouse excitement in readership, insofar as authors have turned characters into structural forms and thematic definers. He observes: "Many modern novelists of course still create characters with tensions like those in earlier novels, but they rarely seem to value character as an end in itself, as their predecessors did. Instead, writers became more concerned with what I have called secondary response, with thematic and formal concerns" (Higbie 1984: 164).

Nonetheless, Virginia Woolf believed in the surviving status of character because of the values it incarnates in a novel and pointed out how it might inspire people:

> if you think of these books, you do at once think of some character who has seemed to you so real (I do not mean lifelike) that it has the power to make you think not merely of it itself, but of all sorts of things through its eyes – of religion, of love, of war, of peace, of family life, of balls in country towns, of sunsets, moonrises, the immortality of the soul. (Woolf cited in Hoffman and Murphy 1988: 32)

In fact, characters may serve as lessons to their readers through the experiences they lead and the different results they reach in fictional narratives.

The proximity between reader and character is further accentuated in Marie-Laure Ryan's work. She notes "once we become immersed in fiction, the characters become real to us, and the world they live in momentarily takes the place of the actual world" (Ryan 1991: 21). Mieke Bal simply concludes: "characters resemble people. Literature is written by, for, and about people. That remains a truism, so banal that we often tend to forget it, and so problematic that we as often repress it with the same ease" (Bal 1977: 80). Does this claim not recall E. M. Forster's argument that characters are in effect the result of the novelist's imaginative creation, all the while being based on reality and inspired from real life people? In the chapter he names "People", he particularly sheds light on some of the main aesthetic and narrative characteristics of nineteenth-century character. The title of the chapter is inextricably linked with realism. Novelists give their characters names, assign their sex, and allow them the ability to use words as well as gestures. In the novel, authors focus on human characters, because they can delve into their characters' psyches and dig into their motivations, actions, and emotions. In other

words, characters are a combination of fictionality and reality, and it is the novelist's role to create a coherent unison out of the real and fictional dimensions, an amalgam which inspires and engages readers.

Interestingly however in recent decades, there has been an evolution in the methodology used to analyse character deviating from classic French structuralist narratology. David Herman notes in his introduction to *Narratologies. New Perspectives on Narrative Analysis*, 'postclassical' narratology has become a narrative analysis which "is marked by a profusion of new methodologies and research hypotheses; the result is a host of new perspectives on the forms and functions of narrative itself" (Herman 1999: 2/3). It is then, the evolution of narratology that allowed character to regain a degree of centrality in narrative.

Hélène Cixous highlights the significance of the character and notes: "character occupies a privileged position in the novel, or the play; without 'character', passive or active, no text" (Cixous 1974: 386). She claims that character or its French equivalent '*personnage*' by means of the lexical root 'person', is the main actant of any literary form, specifically theatre, the one element which brings the story to life. Though Cixous focuses her study on theatre, the novel and more specifically the neo-Victorian genre, similarly celebrates the resurrection of character as its central narrative element. In *The French Lieutenant's Woman* for example, Sarah as a character is the axis on which the story is constructed. She brings together all other characters and gives meaning to how the plot evolves. If Sarah had not created the story of the French Lieutenant, the controversy around her would not have existed, Charles would not have been enamoured with her and ultimately, her journey of liberation would not have been the same. Similarly, Sugar is the centre of Faber's text. She is literally the intermediary between lower and upper classes, prostitutes and gentlemen. Likewise, Sue and Maud bring together two sides of life in London. The intersection is foregrounded by the plot of fraud which positions them at the centre.

As the title of his article "Neo-characterization in the Neo-Victorian Novel" indicates, George Letissier believes that character is a key element in the analysis of a neo-Victorian novel from a structuralist point of view. In fact, he posits that character is what links reality and fiction, insofar as it is an element of an author's creative capacity, but also the intermediary by which literary questions are posed and focal issues are engaged.

Starting his investigation of neo-characterisation, Letissier borrows Umberto Eco's phrase "characters migrate" and argues that with the neo-Victorian novel, the characters recover their migrating process while the experimentalist novel, taking the examples of the French Nouveau Roman and in English literature Christine Brooke-Rose's *Thru* and *Textermination*,

focuses mainly on their "[disintegration] through intertextual and interpretive overkill" in the sense that they become mere tools on behalf of the metafictional novel itself (Letissier 2015: 2). The neo-Victorian novel comes "to reassert the primacy of characters (…) as transfictional" (Letissier 2015: 2). Accordingly, Letissier contextualises the prefix 'trans' which presupposes a process of migration across and beyond literary texts. In fact, he discusses many processes of migration and claims that this technique of character production asserts that neo-Victorian characters are the successors of Victorian characters.

In fact, the neo-Victorian novel is centred on the revisiting of female characters. Letissier traces the emergence of the genre back to Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* through her character Antoinette inspired by Bertha Mason, and to John's Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* through his character Sarah inspired by Christina Rossetti and Jane Burden Morris constructed in a Pre-Raphaelite spirit. In fact, Sarah's constant elusion, "a free spirit who passed for a Victorian spinster" (Letissier 2015: 2), recalls the pre-Raphaelite model of the evasive woman. Pre-Raphaelite paintings often portray the mystique of femaleness: Bernard Shaw believed Jane Morris's portraits to epitomise how her personality forever remained elusive. Through these examples, Letissier distinguishes two different modes of female neo-characterisation: the "model" i.e. the predecessor, the "hypo-character", and the character that embodies the new artistic spirit of neo-Victorianism, the revisited version.

Letissier argues that character formation entails a dialogic relationship that includes the writer's as well as the reader's creativity. Deciphering characters is a complex and subjective process that varies from one reader to another, because it is not a stable creation on the part of the author. In fact, it "is predicated upon an experience of reading, or textual reception" (Letissier 2015: 3). In other terms, a reader who is well-informed about the processes of characterisation in the neo-Victorian novel is very likely to construct a different judgement and tend for a deeper interpretation of 'neo-character[s]' in comparison to a less-experienced reader. To a certain extent, one might speak of a character squared, a character who is doubly a character, a form of characterisation which in the neo-Victorian novel becomes multiplied by itself, and thus doubly crucial to the poetics of this genre.

Character migration can even be ontological in the sense that real-life Victorian people are revived in neo-Victorian fiction to the point of confusion. Letissier takes the examples of Charles Darwin re-presented in Harry Thompson's *This Thing of Darkness* and Darwin's servant Syms Covington revived in Roger McDonald's *Mr Darwin's Shooter*. Some characters are even 'revived' as ghosts haunting the neo-Victorian novel, as in the case of Jane Urquhart's *Changing Heaven* which revives Emily Brontë in the form of a spectral presence.

Another form of character migration which is of great importance to this study is that of creating neo-Victorian characters that are complex reproductions of Victorian historical characteristics. Kate Mitchell labels them as 'faux Victorian' characters because their characterisation is the outcome of a process of simulation and imitation in order to efface the difference from the Victorian antecedent, and refers to this process of imitation as an "authenticating strategy" (Mitchell 2010: 118). Letissier takes the example of Sugar and locates her different precursors in the Victorian tradition:

> She is reminiscent of the image of the prostitute in Victorian literature, for example of Nancy in *Oliver Twist*, as her destiny too is decided upon by the vicious circle in which she is trapped from the moment of her birth. But she also recalls Augusta Davies Webster's poem "A Castaway" as she is employed by one Mrs Castaway who doubles as her mother and the Madame of the brothel. In her womanly dramatic monologue, Webster grants a fallen woman articulate thoughts, whose sincerity cannot be framed within the format of a conventional diary. Sugar also pens her own great novel to bear witness to the plight of women like her, by eschewing the pre-written script of Mayhew's journalism or romantic claptrap. (Letissier 2015: 7)

Sugar is then, a combination of Victorian makings coming together in order to produce a character which is very Victorian-like. Similarly, as mentioned in the section devoted to the study of the parallels between Victorian sensation and neo-sensation, Maud in *Fingersmith* recalls Laura Fairlie in Collins's *The Woman in White* (1859), as well as Dorothea in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1872). Sue's character takes some of its attributes from Dickens's *Oliver Twist* (1839). Furthermore, as I will explore in a later section, Fowles draws on the Victorian ideal of the New Woman in order to construct Sarah's character insofar as she eventually embodies independent women who seek radical change and absolute freedom.

Letissier focuses on the centrality of "round characters" in the neo-Victorian novel in contrast to flat ones, borrowing E. M. Forster's distinction. Central to the round aspect of characters is the focus on its psychological evolution. In fact, according to Letissier, the neo-Victorian novel celebrates its characters' psychological depth and their layered consciousness. In Fowles's novel, the narrator detects Sarah's distress at her in-between position as a governess; like the Victorian governess, she is neither completely dependent nor completely independent, lacks social rank and economic prosperity and so, is relegated to the bottom of the

middle-class. Besides, she is torn between her duty as a mother-figure and personal desire for motherhood. She repeats to Charles: "you are not a woman. (…) you were not born a woman (…) And you were not ever a governess" (Fowles 1969: 72). Focusing on the psychological dimension of character not only dramatizes the narrative, but adds depth and meaning. In this sense, Letissier argues that neo-characterisation necessarily entails such complexity which is significant of the genre and highlights the female character as one of its cornerstones.

Since the genre is often praised for its critical dimension, Letissier highlights that neo-characters serve as 'critical proxies' in the sense that they are created and should be studied by taking into consideration critical studies such as post-structuralism and deconstruction promoted by Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous and Michel Foucault, as well as queer theory, LGBT, haunting and spectrality in Judith Butler's works. To give one example, Letissier argues that drawing on gender and queer theory, Sarah Waters's lesbian trio novels are a manifestation of the influence of gender studies on neo-Victorian characterisation. In fact, according to Heilmann and Llewellyn, "[v]ictorian sexuality and the way we re-imagine it, its contradictions, excesses, dissimilarities from or correspondences with our diversity of experience holds an irresistible appeal for the neo-Victorian imagination" (Heilmann and Llewellyn 2010: 107). So, which aesthetic means have participated in the resurrection of the neo-Victorian character in the neo-Victorian novel following its presumed death?

1.2 Visualizing the Neo-Victorian Female Character through Hanspeter Pfister's Model of Characterisation

Structuralist narratology focuses on the text as a field for study, which represents an entity in itself separated from the ambiguity of the figures of the author be it real or as imagined by the reader, of the reader be it real or as imagined by the author, and of the character. The analyst thus focuses on the narrative, mainly the link between history and fiction, points of view, narrator and the process of narration. Within such interests, Genette's narratological theory focuses on the impact of point of view on character construction and evaluates whether characters are described from outside by a third-person narrator, from within by an omniscient narrator or from a partially-omniscient point of view. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan critiques Genette's theory which considers characters as real narrative entities only when they assume a role in narration or in focalisation, and contends that "structuralists can hardly accommodate character within their theories, because of their commitments to an ideology which "decenters" man and runs counter to the notions of individuality and psychological depth" (Rimmon-Kenan

1983: 30). This is particularly significant since the female protagonists in this neo-Victorian corpus often occupy the focal point of the narrative by 'dethroning' the narrator and assuming the position of narrators, particularly in Faber's and Waters's texts. Fowles's text is a bit different as the narrator is a postmodern figure that enters the narrative, undermines his authorial credibility, and establishes parallels between the Victorian and the present times. In Faber's and Waters's novels however, female protagonists are characters/narrators. In Faber's novel, during the surveillance of William's house, Sugar takes control over narration as she follows characters' movements, describes their gestures and behaviours, and even reports their speeches. The narrator steps down and allows her a momentary control over the role of third-person narrator, and so characters are presented from her point of view. In Waters's novel, since there are two first-person narrators, Sue and Maud, Sue narrates the first and third chapters, while Maud narrates the second one. In each of these accounts, the narrator presents her version of events from her point of view, thus making character construction subjective. "[R]ather than have them chronologically separated, both tell the same narrative events from their respective positions, a signal perhaps of the need to re-read and rewrite the story at every turn" (Llewellyn 2007: 197).

Yet, the construction of the neo-Victorian character does not stop at the level of her role as narrator. Hanspeter Pfister proposes an investigation of the character and the characterisation process making use of a tree diagram and basing his analysis on three parameters: narratorial vs. figural, explicit vs. implicit and auto- or altero- narratorial characterisation. Following the same approach to study the female protagonists of this corpus, my contention here is that the neo-Victorian novel combines these above-mentioned techniques of dramatic characterisation in order to allow the reader to visualize the female character. This complex process of characterisation results in a composite character which is no longer to be regarded as virtual or implicit. The neo-Victorian female character is rather a multifarious and multifaceted subjectivity in the narrative.

From a narratological perspective, characterisation can be narratorial when the characterising subject is the narrator, or figural when the characterising subject is a character. In the second case, the credibility of such characterisation depends on the reader's judgement, because auto-characterisation is often influenced by "subjective distortions", while altero-characterisation can be influenced by social hierarchy and "strategic aims and tactical considerations" (Pfister 1988: 184). If characterisation is narratorial, it also gives absolute power to the narrator who selectively constructs character to suit his/her agenda.

In Fowles's novel, characterisation is mainly narratorial insofar as the narrator controls the presentation of characters, when they are identified and how they are described. From the beginning of the narrative, the reader is allowed a glimpse of how the narrator is: not only is the narrator gendered masculine through the use of the pronoun 'he', he is also masculinist since he gazes at female characters in the narrative claiming "Of the three young women who pass through these pages Mary was, in my opinion, by far the prettiest" (Fowles 1969: 32).

In Faber's novel, the nineteenth- and twenty-first-century narrator takes over narration using a camera-like approach following characters around zooming and de-zooming at times. He adopts an upward approach to present all social classes and starts from the bottom, moving up the social ladder thus presenting different characters starting first with Caroline until reaching Sugar. Much later in the narrative, when Sugar engages in a stake-out in front of William's house, and then follows him and the members of his household around, Faber's narrator gives the impression of stepping down and allowing Sugar a momentary control over the role of third-person narrator, for she ponders: "He's certainly not playing parlour games with his wife and daughter! Is he writing Rackham correspondence, perhaps? If so, how long can a few letters possibly take, now that the Hopsom affair is out of the way?" (Faber 2002: 256). By means of a smooth twist, Sugar is transformed into an omniscient third-person narrator with access to the interior of the house.

Nonetheless, characterisation becomes figural with Sugar's first appearance in the narrative. The narrator recounts how Caroline perceives Sugar, and retreats to allow her some narratorial space to describe her friend:

> yes, it's Shush, or Sugar as she's known to the world at large. Even in the gloom--especially in the gloom--that that long body is unmistakable: stick-thin, flat-chested and bony like a consumptive young man, with hands almost too big for women's gloves. Always this same first impression of Sugar: the queasy surprise of seeing what appears to be a tall, gaunt boy wreathed from neck to ankle in women's clothes; then, with the first glimpse of this odd creature's face, the realisation that this boy is female. At the sound of her nickname, the woman turns, clutching to her dark green bodice a ream of white writing paper. There's a bosom in that bodice after all. Not enough to nourish a child perhaps, but enough to please a certain kind of man. And no one has hair quite as golden-orange as Sugar's, or skin quite as luminously pale. Her eyes alone, even if she were wrapped up like an Arabian odalisque

> with nothing else showing, would be enough to declare her sex. They are naked eyes, fringed with soft hair, glistening like peeled fruits. They are eyes that promise everything. (Faber 1969: 20/21)

Caroline's use of Sugar's nickname shows the proximity between the two women. Yet, the rest of the passage uncovers a sort of distance and uncertainty as to how she should introduce her. The use of lexical items as 'impression, glimpse', and the contradiction between 'impression' and 'realisation' foreground the idea of mystery and ambiguity. Indeed, though they share a close relationship, Caroline sketches out a rather vague portrait of her friend. This could suggest that Faber manipulates the reader into believing in the authenticity of the account. Unlike the omniscient god-like narrator whose subjective point of view dominates the narrative, secondary characters' presentation of other characters offers an alternative perspective. Thus, in Faber's novel, the narrative does not stop at the narrator's perception of Sugar, but includes Caroline's description of her as well.

Besides, though the narrator's gender is not explicit in the narrative and may be either male or female, Caroline presents a female point of view. Thus, Sugar's description is not narrated from a male – possibly masculinist – gaze. Furthermore, Caroline's description of Sugar as an androgynous figure – both and neither male/ female– releases the text from the shackles of dialogic representations of female as either exceptionally feminine or repulsively non-feminine. From the beginning, Sugar is depicted as defying categories since she cannot be represented in binary terms insofar as her physical appearance makes her an ambivalent figure.

Agnes's characterisation is at first figural through the intermediary of her husband and her maid Clara, insofar as she is physically absented from the narrative, but talked about by her husband and her maid. She is rather an object of conversation than a subject. She is first mentioned in the narrative from William's perspective, as he points out that her ailing health, and more particularly her mental and psychological state, by describing her as one of the "members of the female sex [who] are sickly" (Faber 2002: 37). Furthermore, the reader can detect a state of dependence, especially through the lack of direct contact between William and Agnes, and the reliance on the intermediary of the maid between the couple.

Yet, Agnes's characterisation soon becomes narratorial when the narrator intervenes. The narrative voice is sympathetic towards Agnes taking her side instead of William's. "Oh no, there was never anything wrong with the small, perfect woman upstairs, yet still her cruel and ineffectual husband persists in demanding round-the-clock accounts of her behaviour" (Faber 2002: 61). The reader is intrigued to find out more about William's and Agnes's relationship,

and the reasons behind such a judgement on the part of the narrator. The reader is also tempted to think that there was a sort of change in Agnes's state. The contrast between the past and the present is due to an important reason quite possibly in relation with William. At this early stage of the narrative, the reader is not given much information about Agnes, but left only with some bits of her story thus arousing sensation and increasing suspense.

In contrast to Fowles and more like Faber, Sarah Waters uses a different approach to narration allowing both of her female protagonists to take turns in narration as Sue controls narration in the first part while Maud takes over the second one. Thus, narration is almost completely figural and there is a total absence of Waters' narrator. What implications does this choice of characterisation have on the presentation of both female protagonists?

The first part of the narrative is narrated by Sue as she assumes the position of first-person narrator. The use of the subjective pronoun 'I' as well as possessive pronouns 'my' and 'mine' from the start announces the tone of the story; a personal account reported from a subjective point of view, and foreshadows as well the subject position Sue assumes in the narrative: she tells rather than is told. She confesses: "My name, in those days, was Susan Trinder. People called me Sue. (…) This is the first time I remember thinking about the world and my place in it" (Waters 2002: 2). Using a first-person narrative voice, her account foregrounds the gap between her "*je narrant"* and "*je narré*" by means of the alternation between present and past tenses.

> I know the year I was born in, but for many years I did not know the date, and took my birthday at Christmas. I believe I am an orphan. My mother I know is dead. But I never saw her, she was nothing to me. I was Mrs Sucksby's child, if I was anyone's; and for father I had Mr Ibbs, who kept the locksmith's shop, at Lant Street, in the Borough, near to the Thames. (Waters 2002: 2).

Sue's narrating I is the one which tells the autobiographical story of her life, while the narrated I is the protagonist of Waters's story as it is told. Susan introduces herself providing some pieces of information which reflect her lack of knowledge of her history and her own past. Thus, the theme of identity comes to the surface for it is primordial to her characterisation. The limited time frame and disassociation between her supposedly legal and usual names suggest a momentary identity. Indeed, it seems that Sue suffers from a loss of identity, which is further dramatized as she admits not knowing the date of her birth or where her parents are, except for the fact that her biological mother is dead. Interestingly, the fact that she has no past facilitates

the suppression of her present identity and its replacement with another one, precisely the aspect for which Gentleman aims as he concocts the grand scheme of identity exchange.

She stops for a short physical description of herself, and then confesses to the reader her infantile nature as she tends to lose her temper in childish disputes with John Vroom: "I sound like a child. I was a child!" (Waters 2002: 32). As the narrative progresses, Sue provides additional information about herself, as if to allow the reader the material to compose a portrait of her progressively. This may be a metaphor for the author's composite characterisation of Sue, made up of bits and pieces of Victorian heroines that the reader can partially recognize/guess. Indeed, as early as the first pages of the narrative, the reader is encouraged to establish parallels with Jane Eyre for example. Both girls are orphans with no knowledge of their histories, characters out of place, forced to make their own home in the world.

Among the details Sue presents about herself are her illiteracy and her lack of proper education. She only learns to write her own name through cutting up and reassembling letters from stolen cloths. Reading is uninteresting as well as useless in the kind of life pickpockets lead, for they "never troubled with it" (Waters 2002: 9). Yet, literacy will later prove to be essential in Maud's life and the evolution of the plot. Thus, foregrounding Sue's illiteracy at the beginning is meant to rebuke any natural proximity between the characters, for a pickpocket and a scholar are very unlikely to develop romantic feelings for each other, and mutually participate in each other's awakening. In contrast to reading and writing, Sue enumerates the different skills she acquires at Mrs Sucksby, skills that are essential and much more beneficial in their line of work such as ciphering coins, washing and pressing silks and linens, and shining silver plates.

In order to foreground the idea of loss of both identity and past, Sue narrates how she goes through a process of physical transformation and characterial modification in order to learn "how a proper lady's maid should be" and fit in the mould of the perfect personal maid (Waters 2002: 33). Thus, not only does she lack a knowledge of herself as a subject, she suffers from another form of identity transmission as another persona is imposed upon her by Gentleman.

> First, they washed my hair. I wore my hair then, like lots of the Borough girls wore theirs, divided in three, with a comb at the back and, at the sides, a few fat curls. […] [Gentleman] made me wash my hair till it was perfectly smooth, then had me divide it once—just the once—then pin it in a plain knot at the back of my head. […] When we had finished, Dainty and I looked that plain

> and bacon-faced, we might have been trying for places in a nunnery. (Waters 2002: 34)

Early in the novel, Sue must impersonate another figure which does not look or behave like her, thus further establishing her recurrent loss of identity. Her conditioning to robotic actions as part of her new functions as a lady's maid also endanger her subjectivity. Though she uses first-person narration, the passage highlights her passivity and submissiveness. Verbs of actions are associated with other subjects like 'they' or 'he', while she is relegated to object position: he "made *me*", "had *me* divide" (Waters 2002: 33, emphasis added).

Significantly, even Sue's dialect must change since she uses a colloquial language often spoken in the lower parts of London like the Borough. "'What next?' [Gentleman] asked me. I shrugged. 'Her shimmy, I suppose.' 'Her chemise, you must call it,' he said" (Waters 2002: 35). Moving to Briar – a respectable geographical space in the suburbs of London where upper social classes lives – requires a change in social behaviour; attire, gestures and dialect. Sue's character goes through a process of total transformation. Thus, her identity as authentic and personal is menaced from the beginning of the plot.

Besides the dialect, Sue must also memorize certain gestures of politeness and civility which are customary among upper classes, such as curtseying. Such gestures are a direct reference to one's social background and socio-economic class.

> [Gentleman] had me stand and try a curtsey. This was harder than it sounds. Say what you like about the kind of life I was used to, it was a life without masters: I had never curtseyed before to anyone. Now Gentleman had me dipping up and down until I thought I should be sick. He said curtseyin came as natural to ladies' maids, as passing wind. He said if I would only get the trick, I should never forget it—and he was right about that, at least, for I can still dip a proper curtsey, even now.—Or could, if I cared to. (Waters 2002: 38)

What is interesting to note however, is that such gestures are easily acquired as Sue is trained to perform in such a manner. While curtseying as a sign of social class is typically reserved to upper-class, it equally raises the question of authenticity and credibility in a plot where disguise and duplicity are essential: who is really a lady if the manners of a lady can be easily learnt by lower classes? It is in this manner that a new identity with a specific past and precise details is

forged for Sue. Her impersonation process is complete when her dialect, appearance, clothing and past are transformed to suit the mould of a lady's maid. In brief, Sue's first-person narration progressively relates the different stages of the process at the end of which her initial characterial traits are utterly effaced, prior to her travel to Briar.

In the same narrative style, the second part of the novel introduces Maud as the first-person narrator recollecting memories of her past. Her long monologue brings the reader back to her early years of childhood in the lunatic asylum:

> I pass my first ten years a daughter to the nurses of the house. (…) When I am old enough to reason I am given a gold ring said to be my father's, the portrait of a lady called my mother, and understand I am an orphan; but, never having known a parent's love—or rather, having known the favours of a score of mothers—I am not greatly troubled by the news. (Waters 2002: 175/ 176).

Maud's account signals multiple similarities with Sue's story, and may allude to similar trajectories. Interestingly however, Maud recalls her first encounter with her uncle and how life evolves from that point forward as she becomes his secretary. Read in this light, Maud's character equally exposes the same issue of identity, but experienced differently by both characters. She is an orphan raised by nurses in a mental institution, and later conditioned by her uncle to become his personal assistant.

According to Pfister's model, characterisation can be explicit or implicit. Are the traits overtly mentioned or are they concluded through behaviour and utterances? In explicit characterisation, the characterising subject makes use of overt utterances to attribute traits, whether they are external, internal or habitual to characters. There is a special type of explicit characterisation which is block characterisation that consists of introducing and describing a character at its first appearance in the narrative. In implicit characterisation however, verbal and non-verbal behaviours, clothes, gestures and environment are indicative of a character's traits. It is important to note how two types of characterisation often alternate in the narrative to make the process more complex and interesting to the reader. In fact, is characterisation is exclusively explicit, the reader would probably find it less mysterious and thus less captivating. On the other hand, if characterisation is strictly implicit, it may also turn into a rather challenging task.

Fowles first adopts an implicit approach to characterisation. Starting with a general presentation of the setting, the narrator focuses on the spatial context of the narrative which is

quite important for the plot and its evolution. The first characters are not presented explicitly but rather as shadowy figures. The narrator's account invites the reader to a process of speculation, verification and interpretation.

> [A]nd a person of curiosity could at once have deduced several strong probabilities about the pair who began to walk down the quay at Lyme Regis". […] The local spy—and there was one—might thus have deduced that these two were strangers, people of some taste, and not to be denied their enjoyment of the Cobb by a mere harsh wind. On the other hand he might, focusing his telescope more closely, have suspected that a mutual solitude interested them rather more than maritime architecture; and he would most certainly have remarked that they were people of a very superior taste as regards their outward appearance. (Fowles 1969: 1)

Clearly, Fowles's approach to characterisation will not be overt and straightforward, hence the use of expressions of probability 'could have deduced, might have deduced, might have suspected'. The reader must be curious, an active participant through inferences and deductions from clues and hints. Instead of presenting his characters explicitly, he implicates the reader in the process of character construction. Interestingly, the recourse to the 'telescope' may have two plausible and complementary interpretations. First, it emulates the evolution of astronomy in England between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. We read on the Royal Museum Greenwich website: "Where 18th century astronomy could be characterised by precise measurement of position and the classification of heavenly bodies, the 19th century saw astronomy applying developments in maths, physics, chemistry and geology to understand the make up of these bodies and the origins of the Universe"[9]. Furthermore, as an instrument designed to make distant objects appear nearer, not only, the reader's role is to look closely in order to decrypt the characters.

Similarly, the narrator presents another shadowy figure, different in her clothing, which already foreshadows a non-conformist character. "She too was a stranger to the crinoline; but it was equally plain that that was out of oblivion, not knowledge of the latest London taste" (Fowles 1969: 5). In the light of implicit characterisation, the reader can infer that Sarah's sense of fashion equates her with unconventional women who do not conform to the trends of the

[9] *Astronomy in the 19th century*. n.d. 18 May 2022. <https://www.rmg.co.uk/stories/topics/astronomy-19th-century>.

time. She seems indifferent to the codes and simply refuses to abide by clothing conventions appropriate to Victorian women. Interestingly, from the beginning, the narrator repeatedly refers to Sarah as a 'figure', giving her/it a mythical dimension which fosters mystery and enigma. There is an aura of strangeness around this "figure from myth" (Fowles 1969: 2). In her study of *Middlemarch*, Martha Nussbaum claims that Eliot's realism opts for characters that are not representatives of types, but are "category defiers", to borrow Catherine Gallagher's term. Building on this notion, it seems that Sarah's character evades types, not only by exceeding them, but also by showing "vagueness and formlessness" (Nussbaum 2013: 303). At this stage, she simply cannot be identified nor categorised. She is merely an apparition. Such claim in foregrounded by Fowles himself as he notes in the Introduction to his "Notes on an Unfinished Novel": "The woman had no face" (Fowles 1990: 136).

The character of Sarah is first introduced in the narrative in an indirect manner, she is presented by Charles and Ernestina. Ernestina, as her characterisation will later demonstrate, may well be an accomplice to patriarchy in regard to beliefs and values. Instead of displaying any signs of female solidarity, she takes gossip for truth insofar as the figure is nicknamed "tragedy" and "the French Lieutenant's Woman", both indicative of her loss of virtue and presumed 'fall'. Since no member of society attempts to understand her story, Victorian prejudices define Sarah's social position and consequently, her moral and ethical worthlessness. In Ernestina and Charles's conversation, the woman in the Cobb is attributed different traits like loss of virtue and promiscuity. In fact, during the reign of Queen Victoria, a woman's place was considered to be in the home, as domesticity and motherhood were considered by society at large to be a sufficient emotional fulfilment for females. The Victorian era is thus characterised as the domestic age *par excellence*, epitomised by Queen Victoria who came to represent a kind of femininity which was centred on the family, motherhood and respectability, and became an icon of late-nineteenth-century femininity and domesticity. An example of the ideal Victorian woman, Mrs Frances Goodby, the wife of Reverend J Goodby, was eulogized in *The General Baptist Repository and Missionary Observer* (1840) for "her ardent and unceasing flow of spirits, extreme activity and diligence, her punctuality, uprightness and remarkable frugality, combined with a firm reliance on God [which] carried her through the severest times of pressure, both with credit and respectability ..." (1840: n.d.). She exemplified the good and virtuous woman and embodied Victorian beliefs about the importance of the family, the constancy of marriage and woman's innate moral goodness. The woman in the Cobb then, lacks all of these attributes and is consequently regarded antithetical to the likes of Mrs Frances Goodby.

Accordingly, Sarah's character seems unconventional not only in attire, but also in demeanour. While Victorian ladies – like Ernestina – are depicted as timid and fragile creatures with shy looks and pink cheeks, Sarah's eyes seem more masculine than feminine. Her gaze is rather a stare which Fowles likens to a rifle, a masculine weapon: "[H]er stare was aimed like a rifle at the farthest horizon" (Fowles 1969: 5). The narrator emphasizes its impact on Charles:

> She turned to look at him—or as it seemed to Charles, through him. It was not so much what was positively in that face which remained with him after that first meeting, but all that was not as he had expected; for theirs was an age when the favoured feminine look was the demure, the obedient, the shy. (Fowles 1969: 5)

For a stare can be considered a form of aggression, or an invasion of an individual's privacy, it positions Sarah early on as agent. Interestingly, the enumeration of the qualities expected of a lady in the Victorian age – demure, obedient and shy – further establishes Sarah's nonconformity. She challenges the portrayal of Victorian women as the passive, dependent, and idle creatures of prevailing ideology. Interestingly, the narrator hints at the gap between 'their [characters'] age' and that of the contemporary readership. In other words, Sarah's look may well be too daring for her age, but it is certainly not as shocking and surprising to a twentieth- or twenty-first-century reader. Fowles's narrator then both ironically mocks this divide between both ages, and foregrounds Sarah's avant-garde traits.

On the other hand, by means of repeated comparisons with the conventional Ernestina, the narrator describes Sarah physically. Sarah seems to be equated with otherness by means of the dark skin as Charles notes: "The skin below seemed very brown, almost ruddy, in that light, as if the girl cared more for health than a fashionably pale and languid-cheeked complexion" (Faber 1969: 30). In her comparative reading of the *French Lieutenant's Woman* and *Ourika*, Doris Kadish goes as far as to argue that "Fowles sees [Sarah] as a slave of sorts in the British society of the time" for she "is consistently depicted as the sensual, lower-class, darker-skinned alternative to the virginal, upper-class, white Ernestina" (Kadish 1997: 84). Though such point of view may well be valid since Fowles himself "reveals in the Foreword to his translation of *Ourika* that the foremost feature of Duras's heroine that affected his original conception of Sarah Woodruff was color" (Kadish 1997: 84), one may suggest that Sarah's dark skin can be equally read as a sign of nonconformity, mystery and enigma, especially with regard to her

Victorian setting. By deliberately exposing herself to the sun, Sarah effectively breaks with the mould of Victorian femininity.

Another medium Fowles uses to present his protagonist indirectly and implicitly is dialogue. Interestingly however, Sarah is presented through dialogues exchanged by other characters: first between Charles and the dairyman, and then Charles and Doctor Grogan, all male characters. Sarah's reputation precedes her, for even the dairyman and his wife recognize her liaison with the French lieutenant. The dairyman who appears to be rather religious though taciturn, unreluctantly calls her a 'whore'. Conversely, Charles proves to be pragmatic and open-minded though he has no knowledge of her story and past, and simply rejects others' negative judgements.

> Then he [the dairyman] said, "And she been't no lady. She be the French Loot'n'nt's Hoer." Some moments passed before Charles grasped the meaning of that last word. And he threw an angry look at the bearded dairyman, who was a Methodist and therefore fond of calling a spade a spade, especially when the spade was somebody else's sin. He seemed to Charles to incarnate all the hypocritical gossip—and gossips—of Lyme. Charles could have believed many things of that sleeping face; but never that its owner was a whore. (Fowles 1969: 37)

Both dialogists may well be a microcosm of Victorian society with regard to its perception of womanhood: on the one hand, severely judgemental of woman's transgression of ideal femininity epitomised by Queen Victoria – apparently Sarah is no ideal woman for she is neither homely or motherly – and on the other, a bit more tolerant and open-minded especially at the turn of the century because of the impact of advancing sciences and nearing modernity on an individual's perspectives.

In every Victorian sensation novel, the medical discourse is represented by the local doctor who is often knowledgeable of both physical medicine and psychiatry. Hence, nineteenth-century medical discourse shaped the way woman is represented. In fact, in any case of abnormality in behaviour, women are diagnosed as mad or hysterical, mainly because of a biological abnormality in their intimate organs. In a study entitled "The Insanity of Pubescence", physician G. R. Trowbridge found wilfully-erotic behaviour to be a symptom of insanity in young women (Trowbridge 1891: 349). E. M. Roys Gavitt, a female physician, complained that "a desire to experiment has led ambitious surgeons to perform ovariotomy to

cure insanity, nervous disorders and functional disturbances too numerous to mention" (Gavitt 1893: 123/24). She ironically pointed out that such surgery will be of no benefit "unless the woman has been under the influence of some ambitious medical counselor, who has a mania that every pain and ache suffered by a woman is caused by some disturbance of the genital organs, and *the removal of the ovaries from the pelvis removes them from the head"* (Gavitt 1893: 123/24, emphasis in original). Similarly, in Fowles's novel, Dr Grogan who seems to have the same mania Gavitt signalled, is representative of the Victorian medical discourse. As he presents to Charles a psychiatric analysis of Sarah's character speaking on her behalf, he establishes the link between her behaviour and possible insanity:

> I am a young woman of superior intelligence and some education. I think the world has done badly by me. I am not in full command of my emotions. I do foolish things, such as throwing myself at the head of the first handsome rascal who is put in my path. What is worse, I have fallen in love with being a victim of fate. I put out a very professional line in the way of looking melancholy. I have tragic eyes. I weep without explanation. Et cetera. Et cetera. (Fowles 1969: 94)

The doctor oversimplifies Sarah's dilemma in so far as he reduces her to a woman who seduces a man to secure a good financial situation and regain a respectable reputation after having committed an unforgiven sin. In brief, according to the doctor, she is symbol of dishonesty, greed and duplicity. Her actions can only be explained by a mental disease which drives her to behave so irrationally and illogically, and so, the fate of such person is to be locked in an asylum. Fowles starts the following chapter with an anecdote about Lieutenant Emile de La Roncière who was accused by Marie de Morell – later to be discovered to have been in love with him – of attempted rape, imprisoned and later proven to be innocent of this crime. Fowles focuses on how La Roncière was diagnosed by a German doctor to suffer from a mental illness caused by sexual repression. As he blurs the boundaries between real and fictional time, and history and fiction, Fowles directly links the incident to Charles's conversation with Dr Grogan about Sarah's infamous actions. Charles establishes parallels between the real event and Sarah's story: both involve a French lieutenant, a female subject whose actions are rather shocking and "perverse", and the outcome is a victimised man (Fowles 1969: 101). In fact, La Ronicère's story pushes him to compare Sarah to Marie who eventually turns out to be mentally disordered

as the Lieutenant is declared innocent. Thus, the story impacts not only his decision to go visit Sarah, but also her figural characterisation.

Similarly, in Faber's novel, the figure of the doctor is significant in presenting Agnes's character. As Doctor Curlew appears in the narrative, a close link is established between Agnes and mental illness. Like Fowles's doctor, he seems to adhere to the same belief in the association of women's psychological state with their sex: vagina and uterus. Like Gavitt's ambitious medical councillors, Curlew believes that madness is located in female genitals and so easily removed. Men's advantage in this sense is lacking the female sexual organs. The doctor's speech announces the viewpoint towards mental illness and foreshadows Agnes' future at the end of the narrative. Mental illness is simply female and a mad woman is to be placed in a mental asylum. Inspired by Darwinian thought, the doctor posits this ascertainment as natural truth.

In Faber's novel, characterisation is not only figural by means of the doctor, but also both narratorial and explicit according to Pfister's model, when the narrator regains control of the text and assumes the role of an omniscient narrator. The narratorial voice addresses the reader who is eager to learn more details about Sugar. Thus, answering unasked questions, the narrator is allowed access into Sugar's earlier life, and gives a flashback on her past and how she was initiated into the profession of prostitution. Furthermore, the narrator highlights her extraordinary character which is not only part of her fame, but also the reason behind her more respectable position in comparison to her fellow prostitutes.

> Yes, but then Sugar was always precocious—and remarkable. Even when she was newly initiated into the trade, she stood out from the squalor of St Giles, an aloof and serious child amongst a hubbub of crude laughter and drunken conviviality. "She's a strange one, that Sugar," her fellow whores said. "She'll go far." And indeed she has. All the way to Silver Street, a paradise compared to Church Lane. (Faber 2002: 27)

Both omniscient and innovative is how Faber's narrator appears to be from the beginning. In a few lines, he crosses both time and space transporting the reader from past to present and from Church Lane to Silver Street, all the while presenting this remarkable character which managed to achieve this journey of mobility.

In the same direct and explicit manner, Agnes's physical absence in the narrative is put to an end. Faber decides to insert her as a character present in the text. As in a cinematic or

filmic representation, the narrator follows Agnes entering the scene, describing her from a third-person's viewpoint. The reader is introduced to a frail creature, a doll at the verge of breaking.

> Here, then, is Agnes Rackham, gingerly descending a spiral of stairs, breathing shallowly, frowning, biting her lip. As she reluctantly entrusts her weight to each carpeted step, she clutches the banister with one white-knuckled hand, while the other hand is laid on her breastbone, just under the mandarin collar of her morning gown. It's Prussian blue velvet, that gown, and so ample in comparison to her dainty body that its hems threaten to ensnare the toes of her soft grey slippers, and send her tumbling. (Faber 2002: 98)

Agnes is a model of physical fragility and vulnerability. The patriarchal environment of the nineteenth-century rather consolidated such portrayal since it viewed male as strength, and female as weakness. Based on a binary opposition, the representation of the Victorian woman stresses the female gender's weak physical build and so, the subsequent need for a man. In her study of the changing lives of women in European history, Bonnie Smith points out:

> Delicacy was first a character trait but came to affect behavior such 'delicacy' aroused concern for some whenever physical activity was suggested. . . . Nervousness and fainting were other commonly accepted manifestations of women's weakness, in contrast to men's strength. Bad or even disagreeable news, shocking sights, or poor manners could cause fainting. . . . a range of factors — physical, social, and ideological — went toward creating the languishing woman as both an ideal and a reality. (Smith 1989: 198)

Thus, woman's weakness was no longer simply an ideal, but a reality the patriarchal discourse adopted. Agnes is an incarnation of this Victorian type. Faber's narrator confesses to the reader "You wonder if you've seen her somewhere before: indeed you have. She is a high-Victorian ideal; perfection itself [.] (Faber 2002: 98). Agnes conforms to the perfect mould of the ideal Victorian wife, a lady in her docility and weakness. As the narrative stops at every one of her recurrent fits of losing consciousness and turning pale, it caricatures and even ridicules such portrayal. Indeed, it is by means of this narratorial emphasis that Faber mocks the Victorian equation of womanhood and weakness. Laurent Mellet goes as far as to argue that Agnes is

"parodied and minimized" and even "relegated"[10] as a manifestation of Faber's refusal to conform to Victorian narrative codes (Mellet 2012: 9).

It is possible to suggest that Faber's strategy echoes Elizabeth Gaskell's. Though this view of womanhood as frailty was quite popular in the Victorian era, she did not entirely support it. At different points in her novels, she shows her female characters both as weak in comparison to the male ones, for they do faint, cry, and turn pale, and strong as they strive to overcome their fragility. In *North and South*, Margaret is constantly fighting her weaknesses, especially after her mother's death. Determined to look strong especially for her brother and father, she gradually overcomes the family tragedy. Similarly, Agnes is determined to surpass her fragile state before the Season. She exercises not only in order to prepare herself for the efforts she will have to make during the festivities, but also to avoid being absent because she is sickly.

Besides the quality of frailty, Agnes is the embodiment of Victorian beauty: "She is a paragon of porcelain femininity, five foot two with eyes of blue, her blonde hair smooth and fine, her mouth like a tiny pink vulva, pristine" (Faber 2002: 99). What is worthy of note is that Agnes's description, unlike Sugar's, is uniform. There is no androgyny, but absolute femininity. Ironically however, despite conforming to the model of the ideal Victorian lady both in appearance and character, she does not affect William as Sugar, the anti-Victorian ideal, does. Another manifestation of difference between both women is the nature of their conversation with William. Agnes's exchanges with her husband are out of mere civility, they lack depth in topic and passion in sentiment. It is ironic that a conversation between husband and wife is superficial and shallow, while that between a prostitute and a client who have known each other for some hours, is much more intellectually intriguing. This contrast offers a glimpse of the opposite relationships William will have with both women throughout the narrative.

In Waters's novel, since the narrative is divided into three parts wherein narration alternates between Susan and Maud, characterisation is mainly figural. Unlike most characters who are presented by either/both Sue or Maud, the girls are first introduced by Gentleman. Hence, according to Pfister's model, their characterisation is first an altero-characterisation; i.e. the characterisation of one character by another character. This type of characterisation is often very subjective. It is not only guided by personal motivations, but also reflects individual convictions, attitudes and beliefs. Accordingly, as Gentleman describes Maud to Sue, he enumerates the characterial features most important to his scheme: "'A niece. In years,' he

[10] Mellet writes: "Même le personnage d'Agnes, archétypique de l'héroïne victorienne, sera exclu et est ici immédiatement parodié et minimisé pour cela même. (…) Agnes se voit gratifiée d'une première description qui tend tout entière vers la synecdoque pour la réduire à l'état de vulve" (Mellet 2012: 9).

glanced at me, 'say Sue's years. In looks, say handsome. Of sense, understanding and knowledge,' he smiled, 'why, let's say perfectly shy.' […] 'She's rich, oh yes,' said Gentleman, nodding. […] She's an heiress, […] 'she's rich as a queen'" (Waters 2002: 24). It is interesting to note that he does not start with her character as a person, but rather with her financial status. Since Gentleman is responsible for describing the girls to each other, he is totally free to select the elements most helpful to his plot, and to draw the portrait which suits his plan. He adds:

> 'He's [Mr Lilly] made a secretary of her, all these years—has her reading to him for hours at a stretch. I think he hardly knows she has grown up and turned into a lady.' He gave a secret sort of smile. 'I think she knows it, though. No sooner do I start work on the pictures that she discovers in herself a passion for painting. She wants lessons, with me as her master. Now, I know enough in that line to fake my way; and she, in her innocence, can't tell a pastel from a pig. But she takes to her instruction—oh, like anything. (Waters 2002: 25)
>
> (…) 'Only what I should call fey. She's an innocent, a natural. She has been kept from the world. She's an orphan, like you are[.] (Waters 2002: 30)

In his introductory passage, Waters's narrator Gentleman puts to the fore Maud's upbringing by her uncle, occupation as a secretary, innocence, and condition as an orphan, as keys to the success of his plot. So, both Sue and the reader start to collect details in order to draw a portrayal of Maud. Besides her fortune, it appears that Maud is well-educated, well-mannered and somewhat simple-minded. Though at this early stage of the narrative, neither Sue nor the reader have reason to doubt Gentleman's credibility, it seems legitimate to question the extent of the authenticity of this report. Interestingly, Sue starts to have a prejudiced opinion about Maud, she claims "'If she'll believe bouncers like those, Gentleman, she must be even sillier than you first told us'" (Waters 2002: 33).

In the same manner, Maud narrates Gentleman's description of Sue: "He says he has a girl in mind, a girl of my years and colouring. A sort of thief—not overscrupulous, not too clever in her ways, he says; he thinks he will secure her with the promise of some slight share in the fortune—'Say, two or three thousand. I don't believe she'll have the ambition to ask for more" (Waters 2002: 222). Similarly, he points out that Sue's simple-minded, a necessary condition for the success of the ruse. So, Maud starts to draw a picture of Susan: "*Suky Tawdry*. Her. I think of her. I think so hard of her I think I know her colour—fair— her figure—plump—

her walk, the shade of her eye.—I am sure it is blue. I begin to dream of her. In the dreams she speaks and I hear her voice. She says my name, and laughs" '(Waters 2002: 235, emphasis in original). In brief, altero-characterisation is heavily influenced by Gentleman's strategic aims. It is utilized by Waters to present a subjective, one may posit erroneous, account of the female protagonist in order to prepare her readers to engage in a process of evaluating and assessing the authenticity of this description.

One of the most problematic types of characterisation however, is implicit self-characterisation, as it poses the question of how to interpret the position of characters, in terms of their omniscience, competence, personal opinion and reliability. To Rimmon-Kenan, a reliable narrator is the one "whose rendering of the story and commentary on it the reader is supposed to take as an authoritative account of the fictional truth", while an unreliable narrator is the one "whose rendering of the story and/or commentary on it the reader has reasons to suspect. [...] The main sources of unreliability are the narrator's limited knowledge, his personal involvement, and his problematic value-scheme" (Rimmon-Kenan 1983: 100). Since this study is interested mainly in the characterisation of female protagonists, it is then of primary importance to deal with auto-characterisation only when the female character assumes the role of narrator in the novels of this corpus. Thus, narratorial and figural characterisation overlap when the protagonist herself becomes the narrator of her self-description. Accordingly, all neo-Victorian narratives present instances of interior monologues and stream of consciousness reflecting the character's own presentation of herself. Often complex and multi-layered, these personal and individual accounts relayed directly by the female characters themselves not only highlight that the heroines are round characters, but that their voices are as – if not more – important as both author's and narrator's. Hence, a section devoted to studying protagonists' voice in narrative will follow in the fourth chapter of this project.

In brief, the three neo-Victorian novels under study combine different techniques of narrative characterisation in order to draw a complex and multi-layered portrait of the female protagonist. Not only does this diversity result in a thorough and extensive depiction of this same character, it brings to the fore the multiplicity of perspectives in viewing her, and thus pushes the reader to picture a subjectivity and confronts them to a material character.

Interestingly however, structuralist narratology has proved to be deficient since it disregards gender as a vector in character analysis. Thus, since this investigation centres on the characterisation of the female protagonist in neo-Victorian fiction, exploring the theoretical framework of the genderization of narrative is an essential step. To investigate the genderization processes in the fictional text, I will study the female character from a feminist narratological

perspective focusing mainly on how the context which establishes gender as a factor impacts characterisation in narrative. Then, I will show how gender studies sheds light on the study of the acquisition of gender, thus bringing closer the study of gender to feminist theory.

2. Gender Characterisation and Female Character

2.1 Feminist Narratology and Female Character in (Con)text: the Question of Gender Roles

The neo-Victorian novel is a text inextricably linked to the socio-cultural and ideological context of the Victorian age as it re-explores how and which social roles are taken up by women. Thus, it is interesting to study to what extent the construction of the female character is impacted by Victorian reality, a reality which is closely affected by the division of roles. Indeed, the study of female characterisation in this neo-Victorian corpus can be illuminated through feminist narratology, a recent branch of narrative theory which precisely seeks to bring together feminist theory and narratology and reveal the blind spots and pitfalls of the supposedly gender-neutral analyses of structuralist and formalist narratology. Unlike structuralist narratology, feminist narratology, which flourished in the 1980s as one of the first 'postclassical' context-oriented approaches within narrative theory, assumes that gender is a category that is relevant to the analysis of the structural features of narratives. The study of gender and narrative stakes its diverse approaches on the shared belief that sex, gender, and sexuality are significant not only to textual interpretation and reader reception, but to textual poetics itself and thus to the shapes, structures, representational practices, and communicative contexts of narrative texts. As an intersectional field of study, narratology has sought to relate textual features to relevant cultural contexts and has modified and reinterpreted narratological categories from a gender perspective. Interestingly, the study of gender and narrative explores the historically contingent ways in which sex, gender, and/or sexuality might shape both narrative texts themselves and the theories through which readers and scholars approach them.

The socio-economic content of the Victorian era was far from stable, for it underwent gradual and progressive changes, especially with regard to female employment which defined her position within/ outside the household. Kathryn Hughes notes that in the early nineteenth-century, "men and women's roles became more sharply defined than at any time in history" for many reasons (Hughes 2014: para. 1). Families no longer lived over their shops, which meant that men commuted to factories, shops and offices while wives and daughters were left at home for domestic duties. During the second half of the century however, women's occupations

included work in textiles and clothing factories and workshops, as well as in coal and tin mines. Many women were employed in small industries like shirt making, nail making, chain making and shoe stitching, to the point that Patricia Johnson claims that "working- class women fueled the Industrial Revolution, making up as much as 60 percent to 80 percent of the workforce in light industries such as cotton manufacturing" (Johnson P. 2001: 1). The end of the century witnessed the rise of a new social group of female journalists and authors. Consequently, defining woman's role in both private and public life was a controversial debate which not only reflected the remarkable changes but also the conflicting positions in approaching gender roles.

On the one hand, some thinkers like John Ruskin insisted that woman was to remain in the household since her duty involved the upbringing of the children and the maintaining of proper moral and ethical values. Ruskin's *Sesame and Lilies* (1865) addresses the philosophy of the separation of spheres: women were best equipped for the private or domestic realm, while men were naturally suited for the active, aggressive and intellectual domains of public life. The concept of women's subordination to men was also shared by Victorian author Sarah Stickney Ellis who wrote books such as *The Wives of England* (1843), *The Women of England* (1838), *The Mothers of England* (1842) or *The Daughters of England* (1842) which stressed women's religious duty as their main role in the improvement of society.

On the other hand, others like John Stuart Mill signalled the possibility for women to transgress the limitations of this gender representation and have other roles outside the home. In 1869, a few years after Ruskin's publication, Mill published "The Subjection of Women", a different approach to gender philosophy in clear contrast to that of Ruskin's, which articulated the reflections and ambitions of many women who had already started the battle for their emancipation, symbolised by the long campaign for female suffrage and 'Votes for Women'. He expressed his point of view in the first lines of his article:

> the principle which regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes –the legal subordination of one sex to the other –is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement; and that it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no power or privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other" (Mill 1869: 1).

In brief, Ruskin and Mill voiced conflicting approaches to gender, thus highlighting the problematic nature of woman's position in society and her subsequent representation in literature.

Feminist narratology then seeks to explore the implications of sex, gender, and/or sexuality for analysing the structural composition of narrative and for exploring the full range of elements that constitute narrative texts: narrative voice, narrative situation and plot. In a previous section where I explored the continuities between the neo-Victorian novel and the Victorian sensation novel, I have demonstrated that the neo-Victorian plot in the three novels of this corpus is centred around the female protagonist, for she is the actant. Plot as a narratological notion entails a sequence of anticipation and fulfilment wherein the verbs and events refer to actions which reflect the intentional deeds of protagonists. Through the lens of feminist narratology, one may argue that the neo-Victorian plot celebrates woman's activity, "a power, a possibility that may be inconsistent with what women have experienced both historically and textually, and perhaps inconsistent with women's desires" (Lanser 1986: 357). The outcome of the plot in each of the novel embodies this female activity, movement, effort.

Sarah's agentivity as the doer of the action and subject of an active verb is put to the fore in Fowles's text. Her rejection of Charles's marriage proposal and decision to leave England for the New World may be read as the ultimate expression of activity. Charles attempts to convince her of the 'typical' role woman must embrace: "But you cannot reject the purpose for which woman was brought into creation" (Fowles 1969: 193). Yet, she firmly asserts: "I refuse, as I refused the other gentleman, because you cannot understand that to me it is not an absurdity" (Fowles 1969: 193). Not only does Sarah's statement contravene Charles's – and subsequently conventional patriarchal – ideology, it vigorously establishes her active role in the plot. Furthermore, one may suggest that Sarah embraces her "*rôle thématique*" to borrow Vincent Jouve's term by which he designates the actor who carries meaning, particularly at the figurative level. It therefore refers to categories, both psychological and social, allowing the character to be identified in terms of content. Jouve states: "si le rôle actantiel assure le fonctionnement du récit, le rôle thématique lui permet de véhiculer du sens et des valeurs. De fait, la signification d'un texte tient en grande partie aux combinaisons entre rôles actantiels et rôles thématiques" (Jouve 1997 : 53)[11]. Thus, Sarah's transgression of the normative gendered roles as wife and mother not only makes her capable of reconstructing her identity as a liberated independent woman in the narrative, but symbolically challenges and subverts the norms associated with woman's role, thus bringing together both roles, "*actantiel*" and "*thématique*".

[11] Vincent Jouve writes: "if the role as actant ensures the functioning of the story, the thematic role allows it to convey meaning and values. In fact, the meaning of a text is largely due to the combinations between the role as actant and the thematic role" (Jouve 1997 : 53; my own translation).

Similarly, in Faber's novel, Sugar is often equated with verbs of action which entail determination. "Emboldened, she decides to take a much bigger risk" (Faber 2002: 343) may well be an expression which encapsulates her overall attitude. Such disposition makes social mobility possible as she moves from one social role to the other: a prostitute, a kept mistress, a governess and finally a mother-figure. It is worthy of note that acquiring a new role is never an easy task, for her initial identity as prostitute constantly haunts her present. Clara, a maid at the Rackham house, suspects Sugar's history: "From the moment the woman set foot in the house, Clara could smell it on her: the stink of badness. This self-styled governess, with her highly suspect walk and her slut's mouth— where on earth did Rackham find her? The Rescue Society, maybe. One of Emmeline Fox's 'success stories'" (Faber 2002: 422/412). Similarly, her ultimate roles of governess and mother-figure are threatened by Cheesman, the Rackhams' driver, who knows her true identity: "She can't hope to erase what he already knows; to him, she'll always be William's whore, never Sophie's governess" (Faber 2002: 378). Interestingly however, Sugar's choice to escape the Rackham residence, save Agnes and take Sophie with her is the epitome of her agentivity. In fact, she ultimately succeeds in assuming her new role as mother-figure and leaving behind the previously prescribed role of prostitute. Reassuringly, she tells Sophie: ""We have a very, very long journey ahead of us, Sophie," she responds, dizzy with relief when Sophie relaxes, wriggles closer, and lays her own hand on Sugar's belly. "But when it's over, I'll make sure you have a bed. The warmest, cleanest, softest, driest, nicest bed in the whole world."" (Faber 2002: 612). The use of the term 'journey' is highly important insofar as it both denotes the physical trip to their final destination, and connotes Sugar's ongoing journey towards her ultimate role. Symbolized by the warm bed, her statement hints at her future role as Sophie's mother. It is possible then to suggest that the narrative echoes the evolution of Sugar's identity as she progresses from one social role to the other.

In Waters's novel, after having escaped Briar, Maud describes herself as an agent of free will: "I have been bold and determined. I have bitten down rage, insanity, desire, love, for the sake of freedom" (Waters 2002: 343). In the ending of the narrative, both Sue and Maud's ultimate recognition of their mutual romantic feelings as well as lesbian identities symbolizes their transgression of Victorian norms of heterosexuality. In a symbolic gesture, Sue firmly confesses: "I only want you" (Waters 2002: 547). Maud describes her books as "filled with all the words for how [she wants Sue]…" (Waters 2002: 551). Furthermore, the latter's ultimate resolution to become an author may be considered a decisive response to a patriarchal system which clearly limited female identity, both authorial and sexual.

Nancy Armstrong claims that fiction constantly portrayed the struggle between femininity and femaleness before Freud came to declare it a manifestation of hysteria, of "[acting] like a foreign body" (Breuer and Freud 1955: 6). This struggle manifests itself for example, in the surge of a desire rarely in its natural form (heterosexuality within marriage). For example, desire "takes such forms as Jane Eyre's nemesis Bertha Mason, the ghost of the first Catherine Earnshaw, Mary Barton's near-dead aunt who collapses into an unrecognizable heap outside her window (Elizabeth Gaskell, *Mary Barton*, 1848) or Estella's murderous working-class mother" (Armstrong 2001: 110). In other words, all forms of excess become the tools to materialize the inner conflict women must go through. One may suggest that Agnes's repetitive losses of consciousness and fits are symptomatic of such struggle, for they combine imagery of both composure and irrationality, composedness and fluster.

> Agnes's hand has already shivered out of the teapot's grip, and she totters away from the table, eyes wild. The shoulders around which he tries to cast a comforting arm seem to convulse and deflate and, with a retching cry, she falls to the floor. Or sinks to the carpet, if you will. Whatever way she gets there, she lands without a thump, and her glassy blue eyes are open. (…) She, in turn, stares up at him, bizarrely calm now that she can fall no farther. Her hair is still neat, her body is arranged as if for sleep. (Faber 2002: 103)

Through the use of two contradictory lexical fields, that of agitation 'shiver, convulse, deflate' and a second of poise 'without a thump, neat, arranged', the passage highlights Agnes's double character; both 'wild' and 'calm'. Besides, what is initially described as hysteria eventually turns out to be simply sleep. This suggests not only a satirical message on the part of Faber, but also signals woman's capacity to embody both traits, to role play if/ when needed. In other terms, the author revises this presumably inevitable conflict and reductive definition of woman as either femininity or femaleness. Indeed, the struggle often illustrated by a pair of protagonists, or protagonist and antagonist representing both extremes of femininity and femaleness, must end with the victory of one heroine over her fallen sister. In other cases, the struggle is lost and the heroine becomes unmistakable from her brothers as in George Eliot's *Mill on the Floss* (1860).

The neo-Victorian novels of this corpus disregard Freud's hysteria insofar as the neo-Victorian female protagonists are both feminine and female. As far as Sarah is concerned, the narrative puts to the fore how her independence and mystery mesmerize Charles's masculinist

gaze, and not simply her beautiful face. As for Sugar, it is practical intelligence and intellect which attract William. Despite being a prostitute with whom male clients usually share a physical bond, she captivates William's attention thanks to her non-physical traits. Interestingly, her bony body like that of a man is not described in flattering terms for it does not resemble the conventional feminine body. Maud and Sue's characterisation is a bit different for they are never involved in a heterosexual pattern, even though Gentleman does initiate a fake plot of courtship. Within the plot of usurpation, the narrative emphasizes their mutual eagerness to learn each other's actions, which eventually brings them closer to each other and to themselves. It seems that neo-Victorian novelists' approach is then rather comprehensive than divisive, for their female characters can embody both femaleness and femininity without needing to sacrifice one or the other. Accordingly, what makes the uniqueness of the neo-Victorian protagonists of this corpus is the amalgam of moral and cognitive attributes, typically disassociated from femininity.

Feminist narratology then helps to deconstruct the natural association between woman, and femininity and femaleness by shedding light on the ongoing impact of the binary opposition between male and female on (social) roles. By doing so, the neo-Victorian text aims to elucidate the confusion between sex and gender. These interests are reverberated in gender studies which proves equally relevant to explore how gender is constructed in the neo-Victorian text and how identity comes to be performed.

2.2 Girls' Social Conditioning to Perform a Female-Gendered Identity

Neo-Victorian studies, as a contemporary field, looks back at the Victorians and points out how patriarchal discourses on gender relations continue to be, given that we still consistently begin from a binary gendered position in order to critique and hopefully deconstruct precisely that male/female binary. Indeed, the novels of this neo-Victorian corpus dramatize the journeys of their female characters insofar as the texts follow the process of acquiring identity through a variety of female characters, child and adult, heterosexual and lesbian, upper-, middle- and working- class, educated and illiterate. This diversity leads to the following questions: To what extent is gender a purely social construct? What is the relationship between sex and gender? How does the gendering of identities shift across disciplinary and cultural contexts? Furthermore, though *The Crimson Petal and the White* is the only neo-Victorian novel in this corpus which proposes a child character, the others do recollect their

protagonists' childhood memories and stress the evolutive dimension of the gendering process. Thus, one may wonder how gender comes to be performed and acquired since childhood.

To answer these questions, neo-Victorianists rely on an analytical approach which is conscious of the multiple social contexts: historical, cultural, economic, political, textual, analytical, gendered, raced, classed, and so on, as it traces the process of constructing this same individual identity and gender in discourse. In the 1970s, at the same time of the rise of neo-Victorianism, an interdisciplinary field of studies baptized 'Gender studies' was institutionalized in order to provide analyses of issues of gender, gender relations, and the representation of women, and focus on the literary and cultural production in the contemporary age, in interaction with other transdisciplinary studies in the fields of literature, cultural politics, film studies, post-colonialism, travel literature, music, and translation. Gender studies addresses a multiplicity of codes, either social, sexual, racial or political, through which feminist discourses that resist univocal manifestations become materialized. It has since then evolved and grown so as to include other points of interest such as feminist studies, queer studies and women's studies.

As we follow Sophie's gendered upbringing more closely, Faber's narrative proposes opposite perceptions of gender performativity from different points of view: the maid's and Sugar's. From the start, the narrative presents Mrs Cleave as Sophie's nursemaid – a firm insensitive woman tightly attached to social conventions and rules of upbringing who has a rather cold and distant relationship with the child. She is the one who "has let it be known that [Sophie] has, in her humble opinion, reached the age where a nursemaid is no longer enough" (Waters 2002: 342). Ironically, Sugar refers to the maid's recitation of the dos and don'ts as a "lecture on the proper maintenance of the Rackham child" (Waters 2002: 386). Raising a child is a project which must follow a set of proper rules. Otherwise, it is doomed to fail. Judith Butler's works on gender performativity help to shed light on this process of gendering. In her study of gendered identity construction, she establishes a close link between discourse acts – speech acts that illustrate the relationships between speaking subjects – and the phenomenological theory of 'acts' which aims to explain how "social agents constitute social reality through language, gesture, and all manner of symbolic signs" (Butler 1988: 519). In other words, she considers that the 'constitution' of a subject is predicated on the association and co-existence of language and acts that illustrate this same language. The maid in Faber's text then serves as the executioner of this set of regulations; she makes sure that the guidelines are implemented.

Because of this intimidating position, Sugar feels both guilty and afraid of not having the required skills to be Sophie's governess. She thinks to herself: "In a few hours, she'll be solely responsible for Sophie Rackham--What on earth is she going to do with her? She's an imposter, a fraud so outrageously transparent that... that even a child could see through it! *Axioms*, *dictums* and *golden rules* are what's wanted in a teacher, but when Sugar racks her brains for some, what does she find?" (Waters 2002: 373, emphasis added). The use of the lexical field of principles and maxims not only emphasizes their strict necessity to the requirements of a teacher, but also complicates the process of bringing up a Victorian female child. Lacking a proper education herself, Sugar is unable to consider herself a suitable role model for the young child, especially if she must abide by the Victorian codes dictated by Mrs Cleave.

Butler's notion of gender performativity helps elucidate Sugar's concern at the way Sophie is to be raised. In fact, Butler focuses her research on woman's gender constitution. Taking as a point of departure Beauvoir's claim that "one is not born, but, rather, *becomes* a woman", she contends that gender is a social and not only a biological identity and the process of its construction happens over time by means of "a stylized repetition of acts" (Butler 1988: 519). More simply, the female-gendered self is the outcome of the stylization of the body through bodily gestures, movements and various enactments of different kinds, hence, the performative dimension of the social construction of identity. Social dictates – the dos and don'ts – are an important factor which determines how the process of gender identity formulation takes place. This claim seems to be of great importance considering any social context for a woman' s becoming – notably the Victorian society which is hierarchized, organised and predicated on rules and conventions. In fact, from an early age, an upper- and upper-middle-class female child is taught how to behave and what to become. The governess as an emblematic figure in the moral and social bringing up of wealthy families' girls, teaches socio-cultural etiquette: how a young lady must address and greet people from specific social circles and classes, what colors and fabrics she must wear in given social events, what kind of topics she must discuss and engage in, and probably most importantly, what achievements and accomplishments are necessary to secure a good husband like music, poetry, sewing and other similar activities related to the private life in the household. Read in this light, it is possible to consider Sophie's gendered becoming based on a set of strategies, what Sartre would perhaps have called *a style of being* or Foucault, *stylistics of existence*. In a similar vein, Marielle Macé reaches well beyond the boundaries of aesthetic considerations so as to extend the study of style to all those "Gestes, rythmes, habitudes, habits, habitats, paroles, costumes, coutumes, pratiques

du corps" (Macé 2016: 32) [12]. Her study thus, may help elucidate our reading of Sophie. In Faber's novel, Mrs Cleave has inflicted upon Sophie multiple ways and forms of existence through commonplace manners, habits, bodily movements and rhythms that are part and parcel of any form of lived experience, these may be referred to in Macé's words as "*formes de vie*", "*style de vie*" and "*mode de vie*" (Macé 2016: 13). One may suggest that the nurse's objective is to mark Sophie's character in accord with the dictates of patriarchy. Macé confirms that "Ces reliefs sont caractérisants; ils permettent de reconnaître une forme dans la pluralité de ses occurrences" (Macé 2016: 22) [13]. If Sophie were to follow the nurse's list of guidelines, she would be recognizable precisely in her conformity to Victorian norms. As contradictory as such statement may sound, a Victorian female-gendered identity is about invisibility rather than visibility, compliance rather than infringement.

The threat of such process is to set up a system of alikeness and similarity to the detriment of individual distinctiveness and diverseness. Soon afterwards, Sugar questions to what extent the type of education she is expected to give Sophie is appropriate. For example, she wonders how a six-year old child would understand a lesson of mineralogy from Mangnall's Questions. Written by a schoolmistress who became the headmistress of Crofton Hall, a successful Yorkshire school, the book became generally known as the textbook of the age for governesses and other teachers. In other words, the book became the manual for giving girls a proper education, an education which abides by the laws and conventions of the time. Yet despite her questioning, Sugar believes in the necessity of education and "[t]hey carry on with the lessons-- arithmetic, the Pilgrim Fathers, the properties of gold--with a sorrowful awareness that none of these subjects is quite what's required of *a young lady in the making*" (Waters 2002: 601, emphasis added). Sugar's stream of consciousness highlights the contrast between reality and requirements. Indeed, the problematic nature of raising a female child lies in the conflict between education on the one hand, and social manners proper to a lady on the other. The narrator sarcastically concludes:

> The full story, when Sophie has been sufficiently calmed to tell it, is this: Miss Sugar is a very good governess, but there are a great many things that a lady needs to know that Miss Sugar doesn't know, like Dancing, Playing the

[12] Marielle Macé writes: "Gestures, rhythms, habits, clothes, habitats, words, costumes, customs, bodily practices" (Macé 2016: 32; my own translation).

[13] Macé argues: "These reliefs [as in carvings and mouldings] are characterizing; they make it possible to recognize a form in the plurality of its occurrences" (Macé 2016: 22; my own translation).

> Piano, German, Watercolours, and other accomplishments whose names Sophie can't recall. If Sophie is to be a proper lady, she'll need a different governess, and quite soon. Lady Bridgelow, a lady who knows all about these things, has confirmed that this is necessary. (Waters 2002: 600)

From the narrator's point of view, education should be privileged over etiquette. Yet, to dramatize its revision of Victorian practices, the narrative puts to the fore two opposite perceptions of a female child' genderization process. In contrast to Sugar's – and the narrator's – belief in the necessity of education, Lady Bridgelow privileges manners and social etiquette. The examples of the activities proposed illustrate the required accomplishments of a lady. The more accomplished she is, the more ladylike she will be considered in society. Hence, it is unsurprising that Sugar's services are to be terminated following Lady Bridgelow's recommendation. A lady herself, she is more suited to judge what Sophie's needs are, in order to secure a bright future. Seen from this angle, the narrator ironically mocks Victorian practices and the traditional view that performing femininity is closely related to household accomplishments, while boys are to be educated in preparation for their active life in the outside world.

Yet, despite this seemingly patriarchal alliance in the narrative, the ending in which Sophie is accompanied by Sugar may embody Faber's rather challenging and even revisionist project. In her relationship with Sophie, Sugar focuses not only on the educational aspect but even more, on the humane and personal aspects of growth. She tries to teach the child more about self-confidence and independence to help her shape her future self instead of being told what and how she must become. Recognizing that a child must learn to be self-reliant, she successfully teaches her not to wet her bed at night and gratifies her effort. In fact, from an early age, Sophie has been negatively impacted by her nurse who insisted that urinating in her bed at night symbolises her dirtiness. The repetition of term 'dirty' by little Sophie indicates to what extent her nurse had reiterated discussions of propriety and cleanliness, not only in the literal sense, but also in the figurative one i.e. the religious and moral dimensions. She tells Sugar: ""It's too full of dirtiness, Miss," says the child, solemn in her role of introducing a newcomer to the unchallengeable realities of the Rackham domain. "My bad smell would be spread into the good parts of the house, onto the nice clean beds, ev'ywhere"" (Waters 2002: 405). Sophie is convinced that her urine would soil the pure house. The fact that Sophie cannot control herself and urinates during the night in her bed is symptomatic of her fear of not following the rules and not being a 'good girl'. When Sugar succeeds in helping Sophie control this need and

boosting the girl's confidence who "wakes in a dry, warm bed, blinking in disbelief at the wonder of it", she undoes Beatrice's assumption that girls who are physically soiled are naturally inclined to be morally soiled (Waters 2002: 416). By means of simple acts of caring, Sugar manages to challenge and subvert patriarchally-biased convictions of female's frailty and helplessness, and helps Sophie overcome feelings of uselessness and unworthiness.

We read similar yet more dramatic manifestations of this same genderization process in Sugar's childhood memories. From a young age, her mother Mrs Castaway – who is also her madam – forces her into prostitution to make a living by means of her body, thus robbing her of her childhood and depriving her of her innocence. "In Sugar's dream, this is translated into the callused fingers of a man, seizing her calf, crawling up her flesh towards her groin. "You needn't shiver any more," says Mrs Castaway. "A kind gentleman has come to keep you warm"" (Waters 2002: 391). Mrs Castaway forces Sugar into prostitution at a very early age. The narrative stops at the rapidly-increasing phenomenon of child prostitution in the Victorian era. In fact, as a result, there were incessant attempts to guarantee more rights for children: The Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885 for example, raised the age of consent from 13 to 16 years and defined the penalties for sexual offences against women and minors. Yet, to Mrs Castaway, making money is more important than her child's worth and sanity. In fact, in 1848, it was claimed that almost 2,700 girls in London between the ages of 11 and 16 were hospitalised because of venereal disease, many as a result of prostitution, and so children above the age of 13 could be procured without any difficulty. In other words, child prostitution in the Victorian age was rather a common phenomenon, which reflects the extent of the genderization process of little girls. Like most madams, Mrs Castaway even teaches Sugar what to do when a client forces her to perform particular actions for his pleasure. As she consequently reiterates these actions, she becomes the prostitute her mother sought, thus embodying her mother's heritage. What is worthy of note is Sugar's ultimate rejection of this gendered identity her mother had dictated. Instead of succumbing to vulnerability and weakness, Sugar learns to be independent and fight for a better social standing. Thanks to her strong character, she refuses to be ill-treated by male clients and commands how the professional relationship should be. By means of her education and literary formation, she manages to select her clientele and have power over male recipients. Besides, she becomes an author who writes a novel where the prostitute is given power and control over male clients. Towards the end of the narrative, we observe Sugar's rebellion against the role of the prostitute and her progressive transformation into a more independent individual aware of her worth outside the realm of prostitution. She opts for the status of a mother-figure which brings her a sense of peacefulness and completion.

In Waters's novel, the genderization process is more problematic since Maud is subjected to a patriarchal male conditioning from an early age by the nurses first – considered to be accomplices to patriarchy because of their internalization of gender relations hierarchies and gender requirements – and then by her uncle, an authoritarian patriarch himself. In the lunatic asylum, Maud "learn[s] the rudiments of discipline and order; and incidentally apprehend[s] the attitudes of insanity" (Waters 2002: 176). This early stage of her upbringing foreshadows the psychological torment she will have to endure in her uncle's house. As Maud recounts some of her early childhood memories, it is interesting to stop at the linguistic structure she uses to describe the stages of her growth. She states: "My mother's brother has had the house of nurses raise him me" (Waters 2002: 178). Indeed, the nurses may be considered Lilly's employees, in charge of executing his orders and raising her as he wishes. In other words, they are to prepare her for the next stage of her life, for they "tell [her] gravely what [her] future is to be, in the house of [her] uncle" (Waters 2002: 178). Interestingly, the use of the active mode commands who detains power in this process: the nurses and Mr Lilly, while Maud simply occupies the position of object in the sentence. She continues: "Now he means to take me home and make me ready for the roast" (Waters 2002: 178). The expression announces another stage: all attributes the nurses have taught her – subordination, obedience, and silence – will be of service in the next stage of her life. Indeed, Maud's genderization process takes place in two phases: by matriarchs first and by the patriarch later.

When she moves to Briar, Mr Lilly aims to turn the child into his private secretary working on a bibliography of pornography. Pornography as a material may be considered rather inappropriate to a child, which could later impact their cognitive, moral and psychological growth processes. This conditioning process is not only individually debilitating since Maud is taught to be silent, submissive and self-effaced, morally and ethically inappropriate because of the content she is forced to work on, but also physically domineering since Lilly forces specific behaviours. First, Maud must wear gloves whenever she is in the library. While Victorian ladies were expected to cover their hands when they went out, Maud must cover hers inside the house when she is within proximity to the books. Lilly makes the gloves mandatory in the library out of fear that Maud would tarnish the books. Furthermore, he forces her to eat specific types of food. "The dishes he prefers being all bloody meats, and hearts, and calves' feet, my kid-skin gloves grow crimson—as if reverting to the substance they were made from" (Waters 2002: 191). In inflicting a barbaric form of dining upon Maud, this type of food becomes a symbol of Lilly's utter control. He may be read as a predator. While "Some men have farmers raise them

veal-calves", Maud compares herself to one of these vulnerable animals to be roasted (Waters 2002: 178).

Since Lilly takes the position of the dominant patriarch in Briar, it is only natural that only his vision of a girl's formation is highlighted in the narrative, a uniquely distinct perception since it does not abide by Victorian social conventions. In contrast to Faber's novel where Sophie is prepared to become a lady, Mr Lilly chooses another path for Maud, turning her into a librarian. It is possible to argue that Lilly's genderization process of Maud is unconventional insofar as the girl is not confined to the private sphere of the household and is rather integrated in the library – a masculine space of creation. Seen from this angle, it is interesting to note that Maud is likened to males more than to females, since the task she is educated for is rather masculine. Hence, she is depicted in the world of the library, surrounded by the dominant presence of male figures who are engaged in the activity of smoking associated with Victorian gentlemen and in 'intellectual' discussions of the literature of the time.

What makes Maud's genderization process problematic is the position she takes within this world of men. Lilly commands her to perform numerous acts like standing still, speaking softly and writing in a certain manner until she learns them by heart, thus denying her subjectivity and even humanness. She admits: "'I was bred to the task,' I say, 'as servants are'" (Waters 2002: 206). She even goes as far as to compare herself to a book saying: "I have grown used to thinking of myself as a sort of book. Now I feel myself a book" (Waters 2002: 246). Indeed, because of the repetitive nature of Mr Lilly's commands, Maud no longer feels human. She is simply a tool, a means in her uncle's project. Being the object of his 'immunising' process, she no longer seems touched by the material she reads, as she admits: "'I am my uncle's secretary,' I say. 'The appeal of the subject is nothing to me'" (Waters 2002: 209). The subject not only does not affect her but also strips her of emotion. She declares: "'I have been bred to be quite beyond embarrassment" (Waters 2002: 210). Interestingly, unlike Victorian stereotypes of gendered representations whereby women are often associated with sentiment and passion, Lilly's upbringing challenges this mould. She is taught to become unsentimental, foregrounding her male genderization. In a long monologue addressed to her, Lilly explicitly associates her with men, comparing her to himself, and then to the male gender:

> 'Your sight shall save my own. 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. (Waters 2002: 194)

Lilly considers the library an extraordinary world, where an unconventional process of genderization must take place, for his objective is to transform Maud into a version of him, an inheritor, a successor. He does not identify her in relation to her sex, but rather to himself. The alternation in the use of pronouns 'you' and 'my' closes the gap between them and brings both genders closer. Interestingly indeed, Maud's genderization process takes an unexpected direction. She is not gendered female as in Victorian customs, but is taught to perform a male tradition. Besides, calling the library Maud's 'proper sphere' consolidates the notion of inheritance. Lilly envisages to make Maud the owner of this typically masculine space.

Conversely, Maud progressively acquires a hybridized gendered identity alternating between feminine and masculine attributes. On the one hand, she is associated with intellectual masculine capacities. On the other hand, she is used as a sexual object to attract men's attention and heighten the effect of the pornographic material. Lilly implores the maid to dress Maud in a specific way: she must cover her hands with gloves, all the while showing her ankles under her short skirts, thus combining both innocence and sensuality, concealment and eroticism. Like a lady, she must abide by Victorian etiquette of dress insofar as no lady should step outside without gloves, otherwise, she is to be considered an improper woman. At the same time, her bare ankles show her white skin which is meant to arouse the fantasies of Lilly's male friends, and amplify the pleasure effect of the reading sessions.,

Because of this hybridity, Lilly describes Maud's work as "queer, to the eyes and ears of the untutored" (Waters 2002: 195). Janice Irvin defines queerness as "an encompassing identity that challenges and resists the calcification of identities and categories" (Irvin 1994: 243). Read from this angle, it is possible to argue that Maud's queer identity as neither female nor male, concurrently resists Lilly's genderization process and subsequently both definitions of femininity and masculinity. Consequently, she cannot be identified as either feminine or masculine.

Maud's identity formation process exposes the limitations of Lanser's approach which rests on a "binary model of gender that emphasize[s] difference" and tends "to construct the category 'women' as if it were a universal group" (Page 2006: 46/7). By means of this investigation focused on a few protagonists, one may suggest that neo-Victorian fiction celebrates women's multiplicity by putting to the fore various and often quite different models

of protagonists. In these novels, the female protagonists challenge and even (attempt to) overthrow their genderization processes.

In brief, the representation of gender roles in the narrative manifests the high impact of the Victorian socio-economic and ideological context which delineated male and female responsibilities within and outside the household. In fact, the consolidation of the private/ public dichotomy undeniably contextualized discussions about gender roles. This further suggests that female identity construction may be affected by Victorian spaces, insofar as the nineteenth century offers itself as a highly-complex physical landscape. In its investigation of the female protagonist, the neo-Victorian novel revisits this dichotomy in order to blur the boundaries between the private and the public, and to propose new readings of female identity(ies). One may wonder how (neo-)Victorian spaces help make up the female characters, and how the latter help re-shape such spaces.

3. Spatialising the Neo-Victorian Female Character: Gender and the Victorian Private/Public Dichotomy

The neo-Victorian texts under study track the female protagonists' movements between spaces in both private and public spheres. The plots are situated in the Victorian household with special attention to the bedroom, the dining room, and the library, as well as in other Victorian places as the hotel, the brothel and the factory, shedding light on the personal dimension of these spaces insofar as the narratives focus on how the neo-Victorian protagonists experience (neo-)Victorian spaces. The novelists' interest in this private/public dichotomy can be explained by the fact that this spatial division took on a social meaning since it was closely linked to gender roles. In fact, the establishment of the division of separate spheres and the ensued distribution of gender roles bear their foundations in the eighteenth century and the rise of the European bourgeoisie. Jürgen Habermas, in his 1962 book translated in 1989 as *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* coins the terms 'private' and 'public'. The private was restrictedly occupied by the family while the public was at first a forum in which art and literature could be discussed but quickly developed into an arena in which issues of general social concern, including the actions of the state, could be examined and critiqued. He strongly contends that eighteenth-century reality as well as studies reinforced this binary division by equating the private with the domestic and the public with the political. He argues that the opposition between the "intimate

sphere of the conjugal family" and the "public sphere" was, above all, a discursive construct because the intimate/domestic sphere formed part of the private sphere (Habermas 1962: 51).

The highpoint of the public/private dichotomy was in the Victorian era when the increasingly urbanised, industrialised and modern society took form and shaped social organisation of families. Linda McDowell posits that

> [a]s cities grew over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this spatial division between the public and the private, between those with a legitimate right to the public arena and those who should be excluded, was enshrined in theory and in practice, in the state and in legislation, and in the definition of citizenship and civic values. Thus the urban civic arena – the public spaces and state institutions – was constructed as an exclusive rather than an inclusive space, and the notion of citizenship itself took a spatially constituted form. (McDowell 1992: 109)

This has led to an exorbitant overgeneralisation of women's socially confined position in Victorian society. It follows that the neo-Victorian novel addresses Victorian assertions about the gender dichotomy, which have often associated women with the private/public dichotomy as a manifestation of a bourgeois ideal to borrow Sally Shuttleworth's idea (Shuttleworth 2012: 33). These assertions have resulted in gendering space by attributing particular roles to both men and women. The private sphere was associated with chaste women, specifically wives and mothers. The public sphere was at once a male space of freedom and agency, and one of erotic activity and amorality. As social roles became dictated mainly by gender restrictions, Victorian ladies had to abide by a set of non-written rules of behaviour in public spaces in order to preserve their reputations; their movements had to be either chaperoned or restricted to particular places at certain times of the day. This same ideology finds its highpoint in Victorian reality and literature. Thus, scholars today, and one may suggest the neo-Victorian novelists of this corpus, are paying heed to the porosity of the separation of the public/private focusing on how women were, in fact, moving within the public realm, and in doing so subverted heteropatriarchal normativity by stepping outside their allotted social roles and sphere to instead appropriate a female space within the public.

Seen in this light, spatial experience is paramount when character is female, since literary studies have approached the concept of space from the angle of gender studies. Indeed, the exploration of a possible female experience within this time-space is of immediate

importance to this investigation, for a *female* and *feminine* spatiality refers to the chronotope where the feminine is central in the articulation of the spatial theme in the narrative. In the introduction to *Bodyspace: Destabilizing Geographies of Gender and Sexuality* (1996), Nancy Duncan explores "the idea of knowledge as embodied, engendered and embedded in the material context of place and space" by means of "a reconsideration and repoliticization of such geographical concepts as space, place (…) sites of resistance, (…) the transgression of boundaries and the public/ private division of space" (Duncan 1996: 1). In detecting a female character's movement in space, we can seek a knowledge of her social map which not only uncovers patterns and modes of behaviour, but can also be used to explain relationships of identity and power between social subjects. In this case, it seems quite pertinent to associate Butler's gender performativity with spatial studies in order to explore female identity. How does woman perform her femaleness in space? By drawing on Butler's theory of performativity, feminist geographers contend that geography influences the formation of gender identities and gender relations, and gender is likewise a significant dimension in the construction of the spatial. Doreen Massey claims that "[t]he intersections and mutual influences of 'geography' and 'gender' are deep and multifarious. Each is, in profound ways, implicated in the construction of the other" (Massey 1994: 177).

Like Robert Louis Stevenson in *Dr Jekyll and Mrs. Hyde* (1886) and Oscar Wilde in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), Faber utilizes the motif of duplicity to expose the duality of the city in his representation of two Londons: a respectable wealthy one, and a dirtier one[14]. Thus, his text – which focuses on the social group of prostitutes – is aptly placed in the East End, particularly in St Giles, where the phenomenon of prostitution witnessed a remarkable widespread. In fact, during the Victorian era, the East End of London gained a reputation for crime and poverty, and was once described as a terra incognita for respectable citizens. In the last decades of the Victorian era, East London was inhabited predominantly by the working classes, which consisted of native English population, Irish immigrants, many of whom lived in extreme poverty, and immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe. Because of poverty and unemployment, the slums grew rapidly at an unprecedented rate towards the end of the century. The most notorious slum areas were situated in East London, which was often called *darkest London*. However, slums also existed in other parts of London like St. Giles in central London. On the other hand, the West End refers to the more fashionable areas of London, where the most prosperous classes live and go boutique- or window-shopping in Regent Street or Oxford

[14] I borrow this idea from Jaine Chemmachery who adopts a postcolonial approach to study how London and the Victorian era were *Orientalised* and presented as 'other' in neo-Victorian productions.

Street. Indeed, the geographical division between East and West End signals the class-structure of English society. Thus, in the tradition of slum exploration literature, Faber minutely describes predominant filth, unsanitary conditions for both adults and children and prominent diseases. Yet, what is of immediate importance to this investigation is how Sugar experiences space, as she moves from one End to the other, thus questioning the supposition that a prostitute like Sugar is to remain in the East part of London, and signalling early on, her capacity of transgressing boundaries.

Faber revisits the ideology of the nineteenth century which regarded the prostitute as a problematic figure since she is neither a woman apt to occupy the private sphere nor a man in the public sphere. He points out the controversy of where to place her if both spaces do not welcome her, by dramatizing his main protagonist's mobility within and between both private and public spheres. She is first at Mrs Castaway's brothel, then is moved to a private apartment, and ultimately to the Rackhams' family home, thus invading the private sphere. By means of such spatial movement, Faber subverts the Victorian tradition of placing the prostitute as a fallen woman and a public figure that symbolises promiscuity, and whose activities were legalized and regulated by different laws passed towards the end of the nineteenth century[15] in the public sphere. In the literature of the time as well, the fallen woman was discarded from the private family home. In Mrs Henry Wood's *East Lynne* (1861), Lady Isabel is punished for her amorality, banished from the private sphere of family and deprived of her role of mother. Elizabeth Gaskell's *Ruth* (1853) focuses on the consequences of the 'fall', for the heroine finds herself shamed in the eyes of society by her illegitimate son. Though a tradition of Victorian novels sympathising with the figure of the prostitute and allowing fallen women the possibility to reconstruct their lives emerged, it is rather common that Victorian society did not tolerate women's amorality and restricted them to the public sphere where they were deprived of respect.

Read in this light, Faber's spatial subversion echoes numerous studies of this spatial dichotomy in nineteenth-century reality and literature as well, such as Martha Vicinus, Judith Walkowitz or Deborah Epstein Nord. In her pioneering edited volume, *A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women* (1977), Vicinus brought together papers that presented a fresh perspective on previous generalisations made about Victorian women and questioned clichéd images of femininity:

[15] The Contagious Diseases Act of 1864 regulated the conditions in which prostitutes worked in the service of military men, for example.

> it is now possible to write about areas previously unexplored. Scholars of the Victorian period are expressing considerable discomfort with the old clichés about women. . . . The passivity, frigidity, and uselessness of the female model idealized during the Victorian era in etiquette books and some fiction has come under attack for its extreme simplicity. Indeed, research is now frequently concerned with the relationship, whether close, distant or confused, between the prescribed ideal of womanhood and the actual reality. We no longer generalize so steadily about the Victorian woman. (Vicinus 1977: xi)

Indeed, like Vicinus, one may suggest that by means of his female protagonist, Faber illustrates how previous essentializations about gender roles and gendered spaces are no longer valid from a contemporary perspective, and claims that the public/private is in fact not as fixed as previously assumed. On the contrary, it was constantly being challenged, transgressed and subverted by women who appropriated a female space within the public sphere as Judith Walkowitz's research in *City of Dreadful Delight* (1992) maintains. The author traces the course of sexual and gender relations in London during the 1880s highlighting the spatial contrasts between life in the East End (poverty and unemployment) and the West End (bourgeois circles). As she focuses on the politics of space, both in the public and private sphere, she notes that towards the end of the century, women were increasingly entering the public sphere to exploit new forms of employment especially in shops and department stores, which demonstrates the porosity of such spatial organisation. During the 1880s, "the prevailing imaginary landscape of London [shifted] from one that was geographically bounded to one whose boundaries were indiscriminately and dangerously transgressed" (Walkowitz 1992: 29).

The work of these scholars paved the way for others to follow and as a result, by the turn of the twentieth century, our image of the Victorians was radically changed. Subsequently, critics tend to focus on the public realm as an arena of presence rather than absence of women as they contemplate how Victorian women used different strategies to venture out into the male domain. The modern city, and the new urban experience that it presented, offered women in particular the possibility to expand their roles beyond the domestic sphere. In what way and for which purposes do contemporary authors retrieve the Victorian period and the private/public dichotomy to consider issues of gender? I suggest that neo-Victorian fiction accentuates the porosity and instability of the public/private dichotomy to stage current concerns and issues in Victorian disguise to push contemporary political agendas. Jaine Chemmachery even goes as

far as to argue that "Imaginary recreations of London can result from a desire to provide alternative discourses on London, add layers to the many pre-existing layers of historical, literary, cultural, geographical constructions of the city" (Chemmachery 2020: para. 36).

In London, the public sphere itself is not uniform. Henry Mayhew classifies prostitutes into three categories from the lowest to the highest paid, which suggests that the space occupied by them was similarly divided into different territories. At first glance, it seems that Faber reproduces Mayhew's model in his narrative. The fat and old prostitute wandering the streets in Faber's text belongs to the first type which Mayhew calls the streetwalkers "the thieves' women" (Mayhew 1851: 336), who keep to low neighbourhoods such as St Giles. They prostitute for a shilling; which reflects their low position not only within society as a whole, but also within the class of prostitutes. Usually not physically attractive and quite old, they are the least desired among their peers. Both Caroline and Sugar at the beginning of the narrative are representatives of the second type living in brothels and theoretically owned by a patron or a mistress to whom they give a considerable percentage of their revenues. These brothels are usually kept in modest or respectable neighbourhoods, Church Lane and Silver Street respectively, to attract a clientele who looks for secrecy to limit gossip and to satisfy sanitary conditions to prevent venereal diseases.

However, what is interesting to note is that even though Faber seems to abide by Mayhew's classification, his heroine Sugar is allowed mobility inside the public sphere. Sugar is the most mobile character in the narrative since she is allowed to move around social and geographical spaces with the advantage of leaving one or the other at her own will. The narrator follows her to the café to get her morning coffee and pastries and thoroughly describes her strolling around in St James's park enjoying the good weather and the business of a typical day in London's West End. She crosses invisible social boundaries "walking (…) through a maze of streets . . . already marked for destruction by town planners dreaming of a wide avenue named after the Earl of Shaftesbury" (Faber 2002: 24). Such movements highlight Sugar's agency and freedom to move from one space to another, though she has to resort to some techniques of camouflage such as refined materials and acceptable colours for dresses. She is concerned about wearing expensive dresses in accord with the actual fashion, as well as putting on gloves since "ladies must wear them at all times, until safely indoors. Sugar dresses like a lady, therefore she must on no account bare her extremities in public" (Faber 2002: 34). In addition, she has to adhere to some specific patterns of public manner related to pace, movement and vision to avoid being mistaken for a prostitute. Judith Walkowitz claims that respectable

girls were instructed to avoid strolling at a leisured pace, to look straight ahead and specifically to move away from approaching men (Walkowitz 1992: 51).

These strategies not only grant her freedom to move easily along the streets, traverse the boundaries between class-divided areas and not be confined in the limited spaces permitted by Victorian social codes, but also give her the opportunity to create a private space within the public sphere. In fact, by designing an alternative identity different from her own in order to adapt to the different places in the public realm[16], Sugar acquires a comprehensive subjective view of the city without having her privacy disturbed. As she adopts the lady-like persona, she embarks on an inward journey thus creating a private within the public. If not solicited for sex, prostitutes are usually ignored by gentlemen because they are considered the trash of society. Yet, Sugar manages to change this attitude since she is ignored because she simply looks like a lady who must be respected and not approached by strangers. Furthermore, her position within the public, unlike prostitutes who are usually at the bottom of the social ladder, situates her at the centre. As Faber tracks her movement down Trafalgar Square, he writes that "[s]uddenly […] Sugar seem[s] to have all the space in the world" (Faber 2002: 26). Though quite illusive and especially momentary, Sugar seems to occupy a more decent position within the public sphere compared to that usually deemed for the social group of prostitutes.

In the process of moving around London, Sugar blurs the fixed stratification for the social group of prostitutes. Going to the places of the higher English social classes, being Rackham's kept mistress and enjoying a diversified education and a vast literary culture, Sugar occupies an in-between position among the social classes of English society. Though her profession as a prostitute confines her to the lower working classes, the elevated life she leads promotes her to upper-middle class. This pinpoints the prostituted woman's intermediate position as a bridge between classes for she is in direct contact with members of all layers of society. Sugar's liminal position is both social and locational. First, she interacts with people from different social classes. On the one hand, she keeps a close friendship with Caroline and on the other, she aspires for a better life by means of her relationship with Rackham. Furthermore, Sugar manages to dissolve the stratification that prohibits social mobility, for she is a transitional figure who transgresses class boundaries through sexual intercourse with members of higher classes. Henri Lefebvre in *The Right to the City* (1968), argues for a "destructuration" of the city (Lefebvre 1968: 156), a revolutionary move against the established

[16] Though the terms place and space are often used interchangeably for they share some common features in regard to geography, they diverge in their relation with the social being. Place is simply a reference to a specific, physical or geographical location, while space is a social space, a socially constructed and constructive sphere.

order of the city. He claims that the transformation of the organisation of the city must take place first through the working class which must revolutionize this sort of lamination and segregation for the sake of promoting integration (Lefebvre 1968: 154). By blurring the boundaries between lower and upper-middle English classes, Sugar participates in the establishment of an alternative social system in which she is fully capable of socialising with all social circles.

But the prostitute was certainly not the only woman on the streets. There were also working-class women on the way to and from work, middle-class women shopping and moving from place to place, and social investigators from Lady Bountifuls to the professionals who emerged in the last two decades of the century. In *Fingersmith*, Maud looks for refuge in Mr Hawtrey's book shop on Holywell Street, a dark and narrow street[17]. The shop is problematic on different levels. First, it is a public space where no lady should be unchaperoned. Second, it is an exclusively-male space, for all the workers in the shop are men. Third, the type of activity Mr Hawtrey exercises in this shop – selling pornographic books – is inappropriate to a lady. "Really, you oughtn't to have come to the shop. The shop is for selling books and prints — do you know what kind?" (Waters 2002: 375). It is unsurprising that as soon as Maud steps in, the youth "stares, as they [the workers] do" (Waters 2002: 374), while another customer addresses her: "'Don't mind him,' he says softly, meaning the youth. 'He supposes you gay, that's all. Anyone can see though, that you're a lady…' He looks me over, then nods to the shelves of books. 'You like them, hmm?' he says, in a different tone. 'Of course you do. Why shouldn't you?' (Waters 2002: 376). By entering this prohibited territory, Maud is given another persona through the male gaze. Associated with the pornographic books, her social status is degraded and she is assimilated to a prostitute. The same thought crosses Mr Hawtrey's mind as Maud steps in his office. "'Be calmer. You know how queer this will look? Do you? What are my staff to think? A girl comes asking for me urgently, sending up a riddling name…' He laughs, not happily. 'What would my daughters say, my wife?'" (Waters 2002: 378). In *Walking the Victorian Streets: Women, Representation, and the City* (1995), Deborah Epstein Nord focuses on the social group of women who walked the Victorian streets, in order to critique the position of the flâneur. She points out that the female walker is not simply a female version of the male figure, a *flâneuse*, because no matter her business, whether is it just strolling, shopping or doing social work, she was likely to be objectified and sexually marked. Indeed, the use of the

[17] As early as the 1900, this street was the centre for the sale of romance books and pornography in Victorian London during which time it was known as 'Booksellers' Row'. Indeed, the print industry boomed as a direct consequence of the Industrial Revolution and the use of machinery for print.

adjectives ‘gay’ and ‘queer’ in Waters’s text is even more significant given the context, since Maud’s decision to come into Mr Hawtrey’s shop is not only strange, but also an explicit association with her sexual orientation, an orientation of deviation and transgression.

Desperate and moneyless, Maud asks Mr Hawtrey for a job in his book shop. She believes to have all the required capacities to help him with the putting together and writing of the books, given her training by her uncle. The scene reflects a moment of dramatic irony: Maud seems completely oblivious of the difficult situation in which she put herself and unaware of its consequences on both her and Mr Hawtrey’s social images. More importantly however, asking for a job to make money and finance herself is a literary wink to New Women who sought work in diverse fields, a trend which rose prominently towards the end of the century. Journalists, telephone operators, school teachers are but a few examples of the jobs middle-class educated New Women pursued. Even though Maud’s attempt to secure a job fails with Mr Hawtrey’s refusal, her demand at least signals her quest for financial independence and autonomy in a world where she would have to sustain herself.

These “walkers of the streets”, when they represent their urban experiences as Nord argues in her study which challenges the standard (male) view of the Victorian city divided into public and private, are driven by “a consciousness of transgression and trespassing, [by] the vexed sexuality [their] position implies, and [by their] struggle[s] to escape the status of spectacle and become a spectator” (Nord 1995: 12). Thus, Nord’s project to examine the forms of representation that emerge from the perspective of this female walker of the streets and to trace their role in the creation of a modernist “literature of rambling and urban investigation” proves to be of great insight to investigate Maud’s social role as she walks the streets of London (Nord 1995: 15).

The neo-Victorian protagonists manage to transform public spaces, giving them a more subjective and personal dimension in relation to their gender roles. Fowles’s narrative is centred on a limited number of public spaces the first of which is the natural landscape of Lyme Regis with its sombre grey cliffs “masked by dense woods” (Fowles 1969: 2), wild engulfing channel waters and caves of mysterious geologic and cosmic enchanting mysteries. Yet, despite the openness of Lyme Bay since “No house lay visibly then or, beyond a brief misery of beach huts”, Sarah stands “at the seawardmost end, apparently leaning against an old cannon barrel upended as a bollard” (Fowles 1969: 2), as if about to fall in the sea. Later in the narrative, the falling “precipice” is symbolically used in reference to her quest for freedom (Fowles 1969: 75). Besides, Sarah is often associated with Ware Commons, an ill-reputed place in the village which is known for its attraction of lowly people seeking sexual deviance, “a de facto Lover’s

Lane" (Fowles 1969: 38). It is referred to by Mrs Poulteney, Sarah's host who is very religious, as "that place" (Fowles 1969: 40), a place usually associated with people who want to deviate from the legality of law and religion. It is only appropriate that Sarah is often found at this place, for "The area had an obscure, long and mischievous legal history" (Fowles 1969: 38). Yet, despite Mrs Poulteney's firm prohibition, Sarah continued "to haunt Ware Commons. In a way, therefore, she had indeed jumped; and was living in a kind of long fall, since sooner or later the news must inevitably come to Mrs. Poulteney of the sinner's compounding of her sin" (Fowles 1969: 42). The falling metaphor is revisited to connote Sarah's status as a fallen woman. This reading suggests that the outer places of Lyme Bay and Ware Commons are utilized to reflect Sarah's inner experience of freedom and transgression of rules. By means of depicting her in open spaces, Fowles's choice of spatial settings for his protagonist echoes her individual inclination for both freedom and transgression.

Interestingly however, the hotel in the town of Exeter proves to be a space which is axial to Sarah's characterisation, insofar as it reflects female passion. In fact, Fowles starts chapter 36 with an epigraph from Tennyson:

> "But on her forehead sits a fire:
> She sets her forward countenance
> And leaps into the future chance,
> Submitting all things to desire.
> —Tennyson, *In Memoriam* (1850)" (Fowles 1969: 117)

By means of the female pronoun, the epigraph associates a female subject with fire, and consequently desire and passion. Yet, the chapter describes Exeter as a common provincial town and follows Sarah's monotonous and dismal stay, thus creating a tedious atmosphere, very much antithetical to Tennyson's. In chapter 46 however, upon Charles's arrival, Sarah's blanket literally catches fire and both of them burn in desire, materialising Tennyson's lines. As sexual tension is heightened, the place is transformed into a space which is lived, and experienced by both characters. As Sarah intentionally seduces Charles and initiates the sexual act in the hotel room, she embodies her freedom, her subjective identity, and the hotel room epitomises New World values and foreshadows the New Woman Sarah is to become. Thus, seen from this angle, the hotel room reflects the epistemological dimension of space in Fowles's text insofar as the hotel is not simply a place where the sexual act takes place, but rather where a whole ethos of regulation and order is challenged and even subverted.

Like the Exeter hotel room where Sarah embraces her sexual liberation, the Pre-Raphaelites' house which represents "The revolutionary art movement of Charles's day" (Fowles 1969: 75), epitomises Sarah's utter emancipation from Victorian codes. In contrast to "every Victorian [who] had two minds", she adopts the values of the Pre-Raphaelites who "tried—or seemed to be trying—to be one-minded about both art and life; in the endless tug-of-war between Liberty and Restraint, Excess and Moderation, Propriety and Conviction (…); transparent also in the mania for editing and revising" (Fowles 1969: 157). In the hotel room, Sarah seems to disregard all forms of restraint and moderation, and revises Victorian codes which curb female passion. The passage in the hotel room paves the way for the ending in which Sarah fully assumes her new identity as New Woman. Thus, the Pre-Raphaelites' house becomes a signifier of a journey of maturity and quest for a womanhood centred on agentivity and subjectivity. Unsurprisingly, Sarah's actant 'I' takes over chapter 60 which depicts their reunion in the Pre-Raphaelites' house. Symbolically, the chapter ends with her assertion: "I am at last arrived, or so it seems to me, where I belong" (Fowles 1969: 193).

One may suggest that Fowles's text echoes how the 1880s were a time when women began to gain more freedom not only in moving out into the public spaces of the city, but more importantly in speaking out both on sexual desire and against their own sexualization and objectification in the public, specifically urban, sphere. In fact, a new air of sexual freedom emerged in the *fin de siècle*. It is equally possible to claim that Sarah's ultimate position as a New Woman materializes Charles's view of her as the means for emancipation. In his reading of Marxist influences in Fowles's novel, David Landrum argues that throughout the narrative, Charles "realize[s] in his experience with Sarah the possibilities for human freedom and liberation", "personal liberation, emancipation from all that he finds so restrictive" (Landrum 1996: 108/109).

Among the numerous Victorian public spaces that were typically associated with femaleness is the asylum. The Victorian era may not have been the start of the institutionalisation of patients with mental health problems, but it was certainly a period when the numbers of asylums and patients treated within them, exploded. Thus, the Victorian asylum, given its nature as a patriarchal institution meant for regulation, eventually becomes a place inextricably associated with women. Indeed, reasons for admission were very much subject to personal judgment either by families or family doctors and seemed to have been heavily weighted against women, for there were often many more women admitted in these institutions compared with men. As a result, the Victorian asylum became a female-gendered space. A great number of Victorian sensation novels such as Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*

(1862), Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* (1859) and Sheridan le Fanu's *The Rose and the Key* (1871) among others, at one stage of the narrative tend to subject female characters and/ or protagonists to the predicament of confinement in a mental institution. In the same manner, the neo-Victorian novels under study, in their exploration of the Victorian, allow for the re-emergence of the asylum not only to question its role in the control of women, but also to express female anxiety about this patriarchal ideological apparatus. Hence, the neo-Victorian protagonist finds herself either at risk of being committed to a mental institution, or actually locked up. In Fowles's novel, Dr Grogan believes that Sarah's state of mind is rather unstable, which may lead to a case of a "graver melancholia" (Fowles 1969: 97). He suggests a private asylum in which she would be treated "in an intelligent and enlightened manner" (Fowles 1969: 97). Ironically, physically restraining patients with jackets or chains, or fastening them to beds was one of the easiest ways of controlling those with excitable or aggressive behaviour. Hence, the commonplace use of physical restraints on patients had its roots in the custodial nature of early asylums, since the function of mental institutions was simply to keep 'inmates' in custody. The keepers were little more than guards and it was not uncommon for patients to be physically restrained for most of the time. In other words, the Victorian asylum was established to contain forms of excess, most often excessive femaleness. It seems that Fowles's text mocks Dr Grogan's proposed solution to Sarah's case.

Similarly, Rackham's family doctor advises that Agnes be confined to a mental asylum where she should be cared for appropriately: "Doctor Curlew can predict with authority that, in her own house, Agnes Rackham is doomed" (Faber 2002: 434). Like Sarah, Agnes is a victim of this resolution concocted by patriarchal figures such as William and Doctor Curlew. Yet, unlike Charles who unhesitantly accepts the doctor's proposal, William seems more dubious of the necessity of such decision at the beginning for the highly-unfavourable reputation of public asylums and fear of shame. He thinks to himself, "If Agnes goes mad and needs nurses, I shall employ them. If one day she is so beyond reason as to need strongmen to restrain her, I can afford them, too" (Faber 2002: 196). Ultimately, he reaches the resolution that ""[sh]he can be cured there," he argues with the passion of unconviction. "They have doctors and nurses in constant attendance. She'll come home a new woman"" (Faber 2002: 489). From William's perspective, the role of the mental institution is to transform women. Whether this metamorphosis takes place for the better or the worse remains a conclusion to be determined by patriarchy. What matters is that women come back from asylums with all of their excesses curtailed. Interestingly, it is Sugar who stops this decision. Manifesting female solidarity, she manages to obstruct the male patriarchal resolution.

Unlike both Sarah and Agnes who are only threatened by the shadow of the asylum, Sue is physically locked up in a mental institution, a decision taken by Gentleman and Maud, his accomplice in their scheme of betrayal. The lunatic asylum in Waters's text conforms to the Victorian literary representation of the madhouse. It evokes within Sue feelings of torment and terror. Not only is the place literally gloomy and sombre, the nurses and doctors working in it resemble sensational villains. As Sue reports the scene of the doctors dealing with their female patients, the mental institution is represented as a patriarchal apparatus by which women are subjugated, silenced, and effaced. It is another process of conditioning at the end of which women are no longer subjects, but rather objects made docile and passive. The asylum has for a project to curb all sorts of emotions among women and suppress any sense of individual identity. Katharina Boehm reads spaces in Waters's fiction[18] from a Foucauldian perspective as she claims that incarcerating places are closely influenced by Foucault's panopticon as a surveillance apparatus that "seems to function independently of any personal intervention, operating rather on the participants' internalization of the mechanisms of control" (Shuttleworth[19] 319 cited in Boehm 2011: 241). One may claim that Sue's limited mobility inside the madhouse suggests a place like a prison and thus aligns it with Foucault's panopticon. Such reading foregrounds the fact that places are not merely settings in Waters's novel, but are closely linked to history allowing a modern culture to intervene in and enter in dialogue with the past by imagining and reimagining historical milieus. Interestingly however, Sue incessantly thinks about the different ways to escape and reverse a predicament imposed upon her by others. She ultimately manages to transform the asylum from a space of female nullity to female agency, a crucial step in her journey of individuation. Thus, the Victorian asylum in the neo-Victorian novel is remodelled into a space of opportunities and alternatives for female subjects. The madhouse in Sue's case is given a symbolic dimension, for such places may be read "as potential containers of "resistances" and past "traces" (Certeau 4 cited in Boehm 2011: 253).

The bedroom may be one of the most evident private spaces in the Victorian household. Though the wealthiest afforded to have separate bedrooms, most Victorian married couples slept in the same bed in the same room, making it a symbol of the conjugal relationship. Whether willingly or forcefully, women had to yield to their husbands' sexual desires. In other

[18] She "discuss[es] *Affinity* rather than *Fingersmith* (2002), the novel that directly precedes *The Night Watch*, because *Affinity* engages with concepts of historiography more fully than Waters's other neo-Victorian novels" (Boehm 2011: 256).

[19] Shuttleworth, Sally. "'The Surveillance of the Sleepless Eye': The Constitution of Neurosis in *Villette*." *One Culture: Essays in Science and Literature*. Ed. George Levine. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1987.

words, though the bedroom is a typically private space usually associated with female, it becomes a male arena of control, wherein the husband controls his wife's body, as is the case with Rackham's rape of Agnes on their wedding night. Indeed, Duncan argues that "the private home has historically been seen as a place where men have assumed their right to sexual intercourse" (Duncan 1996: 130). Soon after the rape, Agnes denies William access to her bedroom, "for he knows she hates him coming into her bedroom" (Faber 2002: 197). In contrast to Agnes's bedroom where the sexual intercourse takes place within the binds of marriage, Sugar's bedroom epitomises sexual divergence for it is where she receives her male clients. Mrs Castaway's is an androgynous place which belongs both to the private and the public. On the one hand, Sugar calls it "home" since Mrs Castaway is both her madam and mother (Faber 2002: 83). On the other hand, it is a public space for prostitution where she receives her clients. Thus, her bedroom is both private and public at once, for it is situated in the brothel, a typically public space. Interestingly, both bedrooms in Faber's text are transformed into places of literary creativity: Agnes writes her personal diaries and book of illumination, while Sugar writes her novels of revenge. For the creative act to take place, it is essential that it is accompanied by male absence. Thus, William is denied entry into Agnes's bedroom allowing her to write at all times, and Sugar only writes when William is not there or asleep. In other words, both protagonists not only manage to re-claim ownership of this space invaded by male figures, but also succeed in turning it into a place of genius and expression.

One may also suggest that Faber does not comply with bourgeois spatial organisation by which the private sphere is exclusively reserved to ladies and to the institution of the family, and with social dictum which punishes fallen women by depriving them of the role of motherhood. In fact, Sugar the prostitute manages to appropriate a central position in different places within the private sphere itself and play a new role other than hers as a prostitute in the public sphere. Hence, Faber dramatizes Sugar's movement from one private place to another: she first lives in Mrs Castaway's brothel, then moves to the apartment brought to her by Rackham, and ultimately integrates his Bourgeois family home. Sugar's mobility in the private sphere is foregrounded as she moves to the private apartments leased by Rackham, and assumes the role of a kept mistress. Though the social and financial ascension from the slums of the brothel and daily prostitution with a number of different clients, might suggest a sort of liberation from the confines of the first private space, Sugar not only finds herself constrained in a new limited space where she does not enjoy the freedom she once had, but also soon becomes object to Rackham's control, reducing her world to a narrow domestic realm. The busyness and livelihood of both previous spaces – i.e. Mrs Castaway's and the public sphere –

is suddenly replaced with silence and "stillness" (Faber 2002: 215). She quickly realises she is imprisoned in a small apartment, "fenced all around by iron spikes" (Faber 2002: 215). Indeed, by becoming Rackham's kept mistress, Sugar breaks free from degrading social and financial conditions at Mrs Castaway's. Yet, she unexpectedly starts to yearn for liberation from the confines of an initially luxurious and comfortable private space. This desire for freedom is what motivates her decision to move to another private space and to assume another social role, that of the governess.

The Victorian nursery – to be turned into a school-room as the child gets older – marks the space where children are kept by nurses, and taught by governesses. It is both a child- and female-gendered space which dictates how children's lives followed a strict routine commanded by these two house-employees, away from their parents. Seldom did Victorian parents – particularly fathers, even if mothers were rather absent as well –participate in their children's early care and education in both nursery and school-room. Unsurprisingly, in Faber's novel, Agnes never goes to visit Sophie in either one of the spaces. William however, stops at the school-room once to inform his daughter of his decision to send Sugar away, and a second time when he brings in the new governess. Interestingly, despite the paternal absence, both spaces represent the early stages of a child's identity formation. Hence, it is only appropriate that Sophie progressively acquires more subjective traits in the school-room, like voice, for Victorian children were rather to be seen than heard. Gradually, the narrative presents Sophie's utterances by means of her dialogues with Sugar, as well as her monologues where she expresses her emotions, and opinions, especially vis-à-vis her relationship with her parents. She abruptly interjects: ""Mother hasn't seen me since my birthday"" (Faber 2002: 406). This utterance shows that the girl is aware that a mother's place is by her daughter's side, and that she is terribly marked by her absence.

The school-room is not the space where only Sophie grows, but Sugar as well. As she integrates Rackham's family home as a governess, her new social space and role help her perform another persona. She willingly and consciously transforms herself from a fallen angel to a sort of angel in the house. Having once been a Victorian symbol of the fall from grace, she becomes the embodiment of the angel in the house, a symbol of affection and altruism vis-à-vis both Sophie and Agnes. Interestingly, her new role as governess puts her right back in the social group of working classes. Yet, the nineteenth-century governess also occupies a marginal position. Being a governess was a difficult and solitary occupation for Victorian women, insofar as it kept them in a liminal class position between the lower and upper classes, between servants and their employers, between the uneducated and the cultivated, between children and adults.

Neither completely dependent nor fully independent, governesses lacked social rank and economic prosperity, which made them relative outcasts and relegated them to the bottom of the middle class or the top of the working classes. Being at once financially productive and generally coming from a middle-class background, the governess is problematic since Victorian middle-class generally associates women with domesticity and dictates a non-participation in the public market. In this sense, Sugar again finds herself at the threshold of two social groups. Yet, as a nonconventional character, she blurs these boundaries and challenges the social stratification, not only from prostitute to governess, but also from governess to mother-figure. She gradually ceases to be a governess as she discovers her instinctive capacities and natural inclinations to become a mother-figure to Sophie. She turns into a symbol of protection, nurturing and caring. As she embodies the mother-figure, her roles as prostitute and mistress are effaced gradually. It is unsurprising then that as the narrative moves forward, she loses the persona of prostitute and her esteem for William: "With a cry of rage [against him], Sugar pulls Sophie to her breast and kisses her over and over, murmuring inarticulate reassurances. How dare he do this, she thinks, to my child" (Faber 2002: 600).

Interestingly, at first, Sugar had envisaged moving into Rackham's family home to secure her place within his household as his mistress and life partner. Yet, her goal is gradually altered as she establishes a maternal bond with Sophie. In fact, the household can be divided into two private spaces. The first may be represented by her room and the library. In both these places where sexual intercourse with William takes place, Sugar assumes her role of kept mistress. The second may be represented by the school-room and the garden. In Sophie's company, she undertakes the role of governess. Thus, as she moves from one private space to another, she adopts a different social role and constructs a new identity for herself. It is possible to argue then that it is space which dictates Sugar's social role and consequently shapes her identity formation, and vice-versa. Her social roles as mistress, governess and mother-figure bestow a spatialised identity upon her character. Barbara Braid borrows Jeannette King's idea of women's shifting roles and points out that "the representation of women in Victorian culture [was] far from homogeneous. A woman [could] be a 'Madonna' or a 'Magdalene', an angel or a monster, and she could transform from one to another instantaneously", exactly like Sugar's constantly shifting personas (Braid 2009: 2). In *The Crimson Petal and the White*, Sugar goes through a spatial, social and emotional journey, one of the key tenets of the Victorian *Bildungsroman*. In her study of the novel, Lin Pettersson argues that "Sugar's fulfilment of different social roles together with the interpretation of and interaction with London is

demarcated by the spatial production of perceived-conceived-lived space in the city" (Pettersson 2013: 318).

By means of her social mobility and constant challenge of the established social order, Sugar manifestly embodies Jean-Marie Dru's idea of "disruption" which he defines as "breaking with the status quo" (Dru 2007: 1). In fact, displeased with the marginal situation of prostitutes, she intelligently devises different strategies centred on manipulation to achieve social ascension and gain financial security. The narrative pays special attention to Sugar's distinctive features of greed, and willingness to take advantage of William, for she sees in him the means to guarantee her social ascension. Putting the accent on her materialistic attitude, the narrative dramatizes her practical intelligence and strategic cunning, as she puts in place a plan to trick William into improving her living situation.

> "The city is a filthy place", Sugar affirms. (…) "And do you have anything to purify drinking water? You don't want to see me carried off by cholera!" Bull's-eye, she thinks, as a shudder passes through him". "I wonder, though," she goes on, in a dreamy, musing tone. "Don't you ever get fed up, William, with living in the city? Don't you ever wish you lived somewhere pleasanter and cleaner?" (Faber 2002: 188)

The passage illustrates how Sugar follows a specific pattern of reasoning. First, she states the problem of pollution. Then, she alerts William to the dangers on her health and the risk of Cholera. Finally, she ponders the possibility of moving to a less polluted place in London. Besides, her strategy targets an emotive reaction as she invests in pathos. Eventually, she manages to trick him into leasing her a private apartment in a better district. Hence, she is elevated from the second to the first type in Mayhew's classification of prostitutes: she becomes a kept mistress. Gradually, Sugar approaches her goal: she becomes vital and unexpendable to William as he vows to her "You're a treasure. Indispensable, that's the only word for you" (Faber 2002: 367). Being a prostitute then, by no means imprisons a woman in the lower classes usually associated with ignorance, poverty and hardship. Sugar takes advantage of her physical, intellectual and characterial attributes and climbs steadily up the social ladder. Soon after this conversation, Sugar is to be moved to an individual apartment where she can be more secure. Admittedly, Dru claims that "disruption" can only take place in the form of a process.

> As a methodology, Disruption is a three-step process: Convention, Disruption, and Vision. You start by identifying the Conventions that restrict the thought processes, and then you challenge them through a Disruption, a radically new approach. This is all done with a very definite sense of Vision—of where you are going, of the ground you want to cover from today to tomorrow." (Dru 2007: 2)

Like Dru's process of disruption, Faber skilfully imagines Sugar's spatial and social journey. She ultimately reinstates another social order wherein social mobility for women in general and prostitutes in particular becomes thinkable. Furthermore, her ability to move from one space to another, blur the boundaries between the private and the public and assume a different social role in each space consolidates the porosity of the public/private dichotomy that has for long dictated social codes and gender roles. Through spatialising Sugar's trajectory as a character, Faber illustrates that spatially-attributed gender roles are not as fixed as in general assumptions and that the subversion of such order is indeed possible. Nonetheless, despite the possibilities of financial security and upward social mobility the Rackham household offers, it turns out to be a repressive space for women, a gilded cage where the patriarch controls, silences and neglects female individuals. Soon, Sugar urgently not only wants to break free from these confines, but also to save her new female companions. She ultimately escapes from the house and takes Sophie with her.

Among the female-gendered upper-middle class Victorian private spaces is the drawing room which is essentially the lady's withdrawing room intended for the women of the house. At the end of a dinner party, the ladies would withdraw for conversation, while the men remained in the dining room to discuss business affairs, drink and smoke. Women would play cards or board games, or they would entertain each other with music. Its successor, the drawing room however, was meant to entertain both men and women. Even though these rooms were feminine, comfortable and hospitable, they were also the places for receiving guests. They were platforms to show off one's wealth, culture and taste by means of the furniture the home-owners chose, like sofas, ottomans, upright chairs and easy chairs, stools, ladies' writing desks, console tables, work tables, sewing tables, occasional tables, and screens, but also by means of decorative objects as curtains, paintings, and ceramic figurines. Hence, the drawing room was considered the main public room of a Victorian home. Besides its gendered significance, the drawing-room was also socially inscribed, since it involved the interaction of ladies and gentlemen.

In Mrs Poulteney's house, the drawing room is the space where reading of the Bible and religious rituals take place. Interestingly, this place is invaded by Sarah, a seemingly-unreligious person later to be associated with blasphemy and sin. "Sarah appeared in the private drawing room for the evening Bible-reading, and found herself as if faced with the muzzle of a cannon. It was very clear that any moment Mrs. Poulteney might go off, and with a very loud bang indeed" (Fowles 1969: 39). Thus, the drawing room not only signals a hostile place which does not welcome Sarah, marked by the metaphor comparing Mrs Poulteney to a "cannon", but also announces the tone of Sarah's journey: she is to face constant enmity and to confront obstacles in her itinerary.

Interestingly, in *Fingersmith*, the drawing-room is no longer a female-gendered space. In Lilly's house, the only form of entertainment to be had in the drawing-room is reading among gentlemen. As Gentleman tells Sue about Briar, he points out that the drawing-room is closely associated with books: "They told me that, when he had eaten, Mr Lilly liked his niece to sit and read to him in the drawing-room. That was his idea of fun, I suppose, for they said he hardly ever had guests, and if he did then they were always other bookish gentlemen, from Oxford and London; and it was his pleasure, then, to have Maud read books to them all" (Waters 2002: 81). Yet, contrary to common drawing-rooms where reading may take place, the drawing-room in Briar is unlike any other, as Mr Lilly is proud to affirm: "Now, note this, Rivers, and tell me if you suppose it may be encountered in any other English drawing-room!'" (Waters 2002: 208). There, Maud reads pornographic material to a male audience. Unlike Mrs Poulteney's drawing-room where reading orthodox Bible is a common ritual, Lilly's drawing-room is the place where unorthodox transgressive readerly pleasures are to be consumed. The drawing-room is transformed into a physical as well as metaphorical prison to Maud. "Where the windows are all dark", her uncle exercises power and controls her (Waters 2002: 125).

Similarly, the drawing-room in the lunatic asylum, "a great grey room that smelt of leaking gas" (Waters 2002: 420), is also a place of imprisonment for Sue. Like Mr Lilly, Dr Christie has the same power of command, people "were made to stand in the drawing-room and listen while Dr Christie read prayers" (Waters 2002: 434). Both Faber and Waters make of the drawing-room a masculine place where females are victimized, only to allow them to break free from the state of imprisonment imposed upon them, thus subverting the masculine order in this semi-private/public space. Both Maud and Sue refuse to succumb to male domination and opt for alternative spaces in which they would not be subject to masculine control.

While the drawing-room is a typically-female space, the Victorian library is a distinctive intellectual and cultural space in the mansion or country cottage of English upper-class, usually

connected with the gentleman's dressing-room. Based on its location within the house, it seems that the library is a typically-male space. The library "was solely kept as one of the series of show-rooms in which the proprietor of the house delighted in displaying his money's worth", hence, the marble mantle and fireplace, thick silk-carpet, "richly-carved rosewood, plate glass, and book-backs of gilt" (Victoriana Magazine). The literary, scientific, or professional man would have his library for studying and reading, as well as to receiving his male friends to smoke or drink, especially after the ladies had withdrawn to the drawing-room, thus magnifying even further the masculinist dimension of this space. A place of socialization, the private library could be turned into a public space.

It is therefore a rather unexpected neo-Victorian choice to have Maud be the central attraction of the Briar library, for she spends all day reading and writing as her uncle's assistant. Gradually, she also acquires a male privilege. Initially, the finger drawn on the floor of Mr Lilly's library symbolizes the boundary between those who have access to Pornography and those who are denied it. Sue's illiteracy forces her to stay outside the boundaries while Maud's training allows her access into the world of gentlemen, which later enables her to assume the role of a pornographic writer and to move from the role of passive object of male domination and lust to the position of creator. As Maud eventually becomes an author, the Victorian library is transformed from a masculine place of domination into a feminine place of creation.

Both Fowles and Faber seem to mock the Victorian library, for it is often presented as a place for the gentleman to doze off while reading his newspaper or rest after an eventful dinner. In Fowles's novel, the library in Charles's uncle's house is nothing but a decorative piece, "a room his uncle seldom if ever used" (Fowles 1969: 2), for he believed "the only proper object for a gentleman to carry in the country was a riding crop or a gun; but at least it was an improvement on the damned books in the damned library" (Fowles 1969: 7).

In brief, one may argue that the neo-Victorian novelists revisit Victorian spaces not simply to illustrate the porosity of the public/private dichotomy, but mostly to capitalize on their protagonists' capacity to transcend limitations by blurring the boundaries between such separate spheres, as well as creating liminal spaces in which they could assume different roles. The neo-Victorian texts echo the concerns of feminist geography which contends that woman's consciousness of her role, identity and meaning are geographically and spatially embodied. The neo-Victorian novelists respond to the call that space affects how gender is experienced, constructed and interpreted:

> the limitation of women's mobility in terms both of identity and space, has been in some cultural contexts a crucial means of subordination. Moreover the two things – limitation on mobility in space, the attempted consignment/confinement to particular places on the one hand, and the limitation on identity on the other – have been crucially related. (Massey 1994: 179)

One may suggest that like feminist geographers, the neo-Victorian novelists are particularly interested in how spatial constraints affect gendered belonging and the ways this is manifested or challenged. By means of their re-utilization and subversion of Victorian spaces, they aptly shed light on the possibilities and limitations of spatial mobility for women beyond the patriarchal spatial order. Besides, female characters' ability to transcend the binary division of space foregrounds not only their insistence on (un)belonging to particular places, but also the indistinguishable link between space and place, self and geography.

My main aim in the first part of this thesis has been to examine how character in neo-Victorian fiction returns not only to refute claims of its death, but also to reject the contention of the repetitive dimension of neo-Victorianism. It in fact foregrounds the intertextual relationship between Victorian sensation and neo-sensation, all the while signalling the fresh critical perspective. Furthermore, through the intermediary of a female character which is multiple and versatile, neo-Victorian fiction re-explores the question of gender roles insofar as it exposes how the Victorian social order can be contested and re-negotiated. It also shows identity formation as a dynamic process directly impacted by physical spaces, insofar as female's spatial mobility can become a means to devise alternative gender roles. Because of neo-Victorianists' constant desire to re-write the Victorian female predecessor, in the second part of this thesis, I will specifically focus on the manifestations of the political engagement of the neo-Victorian female character, especially in revising matrilineal heritage.

Part II: Political Re-orientations of the Neo-Victorian Female Character

When studying the interfaces of (dis-)continuities between Victorian sensation and neo-sensation, I have established numerous parallels between the neo-Victorian protagonists of this corpus and several Victorian ones insofar as Sarah, Sugar, Agnes, Sue and Maud are modelled after archetypal figures. This contention not only leads to the conclusion that the relationship between both genres is defined by simultaneous proximity and distance, similarity and difference and a tension between past and present, but also suggests "a paradoxical connection between imitation of and escape from the inherited maternal narrative, since the daughter can re-enact as well as alter it" (Muller 2011: 38). Though Angela Carter specifically uses the matrilineal metaphor in her study of the pornographic writing of the Marquis de Sade, one may claim that the same metaphor can be utilized to explore the significance of Victorian predecessors in the characterisation of female protagonists in neo-Victorian fiction. The aim in the first section is to evaluate to what extent neo-Victorian protagonists both follow and deviate from their Victorian predecessors, especially with regard to typological representations such as the fallen woman, the angel of the house, and the female villain.

Furthermore, all female protagonists in this neo-Victorian corpus, one may contend, are directly or indirectly prompted by their fictional mothers, dead or alive. Carter writes: "If the daughter is a mocking memory to the mother ‑ then the mother is a horrid warning to her daughter. 'As I am, so you will be.'" (Carter 1979: 144). Thus, the objective is to examine to what extent these neo-Victorian characters' identity formation imitates and/or deviates from their respective mothers. Consequently, one may wonder what kind of female relationships are put in place in the narratives.

Another variation of the matrilineal metaphor is centred on artistic creation. In fact, several neo-Victorian protagonists develop an authorial identity by means of which they accentuate a female voice which not only encompasses the narrative space, but also illustrates female attributes of creativity. Thus, the matrilineal metaphor can be used to describe the relationship between literary daughters and mothers, neo-Victorian characters and their Victorian predecessors particularly New Women of the *fin-de-siècle*.

The ultimate goal then, is to investigate how the revision of the matrilineal metaphor by neo-Victorian novelists can be utilized to advance the female protagonists' liberation from patriarchal moulds of Victorian predecessors and consequently to foreground the neo-Victorian novelists' feminist project of empowering their female characters.

Chapter 3: Feminist Heritage: Rewriting Female Histories

Neo-Victorianism serves to re-write women's past so as to explore the different possibilities for a subjectivity they became aware of, but struggled to represent in Victorian fiction. For this revisionist dimension, many critics like Tara MacDonald and Joyce Goggin investigate the possibility of a fourth phase of post- or after-feminism in the twenty-first century where neo-Victorianism emerges as a new feminist politics of "survival"/ re-birth since it investigates the politics of gender and its representations in literature. They contend that neo-Victorianism may be considered the continuity of a Victorian feminist heritage insofar as it investigates the "constructive relationships between women's pasts and their presents" (Muller 2009/2010: 131).

Historians and critics like Elaine Showalter recognize three waves of feminism, each has its own features of engagement. In the first wave between 1840 and 1880, the "feminine" stage to borrow Showalter's term in *A Literature of their Own*, literary criticism focused on the re-discovery of Victorian female writers who were submerged in the masculine literary tradition of the canons in an effort to compete against and emulate male literature. So, female Victorian authors were interested in the social study of the position of women within their society. In other words, political engagement was rather about the study and analysis of the actual status of women than about the attempt to improve it. Thus, the repressive circumstances gave rise to the technique of covertness at the level of authorial identity such as the male pseudonym[20], and textual camouflage for their content was typically oblique since they had to voice their dissatisfaction with the status quo in between the lines.

In the second wave the "feminist" stage between 1880 and 1920, women started to challenge the stereotypical masculine representations of them. Showalter describes it as a 'protest phase', a protest against dominant traditions and male aesthetic standards and values and highlights the call for autonomy (Showalter 1998: 405). For example, women challenged the monopoly of male press insofar as many feminist journals came into being[21]. Furthermore, others like Virginia Woolf controlled their own press, Hogarth Press.

The third wave, the "Female" stage, was marked by courageous self-exploration and a return to more realistic modes of expression. It is a phase which celebrates the woman author

[20] Mary Ann Evans is mostly known by the male pseudonym George Eliot. The Brontë Sisters similarly used pseudonyms: Charlotte as Currer, Anne as Acton, and Emily as Ellis Bell.

[21] Faith Bincke's *Modernism, Magazines and the British Avant-Garde: Reading "Rhythm" 1910-1914* (2010) and Jenny McDonnell's *Katherine Mansfield and the Modernist Marketplace: At the Mercy of the Public* (2010) explore the impact of Mansfield's avant-gardist work in magazines like Rhythm and the Blue Review in the 1910s.

and the female mode of writing. Female authors like Doris Lessing, Muriel Spark, Iris Murdoch and Margaret Drabble dismissed both imitation and protest and focused on women's writing all the while reasserting their continuity with women writers of the past.

Jeannette King argues that neo-Victorian novels "tend to be characterised by their engagement with gender issues" (King 2005: 2). Indeed, it seems that interest in gender-related issues is at the core of neo-Victorianism. Muller claims that these novels "can, through their return to the past and their preoccupations with gender and sexuality, be considered as a form of feminist historiography", of feminist history (Muller 2012: 104). King even adds that neo-Victorian fiction can be placed in the context of "a wider project, pioneered by second-wave feminism, of rewriting history from a female perspective, and recovering the lives of women who have been excluded and marginalised" (King 2005: 3/4).

If we follow this reasoning, I will attempt to explore how the corpus under study construes new embodiments of womanhood which may be of "deviant" nature to borrow the term Muller uses as a title to her article[22]. While in the previous section, I focused particularly on how neo-Victorian fiction emulates, negotiates and adapts the genre of sensation fiction at the levels of narrative structure, style and theme, I will turn my attention in this section to the female character in the text, this neo-Victorian woman protagonist who appears to be "an anachronistic modern woman thrown back into the nineteenth century, with hyper-awareness of gender codes and even of feminist theory" (MacDonald and Goggin 2013: 7). Sarah innately adopts an avant-gardist attitude as "[s]he led the way into yet another green tunnel" knowing that "a lady would have mounted behind, not ahead of him" (Faber 1969: 71). As simple as it may seem, the scene arguably suggests that Sarah has adopted modern ways. In Faber's novel, Sugar thinks to herself: "[s]he must finish her novel. Nothing like it has ever been published before; (…) think of the effect she could have with this, the first book to tell the truth about prostitution! The world is ready for the truth; the modern age is here" (Faber 2002: 249). By means of her forward-looking literary vocation, she impersonates a modern woman whose role is to unravel the truths about woman's forced submissiveness in a masculine world. She even aspires to inspire the future generations as she tells Sophie: "'These are modern books, up-to-date books," enthuses Sugar. "Because you're a modern person, living today, don't you see?"" (Faber 2002: 416). By means of both these examples, the novelists manifestly construct their female characters as modern women postdating the Victorian times.

[22] Muller, Nadine. "Dead Husbands and Deviant Women: Investigating the Detective Widow in Neo-Victorian Crime Fiction." *Clues* 30.1 (2012): 99-109.

In this respect, this investigation will deal mainly with how the neo-Victorian character deviates from Victorian types in order to break free from the shackles of Victorian moulds such as the fallen woman, the angel in the house and the demon, essentialisations that have often entrapped women in binary gender roles. I will analyse several manifestations of how Sugar revises the trope of the fallen woman by embracing other roles, the rebellious Agnes breaks with the angel in the house, and Sarah takes on a double revision of both figures of the angel and demon by means of her play-acting and shifting personas.

Besides their literary mothers, the neo-Victorian protagonists are inextricably linked to their fictional mothers. The narratives dramatize the relationships between daughters and mothers. In the following section, I will investigate how daughters attempt to break with and deviate from identities imposed upon them by their mothers and explore neo-Victorianism's re-readings of motherhood.

1. A Reworking of Victorian Types: The Fallen Woman, the Angel in the House and the Female Villain

1.1 Revising the Fallen Woman: Sugar's Social Ascension

Studying female representations in literature, notably in the light of Victorian and neo-Victorian fiction, the dichotomy of the fallen woman and the angel in the house is recurrent and relationships between characters are often based on the dialogism angel/demon. As M. H. Abrams puts it,

> Images of women are often represented as tending to fall into two antithetic patterns. On the one side are idealized projections of men's desire – the Madonna, the Muses of the arts Dante's Beatrice, the pure and innocent virgin and the 'Angle in the House'. On the other side are demonic projections of men's sexual resentment and terror – Eve and Pandora as the source of all evil, destructive sensual temptresses such as Delilah and Circe, the malign witch and castrating mother. (Abrams 1993: 90)

Indeed, portrayals of women have often been construed along dichotomous angelic or demonic. Maggie Power claims that the dialogue with the Victorians continues because of "the residues of stereotypes" that persist (cited in Kohlke 2011: 85). Lois Tyson adds that there are only two identities a woman can have: she can either be a "good girl" or a "bad girl" (Tyson 2014: 89).

These two roles define women in terms of male desire and sexuality. Furthermore, Victorian female characters are equally defined based on their conformity or disobedience to the moral dictates of Victorian society.

The literary trope of the fallen woman is revisited in *The Crimson Petal and the White* by means of the social group of prostitutes, and more particularly Sugar. In fact, the fallen woman is one who has irrevocably lost her innocence and virtue or does not comply with the moral and social codes of decorum and propriety. 'Fallen woman' is originally an expression which refers back to the myth of Eve's fall from Eden because of her disobedience of the divine rules which forbade her from the apple tree. Surrendering to passion, she is thus banished from Eden as a punishment for her rebellious behaviour. In the Victorian context, though the allegory maintained notions of disobedience and punishment, it took on other meanings. If woman succumbs to seduction or sensual desires out of wedlock, she suffers social condemnation and ostracism and eventually dies either repentantly or shamelessly – the latter much more often than the former. The long-standing myth in patriarchal discourse reinforced by Victorian moral and sexual ethics serves to keep women in line and to punish them in case of transgression. Gradually, the fallen woman became associated with the prostitute, when the phenomenon witnessed a huge proliferation in the Victorian period especially towards the second half of the century.

Faber revisits the myth of the fallen woman insofar as the frame of the narrative sets the pattern in which the woman falls, by seduction, rape or sensual desire, suffers public disgrace and rejection, undergoes social condemnation and ostracism and eventual death.

> (…) let me tell you about Claire and Alice. They are brothel girls in the truest and lowest sense: that is, they arrived in London as innocents and *were lured* into their *fallen* state by a madam who, resorting to the old stratagem, met them at the railway station and offered them a night's lodgings in the fearsome new metropolis, then robbed them of their money and clothing. *Ruined* and *helpless*, they were then *installed* in the house, along with several other girls similarly duped or else bought from parents or guardians. (Faber 2002: 55, emphasis added)

By means of Claire and Alice's story which illustrates the usual fall from innocence to prostitution, Faber's narrator exposes the conventional treatment of the ruined woman following a specific pattern of demise and probably eventual death. The use of the passive voice

as well as adjectives of weakness is meant to show that isolation is seen as a form of punishment for a woman's nonconformity and misconduct.

Furthermore, Faber's text exposes the double standards at viewing sexuality insofar as it discloses how Victorian masculinist ideology reinforced the gap between men and women: the former were not only considered intellectually more capable but also morally superior, especially with regard to self-containment. Indeed, as Henry attempts to reform Caroline, she recounts "'e told me that if all men like 'imself gave in to temptation, there would always be poor fallen widows like me" (Faber 2002: 306). He believes that it is the male's duty and moral obligation to repress their desires. In other words, men are supposedly more capable of self-command, while women simply succumb to sexual desire. We find echoes to this perception in Jesse Battan's account of the history of social culture in the Victorian times:

> The cornerstone of this interconnected set of beliefs (of science and the church) was the "passionless" woman. Rejecting the long-standing belief in the insatiability of women's sexual desires, nineteenth-century ministers, moralists, and physicians argued that the sexual drives of women were much weaker than those of men. Unlike the raw sensual urges that drove male desire, they insisted that women's erotic impulses were shaped by maternal instincts and a social conscience, and were spiritual in nature. (Battan 2004: 603)

Accordingly, Victorian sexual purity and propriety exerted a significant influence on women's lives and women in literature, for both had to be passionless in order to be considered morally proper. If they dared to express their sexuality too blatantly, they were frowned upon and even worse, chastised. Hence, repression was necessary for women, which caused frustration, marital unhappiness, and even rebellion. Both in reality and literature, we find women with strong sensual desires: wives committing adultery, prostitutes and unwedded mothers, especially in sensation fiction. When a woman deviated from the idealized conception of womanhood, she was stigmatized and labelled as a fallen or ruined woman.

Indeed, the Victorians believed female passion to be a form of deviance and often associated sexuality with insanity, hysteria and madness. Faber sheds light on this notion by means of a dialogue between Emmeline Fox, the reformist and her father, the Victorian doctor where the latter equates "intractably insane" people and "fallen women" (Faber 2002: 474). In

other words, prostitution becomes a manifestation of insanity, thus foregrounding the gap between men and women, since madness is thought to be specifically female.

The myth of the fallen woman is exposed by Faber's narrator from the early pages of *The Crimson Petal and the White*. Through the intermediary of Caroline, a secondary character, he questions whether it is appropriate to judge a prostitute for her choice of profession in light of the miserable social and economic conditions of the time. Indeed, Faber studies the category of prostitutes not from the standpoint of a moral preacher, but rather from a sociologist's. The text refuses to judge a prostitute's morality, for it highlights the struggle and difficulties that may lead to prostitution. Instead of putting the blame entirely on women, the text seems to posit that prostitution as a sociological phenomenon requires a study of the diverse personal and social reasons behind its proliferation. Hence, from the beginning, we notice the narrator's sympathy towards the character. Even though she is explicitly identified as a prostitute, he neither judges nor condemns her, as he narrates her stream of thought:

> Responsibilities, responsibilities. To get enough sleep, to remember to comb her hair, to wash after every man: these are the sorts of things she must make sure she doesn't neglect these days. Compared to the burdens she once shared with her fellow factory slaves, they aren't too bad. As for the work, well ... it's not as dirty as the factory, nor as dangerous, nor as dull. At the cost of her immortal soul, she has earned the right to lie in on a weekday morning and get up when she damn well chooses. (Faber 2002: 10)

The narrator's tone is ironic, as he enumerates the examples of Caroline's responsibilities. The contradiction between the term 'responsibilities' which denotes an air of seriousness and graveness, and the list which is made up of trivial and inconsequential actions, is sharp and sarcastic. Besides, the passage foregrounds the disparity between her previous life as a factory 'slave' and present one as a prostitute. In his defence of Caroline's choice, the narrator lays down a list of advantages, making prostitution a more comfortable profession. Furthermore, the utilization of a religious discourse by means of the expression "immortal soul" is meant to mock the Victorians who drew clear distinctions between the body and the soul, between sexuality and chastity, between prostitution and respectability. Finally, the slang term 'damn' attests for Caroline's wilful choice, thus breaking with the prevalent image of woman lured into demise.

Caroline's long recollection of the past in which she gives an account of how her life used to be before she started prostitution seems to corroborate the narrator's position. She used

to be a wife, a mother and a worker in a dress-making firm. But because of miserable working conditions, poverty, and being a single mother to an ailing child who needs a constant and expensive medical treatment, she turns to prostitution, a profitable line of work where one provides services and gets instant money in return. Indeed, at the time, women preferred to be labelled 'fallen' and not work under such inhumane conditions in factories. The twenty-first-century narrator ironically comments:

> Poor ugly biddies: they spend their daylight hours drudging in the scalding heat for next to nothing, then come home to drunken husbands who knock them from one wall to the other. If this is what it means to be "upright", and Caroline is supposed to be "fallen" ...! What did God make cunts for, if not to save women from donkey-work? (Faber 2002: 11)

By means of this narratorial intervention, Faber's narrator seems to justify or at least logically explain Caroline's decision. He assumes the position of a social commentator as he sheds light on the morbid situation of the working class and critiques the industrial advances which made factory workers no better than slaves or animals: he draws an image of working for long hours, small wages and disrespectful patrons. Besides, the passage employs an informal register to refer to working women as 'biddies' and later compares them to animals, particularly donkeys. He capitalizes then on individual experience: though he first comments on a collective social phenomenon, he is particularly interested in Caroline's situation. Finally, the narrator calls into question the religious belief in the necessity of virtue and decency to the detriment of respectable living, for he seems to privilege the latter. His use of the rhetorical question as well as the slang term are meant to mock tenacious Victorian insistence on moral correctness. Seen from the narrator's perspective, it seems that prostitution is not usually a woman's (free) choice, but a necessity for survival. Hence, assuming such a position is not only an overt critique but can also be read as a legitimation of prostitution for the sake of decent and respectable survival.

In sympathizing with the character of Caroline, the narrator takes a clear position against England's disrespect of its workers and its incapacity/unwillingness to provide them with humane working conditions. He also seems to highlight that one of the reasons behind the boom of the rates of prostitution in the 1870s is in fact the state's neglect of its lowest classes. Faber humanizes the figure of the prostitute who has been condemned and chastised for so long, pushed away to the margins of society and rebuked by all, thus echoing Elizabeth Wolstenholme, a nineteenth century feminist and activist who believed that "women […] are

driven to this unhappy life in most cases by sheer poverty" (Wolstenholme cited in Levine 1994: 129).

Still in the role of social commentator, Faber's narrator sheds light on the primary character of Sugar. He directly addresses the reader to present the protagonist's history.

> Ah, to know that you'd have to get deeper inside her than anyone has reached yet. I can tell you the answers to simpler questions. How old is Sugar? Nineteen. How long has she been a prostitute? Six years. You do the arithmetic, and the answer is a disturbing one especially when you consider that the girls of this time commonly don't pubesce until fifteen or sixteen. (Faber 2002: 27)

The narrator asks direct questions and immediately provides clear and brief answers to give a glimpse of Sugar's story of her initiation into prostitution through an implicit reference to child prostitution. He alarmingly points out her very young age: still minor and frail at thirteen, Sugar was raised and trained to be a prostitute. Seen from this angle, prostitution is presented as a crime against women, and girls more particularly. Unlike Caroline who consciously makes the choice, Sugar is not responsible, she is rather a victim. The narrator then seems to highlight the disparities between Caroline's and Sugar's stories, but emphasizes at the same time a similar outcome. By virtue of two different sub-plots, the narrator presents two samples of women whose histories are inextricably linked with prostitution.

By means of its focus on the category of prostitutes, the narrative sheds light on the different lives of numerous primary female characters such as Sugar, and secondary ones like Caroline or the prostitutes living at Mrs Castaway's: Amy Howlett and Miss Lester for example. The figure of the prostitute was typically seen as a marginal character in Victorian literature and culture. Esther in *Mary Barton* claimed she was "the abandoned polluted outcast" (Gaskell 1848: 220) and Nancy in *Oliver Twist* described herself as a "degraded being" (Dickens 1838: 367). Rossetti's incomplete oil painting *Found* (1853) shows an urban prostitute fallen to the ground at the margins of a corner-street.

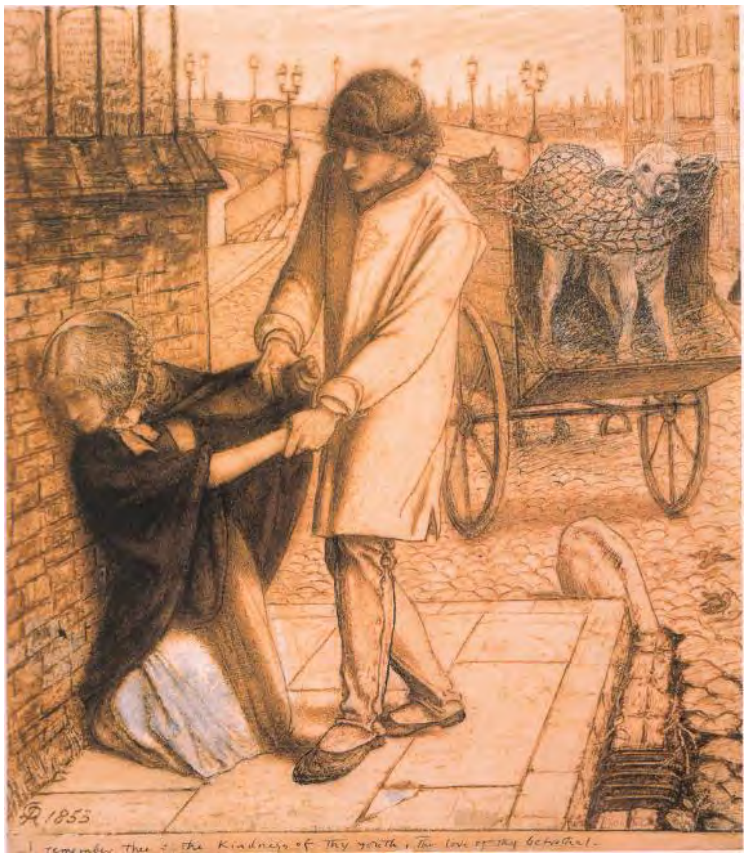

Figure 2: Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Found* (1853)

In contrast to this liminal position, the prostitute invades Faber's narrative and even occupies the centre. A case in point is Sugar. Though she is a prostitute, she is at the heart of the narrative. Faber's narrator, from the beginning, focuses his attention on her as he follows her around from one place to another. He addresses the reader: "Who to follow? (…) Stay with Sugar now. You won't regret it" (Faber 2002: 32). In the traditional narrative which associates the sexually transgressive woman or the ruined body with the ruined narrative, the fallen woman is generally embodied by a secondary character who represents the threat of "ruin" to the heroine, the main character. Amy L. Wolf affirms: "During a literary shift towards respectability for the novel … it became even more important for central heroines in novels to be pure, the fallen woman becomes a necessary secondary character" (Wolf 2001: 4). Yet, in Faber's novel, Sugar is the protagonist who occupies most of the textual space in the narrative. The author brings the prostitute from the literary margins and assigns her the centre.

Furthermore, what is remarkable about Sugar's character is not only her central position in the narrative, but equally her socio-economic position in society. From the start, she is portrayed as non-normative compared to her fellow sisters, which would explain later on her social evolution. Faber follows Henry Mayhew's journalistic investigation of London society, since he pays special attention to the social type of prostitutes which can be categorized into

three types: prostitutes in streets, those in brothels and kept mistresses (Mayhew 1851: 331). The former presents numerous examples of prostitutes categorized in *More Sprees in London--Hints for Men About Town*, a popular gentlemen magazine for sexual adventures. As "William flips through the pages. He bypasses the "Trotters" section (street girls) and flicks through "Hocks"" (the cheapest brothels). "Prime Rump", at the back of the book, is out of his range, being the class of establishment where one is expected to call for first-rate wines on top of everything else" (Faber 2002: 65). The narrative presents Sugar's character as a representative of the second type of prostitutes, living in a brothel owned by a patroness Mrs Castaway. However, even inside the brothel itself, Sugar's reputation exceeds that of her fellow sisters. She is the most wanted and desired of all, whose reputation is exceptional in the gentlemen's magazine. Indeed, men look for her across town: Ashwell and Bodley are but two examples of her many admirers. Sugar then is not an average prostitute in an ordinary brothel, she is unconventional because ""Ain't nuffink Sugar won't do, sir. Nuffink. It's common knowledge, sir, that special tastes as can't be satisfied by the ordinary girl, Sugar will satisfy"" (Faber 2002: 58). Sugar's description foreshadows her many secret skills to please men and fulfil their fantasies.

Furthermore, the text posits the possibility for a prostitute to change her fate. Though Sugar's character was forced into prostitution from an early age, she is determined to leave Mrs Castaway's average brothel thanks to a wealthy respectable gentleman. Thus, she celebrates this victory,

> Squealing in triumph, she dances from room to room, pirouetting till her skirts twirl and her hair lifts from her shoulders. Yes! At last: she can walk at his side, and damn what the world thinks! That's what he said, isn't it? Their liaison can't be held to ransom by petty minds --he won't stand for it! Joyous, joyous day! (Faber 2002: 367)

Though celebrating her triumph might give the reader the impression that Sugar has secured an enduring position by William's side, she is soon confronted to many surprises. By means of plot twists, Sugar's trajectory is seriously disturbed. Yet, Faber teasingly keeps up the illusion as the following chapter announces another step in Sugar's ascension. From the private apartment, Sugar is to move to the Rackham residence. Sugar's upward (physical) trajectory in the narrative completely deconstructs fallen women's typical downward descent from virtue to degradation. As I previously argued, most fallen heroines are usually middle- or upper-class

women, married to Victorian gentlemen and enjoying stable living conditions. Their fall is both physical and metaphorical since they are abruptly or progressively deprived of all symbols of good fortune. In contrast, Faber dramatizes Sugar's elevation, hence discarding the myth of the fallen woman always condemned to damnation.

Another element of revision Faber introduces to the figure of the prostitute often labelled as a ruined woman is rather surprising and quite remarkable. Sugar's literary tastes are advanced and complex, contrary to most Victorian women readers. Monica Correa Fryckstedt argues that

> The growing number of women readers turning to Mudie's Select Library for the latest domestic novel had a large range of novelists at their disposal: Anne Marsh, Anne Manning, Charlotte Yonge, Dinah Mulock Craik, Margaret Oliphant, Geraldine Jewsbury, Holme Lee, Julia Kavanagh, Emma Worboise, Selina Bunbury, Lady Georgiana Fullerton, Hesba Stretton, Katherine Macquoid, and Georgiana Craik all supplied wholesome family stories. (Fryckstedt 1987: 10)

Yet, though the domestic novel was popular among Victorian women, Sugar's character is interested in different literary genres such as picaresque fiction, satire, or poetry. Later in the narrative, it will be mentioned that she has already read Tobias Thomas's *The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle* (1751), Jonathan Swift, James Thomson's *The City of Dreadful Night* (1870-1873) and even the Pre-Raphaelites (Faber 2002: 31). As William takes over the figural characterisation of Sugar, he notes that her literary interests are indeed quite exceptional. His choice of vocabulary like 'prodigy', 'well-read', 'discuss', 'intelligently' and 'protests' are evocative of Sugar's advanced literary training and cognitive skills. Thus, she has rather exceptional attributes compared to most women and prostitutes' ordinary traits. One may establish parallels with Dickens "who often gave his lower-class characters a level of discourse which was totally at odds with their social background. Thus, although he is brought up in a workhouse and subsequently frequents Fagin's gang of thieves, Oliver's discourse never departs from the most proper forms of English" (Vanfasse 2004: para. 17). Interestingly, William even compares Sugar to Agnes. He aligns his wife more with what Fryckstedt above affirmed: "To most women--Agnes among them, unfortunately--Swift is the name of a cough lozenge, or a bird to be worn stuffed on their bonnets" (Faber 2002: 79).

More interestingly, Sugar's character is a novelist. She compares her novel to that of Wilkie Collins: her "inventory of brutish men" (Faber 2002: 172) resembles "*The New*

Magdalen, a feeble, cringing affair in which a prostitute called Mercy Merrick hopes for redemption", though her protagonist, a prostitute as well, is determined to "take revenge on the men she hates" (Faber 2002: 173). She even ponders the possibility of becoming financially independent thanks to her writing: "Why, she may even be able to live by her writing: A couple of hundred faithful readers would be sufficient; she's not coveting success on the scale of Rhoda Broughton's" (Faber 2002: 173). This desire recalls Victorian female authors' quest for financial independence by means of their novels. Interestingly then, by bringing together prostitution and authorship in the character of Sugar, Faber seems to refute the pre-conceived notion that a ruined woman is no longer of intellectual value to her family and society. Sugar's interesting literary and political debates with William prove that she deserves a respectable place within society. Besides, her eventual role as a governess to Sophie allows her to participate in a process of healthy upbringing of a lost forgotten little girl.

In brief, in his re-exploration of the Victorian model of the fallen woman, Faber masterfully dramatizes Sugar's elevation not only among the category of stereotypically-defined prostitutes as well as Victorian women, but also in the plot. He also chooses to endow her with exceptional literary skills making of her a nonconventional character and allowing her to occupy an eventual position of governess. Her trajectory then, reverses the typical journey of fallen women in early-century Victorian fiction, thus, revisiting the Greek motifs of *katabasis* and *anabasis*. While etymologically, katabasis in ancient Greek refers to a descent, or to a military manoeuvre involving a descent, in mythology it came to signal the hero's journey to the underworld to display his exceptional qualities. By contrast, anabasis can be defined as going up, a march up, or a military advance. In mythology, it refers to the special title of the advance of Cyrus the Younger into Asia, as narrated by Xenophon. Significantly, Sugar's character is constantly portrayed in an ascending movement: "[looking] up" (Faber 2002: 88), "sitting up to comb her hair" (Faber 2002: 187), "[creeping] up the stairs to her room" (Faber 2002: 209), and "[lifting] herself up on her elbows" (Faber 2002: 562). As trivial as these actions may be, they nonetheless signal the protagonist's erect attitude throughout the narrative, as if marching up like Cyrus.

The Crimson Petal and the White does not stop at Sugar who challenges Victorian stereotypical representations of women in narrative. Through the intermediary of Agnes, the text foregrounds the dichotomy fallen woman and angel in the house.

1.2 Questioning the Angel of the House: Agnes's Nonconformity

In *The Crimson Petal and the White*, Faber draws on the Victorian trope of the angel in the house to construct the character of Agnes, who is seemingly the literary embodiment of the perfect angel. The early chapters of the narrative portray her as a metaphysical figure, physically absented from the narrative and simply described by her husband and her maid, thus, establishing the link with the mythical dimension of the metaphor. In fact, in *Woman and the Demon* (1982), Nina Auerbach proposes that metaphorical constructions of angels enabled the latter to have limitless movement and mobility. Conventionally, biblical mythology attributed them power to move, swoop, and actually intervene in mortals' lives quite easily. Exactly like incorporeal angels, Agnes is talked about, described and discussed as if she has no material presence.

In the early chapters, Agnes is repeatedly referred to as "his wife", thus highlighting the fact that she exists only in relation to Rackham. Agnes's character then, evolves from a metaphysical creature to a social one. Indeed, as Auerbach argues, the myths about angels have changed drastically since their ancient conception. Angels began to take on more of a feminine quality as early as the fifteenth-century, ultimately surfacing more commonly as a social metaphor for women in Victorian literature. On the face of it, this domestic ideology appeared to stem from the woman's honoured and respected place in the home. Agnes's identification as wife then, consolidates her association with the Victorian angel in the house, insofar as it recalls Coventry Patmore's poem in which this definition took hold and solidified the classification of married women and morally sound maidens as angelic figures. Patmore wrote "Angel in the House" for his wife Emily[23]. Borrowing biblical terminology, Patmore appropriated the term angel to define this wife whose whole existence centred on service to her husband and children. An angelic wife not only supposedly strengthened the relationship itself, but also secured the entire family's reputation. Although its conception was to maintain the middle-class status through the wife's devotion, morality, and service, the angel metaphor reached the royal family as well. Upon marrying Prince Albert, Queen Victoria also exhibited domestication, thus further appropriating and extending the metaphor to later define the women of the nineteenth-century.

In chapter 7, Faber puts an end to Agnes's physical absence from the narrative by inserting her as a character that has an actual presence in the text. As in a cinematographic representation, Agnes slowly enters the scene. As she is described from a third-person

[23] The collection was first published in 1854 and later revised in 1862. Originally targeted and hopefully exemplary of middle-class marriages, lines such as: "At any time, she's still his wife/ Dearly devoted to his arms/ She loves with love that cannot tire" assumedly defined the perfect wife.

viewpoint, the reader is introduced to a frail creature, almost like a doll risking to break at any moment.

> Here, then, is Agnes Rackham, gingerly descending a spiral of stairs, breathing shallowly, frowning, biting her lip. As she reluctantly entrusts her weight to each carpeted step, she clutches the banister with one white-knuckled hand, while the other hand is laid on her breastbone […] that gown [is] so ample in comparison to her dainty body that its hems threaten to ensnare the toes of her soft grey slippers, and send her tumbling. (Faber 2002: 98)

Faber's choice of vocabulary is extremely fitting for the characterisation of the angel reduced to a ghost. She is presented as a model of weakness and vulnerability, making her portrayal rather typical in Victorian representation of female characters insofar as she embodies the Victorian 'type' in her well-measured steps, silent breaths, slender body and elegant fashion. Suitably, Faber's narrator confesses to the reader "You wonder if you've seen her somewhere before: indeed you have. She is a high-Victorian ideal; perfection itself [.]" (Faber 2002: 98). In appearance, Agnes conforms to the perfect mould of the ideal Victorian wife, a lady both in her docility and weakness. Interestingly however, despite this seeming accordance between Agnes's character and the traits of an angel, the same passage denotes a distant style by means of the use of the demonstrative pronoun 'that'. This narrative distance is not only meant to maintain some distance between readers and characters, but also to keep the character at a distance and thus foreground the fact that she is simply a Victorian literary trope, an instance of metalanguage. Besides, the ample dress which does not fit her and may lead to a risk of falling is an element which seems to indicate that the angel of the house is not a role appropriate or befitting to Agnes, it may be a faux part and so, unnatural. This hint foreshadows Agnes's deviation from this literary trope so as to liberate herself from the subservient role which restricted, confined, and bound women.

Agnes embodies Victorian beauty. The narrator describes her as "a paragon of porcelain femininity, five foot two with eyes of blue, her blonde hair smooth and fine" (Faber 2002: 99). Interestingly however, her description reduces her to her sex for "her mouth [is] like a tiny pink vulva, pristine" (Faber 2002: 99). While the comparison stresses Agnes's virginal position, it also eroticizes her. She is both pure and sexual. This recalls Marie-Luise Kohlke's concept of

‘sexsation’ which precisely unveils the Victorian era’s captivation by the erotic, but also exposes neo-Victorian fiction’s interest in the construction of women’s (sexual) identities.

Furthermore, the narrative dramatizes Agnes’s preoccupation with her skin especially before the Season, for she knows all eyes will be on her appearance. She often resorts to cosmetics, especially “face-powder”, though the doctor advised her against such artificial techniques: ““But had I not cautioned you,” he says, “against the use of cosmetics, for the sake of your skin?”” (Faber 2002: 121). This may recall the motif of cosmetic tragedy in Victorian fiction, whereby novelists aimed to warn the women of the bodily harm that might ensue from wearing such toxic products. Wilkie Collins’s *No Name* (1862) features a professional actress whose use of cosmetics and talents in mimicry on and off stage eventually lead her to the polluted and contagious slums of London. The text sheds light on such life-threatening methods by means of its character Magdalen Vanstone, all the while consolidating their association with women of low virtue, professional acting or duplicitous and criminal femininity. Accordingly, though Agnes is modelled after the trope of perfect beauty, the text capitalizes on blemishes and pimples which regularly appear on her face in each menstruation period. The narrative even exaggerates her depressive state as she notices these imperfections and seriously examines her face in a mirror, for she sees such thing as abnormal and unnatural:

> A tight, throbbing blemish has appeared on her forehead, just below the wispy golden hairline. Unthinkable, given how often and how carefully she sponges her face, but there it is. On impulse, Agnes squeezes the pimple between her thumb and forefinger. Pain spreads across her brow like a flame, but the pimple stays intact, only angrier. (Faber 2002: 178)

The serious tone of the passage is meant to mock this insistent fixation on physical beauty. By means of the scene of squeezing the pimple, a typically neo-Victorian gesture, the narrative contemporizes the literary motif of Victorian perfection which delineates a pure, natural face, free from blemishes, freckles, or marks. In other words, Agnes is no longer equipped to conform to the model of Victorian angelity. Furthermore, the persistence of the pimple is an ironic gesture meant to rebuke the domestic ideology which equates angels and flawlessness.

Furthermore, Faber shatters this conception of female perfection, at the level of health. Contrary to perfect wives whose duty is to breed healthy children, Agnes’s health seems to be ailing, not only physically but more importantly mentally and psychologically. As the doctor appears in the narrative, a close link is established between Agnes and mental illness. Since

Victorian doctors are representative of a patriarchal discourse judging and consequently identifying women as either sane or insane, they embody Victorian beliefs associating women's psychological state with their sex. In Faber's novel, Doctor Curlew associates the female sex/ gender with the inevitability of mental illness and madness and believes that it is only natural that women turn mad because it is simply a biological matter. On the other hand, mental illness is rare to inexistent among men because they lack the female sexual organ. He explains to William:

> "You should know that mental illness in the male has nothing to do with nature. Every man has his breaking-point. Once the suffering is beyond endurance, madness strikes, and note that I say strikes, for often it comes suddenly, and it is not reversible. You and I have no womb that can be taken out if things get beyond a joke--for God's sake remember that." (Faber 2002: 64)

The doctor's speech presents the dominant viewpoint towards mental illness not as a scientific but rather a biological and thus, socio-cultural phenomenon. It nonetheless widens the gap between the portrait of the angel and Agnes's character. This leads Barbara Braid to argue that "the themes of female insanity and the Victorian ideals of femininity are put together in a way which is evocative of the performative nature of both madness and gender" (Braid 2014: 85). In other words, one may suggest that by bringing in madness, the narrative highlights how Agnes refuses to perform her role of angel.

More interestingly, the narrative puts to the fore the various innovative techniques and strategies to show Agnes's rebellious character. In fact, the metaphor of angel in the house entailed that the ideal woman should be submissive, modest, unassuming, self-sacrificing. Yet, Agnes's character manifests signs of non-compliance and defiance. In fact, a technique of resistance is the repetitive fits by which Agnes escapes the real world of the narrative. In contrast to the ideal perfection she is supposed to incarnate, Agnes's character is associated more with the 'mad wife' than with the perfect one. Mockingly, the narrator claims that this scene will happen many times in the narrative, thus further consolidating the link with madness. "Agnes's collapse, though dramatic, is of no great significance; she has collapsed before and will collapse again" (Faber 2002: 104). Constantly associated with the mad woman, and eventually sentenced to exile to a lunatic asylum by her husband and the doctor, Agnes's madness becomes her strength. In fact, Faber re-employs the literary motif of madness insofar

as it becomes an instance of role-playing. Agnes's madness is a strategic ploy, a rather peculiar manifestation of rejection and noncompliance. This reading is illustrated in William's stream of consciousness: "But, lying there on the floor, she had, for a brief moment, an intoxicating power over him--the power to scorn his offer of the olive branch. Standing up to him like that – admittedly, while lying at his feet – was revenge of sorts" (Faber 2002: 118). Though her lying position may be read as inactivity, it can become symptomatic of a moment of passive resistance. Thus, Agnes's madness, as a literary device revisited in Faber's novel, may recall Emily Dickinson's poem "Much madness is Divinest Sense" which challengingly posited that much of madness was actually sense. In other words, Agnes's mad character is presented in a different light, one of sensibility. In these moments, Agnes's character is made triumphant by rebuking all forms of male domination.

Curiously, the narrative constructs a highly-intellectual character for Agnes, for it portrays her constantly engaged in moments of existential questioning. In her room, she often contemplates her situation as woman and wife:

> Agnes has been thinking a great deal about Death and Resurrection lately. Queer topics to be pondering amidst the hurly-burly of the Season, but she can't help it: it's her philosophical turn of mind. She can be cheerful, and sing enchantingly for guests, but really, is there anything in Life as important as what happens to one's body after Death? (…) What she wants is to wake up, corporeal, in the Convent of Health, ready to begin a better life. Almost every night she dreams the same dream, in which she walks through the ivy-laden portcullis of the convent, no longer Agnes Rackham of Chepstow Villas, Notting Hill, but not a ghost either. (Faber 2002: 271)

Faber invests in the Victorian fascination with mysticism and spiritualism in order to formulate a new conception of individualism that offers a fresh look at subjectivity, not in terms of the dyad sanity/insanity. As the gothic mood is transformed into philosophical thought, Faber's neo-Victorian depiction of Victorian mysticism offers a reconfiguration of spiritualism as transgressive and subversive, manifesting Alex Owen's conclusion that nineteenth-century Spiritualism provided opportunities for women to challenge their limited roles in Victorian society (Owen 1989).

To overthrow the dyad sanity/ insanity and maintain the mysticism of the characterisation of Agnes, Faber's text constantly puts to the fore duality and/or irresolution.

By means of a simultaneous combination of rationality and irrationality, he dramatizes Agnes's characterisation which can neither be defined as sane or mad.

> Taking part in the Season is, to her, the One Thing that will prove beyond doubt that she isn't mad. For, in her uncertainty where exactly the borderline between sanity and madness is supposed to lie, Agnes has chosen a line for herself. If she can only keep on the right side of it, she will be sane, first in the eyes of the world, then in her husband's, and finally even in Doctor Curlew's. And in her own eyes? In her own eyes she is neither sane nor insane; she is simply Agnes ... Agnes Pigott, if you don't mind. (Faber 2002: 119)

Though most characters around Agnes doubt her sanity, the verb 'know' underlines a rational use of her cognitive functions as well as her social awareness. Besides, deciphering people's intentions and motives requires lucidity and cleverness, since she conscious of her maid Clara's real intentions. "Her smile is insincere. All her smiles are; Agnes knows that" (Faber 2002: 117). Thus, even though 'the world' around her believes she is mad, the narrative implicitly suggests that Agnes is in good health.

Interestingly, Faber transforms the significance of the Victorian Season so as to bring with it other possibilities for his character. In fact, while Victorian ladies eagerly awaited the Season festivities usually considered the most important social occasion to show off their physical beauty, refined manners, most fashionable dresses and absolute happiness within their private households, for Agnes, the Season is the opportunity to foreground her self. Thus, she takes on walking a bit every day in order to strengthen her build and accustom her body to the efforts it must endure during the Season, a seemingly rational and well-thought decision to manifest her sanity. Read in this light, Agnes's preparations for her initiation to the Season seem to be a rejuvenating process, a symbol of her long-desired rebirth. Thus, in highlighting the difficulty of the process as well as the obstacles which Agnes comes across: physical, aesthetic, psychological and even alimentary, the narrative puts to the fore the fact that the Season represents another horizon outside the confining household where she is seen as a fragile creature to be taken care of like a doll. In giving another meaning to the Season, Faber significantly challenges the patriarchal order which bases its power on the assumption that women are naturally weaker and more submissive, and that by their very submission, drive and help the resilience of patriarchy.

The inner conflict from which Agnes's character suffers is also meant to demonstrate how the trope of the angel in the house brings about drastically negative repercussions on women. "In contrast to her swooping ancestors," Auerbach writes, "the angel in the house is a violent paradox", since the honour implied by the appellation worked to safeguard patriarchy's control over women. (Auerbach 1982: 72). The angel lived a closely-regulated life submerged by her duties as wife and mother. It is rather an unsurprising neo-Victorian choice that Agnes abandons one of these duties: wifehood. Her insistence on naming herself in reference to her family name instead of William's is telling not only of the nature of her relationship with him but also of her desperate attachment to her own subjective identity. She defines herself as Agnes Pigott, her maiden name. This naming question could be interpreted in different ways. It is possible to argue that Agnes simply refuses the state of being married to William. She writes in her diary: "Dear Diary, How do you do? My name is Agnes Pigott, or should I say that was my name, but now

Dear Diary, I" (Faber 2002: 396, space in original). The interruption in her diary may evoke a state of shock following her marriage. Refusing William's name could also be driven by the disrespect and loathing she evokes vis-à-vis her husband. To her, he is not a person whom she trusts or with whom she feels at ease. She sees him as the enemy always trying to over-protect her by means of intrusive actions. Finally, though it is still early at this point of the narrative to read Agnes in feminist terms, it is possible that her refusal to be defined as a Rackham, as William's property, manifests her quest of self-definition and female subjectivity. While the marriage institution in the Victorian period often functions in a dialogical manner granting men all sorts of rights while at the same time denying them to women, Agnes may be read as a rebellious woman in search for individual liberation.

To relieve some of the dramatic tension in Agnes's characterisation, Faber also employs humour as a device to illustrate her nonconformity to the model of the perfect wife, notably by means of the scene of mopping the kitchen floor along the maid. Such behaviour is forbidden in Victorian etiquette and social decorum. Only maids mop floors and ladies never enter the kitchen to perform such a task.

> Noiselessly, like a stage curtain parting, the door is nudged open, to reveal not just the harshly-lit, high-ceilinged cell in which all his food is prepared, but also (when he lowers his eyes) two women engaged in an act which shouldn't have shocked him in the least--had not one of the women been his wife. For there, side by side on the stone floor, are Agnes and the scullery

> maid Janey, both with their backs to him and their arses in the air, crawling along on their hands and knees, dipping scrubbing-brushes by turns into a large pail of soapy water. (Faber 2002: 197)

The tone of the passage is humorous. The minute description of the female characters gives the impression that the task is of great seriousness. Yet, it counters William's shocked and mortified reaction who immediately decides to bring Doctor Curlew. Despite the triviality of the scene, both female characters, regardless of their different social positions, are described whilst sharing a simple activity in a light and harmonious atmosphere. By pointing out the challenge to the inner stratification of the Victorian household, through the solidarity of the mistress and maid sharing a rather friendly relationship, Faber questions the typical role of the angel in the house. Furthermore, the narrative ironically describes "Agnes calmly, blinking at a strand of hair dangling in front of one sweaty eyebrow" asking: "Is Doctor Curlew here yet?" (Faber 2002: 195). The scene is almost comedic for it recalls the Greek and Roman comedy intended to entertain the audience, as William's character is made ridiculous. As trivial and unexpected as it may seem, mopping the floor becomes a way of challenging, an overt act of defiance on the part of Agnes, against normative embodiments of the angel in the house.

As the narrative dramatizes the tense relationship the married couple share, it questions the supposition that a Victorian angel would forsake her own happiness for the sake of a man in patriarchal discourse. In 1869, the English essayist William R. Greg stressed the inextricable link between woman's self-achievement and the state of wifehood: "[…] there is an enormous and increasing number of single women […] who, in place of completing, sweetening, and embellishing the existence of others, are compelled to lead an independent and incomplete existence of their own" (Greg 1876: 276). One may wonder to what extent Agnes manages to achieve her selfhood through her role as wife. In fact, the narrative portrays her as completely absented from family life and constantly confined to her room, except on the rare occasions where she interacts with other characters around her. Such depiction of a wife's role leads Emmie Shand to argue that "Agnes Rackham's marriage is 'as irrevocable' as death, and she is permanently unfulfilled. Although her husband William Rackham cherishes Agnes as an angelic figure, she is effectively imprisoned in his house and in the company he chooses – partly as a married woman, and partly because of her "madness"" (Shand 2017: 29).

If we read Agnes's character from Greg's perspective, she would have to stifle her own desires or needs to escape confinement, and comply to her role as wife, which would allow her to be a selfless caregiver. Yet, the narrative constantly portrays her as disengaged. She is not

blindly devoted to her husband, nor is she a well-trained mistress of her house. William often critiques the lack of order and organisation in the house, chores supposed to be perfectly performed by an ideal wife. Furthermore, Agnes is not the selfless sample of the perfect mother. Immediately after giving birth, she simply refuses to care for her own child, a child consummated out of rape. Such representation would be considered shockingly immoral in Victorian fiction and especially in the domestic genre which is supposed to present positive examples of wifehood and motherhood to follow. Agnes's character completely breaks away from the advised model and refuses both roles of wife and mother.

Furthermore, the narrative re-utilizes the Victorian motif of hysteria as it allows Agnes some instances of delirious verbal confrontations. In a moment of uncontrolled eruption of emotion, Agnes's character overtly condemns William's lack of faith and religious belief.

> "You believe in nothing," she says, glaring at him through the candle-flame, her voice harsher with each successive syllable, all trace of its lilting musicality lost in a snarl of disgust. "Nothing except William Rackham." She bares her perfect teeth. "What a fraud you are, what a fool." (…) "Beg all you like--fool," she spits. "You make me sick." (Faber 2002: 218)

While her appearance and position initially deemed her an angel, Agnes's attitude and speech reveal the opposite. The juxtaposition of imagery of fire and anger is meant to stress her rage. Besides, the use of lexical items as "glare, snarl, bare" help construct a woman-as-animal image which equates Agnes's character with hunting animals. The harsh voice, the spit and the direct insult further widen the gap between Agnes's character and angelic characteristics. Here, Agnes's frankness, typically considered a virtuous trait, precisely highlights the internal contradictions and inherent instability of the patriarchal idea of feminine order and the angelic. In her demonstration of absolute honesty, what she says actually sets her apart from the role of the angel. In the same vein, Sugar is shocked to narrate one of Agnes's hysteric outbursts, so rude that "makes the hairs stand up on the nape of Sugar's neck" (Faber 2002: 295): ""You are fat, and ugly, and I've never liked you." The words ring out distinctly, in a harsh monotone unrecognisable as Agnes's, issuing from somewhere much deeper than her piccolo throat" (Faber 2002: 295). Again, the narrative establishes two contradictory images of voice, contrasting her birdlike voice to this new harsh one. Thus, the trope of hysteria is revisited in Faber's novel, insofar as it can be read as a form of rebellion against the established order and the ideal requirements of a Victorian angel.

In brief, Agnes's characterisation is multi-dimensional alternating between a state of rationality and reason on the one hand, and another of irrationality and madness on the other. Her feeble state, her constant delusions and hallucinations about the Convent of Health as well as her collapses on the floor, her vomiting in the streets and her uncontrolled and inappropriate behaviour in public places and among higher circles are indications of her mental instability and unpredictability. On the other hand, her awareness of her contempt of William, her state of illumination and decision to reconvert to Catholicism as well as her serious thoughts and questions about life and the duties of a perfect hostess align her more with sanity and reason. Such an ambivalent characterisation confuses the reader and complicates the character of Agnes who is kept a mystery. Though she remains oblique, her study brings readers a feeling of constant intrigue and excitement. In *The Crimson Petal and the White*, Faber employs Victorian mysticism, spirituality, madness and hysteria, and stylistic tools as the recourse to humour and irony, in order to revisit the literary trope of the angel in the house. He thus, creates a nonconventional character, precisely in her nonconformity to this myth.

Through the intermediary of his female protagonists Sugar and Agnes, Faber revises the literary tropes of the fallen woman and the angel in the house. Fowles's text however revisits another Victorian trope since we notice a constant challenge of the figure of the female villain through Sarah.

1.3 Sarah's Role-Playing of the Female Demon

The female demon, as one of the recurrent Victorian literary tropes in sensation, is revisited in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* to construct the character of Sarah who is seemingly the epitome of villainy in East Lyme. Victorian literature often explores the woman who does not appear as saintly and virtuous, characterizing this 'other' polarity as the demonic woman, one who transgresses the behavioural codes which patriarchy establishes for the angel. Thus, as early as the first chapters of the novel, the narrative foregrounds an antagonistic relationship between Sarah's character and the rest of characters around her. Society in East Lyme seems to see in Sarah the embodiment of the villainess or the wicked woman. The gossip about her tarnished reputation because of her association with moral impropriety sets the frame for her characterisation. Because of the constant references to French language, the French lieutenant and the Pre-Raphaelites as symbols of promiscuity and sexual looseness, she is considered a fallen woman to be chastised in respectable society. Accordingly, Fowles accentuates the contradiction between Sarah's immorality on the one hand, and other

characters' morality on the other. Ernestina quickly exclaims: "Let us turn. I don't like to go near her" (Fowles 1969: 4). His narrator presents Mrs Poulteney as the epitome of virtuousness, "Mrs. Poulteney had two obsessions: or two aspects of the same obsession (…) and the other was Immorality" (Fowles 1969: 9). By means of this distinction, Fowles sets the ground for the character of Sarah to be identified as villain in contrast to angelic.

Interestingly, Sarah's villainy is dealt with from a religious vantage point, contrasting her to Mrs Poulteney as the moral beacon of the narrative. Both female characters are often engaged in tense dialogues about Sarah's immoral actions such as wandering in the Cobb on her own. Fowles pays special attention to the lexical field attributed to Mrs Poulteney in her conversation with Sarah, comprising words as "sin, shame, Satan, the One Above". Auerbach tellingly grounds most of her discussion of the angel and demon in their religious implications. Curiously, Mrs Poulteney looks incredulously at Sarah "as if [she] was Satan himself come to claim his own" (Fowles 1969: 104), making the latter "a larger literary myth of womanhood, one that supersedes traditional ideas of divinity" (Auerbach 1982: 85).

Fowles chooses a female villain as the protagonist of his neo-Victorian text. Conventionally in Victorian fiction, this woman often appears in literature as the antagonist, the woman who poses the greatest threat to the heroine/angel's physical, spiritual and moral wellbeing. The female demon thus functions in many different ways, often as a maddened fiend, syren, or villain. In most cases, the villainous woman is often synonymous with the definition of demon or devil. Since order must be restored in the Victorian tradition, this unwanted and unacceptable character – like the fallen woman – usually dies or is incarcerated as a certain consequence of her transgression. Though a neo-Victorian character, Sarah is reminiscent of some of the most popular Victorian villainesses. In fact, many Victorian writers of sensation relied on the dyad angelic/ demonic womanhood to create their female characters seen as villainous and often qualified as anti-heroines. One can recall Becky Sharp from William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1848) as the quintessential example of the villainous woman, determined to pursue her own desires disregarding all attempts to limit her. She presents the template for many social climbers to come. In what is subtitled "A Novel without a Hero", Becky struggles to make her way up in the world by any means necessary: seduction, lying, gambling. After shaky ascents and utter reversals of fortune, the rich Joseph signs her a portion of his money as life insurance setting her up with an important income and dies in suspicious circumstances. Becky finally gets what she dreams of, abundant money and a house in England, thus managing a respectable life even though she is disregarded by her previous friends. While Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) establishes Heathcliff as one of

literature's most famous anti-heroes, in this dark romance of impossible love, an anti-heroine emerges in Catherine. She is self-possessed, argumentative, and sometimes cruel. Although she and Heathcliff love each other, she willingly marries a man who will help her advance in society, much more than Heathcliff. Her narcissism and disregard for the societal conventions of the time lead her to ruin. Some of these traits particular to Victorian anti-heroines can similarly be found in Sarah.

Fowles's text exemplifies how representations of women in grand narratives are often based on how men see women, how women are seen and not how they see themselves. Thus, we are constantly exposed to the male gaze and the male perception of woman through the intermediary of some of the characters as the dairyman and the Victorian doctor. The former, giving her "a dooming stare", interjects "And she been't no lady. She be the French Loot'n'nt's Hoer" (Fowles 1969: 37), while the latter refers to her as "sinner" (Fowles 1969: 26). In order to challenge this perception, the narrative allows Sarah's character to create an image for herself, an image different from the one drawn by the rest of her community. This authorial gesture echoes what Toril Moi investigates in her *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1985). She borrows Kate Millet's 'Early Images of Women' approach to explore the representations that focus on women as the objects of oppression in male texts and claims that this masculine gaze constructs a model to which every woman must conform because women "are denied the right to create their own images of femaleness, and instead must seek to conform to the patriarchal standards imposed on them" (Moi 1985: 57). Yet, whether instinctively or by choice, woman often breaks away from this pre-constructed image, this type of woman is then labelled 'monster' as "the woman who refuses to be selfless, acts on her own initiative, who *has* a story to tell – in short, a woman who rejects the submissive role patriarchy has reserved for her" (Moi 1985: 57, emphasis added). Sarah's assumed wickedness, as she tells Charles her story with the French lieutenant challenges the notion of women bound to male representations of them as either angelic or demonic. For not simply adhering to what is normalised i.e. the angel, she is classified as "wicked" by East Lyme.

Interestingly however, Sarah's character is too complex to be reduced to mere villainy. To depict an ambivalent character, Fowles borrows one of the literary techniques by which female villainy is portrayed in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862): role-playing. Like Lucy who externalizes angelic features while internalizing more demonic ones, Sarah similarly relies on role-playing but in a reverse manner. Auerbach suggests that "Braddon employs with scholarly precision angelic iconography for demonic purposes" (Auerbach 1982: 107). She argues that Braddon's intention here is to paint a picture of angelic qualities only to

showcase the demonic underneath. Auerbach utilizes Braddon's own phrase "so like and so unlike" to define Lady Audley's existence as representing the blurring of angel into demon. In fact, the narrator forces the reader to see first an angel in Lady Audley and then a villainous creature invading the narrative with her ideas – plotting and deceiving, statements of apathy and coldness and actions: arson and murder. Indeed, to hide both her secret identity and past, she does not hesitate to display angelic features of utter femininity and charm. Sarah also explicitly and willingly externalizes villainy. To avoid falling in the same trap of essentialisations, I will not argue that Sarah hides within her, angelic attributes. It would rather suffice to say that she is a template of a woman striving to be free. Wickedness is not to be read as pure inherent evil, but rather as a reaction to an oppressive masculinist society. In this sense, wickedness in neo-Victorian fiction becomes a form of resistance and survival as well as a way to break free from the shackles of prejudiced representations of women. Indeed, Sarah publicly assumes the persona of a berated, scolded and admonished woman in order to construe an identity of her own, away from masculinist representations of women defining them as either angels or demonic, or even fallen. What is key to this analysis is not whether Sarah is morally improper and a fallen woman, but rather her deliberate – and often exaggerated – openness about her sexual deviances. In fact, by telling her story publicly, she assumes the position of the demon and seems to privilege this identity over a respectable one.

Associating Lady Audley with mythical mermaids and syrens, Auerbach proposes that her demonic nature surfaces only with a slight "shift of the viewer's perspective" (Auerbach 1982: 108). Fowles's text precisely dramatizes this shift in perspective as the narrator points out:

> Perhaps [Charles] had too fixed an idea of what a siren looked like and the circumstances in which she appeared—long tresses, a chaste alabaster nudity, a mermaid's tail, matched by an Odysseus with a face acceptable in the best clubs. There were no Doric temples in the Undercliff; but here was a Calypso. (Fowles 1969: 61)

By establishing mythical imagery, Charles compares Sarah to Calypso, the goddess of strange power and beauty, who kept Odysseus captive within her caverns, yearning for him to be her husband. While the comparison reflects Charles's status as captive/ slave, it more importantly foregrounds Sarah's capacity to keep him in such state of imprisonment, and thus a demonic nature. While Lady Audley's strategic performance of the angelic may be considered as an

authorial technique that blurs demon and angel, one may posit that Sarah's performance of the demonic can also be read as Fowles's attempt to confuse her status. Lady Audley embraces the angelic role and repeatedly strives to maintain the appearance of innocence and thus exploits the very characteristics that have traditionally helped the patriarchal system to define and confine women. It seems as though Lady Audley's goal is to maintain the protected status of the angel. Conversely, Sarah problematizes the boundaries between angel and demon, and creates a new sense of place that is neither angelic nor demonic.

This capacity to role-play villainy is highlighted when Fowles allows Sarah the momentary use of first-person narration. As she daringly confesses having lost her virtue to Varguennes, the Victorian gentleman Charles is shocked for Sarah seems not only irrational in openly and freely assuming such debased position, but hysterical in losing control of her emotion. He believed it "outrageous, most unseemly" as "[his] own cheeks were now red as well" (Fowles 1969: 60). Her passionate monologue foregrounds one trait, primary to the figure of the demon: madness.

> I am a doubly dishonoured woman. By circumstances. And by choice. (…) I did it so that I should never be the same again. I did it so that people should point at me, should say, there walks the French Lieutenant's Whore—oh yes, let the word be said. So that they should know I have suffered, and suffer, as others suffer in every town and village in this land. I could not marry that man. So I married shame. (…) An act of despair, Mr. Smithson. I know it was wicked ... blasphemous, but I knew no other way to break out of what I was. If I had left that room, and returned to Mrs. Talbot's, and resumed my former existence, I know that by now I should be truly dead ... and by my own hand. What has kept me alive is my shame, my knowing that I am truly not like other women. I shall never have children, a husband, and those innocent happinesses they have. I am the French Lieutenant's Whore. (Fowles 1969: 75)

In Sarah's possibly most polemic monologue, the stylistic and lexical choices come together in order to foreground her position of power and control. Fowles employs the repetition of the subject pronoun 'I', reinforced by the active voice, and opts for the lexical field of disgrace 'dishonoured, whore, wicked, blasphemous, shame'. In fact, though the clauses are rather short and end abruptly, thus suggesting her turbulent emotional state, the narrative stresses the

association between subjectivity and infamy. In other words, the text advances the possibility that Sarah's character assumes villainy as a subject trait preferable to docility and subservience. Besides, Sarah's voice proves to be bold, direct and frank.

Furthermore, as her most audacious transgression as early as the first chapters of the narrative, she explicitly identifies herself as such: "I am the French Lieutenant's Whore" and strongly believes that her villainy makes her power as "[no] insult, no blame, can touch [her]" (Fowles 1969: 75). In fact, Sarah admits making the choice to conceal her story from everyone to publicly assume the position of the chastised woman, "[t]o be what [she] must be. An outcast" (Fowles 1969: 76). It seems from her utterance that she decides /chooses to be rejected from society. Interestingly, Sarah believes that her shame is one key marker of her identity as she admits "If I leave here [Lyme] I leave my shame. Then I am lost" (Fowles 1969: 77). It is her sin which defines who she is and gives a meaning to her existence. Not only does she embrace her sin, she publicly displays it as one of her key characteristics and assumes wickedness as a defining moral attribute.

As she takes over narration, she addresses a long speech to Charles: Sarah not only tells him her story, but also allows him as well as the reader access into her psychological insights as she shares her feelings about her life as a member of Victorian society, a woman, a governess and a fallen woman.

> You cannot [understand], Mr. Smithson. Because you are not a woman. Because you are not a woman who was born to be a farmer's wife but educated to be something ... better. My hand has been several times asked in marriage. When I was in Dorchester, a rich grazier—but that is nothing. You were not born a woman with a natural respect, a love of intelligence, beauty, learning ... I don't know how to say it, I have no right to desire these things, but my heart craves them and I cannot believe it is all vanity ..." She was silent a moment. "And you were not ever a governess, Mr. Smithson, a young woman without children paid to look after children. You cannot know that the sweeter they are the more intolerable the pain is. You must not think I speak of mere envy. (…) But to live each day in scenes of domestic happiness, the closest spectator of a happy marriage, home, adorable children. (Fowles 1969: 72)

By means of the repetition of the conjunction of contrast 'but', the passage capitalizes on the many dichotomies in Sarah's story: the difference between woman and men, the educated and uneducated, the opposite views on the status of education for a woman, rationality and desire, and the torments of being a governess both in contact with and deprived of the pleasures of family. The melancholic tone which highlights the suffering and agony is meant to unveil the humane side in Sarah's character. In other words, one may suggest that the passage draws on the reader's sympathy towards the character's particular situation. Furthermore, it also stresses Sarah's multi-layered characterisation. In fact, while Sarah's education and qualifications as a governess prove to be advantageous and allow her to gain Mrs Poulteney's approval thanks to her diverse skills of speaking and reading eloquently, Sarah points out that being a governess is a solitary occupation, insofar as it keeps her in a liminal class position between the lower and upper classes, between servants and their employers, between the uneducated and the cultivated, between children and adults. She professes this internal, both individual and collective dilemma.

By means of the recurrent contrasts and the melancholic tone, the narrative advances the possibility that Sarah's present situation as a fallen woman is the outcome of not only her upbringing which condemned her to remain outside of both classes and obliged her to work to finance herself, but also left her vulnerable and easily influenced and manipulated by a Varguennes who was aware of her weaknesses. Her financial situation affected her psychological and emotional states. "He had found out much about me. How my father had died in a lunatic asylum. How I was without means, without close relatives. How for many years I had felt myself in some mysterious way condemned—and I knew not why—to solitude" (Fowles 1969: 73). The alliteration of the sound /h/ creates a romantic mood insofar as it echoes moaning, but also alludes to her emotional vulnerability. Furthermore, Sarah's long confession, though introspective and personal, uncovers and dramatizes the effects of poverty in an age which witnessed huge differences between social classes and divided the community into two separate entities. The capitalist economic system created tremendous gaps between the rich who enjoyed a life of prosperity and stability, and the workers who suffered from a total absence of means and resources. By means of Sarah's characterisation, Fowles uncovers the disparities of the Victorian age:

> Ever since then I have suffered from the illusion that even things—mere chairs, tables, mirrors— conspire to increase my solitude. You will never own us, they say, we shall never be yours. But always someone else's. I know this

> is madness, I know in the manufacturing cities poverties and solitude exist in comparison to which I live in comfort and luxury. But when I read of the Unionists' wild acts of revenge, part of me understands. Almost envies them, for they know where and how to wreak their revenge. And I am powerless. (Fowles 1969: 73)

The passage signals the move from the individual to the collective, and personal to social as Sarah's monologue alternates between the 'I' and other parties such as the manufacturing cities and Unionists. Fowles uses the intermediary of Sarah's character first to give depth to the story of the fallen woman, and highlights that it is not trivial or innocuous insofar as it does not stop at the moral, but rather entails a socio-political dimension. Furthermore, such use also foregrounds his project of social critique through hints at Marxism by means of the reference to Unionism and class struggle. Accordingly, Charles "had felt much more sympathy for her behavior than he had shown; he could imagine the slow, tantalizing agonies of her life as a governess; how easily she might have fallen into the clutches of such a plausible villain as Varguennes" (Fowles 1969: 75). Rather subtly, Sarah's character is slightly detached from the model of the villain, as Charles believes Varguennes is the one who is at fault. This narrative twist then hints at Sarah's role-playing skill, for she simply impersonates villainy. What is innovative about Sarah's character then, is that she impersonates the figure of the fallen woman without actually being so, thus, displaying her demonic nature. In fact, by means of role-playing, Sarah gives the impression that she is a villain while it is possible to claim that she is innocent from the vice of promiscuity. What makes Nina Auerbach's study of the angel/ demon dichotomy pertinent in the study of Sarah's character is how the angelic character often appears to cross over to the demon side of the binary. This move occurs when the angel performs those traits traditionally associated with the demonic. The angel-demon uses her performance simply to gain power not formally found in the limited angel role. Rejecting the limitations society imposes upon her, Sarah longs for freedom.

Fowles's narrative points out that Sarah's villainous characterisation is influenced by external factors: the culture of the Victorian age as well as the culture of the approaching twentieth-century. First, her decision to make up a story about her fall from chastity and knowingly assume the title of the fallen woman despite the certain repercussions of her social rejection is driven by Victorian society's prejudices vis-à-vis unchaste women involved in romantic liaisons outside the binds of marriage. Furthermore, later in the narrative when she chooses to live with the Pre-Raphaelites, her character gradually evolves as she turns into a free

woman of the Modern World. She is influenced by the Pre-Raphaelites' lifestyle since she accepts to live under their roof while such behaviour is inappropriate and inacceptable in England, dresses in new fabrics and extravagant colours and speaks more assuredly and confidently. In addition, she publicly raises a daughter born outside marriage, unforgivable in her traditional Victorian society. Because of such nonconformity, some critics went as far as to contend that Sarah is simply "unrepresentable as Victorian" or at least "another Victorian" (Fletcher 2003: 33), or an "outsider within" (Lenz 2008: 101).

Fowles then, reverses Ms Braddon's presentation of the demon/angel woman on numerous levels. While Lady Audley maintains her angelic appearance often dictated by how others see her, she utilises her darker and more mysterious side in order to gain power and freedom. Sarah on the contrary, maintains a demonic appearance in order to achieve the same objectives. While both novelists focus on shifting personas, their heroines follow two opposite trajectories. While Robert Audley finds himself enamoured with what he sees as the manifestation of the ideal, Charles is intrigued by the demonic and mysterious in Sarah. As Braddon experiments with the idea of a woman who is not herself angelic, but is consistently described and defined in this way according to what others want and must see in her, Fowles chooses the other woman who performs the demonic, a woman usually on the periphery of both society and literature. Auerbach assigns to these demon/angel female representations a type of supernatural power, a power which males recognize on the literary scene and somewhat fear. The angel's and the demon's inexplicable and supernatural power seems to lie within their ability to enact personas that are equally interchangeable. Indeed, Charles repeatedly refers to Sarah as "mystery", for it is precisely the sentiment of uncertainty and constant confusion which overwhelms him, as "he became increasingly unsure of the frontier between the real Sarah and the Sarah he had created in so many such dreams: the one Eve personified, all mystery and love and profundity, and the other a half-scheming, half-crazed governess from an obscure seaside town" (Faber 1969: 183).

In brief, Sarah's character is innovative in comparison to Victorian protagonists insofar as she does not attempt to hide the demonic underneath an angelic appearance, but openly embraces her wild and transgressive nature as the French lieutenant's woman hence, becoming the embodiment of the New World. Sarah's wickedness is a sign of her power because she is the one who chooses to construct such an image of and about herself. She fabricates the story of her loss of virginity and assumes the position of a fallen woman who lost her honour in order to avoid being represented as such by Victorian society. Constantly "[attempting] to become unstoried", she constructs her destiny, she writes her own text (Tarbox 1996: 89). Mahinur

Akşehir Uygur goes as far as to contend that Sarah's deliberate wickedness is a manifestation of freedom, for "[r]ather than portraying the wicked women as victims of a male-dominated society, [Fowles] prefers to grant wickedness to Sarah as a power position that would grant her freedom from the conventional codes of Victorian society" (Akşehir Uygur 2014: 177).

2. Sisterhood and Motherhood: Interconnectedness and Mutuality in Female Relationships

The Victorian novel of sensation usually revolves around a seemingly-virtuous heroine. Besides, one of the key motifs of sensation is a love triangle which involves a male protagonist, a heroine, and a counterpart, usually construed as her antagonist. Thus, the stakes for the sensational heroine are to overcome the different obstacles to win her suitor's appreciation all the while maintaining her virtuous nature. At the end of the journey, the heroine must preserve her moral superiority and ethics compared to her duplicitous and scheming antagonist. Hence, stereotypical representations tend to divide female characters of sensation in terms of dialogic essentialisations: angel/ demon, saint/ evil, protagonist/ antagonist.

Though this dialogism may be considered as a constant narrative structure and a recurrent pattern in the tradition of sensation, in recent decades however, with the advance of postcritical theories, some scholars like Frederick Jameson and Matthew Price have proposed new readings of some narrative traditions, precisely "the fiction of active, heroic protagonism" (Price 2019: 246). Instead of nineteenth-century heroes who occupy a central position in the narrative, one must consider the role of minor characters that undermine the former's strength. This phenomenon referred to by Jameson as the "deterioration of protagonicity" implies that agency in the narrative is not exclusively associated with the protagonist, but distributed variedly (Jameson 2013: 96). Similarly, Price who is interested in studying the influence of 'inactive' characters on the narrative form of fiction notes that characters' agency varies not only according to their significance or importance in the plot, but also to "[their] relations to the crowd of helpers, bystanders, and opponents that surround [them]" (Price 2019: 247). In other words, the hero's journey is not only defined by their own decision-making, or marked by their own failure or success. The plot moves forward thanks to the participation of other secondary characters who make action and activity possible.

Seen from this perspective, traditional formalism which considers that the different actors of the plot have specific roles to perform in relation to other characters can be of great value to the study of the relationship between female characters in neo-Victorian fiction.

Among these different actors, I am interested mainly in the agent of the 'donor' which is defined by Vladimir Propp in Russian folktales "as the figure who provides the hero with a magical agent necessary to defeat the villain" (Propp cited in Price 2019: 247). Jameson and Bruce Robbins argue that even though this figure has a secondary role compared to the hero, it is "the real heart of the narrative" (Robbins 2007: 41). These mediating donors come to disturb the traditional triangle of hero, villain and object of desire, the same triangle establishing the tradition of sensation. Hence, instead of having rival female characters, we are confronted with new models of female relationships no longer founded on rivalry and antagonism, but rather on cooperation and assistance.

Indeed, neo-Victorian fiction comes to revise the traditional model of female relationships by putting to the fore the notions of female solidarity and sisterhood. The protagonist is always aided by and/or rushes to the rescue of another female character. Furthermore, female characters who are traditionally written to be antagonists turn into companions, as is the case in Faber's text. Sugar and Caroline – prostitutes working in a very competitive field – share a relationship of true friendship and companionship. They are each other's confidantes and supporters, there are no feelings of jealousy or envy between the two, especially from Caroline's side considering her less advantageous socio-economic position. Furthermore, Sugar and Agnes – mistress and wife – have always been defined in patriarchal literary tradition as eternal enemies with the former attempting to supplant the latter. Faber imagines a different relationship between Sugar and Agnes based on sympathy, compassion and assistance especially on Sugar's part. In Waters's text as well, Sue and Maud – two characters originally drawn by Mrs Sucksby to be predator and prey in her plot – turn into lovers who are conscious of each other's lacks and deficiencies and willing to support each other after multiple plot twists and revelations. Thus, both Faber and Waters re-imagine traditional female relationships often founded on feud and competition investing in the notions of female sisterhood and solidarity. This new model of female relationships however, does not appear in Fowles's novel. This may be because Sarah is intended to be an independent woman of the New World who is determined to draw her own path towards freedom. Thus, my study of female solidarity will revolve around Faber's and Waters' texts. Furthermore, what is equally remarkable in these new female relationships is the weight of the institution of motherhood on the protagonist' identity formation. In fact, Sugar, Maud and Sue are influenced by their matrilineal heritage, the weight of their mothers' pasts as well as decisions is ever-present in their journeys of their self-exploration. Besides, in the endings of the narratives, both Sugar in Faber's text and Sarah in Fowles's text are associated with their role of motherhood, a role

usually attributed in the Victorian age to a private sphere of limited possibilities. Thus, all three authors reconsider the meaning of motherhood insofar as they explore its potential as a means for individuation and happiness.

2.1 A Female 'Other' for Individuation: Rewriting Female Antagonism as Solidarity

In his investigation of the impact of secondary characters on plot, Price develops a larger model which includes the different agent-forms, combining Propp's and Greimas's models. He divides characters into protagonists' helpers (Propp's friendly and unfriendly donors: benefactors and adversaries encouraging the hero to take action) and antagonists' helpers (Greimas's antidonors: deceived victims or unwitting helpers exploited by villains) in order "to formalize a theory of mediated, codependent (in)activity" (Price 2019: 256). In other words, this model includes various types of secondary agents who impact the hero's evolution in narrative, either directly by assisting him or indirectly by assisting his antagonist. While Price applies this model to study character organisation in Charles Dickens' fiction, it should illuminate my reading of the female characters in both Faber and Waters.

In Faber's novel, Agnes is a character in-between activity and passivity. Though she is initially constructed as a perfect angel, she demonstrates some instances of active rebellion and passive resistance in her various attempts to break free from the control of male characters, notably the husband and the doctor. However, what is worthy of note, is that despite this apparent passivity, she manages to inform Sugar's journey in the narrative, for Agnes is a passive helper/ donor. Indeed, as Sugar spies on Agnes in an attempt to know her, she is amazed by her docility and femininity. Her beautiful voice and soft steps while walking around the garden of the Rackham residence both impress her and arouse her curiosity.

> All she can think is: Why has William never told me his wife has such a beautiful voice? To Sugar's ear, Mrs Rackham, even in the grip of terror, sounds like a bird – a rare bird pursued for its song. What man, if he could hear that voice whenever he pleased, wouldn't listen to it as often as possible? What ear could tire of it? It's the voice she wishes she'd been born with: not hoarse and low like her own croak, but pure and high and musical. (Faber 2002: 181)

If the use of bird imagery is a common Victorian trope, Faber's neo-Victorian text renews the image of woman as bird to suggest the dissatisfaction with feminine social constructions. Sugar sees Agnes as an enchanting singing bird behind the walls of her garden. The use of avian imagery shows Agnes as both caged and free, for the walls symbolise entrapment, while movement suggests freedom. This dichotomy also signals the tension between patriarchy and matriarchy. Though Agnes has a remarkably pleasant voice, the narrative hints at her silenced state, for William seems indifferent to her. Furthermore, the admiration Sugar feels for Agnes is one of the factors initiating her plan to infiltrate the Rackham residence. In fact, she is immediately intrigued to see first-hand what kind of life Agnes leads under William's roof and why their marriage seems to be in constant trouble. Though Agnes is unaware of her impact on Sugar, her passivity allows both the plot to move forward and the main protagonist to act. Immediately after such observations, Sugar construes a reliable plan and implicitly suggests to William that she move to the Rackham residence.

A further instance of unknowingly informing Sugar's journey is Agnes's disappearance in the middle of the night. In fact, confined in her room with an aggravating case of psychosis, Agnes no longer has a firm understanding of reality and starts to hallucinate. She imagines a group of angels from the Convent of Health coming to rescue her from the evil in the house and Clara feeding her "bread and milk ... soaked in poison" (Faber 2002: 483). Thus, she is determined to find this Convent and attempts to look for it in the stables of the Rackham residence in a drearily cold night with bare feet and a light dress. Finally managing to find her after a long search, Sugar realizes that in the midst of her hallucinations about the Convent, Agnes confuses her with one of its angels. She takes advantage of this opportunity to impersonate this imaginary figure, reassuring the terrified Agnes about her eventual fate as well as the loss of her books, a point of reference for her happy childhood and memories of safety and security. This highly emotional and dramatic scene is resolved with Sugar's firm utterance: "Soon I'll help you get away from here. Soon, I promise" (Faber 2002: 483). Thus, Agnes's psychotic crisis pushes Sugar to take the decision to save her both physically by helping her escape the mansion and metaphorically by freeing her from William's control. This scene foreshadows the ending of the novel where Agnes, with the help of Sugar's recommendations, ultimately prevails in her evasion.

William's discovery of Agnes's 'The Illuminated Thoughts and Preternatural Reflections of Agnes Pigott', as well as her favourite titles for reading like "From Matter to Spirit: The Result of Ten Years' Experience in Spirit Manifestations, with Advice for Neophytes, by Celia E. De Foy" and "A Finger in the Wound of Christ: Probings into Scriptural

Arcana by Dr Tibet" enrages him insofar as he becomes convinced of his wife's deteriorating mental health which he eventually describes as "madness" and "complete lunacy" (Faber 2002: 486). Ranting about this to Sugar, he ultimately confesses his decision to put Agnes away in an asylum. Following this decision, Sugar immediately starts to lose her esteem and sympathy for William. Though she gives him the reassurance he craves and soothes his apparent pain, she simply cannot accept his decision. "Sugar holds him tight as he sags against her, and her heart fills with shame, she knows that no degradation to which she has ever consented, no abasement she's ever pretended to enjoy, can compare in lowness to this" (Faber 2002: 489). Thus, Agnes's reading choices provoke a complete reversal in the protagonist's relationship with the main male character as well as the female characters. The extract highlights both Sugar's detachment from William and solidarity with Agnes. Sugar and Agnes are soul sisters who share a strong bond of friendship, trust and mutual aid. In contrast, the relationship between Sugar and William is that of interest – social and financial for Sugar and mostly physical and emotional for William – and can be reduced to a simple business bargain. In her inactivity, Agnes manages to overturn the balance of power, gaining Sugar's reliable support.

From the beginning of the narrative, the narrator avoids characterising Sugar and Agnes's relationship as one of antagonism and jealousy. Sugar feels nothing but sympathy and compassion towards Agnes, she pities her lack of social awareness and lucidity as well as her frail physical state and vulnerability. On one of their nights out during the Season, Sugar realizes that Agnes is going to be a victim of robbery since her purse is not well guarded. She desperately wants to protect her from such intrusive action. She exclaims: "She must warn Mrs Rackham! How can she not warn Mrs Rackham! How can she just stand here, a mute accomplice to this parasite?" (Faber 2002: 279). Thus, the narrative subtly follows the birth of a relationship of sisterhood between the two female characters. Hence, when Agnes falls in the street outside the opera room, Sugar does not hesitate and leaps to her rescue. The scene described as a moment of unison between a mother figure and her child reflects another dimension of female solidarity.

> Sugar kneels at the body's side. She reaches her hand into the darkness under the soft blonde hair and cups one of Agnes's cheeks in her palm, feeling the warmth of it—the fleshy heat of it--smooth and alive like her own naked bosom. She lifts Agnes's face off the cold, gritty cobbles, and her fingers tingle. (Faber 2002: 296)

Gestures like “leaning close to Agnes’s ear” and “squeezing Agnes’s shoulders tightly” focus on the corporeal aspect in both protagonists’ relationship and manifestly express tenderness and affection (Faber 2002: 296). Borrowing Vittoria Faga’s claim that hands are used as a tool for characterisation in Faber’s novel, Sugar’s use of her hands manifestly corroborates the reversal of the antagonistic representations of relationships between wives and mistresses. Faber subverts the Victorian patriarchal model of triangular relationships insofar as the mistress does not aim to supplant the wife in order to occupy a more privileged position, closer to the male patriarch. Furthermore, though she is eager to know everything about Agnes, Sugar is not interested in omitting her from the family picture. Sugar’s protective gestures and Agnes’s trembling frail body align them more with a mother and a daughter than with a mistress and a wife. As sisterhood develops into motherhood, it is possible to argue that Faber proposes maternalism as one of the keys to resolve the narrative. In fact, it is Sugar’s capacity for motherhood that brings female characters closer to each other and rescues them from a life of suffering and imprisonment: Agnes is rescued from William’s tyrannical supervision and control, as well as the imminent bondage of the mental asylum, and Sophie is saved from a life of isolation and indifference thanks to Sugar’s motherly actions.

As the narrative moves forward, Sugar is gradually detached from William and feels closer to Agnes. While William could always count on Sugar to share his convictions and support his decisions, she surprises him by standing up to him and questioning the validity of his position. Such disagreement foreshadows both characters’ opposite opinions vis-à-vis Agnes’s transfer to the lunatic asylum. While William is intent on putting Agnes away in a mad house, Sugar unreluctantly voices her disapproval. “Even as the words slip out of her lips, she regrets them; a man requires constant, tireless flattery to keep him from turning nasty; one careless remark can make his fragile forbearance shrivel” (Faber 2002: 488).

As William confesses his decision to lock Agnes in an asylum, Sugar is disturbed. She soon finds herself restless and loses sleep over the matter. Vis-à-vis William, she feels both disgust and pity, and scorn for breaking his reassuring promises to Agnes. “For the first time in many, many months, Sugar feels disgust at the thought of William Rackham’s touch” (Faber 2002: 494). Subsequently, she makes the ultimate decision “In the final waking moments before her soul lurches into sleep, Sugar knows, at last, what she must do” (Faber 2002: 495). The reader understands that Sugar plans to stop William’s scheme to send Agnes to the asylum. Sugar helps Agnes escape from the house before the doctor comes to move her to the lunatic asylum, as she gives her a number of commands to follow to reach her destination and deliberately omits the name of the convent to convince her that her destination is indeed the

Convent of Health. Though the ending remains quite mysterious and the closure unclear about Agnes' fate, one may suggest that the reader is optimistic about her survival and successful arrival to the Convent. At least, Sugar is certain that Agnes has finally managed to escape William's domination and the doctor's constant intrusions. Among sisters and nurtured by religious faith, Agnes will be able to blossom and regain control of a life of her own.

If we explore the notion of solidarity as a sociological concept, Alain Supiot's definition may help elucidate our investigation of the relationship between Sugar and Agnes. Though he enumerates five diverse yet complementary forms of solidarity, what is particularly interesting to our study is his definition of "*la solidarité familiale*": "Les solidarités familiales ont une dimension affective et coopérative et s'expriment par les secours et les soins prodigués directement aux proches. Fondée sur des liens personnels, la solidarité est source d'une interdépendance qui peut recéler le meilleur ou le pire" (Supiot 2015: 33)[24]. In light of Supiot's insistence on the affective dimension of the relationship, as well as its potential to create a sort of mutual dependence and cooperation, the relationship between Sugar and Agnes can be seen as manifesting a form of familial solidarity which enables Agnes to achieve individuation thanks to Sugar's support. Borrowing Marx's notion of individuation[25], individuation may be defined as socialisation or collectiveness, for "Marx's concept of individuation distinctively [emphasizes] (…) the social and historical context of individuality" (Miller 1979: 6). In fact, early on, the narrative highlights Agnes's isolation, for she is depicted constantly "[a]lone in her bedroom" (Faber 2002: 270), a room "so often darkened in the daylight hours" (Faber 2002: 445). Towards the end however, Agnes's character is associated with verbs of mobility like 'go', 'leave' and even 'disappear' or 'vanish', thus suggesting the change in her state. What happens throughout the text is a simultaneous detachment from her initial state of solitude, and connection with (an)other social being(s) (one may also include the imaginary Sisters at the Convent).

Interestingly however, some critics like Diana Otilia Cordea read Agnes and Sugar as foes and consider that

[24] Alain Supiot writes: "Family solidarity has an affective and cooperative dimension and is expressed by the relief and care provided directly to loved ones. Based on personal ties, solidarity is the source of an interdependence that can harbour the best or the worst" (Supiot 2015: 33; my own translation).

[25] Though Marx's analysis of individuation is heavily grounded in class structure, the ideas of alienation and the necessity of social rapports, not those of exploitation, but rather of mutual aid, help elucidate my reading of female relationships.

> The great gap and differences between the central feminine figures in the novel, Agnes and Sugar, express, the outstanding progress of women's status throughout the Victorian era, from uncultivated, submissive housewives, to new, strong-headed and educated individuals who fight for their rights and liberties with sometimes more logic and perseverance than their male counterparts. (Cordea 2014: 20)

Yet, one may argue that Faber advocates a new female spirit not founded on competition, but on mutual evolution, thus "reinforcing the suggestion that women achieve happiness by helping others" (Shand 2017: 30). Furthermore, by helping Agnes, Sugar matures and acquires more self-knowledge of her true desires and ambitions. She is no longer interested in climbing the social ladder by means of deception and manipulation, but rather seeks a life of self-fulfilment and individuality. Read in this light, one may suggest that female individuation in Faber's text takes place through socialisation. In addition, one may read the protagonists' relationship against a traditional view of opposite gender roles, for the ending celebrates complementarity rather than opposition, harmony rather than discordance.

Faber is interested in female communities. In fact, the choice to focus on the social group of prostitutes can only be driven by his desire to highlight this female union. Michael Levenson's investigation of individuality in some modernist texts may clarify our exploration of Faber's twenty-first-century text. Interested in studying the relationship "between individual experience and collective representations" (Levenson 1991: 4), he "portrays the dissolution of the coherent, stable individual self as the nineteenth-century novel understood it" following "a dialectical pattern in which the destruction of character eventually yields a new relationship between self and other" (Levenson cited in West 1998: 81). Similarly, one may argue that by opting for female characters that participate in each other's self-achievement, Faber equally participates in the same project of creating characters which are individuated thanks to the other in narrative. In fact, the text puts to the fore how Sugar and Caroline's relationship embodies this mutual nurture and protection, which becomes synonymous with togetherness.

> [R]eaching over to Caroline's face, she gently wipes the fleck of cream off her chin. The older woman recoils slightly, startled at this unexpected physical intimacy outside working hours. (…) Briefly they embrace and, as always when they do, Caroline is surprised by how awkward and tentative

> Sugar is; how the girl's body, so notorious for its pliability in the hands of men, feels gawky and stiff in the arms of a friend. (Faber 2002: 31/32)

The friends' discomfort and even embarrassment as they embrace, suggested by the lexical field of uneasiness ('recoils', 'startled', 'awkward', 'gawky') shows that they are not habituated to such display of emotion and feeling, particularly physical sensation. Yet, the same awkwardness also reveals true and sincere feelings between the two women brought closer together by similar pasts of hardship as well as similar presents of prostitution. Sharing simple pleasures such as eating a cake and an ice-cream or taking a stroll in Trafalgar Square allows both women not only to feel safe and secure in the company of each other but also at liberty to enjoy themselves away from the pressure of their line of work. "The two women giggle, emboldened by that old girls-together chemistry. For so much of their lives, they have to be careful to avoid any word or gesture that might hinder the fickle swell of men's pride; what a relief it is to throw away inhibition!" (Waters 2002: 24/25) Indeed, both women enjoy one of the simplest pleasures of the world with much contentment. The narrative highlights this quietude and serenity and once again, Faber makes a reference to the maternal role Sugar has: "As for Sugar, what amuses her? She's regarding Caroline with a benign smile, like a mother who can't quite believe what simple things delight her child" (Waters 2002: 27). In other words, from Sugar's perspective, solidarity inevitably entails motherhood. Though she is "a girl still in her teens", Sugar has a great capacity for maternalism (Waters 2002: 27). Her sympathy towards the women around her suggests her role of motherhood, which will be analysed in the following section.

This model of female solidarity is also established in Waters's text through the intermediary of Sue and Maud. Initially, Mrs Sucksby's plot defines Sue as a manipulator and Maud as a victim, later to be reversed as their roles shift. In both scenarios, Sue and Maud are never meant to be accomplices, but rather enemies. Indeed, their journeys are defined by their constant attempts to win against each other, as well as by the mutual feelings of scorn, rage and even jealousy. The prejudices they hold against each other from the start announce the tone of their relationship. On the night of her departure for Briar, Sue thinks of Maud and tries to imagine what she looks like and how she behaves. "But, she was very dark. Gentleman had said that the other Maud, his Maud, was fair and rather handsome. But when I thought of her, I could picture her only as thin and brown and straight, like the kitchen chair that I had tied the corset to" (Waters 2002: 45). Despite Gentleman's description, Sue thinks of Maud as an 'Other', caricaturing her as everything that lies outside of her self. Her position recalls Edward Said's

theorization of the Self as "the familiar (Europe, the West, "us")" and the Other as "strange (the Orient, the east, "them")" (Said 1978: 43). Sue assumes a Eurocentric position which reflects the underlying hegemonic structure in Gentleman's plan. While she detains power, Maud is to be relegated to the position of victim. In other words, from the beginning, Sue takes a Western identity which is a superior one in comparison to all others.

The same process is presented from Maud's perspective in the second part of the narrative. Based on what Gentleman tells her, she draws a portrait of Sue assembling her character piece by piece. Thus, their antagonistic relationship is first foregrounded by unfavourable and prejudiced opinions of one another. Following the dreams, comes the meeting with the real person. From the glass of her window, Maud observes Sue as she gets closer both to Briar and to her. "She holds a hood about her face. She is dressed darkly, and seems small. But, she is real" (Waters 2002: 237). Maud as well thinks of Sue as other, by means of the dark colour. Besides, she does not think of her as a person, but rather a tool, a means in her plan to escape. "She is before me: Susan—Susan Smith— Suky Tawdry—the gullible girl, who is to take my life from me and give me freedom" (Waters 2002: 238). The girls' first encounter does not by any means foreshadow a close relationship or any sort of complicity or camaraderie. The girls are so different physically and – as is revealed later – morally that it seems unlikely that they get along. This incompatibility is even dramatized as Sue internally mocks Maud thinking that she is silly and calling her "a pigeon" (Waters 2002: 66), an idiotic girl ignorant of what's going on around her, precisely the plot concocted by Gentleman to rob her of her inheritance.

Interestingly however, the narrative soon establishes a contrast between expectations and reality, another instance of the multiple dichotomies of the novel. Susan is different from what Maud had imagined, which foreshadows the eventual turn of events and the romantic feelings they will develop. Maud's long monologue dramatizes this unpredictable character.

> Sharper than expectation, comes dismay. I have supposed she will resemble me, I have supposed she will be handsome: but she is a small, slight, spotted thing, with hair the colour of dust. Her chin comes almost to a point. Her eyes are brown, darker than mine. Her gaze is now too frank, now sly: she gives me a single, searching look that takes in my gown, my gloves, my slippers, the very clocks upon my stockings. Then she blinks—remembers her training, I suppose —makes a hasty curtsey. She is pleased with the curtsey, I can tell. She is pleased with me. She thinks me a fool. The idea upsets me, more than it should. I think, you have come to Briar to ruin me. I step to take her hand.

> Won't you colour, or tremble, or hide your eyes? But she returns my gaze and her fingers— which are bitten, about the nails—are cold and hard and perfectly steady in mine. (…) I draw her to me, to lead her to the fire. She walks. She sits. She is warm and quick. I touch her arm. It is as slender as Agnes's, but hard. (…) She speaks. Her voice is not at all how I have dreamed it, but light and pert; though she tries to make it sweeter. (Waters 2002: 238)

The passage is centred on the contrast between Maud's vision of Sue and reality. Before her arrival to Briar, Maud imagines the kind of girl Sue would be: conniving, devious and even evil. Yet, the narrative reverses such prediction. First, Waters stresses the girls' physical difference, so as to suggest the absence of competitiveness, by means of linkers of contrast, as well as the comparative adjective. Besides, Maud's scrutinous analysis of Sue reveals the girl's simplicity, and rather inoffensive nature. The repetition of the clause 'subject + verb' in ('She walks', 'She sits', 'She speaks') signals docility and submissiveness. In addition, the instance of Maud's stream of consciousness highlights the gap between what Maud anticipates of her supposed foe, and how the latter reacts. Indeed, by means of this divergence, Waters seems to reject essentialisations in typical representations of female antagonists. While villainesses and antagonists are usually depicted in terms of power and cruelty, Sue does not seem to conform to this stereotypical representation, for she shows no signs of enmity or malice. Progressively, as the girls start to know each other and get used to each other's company, Maud realizes Sue is quite nice, gentle and innocent. She even starts to experience some moments of doubt. "Nor does Sue suppose that the last time she kissed her aunt's hard cheek was the last of all her life. I think of that; and I am gripped with what I take to be pity. It is hard, painful, surprising: I feel it, and am afraid" (Waters 2002: 254). Maud's innocent nature briefly takes over and the girl is alarmed at her potential feeling of sympathy towards Sue, once again foreshadowing the eventual nurturing emotions. By means of an authorial twist in the plot, this non-antagonistic relationship grows into a romantic one. Not only are both characters not construed as antagonists, they are eventually turned into lovers.

Furthermore, in the tradition of sensation, either protagonist or antagonist eventually finds death at the end. In Waters's text, the ultimate confrontation scene between Sue and the different people present at Mrs Sucksby's is rife with suspense and sensation alluding to the possible death of one of the female characters. As the different exchanges between the characters are reported and the characters' behaviours and emotions are described, there is an ominous tone underlying the scene. Characters take different positions: those who want the

truth revealed and those who strive to keep it hidden. Mrs Sucksby, still intent on maintaining her plot of deception, attempts to dissuade Sue from the crime to be committed by sweettalking to her and targeting her affection. "'Dear girl,' she said, moving back, 'what's silver, in this house? What's silver, compared with the joy of seeing your face'" (Waters 2002: 491)? John Vroom hints at the fact that Sue had been double tricked by both Gentleman and Mrs Sucksby: "John whistled. 'Double-cross,' he said. 'Nice work but—oh!' He laughed. 'You pigeon!'" (Waters 2002: 492) Nonetheless, the truth is not revealed and Sue is kept unawares. Tension keeps on rising and the mystery is prolonged in the style of Victorian sensation. Dramatic irony is also prolonged as Sue engages in an emotional long dialogue with Mrs Sucksby telling her about the torment and suffering that she endured during her imprisonment in the asylum. The rising tension, the ominous tone, and the accelerated rhythm of narration suggest that the narrative must inevitably end with one of the female characters' victory and the other's subsequent death. Waving her knife at the different characters, it seems that Sue's hatred shifts from one character to another: she starts with Maud being the object of her rage and vengeance moving to Mrs Sucksby by whom Sue feels betrayed and abandoned. This feeling is intensified when Sue observes that Maud has changed since coming into the Boroughs: she has a different allure, has developed a different dialect and wears different clothing. She believes that Maud had supplanted her and taken her place "Was being a lady not enough for you, that you must come to the Borough and take the things that were ours?'" (Waters 2002: 491) Thus, Sue's question alludes to the text's unavoidable tragic end. In the tradition of Greek tragedies, it seems that the scene represents the ultimate climax of the plot before the denouement, for despite Maud's warnings, Sue is still overwhelmed with anger and intent on killing her:

> 'You think I don't know danger? You think that, in looking at you, I'm not seeing danger with a face—a false face, with an actress mouth—with lying blushes, and two brown treacherous eyes?' The words were like clinker on my tongue: they were awful, but I must spit them out or swallow them and choke. She held my gaze, and her eyes did not seem treacherous, at all. I turned the knife. The blade took up the light of the lamp and sent it darting across her cheek. 'I came here to kill you,' I said. (Waters 2002: 494)

The lexical field of rage ('a false face', 'an actress mouth', 'lying blushes', 'treacherous eyes') not only unveils Sue's hysteric emotional state, but also capitalizes on deception and deceitfulness at the heart of the characters' relationship. The scene may be allegorically read as

denouement acts in Greek tragedies which most often end with the death of either protagonist or antagonist, or both. Like Sophocles' *Antigone*, Antigone hangs herself, Haemon, in desperate agony, kills himself as well, Eurydice, the queen, also kills herself, cursing Creon, on hearing the news of her son's death, and finally Creon, alone and desperate, accepts responsibility for all the tragedy and prays for a quick death. In Waters's text however, tension is suddenly relieved and the author, by means of a plot twist, spares both female central characters and brings death upon another male secondary character. It is possible to argue that Waters revises the tradition of Greek tragedy in order to deconstruct the model of female antagonism in Victorian sensation.

At the end of the narrative, truth comes in the form of the letter written by Maud's mother before her death which Mrs Sucksby kept hidden in her bodice for eighteen years. The written text not only unveils the real identities of the daughters Susan Lilly and Maud Sucksby and their respective mothers Marianne and Grace, but also Maud's good intentions to protect Sue from the truth. The letter brings resolution to the sensational plot, for not only does Sue learn the truth about the past Mrs Sucksby hid from her, the letter finally allows her to come to terms with the nature of her feelings towards Maud. "To think I thought she was a spider that had got you all in her web" (Waters 2002: 537). Waters employs the motif of the letter, to dramatize how the truth changes the past as well as the future, insofar as Sue decides to look for Maud and confess her true feelings. Though Waters pays special attention to construct a sensational plot, in which all events, characters and twists, hint at the inevitable antagonistic relationship between the female central characters, the narrative unexpectedly reverses the course of events and paves the way for a declaration of love:

> For all this time I had had as it were a sort of dam about my heart, keeping out my love: now the walls had burst, my heart was flooded, I thought I should drown… My love grew level, though, as I grew well again. It grew level, and calm—it seemed to me at last that I had never been so calm in all my life. (…) 'but I mean to find her. I don't care if it takes me all my life. I'll find her out, and tell her what I know. She might have gone away. She might be on the other side of the world. She might be married! I don't care. I'll find her, and tell her everything…' (Waters 2002: 538)

Waters employs water-imagery to signal the flow of emotions. In contrast to Sue's previous monologue, this passage denotes fluidity instead of sharpness, smoothness instead of jerkiness.

Besides, the repetition of numerous clauses and/or structures gives the rhythm steadiness and tranquillity. In the space of a few dozen pages, Waters manages to drastically change Sue's character, as her monologue unveils. No longer filled with hatred and rage, Sue is overwhelmed with a feeling of remorse and love for Maud. This paves the way for the final climactic point of the narrative where a total shift in positions takes place: the long-destined-to-remain antagonists are finally allowed to become co-heroines. Reunited at Briar after the death of most of the characters of the narrative, Sue and Maud share a moment of mutual confessions about their pasts, respective relationships with Mrs Sucksby and reciprocal feelings.

Both Faber and Waters then reverse antagonistic models of female relationships as they construct their heroines. While Agnes and Sugar become sisters in Faber's novel, Sue and Maud become lovers in Waters's. Though the authors use different approaches to female relationships insofar as the former revises the wife/ mistress relationship and invests in female sisterhood, while the latter opts for lesbian love, both seem intent on revising traditional perceptions of female antagonism by putting to the fore solidarity and complicity. Interestingly, it is only by means of these peaceful relationships that the heroines manage to find resolution within the plot.

2.2 Complex Genealogies and Individual Identity: Mothers and Daughters

The novels of this corpus, through the intermediary of their female characters Sugar, Agnes, Sarah, Sue and Maud, celebrate female individuality and independence, especially since the plots are foregrounded on the protagonists' quest for freedom and liberation from all forms of patriarchal control. Remarkably, the institutions of marriage and motherhood which can be used as patriarchal tools to supervise women, are constantly questioned by the neo-Victorian novelists. Fowles not only discusses the monotony of bourgeois marital love by means of Charles' and Ernestina's relationship, but ultimately ponders the possibility of a liberated womanhood within marriage via two of the three endings of the narrative in which Sarah's character eventually refuses the idea of marriage to preserve her autonomy and confesses to be content with her role as mother. Fowles's fictional representation reflects the increasing number of unmarried women in late-Victorian era, which led to rising worry about the deterioration of the institution of marriage and consequently, the stability of the status of married women strictly dependent on their husbands. Similarly, Faber examines the status of woman as wife by means of Agnes's journey within the family household, insofar as he capitalizes on his female character's obliteration within the marital relationship so as to dramatize her ultimate escape.

On the other hand, the institution of motherhood is tackled from various vantage points in the novels. By means of Agnes's troubled experience of motherhood and the adverse impacts of Mrs Sucksby's motherhood on her daughter's identity formation, Faber contemplates the consequences of an inappropriate model of motherhood on female subjectivity. In the same vein, Waters pays special attention to accentuating the perils of (the absence of) motherhood, insofar as the heritage of a mother's madness and criminality weighs heavily on both Sue and Maud. In fact, the neo-Victorian novelists revisit Victorian ideology in order to imagine narratives that would allow their neo-Victorian protagonists the possibilities for an individuated subjectivity within/ regardless of both institutions of marriage and motherhood. Ann Heilmann contends that "a panoramic view of centuries of female subjection" is meant to point out that locating the existing apparatuses of oppression is not enough, but digging deeper into their social and ideological backgrounds to analyse their evolution and impacts on institutions of marriage and motherhood specifically, are rather essential (Heilmann 2004: 159).

The Victorians, and particularly towards the *fin-de-siècle*, were extremely interested in addressing the significance of marriage and the progress of women's rights, a fight which eventually resulted into revising the legislation of married women's right to property[26]. The end of the century witnessed a debate centred on the persistent call to guarantee equal rights between unmarried and married women. In two major novels of 1895, Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* and Grant Allen's *The Woman who Did*, the heroines explicitly refuse legal marriage. Such position led Margaret Oliphant – a great supporter of traditional marriage – to attack what she called 'The Anti-Marriage League' and explicitly object to alarming notions such as unfaithfulness and multiple partners. Progressively, the different stands vis-à-vis marriage paved the way for the New Woman fiction raising the Woman Question. At the end of the century, we find the female character constantly instable, at war with herself and the world, thus representing what Heilmann refers to as "the spirit of the modern world … creedless, searching, restless, ravenous, egotistical, sick and sorry" (Heilmann 2004: 171).

It is precisely from this angle that Fowles constructs his character Sarah, so as to treat the impact of marriage and motherhood on female identity. In fact, the transgressive position taken by Hardy's heroines is reverberated by Fowles's Sarah. Indeed, she deliberately chooses celibacy and proclaims her independence outside the bonds of marriage. Within the legal frame of marriage, the sexual act between husband and wife was seen as a tool for procreation, essential for continuity. Outside wedlock, it was regarded contradictorily, insofar as it was a

[26] In 1922, the Law of Property Act enabled a husband and wife to inherit each other's property. Under legislation passed in 1926, women were allowed to hold and dispose of property on the same terms as men.

pleasure granted to men who enjoy themselves in brothels, and a sin, denied to women who would be automatically associated with whores. In Fowles's novel, the scene where Sarah charms Charles to succumb to temptation illustrates her perception of sexual relations. She is first a vulnerable young woman with a twisted ankle crying assumedly out of despair and heart ache and weeping: "I thought never to see you again" (Fowles 1969: 148). Then, she becomes more daring and approaches him as "her hand reached shyly out and rested on his" (Fowles 1969: 148). She ultimately assumes the figure of the passionate wild woman unafraid of the sexual act in order to satisfy her sexual desires. While Charles retreats, "her arms came round him and pressed his head closer" (Fowles 1969: 149). In fact, the act of sexual intercourse with Charles is highly significant of her free will. It is essentially initiated by Sarah, as the scene is charged with foreplay on her part. She makes use of her see-through white dress, her voluptuous hair, and her sensuous body to attract Charles. The act does not take place for the purpose of pleasing his sexual appetite, nor to force him to marry her. It only takes place because she desires it, which is almost a scandalous taboo in the Victorian period, signalling once more how Fowles re-imagines Victorian sexuality. For the sexual act to be seen in terms of pleasure and jouissance outside the legal frame of marriage is a daring move on Fowles's part which epitomises Sarah's bold character. In a chapter she entitles "Freedom Through Artifice", Linda Hutcheon points out that Sarah's entire liaison with Charles is planned, precisely executed and given both a tragic and happy outcome solely by her decisions. Hutcheon is of the opinion that the protagonist is able to command a hold upon Charles and take an upper hand in the relationship unlike most Victorian women and, thereby, Sarah is the "prime mover" and "architect" of the romance plot (Hutcheon 1980, chapter 4). In other words, Sarah counter-plays Charles's desire to possess her. In his reading of Fowles's text from a Lacanian perspective, Keith Booker posits that "[i]f Lacan is right that feminine sexuality embodies the potential for a special access to jouissance (that is, to the sublime), then it would seem clear that the feminine also presents at least a potential for a special transgressive force" (Booker 1991: 180). By initiating the sexual relationship on the one hand and declaring her desire not to marry on the other, Sarah refuses being contained by a male institution, and thus this strategy finds echoes in Heilmann's analysis of both Sarah Grand and Mona Caird's techniques:

> Like Grand suspicious of male agendas, whether they related to the spiritual, political or aesthetic planes, Caird did not adopt her strategy of constructing a feminine counter-discourse from within, but attacked the patriarchal system more directly by drawing attention to the injurious impact it had on women,

> dramatizing the way in which it worked to underpin the dominant sexual hegemonies and sustain woman-to-woman antagonisms, even when it was represented by women themselves. (Heilmann 2004: 183).

Sarah – being the modern woman she is – embodies the discussion about the status of woman in and outside marriage, as she capitalizes on the capacity to refuse: ""I do not wish to marry. (…) I now live in a world where loneliness is most easy to avoid. And I have found that I treasure it. I do not want to share my life. I wish to be what I am, not what a husband, however kind, however indulgent, must expect me to become in marriage"" (Fowles 1969: 192). Sarah's speech epitomises freedom and liberation by means of the short affirmative clauses, and the argumentation which follows, both reflecting certitude and assuredness. It is possible to argue that her speech manifests her social freedom defined by Richard Lynch as "the opportunity to choose between alternative social 'realities' or support groups, which confirm and strengthen one's identity" (Lynch 2002: 51). Though the latter argues that Sarah fails in achieving social freedom because she is ultimately reduced to a state of alienation (Lynch 2002: 55), one may suggest nonetheless that it is precisely her awareness of and insistence on her chosen solitude which marks her independence and helps her achieve her individualism. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman define individualism as "a combination of awareness of choices among discrepant "realities" and identities, and the ability to construct a self out of the choices available" (Berger and Luckman 1966: 171). In other words, Sarah chooses to construct an alien self in East Lyme, foregrounding her solitude.

Fowles imagines a plot in which a Victorian woman is able to say openly what she was not allowed to, insofar as she points out the limitations of marriage on womanhood. His text echoes the debate New Women initiated more than half a century earlier. While Sarah Grand was an outspoken advocate of sexual chastity and the supremacy of motherhood in her novel *The Heavenly Twins* (1893), Mona Caird's *The Daughters of Danaus* (1894) was a clear attack on the same institution. Similarly, Blanche Alethea Crackanthorpe's polemical article "The Revolt of the Daughters" published in 1894, in which she explicitly questions the necessity of marriage despite being herself the wife of a barrister and the mother of a promising writer, caused much debate among supporters and opponents at the time and consequently posed threat to the traditional institution of marriage. Interestingly, though Sarah refuses to be a wife, she becomes a mother. In the second ending, Fowles hints at the possibility of self-fulfilment and happiness by means of motherhood, as Sarah confesses "I have found new affections. But they are not of the kind you suggest" (Fowles 1969: 191). While the reader is initially tempted to

think that Sarah refers to her relationship with the Pre-Raphaelites, she quickly rejects Charles's insinuation of being Rossetti's mistress, and, I would add, she actually hints at her relationship with her daughter.

In fact, the text prolongs the suspense by means of many references to the promiscuity of the Pre-Raphaelites. The owner of the house is not only closely associated with a person whose name would "make any respectable Victorian of the late 1860s stiffen with disapproval" since his poetry was condemned with horror by John Morley as "the libidinous laureate of a pack of satyrs", but also rumoured to have been entangled in "some orgiastic menage a quatre" (Fowles 1969: 191). Yet, Sarah's speech soon orients the narrative towards another kind of relationship, one of quietude and serenity. "There is a lady in this house who knows me, who understands me better than anyone else in the world" is how Sarah describes her daughter (Fowles 1969: 194). Though vague, the sentence not only puts an end to Charles's imagined flirtatious relationship between Sarah and the Pre-Raphaelites, but also highlights female harmony and complicity by means of an allusion to lesbianism. The use of the comparative adjective, comparison and hyperbole combined, is meant for emphasis and effect: Sarah's character has found resolution thanks to another female character.

Indeed, this same idea is foregrounded in her long monologue addressed to Charles, an emotional and rational speech at once, in which she describes her satisfaction about living with the Pre-Raphaelites and being a mother, and which illustrates Fowles's progressive modern views vis-à-vis womanhood and motherhood:

> I never expected to be happy in life. Yet I find myself happy where I am situated now. I have varied and congenial work—work so pleasant that I no longer think of it as such. I am admitted to the daily conversation of genius. (…) The persons I have met here have let me see a community of honorable endeavor, of noble purpose, I had not till now known existed in this world. (…) Mr. Smithson, I am happy, I am at last arrived, or so it seems to me, where I belong. I say that most humbly. (…) You may think what you will of me, but I cannot wish my life other than it is at the moment. (Fowles 1969: 193)

The passage capitalizes on happiness as a life-objective and a final destination for a woman, not only by means of the repetition of the adjective, but also by its association with the expression 'at last arrived'. Besides, it shows two contradictory lexical fields: feeling and

reason. Though it focuses on emotions of gratitude, it also enumerates a list of arguments which allow Sarah this state of felicity: the importance of the work she does for the Pre-Raphaelites and her interaction with intellectuals bring value and purpose to her life. By juxtaposing these opposite semantic fields, Fowles's text suggests Sarah's sense of wholeness.

Though Sarah does not explicitly mention her daughter, chapter 60 is filled with hints. In fact, the chapter starts with an epigraph by Hardy, where Lalage's name is mentioned. It will eventually be mentioned that Sarah names her daughter Lalage. Besides, the text hints at Sarah's interest in children. Though Charles fervently addresses her, she has "her face hidden from him, down into the greenery below. Somewhere there, children played" (Fowles 1969: 191). Then, as she justifies her rejection of his marriage proposal, she claims that "[her] second reason is [her] present" (Fowles 1969: 193). Ultimately, she introduces the other lady. Indeed, readers are given bits and pieces so as to allow them to conclude that Sarah's ultimate status of happiness is triggered by her role as mother to Lalage. The text succeeds in shifting the reader's perception who is initially inclined to believe that Sarah's new sense of completion is caused by her relationship with the Pre-Raphaelites.

Motherhood is no longer seen as confining or limiting as in early nineteenth-century and early waves of feminism. While Sarah seeks liberation from all conventional codes, she ultimately finds herself 'entangled' (a deliberate choice of word) in a new form of relationship which does not confine her but rather allows her ultimate freedom. Fowles's progressive views epitomise his perception of womanhood. Sarah is not only the New Woman, but she is the New Mother. Actually, Sarah enjoys both free and liberated womanhood all the while relishing in self-fulfilling motherhood. Fowles's narrator describes her:

> She was like no other; more than ever like no other. [Charles] saw London, her new life, had subtly altered her; had refined her vocabulary and accent, had articulated intuition, had deepened her clarity of insight; had now anchored her, where before had been a far less secure mooring, to her basic conception of life and her role in it. Her bright clothes had misled him at first. But he began to perceive they were no more than a factor of her new self-knowledge and self-possession; she no longer needed an outward uniform. (Fowles 1969: 193)

In Fowles' novel, the gendered balance of power is reversed. In the last ending of the novel, Charles humbly admits that to Sarah he was merely "the starched soupirant, the pet donkey",

puzzled by her enigma, wondering whether "[s]he could give only to possess … because possession was so imperative in her that it had to be constantly renewed, could never be satisfied by one conquest only, whether ... but he could not, and would never, know—to possess him was not enough" (Fowles 1969: 199). Thus, the second ending highlights Sarah's nonconventional characterisation since she encompasses individual as well as other characteristics of self-realization. Combining strength, independence, freedom, modernity, motherhood and love, Sarah's character seems to have all attributes to be defined as an active agent of her own will, an epitome of New Womanhood.

The portrayal of motherhood in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* recalls the contrasted representations of motherhood in Ellen Wood's *East Lynne* (1861) through the intermediary of Isabel and the second wife. Unlike Isabel who ultimately escapes her role as an over-invested doting mother, long imprisoning her in the private sphere, the second wife is a modern and rational mother who maintains a balance between motherhood and womanhood, thus preventing the former to take over the latter. Fowles is engaged in the same project of depicting woman's suffering from entrapment within the household and her ultimate dissatisfaction with her private life. Though Ellen Wood hurries to re-establish conventional morality and remind readers of the essentiality of woman's roles as wife and mother by means of Isabel's incessant longing to reunite with her family, she nonetheless warns against the dangers of succumbing to the feminine ideal of motherhood, eventually leading to complete incarceration and even death. By means of Sarah's blossoming as a mother, Fowles holds motherhood sacred yet encourages balance at the same time. Despite her quest of freedom, Sarah is fully absorbed by her role as mother which does not inhibit, but rather liberates her. Like Braddon and Wood who "engage in a complex process of negotiating, and in the end, of revising and rewriting, that feminine tradition of submission and renunciation which was a powerful fact of both literature and life" (Pykett 1994: 50), Fowles manifests this negotiation through his representation of motherhood so as to illustrate its positive impact on subjectivity.

Similarly, in *The Crimson Petal and the White*, Faber revisits sensation novel's definition of the female protagonist in terms of the biological function of procreation and motherhood which was the subtext in all sensation novels. In fact, motherhood could be absent, neglectful, abandoning, or over-invested, and even murderous. The heroine's relation to motherhood dictates her emotional and psychological state and consequently her actions. In her investigation of the course of character creation, Helena Ifill provides a comparative analysis of popular sensation novels in terms of characterisation and highlights the process of complex character formation in sensation fiction. She draws attention to the fact that even though the

genre of sensation focuses mainly on plot and events compared to realist fiction or "novels of characters" that give more psychological and sociological depth to characters, she takes the examples of Collins and Braddon who were able to spark "discussions about determinism and character formation in Victorian society, such as class relations, gender roles, the diagnosis and treatment of insanity, educational reform, and the ethos of self-help" (Ifill 2018: 5). In fact, the author argues that the fictional character is influenced by both external and internal factors notably religion, morality, free will, self-control, criminality, education, insanity and heredity that make its construction a progressive process. One may posit that the matrilineal heritage is one of the internal factors affecting both Agnes and Sugar's identity formation in Faber's novel.

Agnes keeps her mother's photograph in a locked frame which she carries everywhere with her. It is the only object which reminds her of a happy epoch. On the day she loses it, she is immediately overwhelmed with a feeling of loss and disorientation: "Agnes stands frozen in her small square of no-man's-land, still weeping" (Faber 2002: 280). When William implores her to go back home, she confusedly asks "home? (…) as if she can't imagine what fantastical place he might mean" (Faber 2002: 280). She reconverts to the Anglican church to which she used to go with her mother and "dawdles past the seats where she and her mother sat" in an attempt to retrieve the identity she lost (Faber 2002: 289). She is eager to recuperate this history so important and essential to defining who she is. This nostalgic search for the past is the reason she evokes her mother so often in her book.

On the other hand, Agnes holds a very negative image of what motherhood is because of her mother's violent death. She links the monstrous and bloody images of her mother's deathbed with her bloody bed when she gets her menstrual cycle. As Sugar reads Agnes's diaries, she is shocked at the brutality of her writings about and in blood: entire pages marked with thick clots of dark red or purple blood describing the period of five days of menstruation. Agnes writes:

> it's a smear of dried blood in the shape of a crucifix. Nor is this blood from a pinprick on the thumb, solemnising a schoolgirl pledge; this is thicker matter, incorporating a stiff clot at the point of the crucifix where Christ's head might be. Here you see my own blood, Agnes explains underneath. Blood from deep within me, flowing from a hidden wound. Whatever killed my Mama, now kills me. But why? Why, when I am Innocent? […] Give us more of this divine juice! There can be no Rescue in this house where even the Rosary is forbidden. At His command, all who might help me are locked out. On the

> window of my bedroom is the cloud of steam Our Lady's nose made as She pressed against it, and the marks of Her fingers. How I long to lie down! But I will not give them my blood! I shall walk on, round and round my room, writing this in the crook of my arm. Their demon mouths will suck at nothing. When I can walk no longer I shall crawl into the fireplace, and give them such a bitter, ashen broth to feed on! (Faber 2002: 419)

Faber brings together two completely different lexical fields of religion and blood. The first is evoked by means of words like 'crucifix', 'Christ', 'pledge', 'Innocent' as well as the capitalized words which refer to divine power and establish spirituality. The second lexical field highlights the materiality of the human body. Unable to understand the biological phenomenon of menstruation, Agnes explains it with religious and supernatural reasons and concludes that she is simply punished by the Gods for having been one of the causes of her mother's death and living in a non-Catholic house at her stepfather's command. Blood becomes the 'demon' that eats away at her every month like it did her mother before her, as a form of divine punishment. The focus on the grotesque in the description of menstrual blood recalls the literary trope of the nineteenth-century-gothic vampire. Interestingly, the passage also establishes parallels between Agnes and the figure of Christ being crucified. The blood which pours down from her every month becomes symbolic of her cleansing of a previous sinful life.

As manifested through her fear of menstrual blood, Agnes associates motherhood with danger and a probable risk of death, which foreshadows her eventual rejection of her own child. In his reading of *The Crimson Petal and the White*, Laurent Mellet identifies the numerous instances of refusals in the novel in order to argue that the text is centred on the idea of the rejection of and/or by the maternal. Particularly in Agnes's case, "Agnes semble rejeter leur fille Sophie jusqu'à en refuser l'existence et la réalité" (Mellet 2012: 5)[27]. Accordingly, the narrative refers to the fact that Agnes is completely unaware of the existence of this child, for she spends years without ever seeing her despite living together under the same roof. Separated by a few walls, mother and daughter characters are constructed as strangers. "Driven to denial of her motherhood through the religiously informed paradox of the procreative and incarcerated female body" (Armintor 2020: 142), Agnes's character exposes the perils of motherhood on female subjectivity. In a similar vein, Mellet concludes: "Peut-être trouve-t-on ici un des positionnements néo-victoriens les plus critiques du roman, qui impute la folie et les malheurs

[27] Laurent Mellet argues that "Agnes seems to reject their daughter Sophie to the point that she denies her existence and reality" (Mellet 2012: 5; my own translation).

d'Agnes à cet idéal victorien qu'il lui faut, encore, incarner" (Mellet 2012: 6)[28]. The novel thus capitalizes on the potential of female refusal to question the roles attributed to gender insofar as the motif of refusal becomes a manifestation of subversion and emancipation. Furthermore, one may suggest that by foregrounding that Sophie is the outcome of a marital rape act, for the narrative hints that William forces himself on an innocent and ignorant Agnes without consideration of both fear and pain on their wedding night, the text may be a literary allusion to the Victorian *fin-de-siècle* and to authors such as Mona Caird whose novels and essays fiercely criticized marriage[29] and associated "institutionalised motherhood with rape" (Heilmann 2004: 160).

Faber presents a second model of perilous motherhood. In contrast to Agnes whose mother is physically absented from the narrative yet dramatically influential on her identity formation, Sugar's mother is well alive and nearby. Yet, she turns out to be an inappropriate mother-figure. Indeed, like William and Henry's mother who is judged to be a fallen woman and doomed to be outcast, the narrative presents Mrs Castaway as a villain. Sugar's mother who is also her madam is the reason why Sugar is a prostitute. Since a young age, she forces her to make a living by means of her body, as the narrative voice forcefully condemns her role in child prostitution (Faber 2002: 27). The moral sin[30] which Mrs Castaway commits is unforgivable for both narrator and adult Sugar. The technique of stream of consciousness is appropriately used by Faber to uncover how Sugar feels anger and rage against her mother not only because of stealing her childhood away, but also depriving her of her innocence. Interestingly, the narrative does not include a single instance of direct dialogue between mother and adult daughter, for Sugar never expresses her true feelings openly, but stops at internal thoughts: "Why did you do it? She thinks. To your own daughter? Why? It's a question she's never dared ask" (Faber 2002: 213). This stylistic choice metaphorically symbolises Sugar's containment of this poisonous motherhood. In other words, the narrative suggests that freedom for Sugar would be possible only if she succeeded to let go of this toxic matrilineal weight.

Faber's discussion of the impact of Sugar's mother is primarily founded on the recurrent parallels between reality and memory insofar as every scene whether closely or loosely linked

[28] Mellet suggests: "Perhaps we find here one of the most critical neo-Victorian positions in the novel, which imputes Agnes's madness and misfortunes to this Victorian ideal that she still has to embody" (Mellet 2012: 6; my own translation).

[29] Mona Caird wrote "Marriage" (1888), *The Morality of Marriage And other essays on the status and destiny of woman* (1897), *The Pathway of the Gods* (1898), *The Daughters of Danaus* (1894), *The Stones of Sacrifice* (1915).

[30] Child prostitution was later considered a legal crime after the passage of the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885.

to motherhood triggers a memory from her past. Such technique not only engages the reader in a task of complex reading – as memories offer themselves for the reader to decode and analyse as traces of the past – but also manifests Faber's stylistic prowess by blurring the lines between his and Sugar's fiction. The narrative capitalizes on Sugar's longing for a normal childhood in which she could have enjoyed simple pleasures such as having a comforting mother. Her mother's lack of nurturing affection makes of her a victim of a social and political system where children are deprived of their childhood. Such loss causes Sugar to feel resentment against her mother, as she reminisces:

> Ever since then, there has been something of the nightmare about Mrs. Castaway, and her humanity has grown obscure. Sugar strains to recall a Mrs. Castaway further removed in time, a mother less vinegary and more nourishing, a historical figure called simply 'Mother' who tucked her in at night and never mentioned where money came from. (Faber 2002: 212)

The tone of the passage emerges as resentful as Sugar reflects on Mrs Sucksby's lack of humanity. In fact, as she remembers her mother, she is unable to conceive of her as a person, a human, but only imagines her as a figure, a myth of motherhood. She even ponders the significance of motherhood to her mother: taking advantage of her daughter's body to ensure financial stability and condemning her to the same fate she suffered as a child. The use of the gustatory and tactile references is meant to point out how Mrs Sucksby lacks in motherhood. The daughter's body is commodified insofar as it is reduced to the value of money, since Sugar suggests that her mother only cares about its worth as an object.

> "Wash well, Sophie," she advises airily, looking away into the shadows, but there's no escape from the memory of her own inflamed genitals, examined in a cracked mirror in Church Lane, the moment the fat old man with the hairy hands finally left her alone. I have a clever middle finger, yes I have! was what he'd told her, as he poked and prodded between her legs. A most frolicsome little fellow! He loves to play with little girls, and make them happier than they've ever been! (Faber 2002: 404)

Faber's text is both illustrative and suggestive. Through the medium of Sophie's inflamed genitals, the narrative crosses spatial boundaries insofar as it moves from the Rackham

household back to Church Lane. As Sugar's memory travels back in time to depict the scene of her initial abuse by one of the male clients, the man's middle finger becomes the metonym for her experience of deflowering. Besides, the use of the adjective 'clever' as resourceful and cunning not only suggests the male's sexual prowess, but also foregrounds the belief in male superiority compared to Sugar's defenceless body. Interestingly, the use of the present tense in her past recollection points out how Sugar lives through her past again, an instance of the return of the repressed.

Sugar's internal monologue stresses how the act of remembering can be painful for the traumatised subject since it implies the reopening of his/her wound, and, in this sense, Domenic LaCapra's concept of haunting becomes relevant. Victims of trauma feel that there is something which haunts them as individuals for the rest of their lives, for "something of the past always remains, if only as a haunting presence or revenant" (LaCapra 1993: 700). Interestingly, the continuation of Sugar's recollection of how she began prostitution takes place during her first nights in the Rackham residence. These nights are characterised by agitated sleeping and disturbing memories: "In Sugar's dream, this is translated into the callused fingers of a man, seizing her calf, crawling up her flesh towards her groin. "You needn't shiver any more," says Mrs Castaway. "A kind gentleman has come to keep you warm"" (Faber 2002: 391). By means of the animal imagery, Fowles dramatizes how Mrs Castaway subjects her daughter to constant male violence. Ironically, he also points out how Mrs Sucksby justifies forcing Sugar into prostitution. Unsurprisingly, Sugar suffers from the repercussions of such traumatic experience until and even during adulthood. Thus, flashes from her past keep re-emerging especially in times of mental and psychological turmoil, heightening her anger against her mother. Though she attempts to keep this rage buried, it resurfaces nonetheless. Until the end of the narrative, Sugar is unable to forgive her mother for her betrayal and even more so because she repeatedly begged her to stop.

> "Mother ...? Are we very poor now?" "Oh no," Mrs Castaway smirks. "We are quite comfortable now." "We aren't about to be thrown into the street, or anything like that?" "No, no, no." "Then why must I ... Why must I ..." Sugar is unable to finish the question. In the dream no less than in life, her courage falters in the face of Mrs Castaway's arch sarcasm. "Really now, child: I couldn't permit you to grow up idle, could I? That would leave you open to the temptation of Vice." "Mother, please: I--I'm in earnest! If we aren't in desperate straits, then why ...?" Mrs Castaway looks up from her pamphlets,

> and fixes Sugar with a look of pure malevolence; her eyeballs seem to be effervescing with spite. "Child: be reasonable," she smiles. "Why should my downfall be your rise? Why should I burn in Hell while you flap around in Heaven? In short, why should the world be a better place for you than it has been for me?" (Faber 2002: 602)

The passage sharply contrasts two tones: Mrs Castaway's sarcastic tone so as to point out her nonchalance and indifference and Sugar's supplicant tone which illustrates her vulnerability. Besides, the girl's repeated interjections, short clauses and questions reflect the failure of her demand. Furthermore, the use of the capitalized term 'Vice' associated with idleness points out a major contradiction. To Mrs Castaway, prostitution is but a profession to avoid having idle women. In the Victorian era, idleness was associated differently with labouring- and comfortable-classes women. On the one hand, the Industrial Revolution demanded to constantly push the former to labour. On the other hand, women above poverty relished in their formative years to prepare for marriage, insofar as "The stamp of masculine approval was placed upon ignorance of the world, meekness, lack of opinions, general helplessness and weakness; in short, recognition of female inferiority to the male" (Petrie 2000: 184). Thus, Faber exposes how Mrs Sucksby manipulates and subverts Victorian moral principles in order to push forward her agenda. Interestingly, the narrative reveals Mrs Castaway's wickedness, for she admits that depriving her child of the chance at a better life and forcing her into prostitution is an act of retaliation, as the text hints at her own past of prostitution. The little girl beseeching her mother to stop is an intense dramatic moment in the narrative, which exposes the failures of inappropriate motherhood. Furthermore, the passage reveals how mothers can be accomplices to patriarchy insofar as they help perpetuate it by endorsing the same values. Both Mrs Castaway and Sugar's male clients alike, participate in foregrounding her inferior position as sexual object. The narrative then, tries to bring to light the violence exerted against children, particularly by their own mothers, in the context of Victorian London where the helplessness of the innocent victims is shown. The aim is not only to rescue the destitute, but also to find the way to show sympathy for the suffering.

The literary trope of trauma is revisited in Faber's text by means of Sugar's constant recollections of her past of victimization. As Kohlke tries to explain, the nineteenth century is a forerunner of all or most of our present-day traumas, the majority of which need commemorating or working-through. These include "social ills, such as disease, crime, and sexual exploitation", all of them present in Faber's text (Kohlke 2008: 7). Resorting to haunting

and spectrality, María Isabel Romero Ruiz claims that "Arias and Pulham define *the trace* as a neo-Victorian trope which consists in the appearance of the Victorian age in contemporary literature 'unlocking occluded secrets, silences and mysteries which return and reappear in a series of spectral/textual traces' ("Introduction" xx; their Italics)" (Romero Ruiz 2018: 7). Thus, as Sugar moves into the Rackham household, a family environment, she starts to experience first-hand a family life. As Sugar's past resurfaces and her horrid past memories which have been repressed are triggered by parallel present incidents with Sophie, her interactions with the child summon her own with her mother. Interestingly however, she subconsciously starts to establish parallels between the two relationships all the while trying to be a better role model to Sophie compared to her mother. Though she lacks any appropriate training of how motherhood should be performed, she firmly resists the temptation to imitate her mother and opts for another kind of behaviour with Sophie. Hence, the following chapters are marked with a parallel-based structure going back and forth between past and present as "[t]he words echo in Sugar's memory, tempting her to speak them aloud, with that same teasing, affectionately bitter tone Mrs Castaway used fifteen years ago. How quickly they spring to the tip of Sugar's tongue" (Faber 2002: 404)!

As she gets more engaged in Sophie's education, scenes of her own days of learning at the hands of Mrs Castaway claw their way back into her present. Through the techniques of parallelism and layering, the narrative establishes an analogy between two similar scenes happening in two different time frames, yet depicted at the same narrative time. In an extremely long and minutely detailed passage, Faber brings together both past and present, a passage which "is marked by a mingling of reality with fantasy such that the memoirist [Sugar] may appear to occupy two worlds simultaneously" (Sanders 2000: 11).

> "The Owl and the Pussy-Cat went to sea In a beautiful pea-green boat. They took some honey, and plenty of money Wrapped up in a five-pound note. The Owl looked into the stars above, And sang to a small cigar, "O lovely Pussy, O Pussy, my love, What a beautiful Pussy you are, you are, What a beautiful Pussy you are!" And Sophie does a quick curtsy, a rare gesture of jaunty exuberance. "Not quite right, Sophie," says Sugar, smiling. "Let's read it again, shall we?"' Her smile hides a secret: this is not patience for its own sake, but a blow of revenge against her mother. Sugar has never forgotten the day in Church Lane when, as a child of seven, she made the mistake of reciting, once too often in Mrs Castaway's hearing, a favourite nursery rhyme.

> "No, my poppet," Mrs Castaway said, in the gentle tone she reserved for threats. "We've had enough of that now, haven't we?"' This was always her mother's final word on any matter, and so the nursery rhyme was dead, dead as a cockroach stamped underfoot. "It's time," announced Mrs Castaway, "you learned some grown-up poetry." Standing at the bookcase, she ran her fingers--already red-nailed by then--along the spines. "Not Wordsworth and such," she murmured, "for then you might get a taste for mountains and rivers, mightn't you, and we shan't ever live anywhere near those ..." With a smile, she extracted two volumes, weighing them in her hands. "Here, child. Try Pope. No, better still: try Rochester." Sugar took the dusty book away with her into a corner, and how earnestly she studied it! But she found that with every line she read, she entirely forgot what little she'd understood of the last one, leaving only an odour of male superiority clinging to her brain. "Is there any other poetry you like, Mother?"' she ventured to ask when, shamed by her own stupidity, she handed back the volume. "I never said I liked poetry, did I?"' rejoined Mrs Castaway sourly, replacing the Rochester in the bookshelf with a hard shove, so that the book hit the wall behind. "Hateful stuff." How charmingly sweet you sing, Sugar now recites to Sophie, in her sincerest, most encouraging voice. Oh, let us be married; too long we have tarried: But what shall we do for a ring? Can you repeat that after me, Sophie, and practise it until I return?"' Sophie and Sugar smile at each other. The child is imagining owls and pussycats. The governess is imagining Mrs Castaway perched on a dunce's stool, her red-nailed hands trembling in impotent fury as a roomful of little girls circle her, reciting the same nursery rhyme for the thousandth time. "Let me hear it as I walk out," says Sugar, at the nursery door. (Faber 2002: 416/417)

Anne Morey and Claudia Nelson write that "[i]n the neo-Victorian context doubling has the interesting consequence of permitting the display of aggression within the narrative, not only because it offers more youthful targets of cruelty within this reconstructed Victorian world, but also because it stages a retrospective struggle for control over the materials that constitute Victorian narratives" (Morey and Nelson 2012: 2). Though the rhyme-teaching scene recalls Sugar's days as a child with her mother, the same scene accounts for multiple differences. First of all, the imagery of the dead cockroach signals Sugar's resentment at Mrs Sucksby's decision

to stop teaching her nursery songs and forcing her to learn adult-poetry. The latter rules out poetry by Wordsworth because of her fear of its romantic influences on her young daughter, thus reflecting her intention to accommodate her to Rochester whose satiric poetry is equally inappropriate for her age because of its allusive philosophical dimension. The contrast in the material taught signals Sugar's disapproval of her mother's inappropriate decision. Besides, the passage also points out the contrast in the attitude of both teachers by means of the use of two opposite semantic fields: Mrs Sucksby is associated with 'threats', 'hard shove', 'announced', 'impotent fury', while Sugar's behaviour is kinder, as she smiles and congratulates Sophie on the effort. This suggests how she unconsciously remembers how her mother used to be as a teacher and consciously opts for another practice to break with the woman's harmful methods, thus detaching herself further from the figure of the mother. Significantly, Mrs Castaway is repeatedly associated with 'red-nailed fingers', thus foregrounding her status as prostitute. Being a mother-surrogate to Sophie then, becomes Sugar's way of taking revenge on her past and the means for retribution, as she fantasizes about haunting her mother in the company of girls reciting the same nursey song for the thousandth time. In brief, the passage illustrates how Sugar struggles to be anything but her mother's replica, as she consciously detaches herself from her memory in order to create a better role model for Sophie and promote a more appropriate perception of motherhood.

Interestingly, the news of Mrs Castaway's death causes Sugar's bewilderment. She is both sad and relieved, shocked and liberated, making such reaction rather unsurprising since Mrs Castaway is not only her mother, but also her patroness and the reason behind the life she leads.

> Damn her; she's dead. She tries to picture Mrs Castaway dead, but it's impossible. Her mother always looked like a corpse, reanimated and painted luridly for some obscene or sacrilegious purpose. How could death alter her? The best Sugar can do is to tip the picture sideways, changing Mrs Castaway's orientation from vertical to horizontal. Her pink eyes are open; her hand is extended, palm-up, for coins. "Come, sir," she says, ready to usher another gentleman to the girl of his dreams. (Faber 2002: 536)

Once again, the narrative foregrounds the image of Mrs Castaway's character as non-human by means of the comparison to a dead corpse and the hint at the process of mummification. In other words, she is not a person, or a mother, but a figure. The tone is ironic as the passage trivializes

the scene of the death. According to Sugar, death is a simple change from vertical to horizontal. Furthermore, it is highly significant that even after her death, Mrs Castaway is still associated with money and profit from her activity as a madam. Significantly, the passage is devoid of all feelings or emotions, the use of the exclamation 'damn her' suggests Sugar's desire to condemn or send Mrs Sucksby to hell.

Through the analogy between past and present, the role of mother is portrayed in two opposite ways: destructive maternal practices embodied by Mrs Castaway and nurturing motherhood by Sugar. Faber offers different versions and thus, presents an ambivalent portrayal of motherhood insofar as he avoids essentialising the institution of motherhood as either negative and so to be rejected, or positive and so to be idealised. By doing so, the text posits that a negative example of motherhood does not necessarily entail a perilous experience of motherhood. While Mona Caird believed that motherhood and the inherent capacity for reproduction were stratagems to keep women imprisoned within narrow boundaries of their private sphere, and that women did not have children because they wanted to, but rather because it was imposed on them and eventually defined them no longer as women but mothers[31], Faber offers alternative forms of motherhood. Sugar eventually emerges as a positive mother-figure to Sophie though she suffered from her mother's poor choices. She also avoids the pitfalls of ideal Victorian motherhood based on self-annihilation and self-sacrifice for the child. Besides, motherhood seems to liberate her from the weight of her mother's upbringing and allows her the possibility for healing and self-fulfilment. Becoming Sophie's adoptive mother, Sugar moves forward from her traumatic past. Faber's ending shows how "neo-Victorian fictions offer a much more complex picture of family matters that echoes the intricacies of our own twentieth- and twenty-first-century social organisation, with its seemingly rootless and fragmented kinship patterns" (Gutleben and Kohlke 2011: 5).

The impact of the mother's heritage on the girl's journey of development finds echoes in Waters's text as well, marking both Sue and Maud. In sensation novel, deviant and/or mad mothers despite their absence represent a danger to their daughters through the hereditary risk of transmitting their deviant behaviours or madness. In *Fingersmith*, Waters swaps not only the identities of the protagonists, but also their matrilineal histories, thus creating a matrilineal fiction for each girl. Through Sue's recollection of childhood memories and her proper introduction of herself, the theme of identity comes to the surface. How does a girl define herself? Is it based on her past, notably her matrilineal heritage, or is it based on her present and

[31] For these explosive views, she was dubbed "priestess of revolt" (Anon 1893: 519).

her place in the world? Sue seems to suffer from a loss of identity because of the absence of a consequential part of her past: her mother. This lack – or deficiency – would resurface as the narrative moves forward, and illustrate the impact of the maternal heritage on her identity formation process.

Sue is raised believing that her mother was a murderess. Mrs Sucksby forges a whole narrative about this imaginary woman and even goes as far as describing her physically pointing out the resemblance to Sue. It is important to note that Sue never met her mother since the latter is presumed to have been long dead. Thus, she only knows the story she had been told. Hence, there is a narrative within the narrative, which leads the reader to question the credibility not only of the story and reality of events recollected, but also Sue's identity which had been crafted and written by Mrs Sucksby.

Early on in the narrative, the heritage of her mother as a thief and a murderess prepares for her eventual transformation into a thief and possible murderess, and hence foreshadows the ultimate scene of murder. She exclaims while recollecting: "I had a certain standing. I was the daughter of a murderess. I had expectations" (Waters 2002: 135). Indeed, Sue narrates a past incident with John Vroom where she acknowledges how her mother's identity forged her own. Angry at one of his remarks, she threatens him with a pair of scissors: "I took up a pair of kitchen shears and put them to his neck. I said, 'Bad blood carries. Bad blood comes out.' And the look on his face was something!" (Waters 2002: 79) Sue seems to embody her mother's violent behaviour by means of the reference to 'bad blood'. Furthermore, on the night of their escape from Briar, Susan asserts that her fear and anguish suddenly turn into courage thanks to her mother: "All my nervousness had left me, and I was suddenly calm. I thought of my mother, and all the dark and sleeping houses she must have stolen her way through, before they caught her. The bad blood rose in me, just like wine" (Waters 2002: 150). Obviously, the inherited mother is constantly resurrected from the past to influence the present. Sue concedes that she is defined by her mother: "I had my mother to thank for that" (Waters 2002: 10).

The narrative told by Mrs Sucksby influences Sue who does not question its truth or her surrogate mother's credibility especially given that the latter is a skilled criminal capable of deceiving people by means of sentiment and affect. "So Mrs Sucksby told it; and every time, though her voice would start off steady it would end up trembling, and her eyes would fill with tears" (Waters 2002: 11). Consequently, Sue was identified in reference to her mother's legacy as a murderess hanged in public. "'That's Susan Trinder,' someone might whisper then. 'Her mother was hanged as a murderess. Ain't she brave?'" (Waters 2002: 11). Nadine Muller argues that in patriarchal societies, women are commodities to be exchanged between men either in

marriage, prostitution or other cultural customs. The act of stealing for Sue is, in fact, a criminal act which allows her a degree of agency by disrupting the masculine system of exchange. Influenced by her mother's criminal matrilineal fiction, not only does she adopt this lifestyle openly, being a thief and pickpocket for Mr Ibbs's store, but also takes pride in it. Besides shaping Sue's identity, the matrilineal heritage participates in pushing the plot forward. In fact, Mrs Sucksby takes advantage of Sue's own recognition of thievery as an identifying trait in order to convince her to accept Gentleman's, or rather her own mischievous plot. She affirms that Sue's mother "would have done it, and not given it a thought. And I know what she would feel in her heart – what dread, but also what pride, and the pride part winning – to see you doing it now" (Waters 2002: 47). Driven by such statements, Sue accepts the proposal, a chance to guarantee the continuity of her mother's criminal heritage and perform this inherited identity.

Following her escape from the madhouse and return to London, where she observes Maud in Mrs Sucksby's house from the window across the street, her feelings of jealousy and rage are so strong that she thinks about killing her. She even goes to the house with a knife in her hand and plans on committing murder crying "Oh I'll kill her, tonight!" (Waters 2002: 476). Since she believes her mother is a murderess, she thinks of killing as an easy act to perform. Muller argues that "this desire represents her final re-enactment of what she believes is her inherited maternal identity" (Muller 2009/ 2010: 113). Yet, tension is resolved and Sue does not perform her mother's identity.

Despite Sue's apparent conformity to the imagined identity, the night of her departure for Briar marks an important rite of passage in her life since it announces the beginning of an important chapter in her growth and identity formation. She recalls her mother's ultimate hanging as punishment for her deeds and questions the moral correctness of this plot of fraud. She wonders whether she would suffer the same tragic fate if she honours her mother's criminal legacy and moves forward with this plan. Guilty and hesitant, she wonders what being hanged feels like as the rope is dropped. This past memory combined with a future prediction are quite important as they highlight the weight of her matrilineal heritage on the one hand, and foreshadow the eventual break with this imagined history on the other. Refusing to commit murder, Sue seems to reject her mother's identity.

Like Sue, Maud experiences an analogous reality/ fiction moment. On the girls' first meeting, she confesses a private detail of her personal life: her past. Like Susan, she is an orphan who lost both of her parents. She narrates: "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, since that time'" (Waters 2002: 66). Clearly, the matrilineal heritage

will have a crucial impact on Maud's identity as well, in light of her own mother's absence. In fact, while keeping her mother's picture locked in a box and tending to her grave regularly may seem simple gestures of affection, they acquire a deeper meaning when Maud confesses her guilt about her mother's death. Maud believes she is the reason behind her mother's death and even her murderer. "For it was my birth that killed my mother. I am as to blame for her death as if I had stabbed her with my own hand'" (Waters 2002: 121). Both girls' matrilineal heritages weigh heavily on their shoulders since Sue feels haunted by her mother's criminal past and Maud feels guilty of causing her mother's death. As Maud takes over the narration of the second part of the novel, she starts with a memory which she imagines, bringing her together with her mother, a bloody memory of her birth and her mother's death.

> I imagine a table, slick with blood. The blood is my mother's. There is too much of it. There is so much of it, I think it runs, like ink. I think, to save the boards beneath, the women have set down china bowls; and so the silences between my mother's cries are filled— drip drop! drip drop!—with what might be the staggered beating of clocks. Beyond the beat come other, fainter cries: the shrieks of lunatics, the shouts and scolds of nurses. For this is a madhouse. My mother is mad. The table has straps upon it to keep her from plunging to the floor; another strap separates her jaws, to prevent the biting of her tongue; another keeps apart her legs, so that I might emerge from between them. When I am born, the straps remain: the women fear she will tear me in two! They put me upon her bosom and my mouth finds out her breast. I suck, and the house falls silent about me. There is only, still, that falling blood— drip drop! drip, drop!— the beat telling off the first few minutes of my life, the last of hers. For soon, the clocks run slow. My mother's bosom rises, falls, rises again; then sinks for ever. I feel it, and suck harder. (Waters 2002: 175)

This passage is minutely descriptive insofar as it gives the illusion of reality by means of temporal and spatial proximity. The reader is confronted to the scene as if the bloody table with the dying woman were close by. The focus on the sense of hearing by means of words of sounds like 'cries', 'shrieks', 'shouts', 'scolds' as well as the repetition of onomatopoeic words like 'drip, drop' combined with the sense of sight amplify the sensory experience. These stylistic techniques are in service of the thematic since they dramatize the recollection. While a child's

first memory with their mother is usually a scene of mutual affection and nurture, wherein the child is immersed in their mother's soft embrace symbolising their corporeal unison, Maud's however is a scene of violence, blood and ultimate separation. It is also necessary to point out that this account is the result of combined memory and imagination. Uncertain of the exactitude of events, Maud – displaying early signs of authorship – creates her own matrilineal fiction, a shared experience with the mother she lost. Since her mother was suspected – and declared by Maud – to be mad and incarcerated in a lunatic asylum, Maud had to be raised among nurses and mad women. Hence, her early childhood years in the company of both of these categories mark her eventual becoming. From the former, she acquires strictness and self-command, from the latter, the favourable background for violence and derangement. Besides, since early childhood, she is aware that she has no parents and thus learns to be self-dependent and solitary. Contrarily to children whose mothers raise them, Maud was raised by a number of nurses who represented mother-figures. She narrates:

> Some of them [female lunatics] kiss and pet me, as the nurses do. Some of them touch my hair and weep. I remind them of their daughters. Others are troublesome, and these I am encouraged to stand before and strike with a wooden wand, cut to my hand, until the nurses laugh and say they never saw anything so droll. Thus I learn the rudiments of discipline and order; and incidentally apprehend the attitudes of insanity. This will all prove useful, later. When I am old enough to reason I am given a gold ring said to be my father's, the portrait of a lady called my mother, and understand I am an orphan; but, never having known a parent's love—or rather, having known the favours of a score of mothers—I am not greatly troubled by the news. (Waters 2002: 176)

Interestingly, the passage brings to light the dichotomy sanity/ insanity by means of the simultaneous presence of lunatics, and nurses, and the use of lexical fields of passion and reason. The kind of upbringing Maud receives as a little girl in such diverse environment shapes her identity since childhood. Early on, she learns violence, discipline and order, symptomatic of life in Briar. It equally prepares her for a life of psychological imbalance under her uncle's roof.

Until the age of seventeen, Maud is constantly haunted by her mother's legacy as a mad woman. The confrontation with Gentleman about her past disturbs her both psychologically

and emotionally. "*Do you think of your mother*, he said, and *feel her madness in you*? Do I?" (Waters 2002: 216, emphasis in original) Gentleman as a representative of patriarchal discourse, establishes a hereditary link of madness between mothers and daughters, completely disregarding medicine or science. That Maud turns into a mad woman seems a natural outcome. Consequently, like Sue who is haunted by her mother's legacy and eager to re-enact her heritage as murderess, Maud supposes that she has her mother's madness within her. "I look at Sue, and there comes, always, that shadow, that darkness —a panic, I suppose it, a simple fear—a quaking, a caving—a dropping, as into the sour mouth of madness— Madness, my mother's malady, perhaps beginning its slow ascent in me!" (Waters 2002: 267) Interestingly, madness is not seen as a disease or sickness, but is rather compared to a Gothic shadow or darkness. It is a monster that slowly eats away at Maud aggravating her psychological instability and dependence on draughts. In other words, Maud's present is shaped by her past just like her identity is dictated by her mother's. As Gentleman proposes the plan to her, he explicitly asserts what the plot would bring her: a potential liberation from the shackles of her past. Being an experienced manipulator, he pinpoints Maud's weaknesses and targets them. He reassures her that when the identity exchange is complete, Sue will not only take her name but also her past and her matrilineal heritage of madness.

> 'And with her, Miss Lilly,' he says finally, 'they keep close your name, your history as your mother's daughter, your uncle's niece—in short, all that marks you as yourself. Think of it! They will pluck from your shoulders the weight of your life, as a servant would lift free your cloak; and you shall make your naked, invisible way to any part of the world you choose—to any new life—and there re-clothe yourself to suit your fancy.' This is the liberty—the rare and sinister liberty—he has come to Briar to offer. (Waters 2002: 223)

The passage highlights the contradiction between autonomous identity and the persistence of the past, as it compares Maud's new identity to choosing a path of salvation. The author subtly builds on religious imagery by means of the servant, the cloak, and the way, making it seem like an "opportunity to rid herself of what she has come to know as her maternal prehistory and the patriarchal oppression inherited with it" (Muller 2008: 118). Gentleman's words summarize patriarchy's assumptions about a female's identity being a continuation of her mother's and an inevitable human project of replication. In other words, if Maud refuses his plan, she would

undoubtedly become her mother's duplicate. At the same time, his plan also points out the possibility for girls' salvation and liberation from their mothers' prescribed identities.

Driven by this need to redefine herself, Maud eventually accepts the plot which demands another stage of identity recreation. First, she rejects her identity as Marianne's daughter and Mr Lilly's niece. Then, she starts to literally transfer her identity to Sue by dressing her like a lady, teaching her to read and altering her physical appearance to look more like her. She ultimately sees herself as a "ghost": she is no longer Maud and at the same time, the girl in Rivers' plot is not yet available (Waters 2002: 284). It seems like she is in-between her old and future selves, and neither is satisfactory, she simply becomes self-less. This transition phase causes her bewilderment and alienation. Finally, to complete this stage successfully, she has to leave behind, or even erase another part which defines her: her books. In a symbolic gesture, she ultimately destroys her uncle's most cherished books. Seemingly, Maud as the secretary and her uncle's pornographic assistant no longer exists.

Dangerously, at Mrs Sucksby's, Maud is told yet another fiction about her mother, different from the one she had been told by her uncle. According to Mrs Sucksby, her mother had escaped from her father and brother who endeavoured to lock her away in an asylum because of her disobedience, both pregnant and ailing. Presumably, she was not mad as her uncle had made her believe. It was only an excuse to incarcerate her. Angry against her uncle who had made up a whole past for her based on lies, Maud confesses: "I only rage, still, against my uncle. I only think, over and over: *My mother, ruined, shamed*, *coming here, lying bleeding in a house of thieves*. *Not mad, not mad*…" (Waters 2002: 328, emphasis in original). It turns out that the fiction they had imagined for her is not real after all. Her mother's secret identity is further exposed as Mrs Sucksby admits having swapped the two babies when Mr Lilly came in looking for his sister and her new-born girl. She claims having given him Marianne's true daughter named Susan and kept her own daughter Maud. The news overwhelms Maud who feels completely bewildered with no recognition of truth and fiction. Her past turns out to be a complete scam. Gentleman puts it to words: "'You understand, Maud,' he says, trying to see about my fingers, 'what Mrs Sucksby has told you? One baby becomes another. Your mother was not your mother, your uncle not your uncle. Your life was not the life that you were meant to live, but Sue's; and Sue lived yours…'" (Waters 2002: 332). She ultimately confesses: "'My life was not lived,' I say in a whisper. 'You have told me, it was a fiction'" (Waters 2002: 334). The fiction is further developed when Mrs Sucksby tells Maud that her real mother was actually a murderess and was later hanged in public as punishment for her crime, the same story she once told Sue.

The deaths of Rivers and Mrs Sucksby are an essential narrative ploy because they allow both Sue and Maud to redefine themselves outside the barriers of their matrilineal fictions and the patriarchal constructs. In order to recreate their identities, Maud and Sue have to learn that the matrilineal histories they have been led to believe are in fact false. Naturally, there is first a stage of confusion, then ultimate awareness. Upon this recognition, Maud leaves behind her past and starts to think about the future. Likewise, Sue decides to find Maud. Both protagonists detach themselves from their fictional pasts and look for each other in order to create their presents.

In Waters's novel, the matrilineal history proves to be of great weight and impact on both Sue's and Maud's identity formation processes. Both protagonists' journeys are initially prescribed by their mothers' decision to swap their identities and thus determine their futures. Though both of them first succumb to the matrilineal fictions and their actions are guided by this past, they ultimately manage to break free from these shackles and construct identities of their own, away from their presumed mothers' dictates. By means of this plot of usurpation, Waters seems to highlight the dangers and limitations of a matrilineal history. The risk is to remain entrapped in an identity foregrounded by one's mother incapable of evolving on one's own. It seems only appropriate then that the revelation of truth about mothers is a rite of passage for both protagonists. Maud eventually returns to Briar determined to assume a life of independence and start a career of authorship, while Sue leaves behind a life of thieving and joins Maud in an ultimate scene of reunion to embark on a life of togetherness and complicity. Nonetheless, despite this apparent quietude, the past still invades their presents. Maud confesses the persistent influence of her uncle's breeding through her choice of career as a pornographic writer. Despite the symbolic gesture of destroying his books, she ultimately goes back to them in order to create alternative ones.

In brief, the novels of this corpus put to the fore complex genealogies and their impact on individual identity, focusing notably on the matrilineal history. Female identity is both determined and distorted by matrilineal histories. The narratives dramatize the long and challenging process of liberation towards an individuated subjectivity away from one's past. While maternalism can be inhibiting and confining for some heroines as is the case for Agnes, it can also be the means for individuation, precisely by detaching themselves from its weight as with Sugar, Sue and Maud, who manage to find new definitions of themselves as well as of motherhood outside the limitations of their respective mothers. Interestingly however, the novels also point out that the daughter is never free from her mother, for the matrilineal history haunts and constantly guides her. Nonetheless, the outcome of this process of liberation is an

individuated identity and a subjective voice by which each protagonist insists on the need to move away from her matrilineal past. The following chapter will explore the interrelations between female characters and notions of identity and voice.

Chapter 4: Voice and Authorship

1. The Multifariousness of Marginal Female Voices in Neo-Victorianism

One of the merits of neo-Victorianism resides in its exploration of the representation of women of minorities, thanks to its discussion of issues of ethnicity on the one hand, and those of sexuality on the other. More specifically, in their investigation of neo-Victorianism, Heilmann and Llewellyn insist on the axial status of voice. In fact, the genre's return to the Victorian past was first associated with an attempt to "recover and heal" from a traumatic colonial past (Letissier 2010: 3). The political commitment of neo-Victorianism can be seen as it highlights issues of colonialism and postcolonialism and the notion of "orientalism", putting to the fore the "other" but also giving voice to marginalised characters in order to overcome the binary dichotomies of self vs. "other", dominant vs. "subaltern".

Building on this notion, Llewellyn signals neo-Victorian fiction's "desire to re-write the historical narrative of that period by representing marginalised voices, post-colonial viewpoints, new histories of sexuality, and other generally 'different' versions of the Victorian" (Llewellyn 2008: 165). Though the theme of colonialism is not a dominant one in the novels under study, some aspects in them do relate to it. Female characters like Sue and Maud are orientalised from each other's perspectives by means of comparisons to the other's darkness. The figure of the prostitute is exoticized in Faber's text. For example, Sugar's name is a direct reference to the history of trading sugar in the Caribbean making her alluring and fascinating to Western gazers. Charles, in Fowles's text, associates Sugar with the East, thinking of her as a "light [spreading] from the east. Destiny" (Fowles 1969: 101). Llewellyn's claim will be used here as a point of departure for the discussion of female voices. Indeed, in the novels of this corpus, female protagonists belong to different marginalised groups, such as the prostitute, the criminal, the mad and the lesbian, categories which were degraded in Victorian society. The texts illustrate how these heroines have reclaimed their voices in various ways, voices that resonate in the narratives and express these women's subjectivity and agency. The novels highlight the assertive speaking voice in Sarah, the rebellious writing voice in Sugar, the private unsure voice in Agnes and the political voice in Maud. But then, Sugar also takes on both a didactic and critical voice especially in regard to the codes of upbringing Victorian girls. Agnes's voice becomes more philosophical in her interrogation of existential phenomena. Maud adopts an even more assertive authorial voice in her rewriting of the fictions around her, while Sue's voice, by means of her constantly evolving (romantic) relationship, represents not only the sexually liberated but also those going through a process of self-discovery and self-

creation. All of these emerging voices combined serve to shape a feminist ideology, to rewrite a patriarchal tradition which has for so long contained female voice in the narrow private sphere limiting it to a number of criteria of respectability and propriety and even to silence most often.

By means of these female characters that re-appropriate individuated subjective voices, neo-Victorianism can pertinently be labelled as the fiction of female voice. Indeed, Helen Davies uses the term "ventriloquism" as a metaphor assimilating the ventriloquized state to the Victorian feminine condition, whereby a female's voice is either appropriated by patriarchy or completely suppressed. In other words, voice which is inherently a manifestation of autonomy, power, and subjectivity when spoken and heard is the medium by which neo-Victorians re-enter Victorian texts in order to question issues of gender and identity. Aptly, neo-Victorian authors give voice to "subjects who have been largely absent from the traditional master discourse of history" (Davies 2012: 3). Thus, I am mainly interested in studying how neo-Victorian fiction gives voice to the voiceless, allowing them to speak what was unspoken and unspeakable, focussing on the realm of the marginalised. Giving the chance to the minorities which were silenced such as prostitutes, villainesses, mad women and lesbians to rewrite their own history from their own perspectives and positions in a manner which empowers them thus breaking with the past state of weakness is at the core of the study of these novels.

Yet, in any process of revisiting, there is the risk of either an imitative reproduction or a complete erasure. Indeed, Davies claims that even though neo-Victorian authors are "ventriloquist[s]" giving voice to their nineteenth-century fictional characters whose voices were silenced, they are simultaneously "ventriloquized" as they become spoken by the recurrent nineteenth-century voice (Davies 2012: 3). She admits that "even as certain neo-Victorian texts are apparently rebelliously 'talking back' to the Victorian era and literary production, they also – in varying degrees – emulate and are indebted to the cultural artefacts of this historical period" (Davies 2012: 3). Hence, neo-Victorianism depends on its success in managing this balance between repetition and subversion, for she ultimately concludes that "the promise and perils of neo-Victorianism reside in the slipperiness of ventriloquial power relations" (Davies 2012: 166). Then, to what extent do the neo-Victorian authors of this corpus achieve this equilibrium?

Sally Shuttleworth claims that neo-Victorianism has risen from a desire to "give voice to women, or the racially oppressed who have been denied voice in history" (Shuttleworth 1997: 256). Previously limited to a position of marginality in Victorian fiction, Sarah, the fallen, Sugar, the prostitute and Sue and Maud, the lesbians have central voices in the narrative, voices which compete with male characters'. Indeed, all female protagonists of this corpus are considered marginal characters either publicly chastised in society such as the fallen or the

prostitute, or simply ignored as the lesbian or the 'mad' woman. Thus, the following section will be devoted entirely to the study of these characters' voices. How do the narratives advocate female voice as they stress these marginal female social groups? What kinds of voice do these characters assume in the midst of their quest of an individuated subjectivity? To what extent does female empowerment take place by means of this re-acquisition of voice?

Having adopted a strictly-structuralist approach in the first part of this investigation, I have focused on the aesthetic characteristics of characterisation, putting the emphasis mainly on the various techniques the narratorial voice uses for the description of the different heroines. In this section, I will focus particularly on how protagonists' voice is constructed in the narrative: whether through the intermediary of the narrator's voice or by means of modern techniques such as stream of consciousness. The technique of 'stream of consciousness', a term coined by William James in *Principles of Psychology* (1890), by which he identifies consciousness as something incessant and continuous, "is nothing jointed; it flows. A "river" or "stream" are the metaphors by which it is most naturally described... Let us call it the stream of thought, of consciousness, or of subjective life" (James qtd. in Parsons 2007: 56). Hence, the term stream of consciousness can be defined as "the never-ending associative flow of our conscious or half-conscious thoughts and perceptions and feelings, the activity of the mind that we are always at least sensible of" (James qtd. in Parsons 2007: 56). Indeed, Régis Salado investigates the construction process of character and argues that the central component of such process is the focus on its interior life: thoughts, emotions, stream of consciousness and interior monologue[32]. As this process of interiorization is more and more focused, the character is no longer told from a third-person external point of view, but rather tells from within. Hence, I will focus in this section both on narrators' perception of characters' voices and on characters' verbal utterances and interior life. How do narrators – especially but not exclusively male – present female voice? How is characters' interior life translated in their speech? What do characters' utterances reflect vis-à-vis their social position? In my study of voice, I will make the distinction between verbal voice, which includes spoken utterances, stream of consciousness and interior monologue, and un-verbal voice which encompasses all silent modes of language, notably in the written format by means of letters, diaries or any other form of fiction, to explore which metaphors these voices stand for. I will devote this part to the

[32] Even though stream of consciousness and interior monologue are often identified as one and the same thing, Parsons points out that it would be more accurate to consider stream of consciousness "the active subjective life that interior monologue, in an attempt to represent it, imitates in the symbolic form of language" (2007: 56). In other words, stream of consciousness precedes interior monologue resulting in variedly organised flow.

characters of Sarah in Fowles's novel, Sugar and Agnes in Faber's, and Sue in Waters's as initial manifestations of marginalisation and promising explorations of active individuation.

1.1 Sarah's Performative Voice in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*

In Fowles's novel, two voices resonate in the narrative: the narratorial/authorial voice and the characterial voice, notably here Sarah's. Fowles's narrator is gendered masculine adopting a masculinist view and dominating the narrative with omniscience accessing all characters' thoughts and interiors. Sarah's voice is described by this narrator from a male perspective as well as from the perspective of other characters:

> Hers was certainly a very beautiful voice, controlled and clear, though always shaded with sorrow and often intense in feeling; but above all, it was a sincere voice. For the first time in her ungrateful little world Mrs. Poulteney saw her servants with genuinely attentive and sometimes positively religious faces. (Fowles 1969: 25)

The first thing to note from the narrator's description of Sarah's voice is its encompassing nature of both male and female attributes. On the one hand, it is clear and controlled as an orator's, usually associated with male skills. On the other, it is emotional and intense. In Victorian gentlemen's circles, men's voices were most often depicted as assured and confident. Furthermore, they were rather labelled as neutral, objective and even scientific, especially towards the end of the century with the advance of scientific research. In Fowles's novel, both Charles's and Dr Grogan's voices resonate as the scientific ones, whereby the former indulges in monologues about the importance of fossils and questions Darwinian and Marxist theory, while the latter represents medicine. To avoid such stereotypical dichotomy setting apart male justness and wisdom from female emotion and feebleness, Fowles's narrator opts for a female voice which combines both composure and sensation all the while maintaining candour and genuineness. More interestingly, Sarah's articulation is one of intellect, for Fowles's narrator even expresses his own surprise and states that Charles is astounded by the tone of her voice, a voice quite confident and assured: "A woman did not contradict a man's opinion when he was being serious unless it were carefully measured terms. Sarah seemed almost to assume some sort of equality of intellect with him and precisely… where she should have been … deferential" (Fowles, 1969: 116). Bonnie Zare claims that it is precisely Sarah's nonconformity which not

only foregrounds her character as agent and "thus, make[s] her a protofeminist" (Zare 1997: 184), it equally rids the text of some of its pro-masculinist readings and claims of its anti-feminism.

The second attribute given to Sarah's voice reveals Fowles's sarcastic humour. Sarah as the allegedly fallen woman is granted both a religious voice and face. By means of her beautiful voice, she is able to touch Mrs Poulteney's as well as the servants' hearts and stir their emotions as she reads from the Bible.

> Upstairs, Mrs. Poulteney had to be read to alone; and it was in these more intimate ceremonies that Sarah's voice was heard at its best and most effective. Once or twice she had done the incredible, by drawing from those pouched, invincible eyes a tear. Such an effect was in no way intended, but sprang from a profound difference between the two women. Mrs. Poulteney believed in a God that had never existed; and Sarah knew a God that did. (Fowles 1969: 25)

The religious voice becomes a performative voice, for Sarah assumes the role of the preacher. Though mainly a masculine role, preaching was occasionally practised by women in mid-Victorian Britain as the examples of Geraldine Hooper, Jessie MacFarlane, and Catherine Booth show. In fact, Olive Anderson claims that the files of *The Revival* newspaper, founded on 30 July 1859 as a weekly record of events connected with the revival of religion, revealed a stream of lady preachers in the 1850s and 1860s (Anderson 1969: 470). Interestingly, their activities reached a peak in 1866, when Mill's petition for female suffrage was presented in Parliament, hence foregrounding the relation between preaching civil rights and female voice. The date is significant since it represents a temporal frame for Fowles's plot which unfolds in 1867. By means of this analogy, Fowles constructs the character of Sarah in the role of the Victorian preacher despite being inextricably linked with infamy. Yet, in the midst of her vocal delivery, Sarah manages to overthrow the prejudice around her. Fowles's narrator is sympathetic towards Sarah who has been censured, as he subtly emphasizes the sacred and spiritual within her, focussing on her honesty and authenticity. We read, and even seem to listen and see at the same time:

> She did not create in her voice, like so many worthy priests and dignitaries asked to read the lesson, an unconscious alienation effect of the Brechtian

> kind ("This is your mayor reading a passage from the Bible") but the very contrary: she spoke directly of the suffering of Christ, of a man born in Nazareth, as if there was no time in history, almost, at times, when the light in the room was dark, and she seemed to forget Mrs. Poulteney's presence, as if she saw Christ on the Cross before her. One day she came to the passage Lama, lama, sabachthane me; and as she read the words she faltered and was silent. Mrs. Poulteney turned to look at her, and realized Sarah's face was streaming with tears. (Fowles 1969: 25)

This selected passage from the Bible suggests that Fowles's narrator attempts to redeem her from her supposed sin and highlight the wrongdoings of the prejudicial Victorian society which he implicitly critiques. Thus, though Sarah is seen as a fallen woman, she is elevated through her quasi-religious influence.

The epigraph of chapter 39 is overtly challenging since it gives both narrative space and voice to the class of prostitutes often silenced and disregarded by all other classes which were supposedly higher on the social ladder. In this narrative instance, the prostitute appropriates the speaking 'I' in a passage which can be assimilated to a sermon:

> Now, what if I am a prostitute, what business has society to abuse me? Have I received any favors at the hands of society? If I am a hideous cancer in society, are not the causes of the disease to be sought in the rottenness of the carcass? Am I not its legitimate child; no bastard, Sir? —From a letter in The Times (February 24th, 1858) *
>
> [* The substance of this famous and massively sarcastic letter, allegedly written by a successful prostitute, but more probably by someone like Henry Mayhew, may be read in Human Documents of the Victorian Golden Age.] (Fowles 1969: 127).

Though the author doubts the identity of the speaker, the voice of the prostitute may be read nonetheless in light of Josephine Butler's campaign for the rights of prostitutes. She "fought a European campaign against state regulation of prostitution, enforced by 'morals police' (from 1874 until her death in 1906)" (Mathers n.d.). Thus, this epigraph is a social critique insofar as it exposes the social peril which was absented from the general frame of mind of the Victorians who claimed to be a society of virtue and ethos, even though it was proven to have existed by

many studies[33]. In the epigraph, prostitution is referred to as 'cancer'. Thus, like any disease, its causes must be studied. A spokesperson, the prostitute highlights the major role society played in the emergence of her social group: 'rottenness' refers to poverty as an economic reason, as well as moral looseness as a social one. Consequently, she claims that though society, and one may add particularly men, is partly responsible for the emergence of such social category, it later openly abuses and even rejects them as its illegitimate children and bastards. Sarah confesses "I live among people the world tells me are kind, pious, Christian people. And they seem to me crueler than the cruelest heathens, stupider than the stupidest animals" (Fowles 1969: 60), which exposes the double standards in regard to female representation. It is corroborated by Fowles's long authorial intervention:

> What are we faced with in the nineteenth century? An age where woman was sacred; and where you could buy a thirteen-year-old girl for a few pounds— a few shillings, if you wanted her for only an hour or two. Where more churches were built than in the whole previous history of the country; and where one in sixty houses in London was a brothel (the modern ratio would be nearer one in six thousand). Where the sanctity of marriage (and chastity before marriage) was proclaimed from every pulpit, in every newspaper editorial and public utterance; and where never—or hardly ever— have so many great public figures, from the future king down, led scandalous private lives. (Fowles 1969: 114)

Through Sarah's religious voice and the impact she has on the people listening to her, Fowles establishes an opposition between her honesty and the Victorians' duplicity. In fact, he claims that in contrast to people around her, Sarah is rather direct. Thus, the narratorial description of Sarah's voice is appreciative, making her seem half-human half-divine. Yet, her actual voice is not heard until much later in the narrative. On their first visit to Mrs Poulteney's, Ernestina, Mrs Tranter and Charles find themselves for the first time in Sarah's company in public. In her private meetings with Mrs Poulteney, Sarah is heard reading the Bible, but in public, her voice is absent among the members of the Victorian upper class (three respectable, wealthy and well-

[33] George Drysdale's *The Elements of Social Science* (1861), and more recently, Judith Walkowitz's "The Politics of Prostitution" (1980) and Philippa Levine's ""A Multitude of Unchaste Women:" Prostitution in the British Empire" (2004) are but a few examples of the studies which acknowledged prostitution as a social phenomenon.

connected ladies and a Victorian gentleman). Sarah is manifestly the outcast in this small circle which can be seen as a microcosm of Victorian society. Interestingly, while Mrs Poulteney and Ernestina deliberately ignore Sarah's presence, Mrs Tranter attempts to include her in the conversation. These opposite reactions reflect Victorian society which was divided between refusing to engage with socially-inferior groups and showing sympathy and openness towards them.

This social division impacts Sarah's identity formation as an external factor in the scope of Helena Ifill's study of characterisation. She is situated at the margins of society and relegated to an inferior position. Interestingly, Sarah's compliance with her social rejection may illustrate either acceptance of or indifference to such attitude. Yet, despite her silence, the reader is eager to learn more about her, just like Charles who "began to realize a quite new aspect of the situation. It became clear to him that the girl's silent meekness ran contrary to her nature; that she was therefore playing a part; and that the part was one of complete disassociation from, and disapprobation of, her mistress" (Faber 1969: 44). Indeed, Sarah's character engages in role-playing as she adopts silence which becomes more significant than speech. Refusing to interact with this upper class is a rebellious choice and a daring decision, a form of silent protest. Despite the lady's incessant attempts to push her to engage in the conversation, Sarah's deliberately absented voice is a form of rejection, as she consciously rebuffs this gesture of solidarity. Thus, the absence of voice becomes more problematic and controversial, as it signals her rebellion and nonconformity.

Chapter 18 marks the actual eruption of Sarah's verbal voice for the first time in the narrative. Following some brief, rather calm and other more agitated exchanges with Mrs Poulteney, Sarah blurts out to Charles "I have sinned" (Fowles 1969: 60), an unusual confession to be made by a lady to a person other than a priest. Talking of girls' honour and virtue and confessing that the Lieutenant is a married man, she crosses all boundaries of propriety despite Charles's constant attempts to stop her. Like the wild animal Charles sees in her, she is simply unleashed and it is impossible for him to retain her. Sarah's voice – contrarily to Ernestina's and by extension the Victorian ladies' – is one of frankness and power. She wants to be heard and succeeds: "Charles looked at her back in dismay, like a man about to be engulfed by a landslide; as if he would run, but could not; would speak, but could not" (Fowles 1969: 60). Sarah then assumes the role of the confessant and forces Charles to listen to her.

When Sarah starts to tell Charles her story, the reader is uncertain as to the veracity of her account. As she divulges more details about her 'fall', she establishes a contrast between Varguennes's appearance and true nature: courage vs. cowardice, humanity vs. dishonesty and

handsomeness vs. cruelty. These dichotomies incite the reader to sympathize with her and understand the duplicity of which she has been victim. Thus, in her long monologue, her voice emerges as frank, honest and true in order to emphasize the hardships she had to endure as woman and governess. By contextualising the socio-economic dilemma of this hybrid social group, her utterances are no longer merely personal and individual, but rather represent a community. She speaks on behalf of the members of this social group who share the same suffering and obstacles. Hence, we see the transformation of the emotional into the socio-political, the personal into the collective, and the private into the public. Indeed, though Sarah's discourse appears at first as intimate, it soon becomes a social critique and a denunciation of the status quo. Sarah becomes a socio-political orator, an advocate for the cause of governesses in her closing statement as she admits that the latter are "all like [her]self" (Fowles 1969: 72).

Furthermore, though she claims that her status as "the French Lieutenant's Whore" makes her "hardly human" (Fowles 1969: 75), her sincerity is specifically meant to highlight this humanness. She may be deemed impure by her community, but she is honest and self-responsible. She admits to having concealed her story from everyone so as to assume the public position of the censured woman, "[t]o be what I must be. An outcast" (Fowles 1969: 76). It seems from her utterance that she chose the destiny of social rejection. Interestingly, Sarah believes that the shame caused by her sin is one key marker of her identity; "If I leave here [Lyme] I leave my shame. Then I am lost" (Fowles 1969: 77). It is her sin which defines who she is and gives a sense to her existence. Not only does she embrace her shortcoming, she publicly displays it as one of her key characteristics.

Sarah's written voice also emerges as challenging and daring. By means of a letter composed of three words indicating the address of the hotel where she's staying in Exeter, a letter meant as an invitation to Charles, the narrative foregrounds her rebellious nature, for "[it] was certainly an act of disobedience" (Fowles 1969: 141). She not only disobeys his recommendation to stop all contact with him in order to save both of their reputations, but openly assumes the position of "Sarah the prostitute" (Fowles 1969: 141). Fowles's narrator describes this written gesture:

> Where I have cheated was in analysing the effect that three-word letter continued to have on [Charles]. It tormented him, it obsessed him, it confused him. The more he thought about it the more Sarah-like that sending of the address—and nothing more—appeared. It was perfectly in key with all her other behavior, and to be described only by oxymoron; luring-receding,

> subtle-simple, proud-begging, defending-accusing. The Victorian was a prolix age; and unaccustomed to the Delphic. (Fowles 1969: 145)

The use of an omniscient narrative voice, the repetition of short sentences, the exaggeration in verbs of emotion, the comparative structure as well as the succession of oxymorons fill the passage with emotional intensity so as to dramatize the impact of Sarah's letter on Charles. Furthermore, the narrative voice sarcastically draws a comparison between the verbose Victorian age since "[Charles] expected a flood of words, but there were only three" (Fowles 1969: 138) and the three-word letter which recalls the ancient Greek oracle at Delphi, deliberately obscure or ambiguous through its cryptic guidance. While the three words may seem inconsequential, this short letter exemplifies Sarah's characterisation as a strong agent, all the while signalling a change in the course of events. The letter prepares for Charles' and Sarah's ultimate meeting and sexual intercourse, the epitome of their forbidden relationship and foreshadows the nearing disengagement between Charles and Ernestina. Indeed, Sarah's brief and written speech is a performative act which reveals major aspects of this protagonist: she is associated with "directness", described as "a substance and purity of thought and judgment", and assimilated to "some page decorated by Noel Humphreys, all scrollwork, elaboration, rococo horror of void" (Fowles 1969: 192).

In her exploration of the figure of the New Woman, Nathalie Saudo-Welby establishes a close connection between private speech and loud voice insofar as she argues that Victorian women in the 1850s had an angelic voice which they used to spread values in both private and public circles, but in the 1880s and 1890s assumed a public voice which was loud and effective. Thus, Fowles's Sarah seems to embody the character of the New Woman who was often destined to become a speaker, an orator. She may be likened to Corinne, the first fictional character who assumed public speaking in 1807 in Germaine de Stael's text, and can be read as the prima donna, a metaphor by which public speaking is paralleled with female writing. Though Corinne's voice allows her to enchant people around her, her journey tragically ends with losing her voice and being reduced to a mere auditor and spectator. Sarah on the contrary, continues her journey and eventually becomes a New Woman in her own right.

Comparing Sarah's voice to Ernestina's seems equally essential. When Sarah and Charles secretly meet in the dairyman's barn, Sarah expresses her passion "with an intense earnestness and supplication; with a declaration so unmistakable that words were needless" (Fowles 1969: 107). They ultimately kiss passionately, hence breaking all codes of Victorian propriety. Needing no words, Sarah communicates with Charles via her body language, which

proves to be one of passion and freedom. Ironically, the following chapter evokes Ernestina's written voice which manifests her docility, obedience and self-control. Conditioned by two different but complementary discourses, patriarchal rule and religious code, Ernestina expresses her regret at having displayed an excess of emotion following Charles's disinheritance and vows to be more obedient and docile. She writes in her diary both a confession and an oath to behave better in the future:

> I was so very vexed, but I foolishly said many angry, spiteful things— which I ask God to forgive me, remembering I said them out of love for dearest C. and not wickedness. I did weep most terribly when he went away. Let this be a lesson to me to take the beautiful words of the Marriage Service to my conscience, to honor and obey my dearest Charles even when my feelings would drive me to contradict him. Let me earnestly and humbly learn to bend my horrid, spiteful willfulness to his much greater wisdom, let me cherish his judgment and chain myself to his heart, for "The sweet of true Repentance is the gate to Holy Bliss." (Fowles 1969: 108)

Fowles uses the Victorian form of the diary – a type of silent self-examination which was especially encouraged in women – to point out the dichotomous female reactions. While Sarah's body language evokes passion and feelings, Ernestina's verbose confession circumvents all emotions and sensation and favours contrition and self-abasement. She seems to adhere to both patriarchy and religion which demand that woman be more rational and avoid all forms of excess. Thus, Sarah's wildness is contrasted with Ernestina's ultimate self-control.

Interestingly however, though silent or simply inconsequential for most of the narrative, Ernestina's voice is ultimately heard at the end of the narrative in the second ending. As Charles breaks his engagement, Ernestina is allowed a brief moment of lucidity:

> I know to you I have never been anything more than a pretty little ... article of drawing-room furniture. I know I am innocent. I know I am spoiled. I know I am not unusual. I am not a Helen of Troy or a Cleopatra. I know I say things that sometimes grate on your ears, I bore you about domestic arrangements, I hurt you when I make fun of your fossils. Perhaps I am just a child. But under your love and protection ... and your education ... I believed I should become better. I should learn to please you, I should learn to make you love me for

> what I had become. (…) Charles, I beg you, I beg you to wait a little. It is true, I am ignorant, I do not know what you want of me ... if you would tell me where I have failed ... how you would wish me to be ... I will do anything, anything, because I would abandon anything to make you happy. (Fowles 1969: 162)

Admittedly, the repetition of the verb 'know' in the affirmative form is indicative of Ernestina's new state of awareness. On the other hand, the recurrent use of the modal 'should' to refer to intention, combined with the adverb of probability 'perhaps' and the conditional, convey not only her lack of knowledge, but more importantly her readiness to be self-effacing. Though Ernestina's speech first promises a partial lucidity, it eventually foregrounds a total self-abnegation, as she insists on beseeching Charles to reconsider his decision to break off his engagement.

In brief, the female characterial voice in Fowles's novel is highlighted by means of a sympathetic narratorial voice. The multiplicity in Sarah's voice allows her to perform diverse roles. It first emerges as religious, thus making her a moral preacher. Then, it is collective, marking her transformation into a social observer. It is also sincere as she assumes the role of confessant. In all of its variations, her voice is not only effective, but equally convincing, for Charles finally tells her: "I already know, to my cost, what an accomplished actress you can be when it suits your purpose" (Fowles 1969: 194). Besides, Sarah's daring voice manifests her nonconformist convictions in a society which condemns women for a rumoured lack of chastity. Her insistence on unveiling her secrets so as to keep control of her life and deprive society in East Lyme to speak her story, thus foregrounds her agency and emphasizes her voice. Furthermore, it is also possible to argue that through the intermediary of Sarah's critical vantage point, Fowles's text serves to explain and nuance Victorian prudery: "The vast majority of witnesses and reporters, in every age, belong to the educated class; and this has produced, throughout history, a kind of minority distortion of reality. The prudish puritanity we lend to the Victorians, and rather lazily apply to all classes of Victorian society, is in fact a middle-class view of the middle-class ethos" (Fowles 1969: 115).

What is interesting to note is that Sarah intervenes in the narrative only by means of speech, verbal utterances and un-verbal forms of expression. Though the work is embedded in modern and postmodern techniques, not a single instance of interior monologue or stream of consciousness is to be located in the narrative as far as Sarah is concerned. This absence is highly significant. A number of critics like Magali Michael, Margaret Goscilo and Brooke Lenz

have argued that Sarah is described externally from a male point of view claimed by three voices (that of Charles, of the narrator and of Fowles himself) and consequently lacks authority since the prevalent voice in the narrative is essentially masculine. Michael claims the absence of a powerful voice of the female character versus the dominance of three male voices, making her "represented through a triple layering of voices, which includes Charles', the male narrator's and Fowles's voices" (Michael 1987: 225) and argues that Fowles falls in the trap of idealising femininity: he neither efficiently critiques male ideology nor creates a space for female subjectivity. Furthermore, "[s]ince Fowles ostentatiously keeps from entering her consciousness, she remains without subjectivity even when not mediated through Charles" (Goscilo 1993: 76). The external focalising eye conceives of her femininity as nature to be examined and then possessed. It is for this reason that she is often described in details from Charles's eye like a doctor would inspect a patient, here Doctor Grogan. This external eye prohibits access into Sarah and thus, she remains in lack of a subjectivity of her own. In a similar vein, Lenz equally argues that "[w]ithin the larger narrative of the text, Sarah occupies a similar [marginalized] position, since the narrator, despite his occasional omniscience, is as intrigued with Sarah as his Victorian characters are, though he is never able (or willing) to penetrate her consciousness" (Lenz 2008: 101). Nonetheless, such deliberate choice may be explained by Fowles's insistence on keeping Sarah an irresolvable mystery to everyone, obliging both characters and readers to read her from the exterior and prohibiting access to her interior. Furthermore, it is possible to argue that though the male voices are narratorial, hers is narrative. Through Sarah's constant attempt to write her narrative, she does assume a creative voice as she constructs her own story, for "power resides in the hands of those who tell the best – that is, most intelligible, most satisfying – stories" (Tarbox 1996: 90).

1.2 Theatrical Female Voices in *The Crimson Petal and the White*

One of the merits of *The Crimson Petal and the White* lies not only in its attention to marginal female voices of the mad wife and the prostitute, both categories often disregarded and even reduced to silence, but also in its depiction of the complexity of such voices. In fact, Agnes's voice is represented as ambivalent and evolving since she assumes different positions throughout the narrative. Sugar's voice is more controlled thanks to her capacity to regulate and transform it. Hence, through the protagonists' skill to play-act different personas, both female voices are made theatrical.

Like Fowles, Faber's narratorial voice is embedded in the narrative by means of ironic interventions. While Agnes's characterisation is at first figural through the intermediary of her husband William and her maid Clara, it soon becomes narratorial when the narrator intervenes. The narrative voice is sympathetic towards Agnes, taking her side instead of William's: "Oh no, there was never anything wrong with the small, perfect woman upstairs, yet still her cruel and ineffectual husband persists in demanding round-the-clock accounts of her behaviour" (Faber 2002: 61). The ironic tone and biased narratorial judgement not only contribute to the humour of the passage but also make the reader intrigued to find out more about the marital relationship and the reasons behind the narrator's negative description of the husband. The reader is also tempted to think that there was a sort of change in Agnes's state. The contrast between the past and the present is due to an important reason quite possibly in relation with William. At this point of the narrative, the reader is not given much information about Agnes, but left only with some bits of her story, thus increasing suspense.

The importance of voice in Faber's novel can be assessed quantitively since the word 'voice' occurs 223 times in the narrative. All types of voices are mentioned: masculine and feminine voices, specific protagonists' voices, and vague unattributed voices in the background of certain scenes.

While Agnes's voice is most often muted in the narrative or described as either frail or calm, "[n]ot hoarse and low, but smooth and lilting" to borrow Sugar's words (Faber 2002: 277), she is allowed some instances of vocal eruption where her voice changes drastically signalling her constantly evolving – or rather alternating, to be more precise – persona. A climactic moment in Agnes's life is when she mistakes Sugar's observing shadow for a sister from the Convent of Health and confesses this to her husband. Naturally, his accusing reaction causes Agnes not only to have an uncontrolled burst of emotion but also to his complete shock, to overtly criticise him and express her long-buried scorn and contempt calling him a "fool" and a "fraud" (Faber 2002: 218). Her voice is both passionate and unhesitant. Despite her vulnerable position in the household, she shows no fear and ultimately speaks her mind. Furthermore, her voice which was described admiringly by Sugar as "enchanting" (Faber 2002: 257) or repeatedly by William as "angelic singing voice" (Faber 2002: 245) focusing on its musical aspect since he claimed "the music is back in her voice: what a beautiful voice she has, even when it's talking nonsense" (Faber 2002: 226) is transformed drastically. On these instances of rebellion, it becomes a "low, ugly voice [William]'s never heard before (…) this new voice of hers is as strange and shocking in her rosebud mouth as the growl of a dog, or a Pentecostal torrent of tongues" (Faber 2002: 218) and "hoarse with demented hatred" (Faber

2002: 241). Through animal imagery and religious references, Agnes's voice is given savage attributes. Besides, the oxymoron between the sharp voice and the soft mouth likened to roses is meant to amplify Agnes's highly improbable and unexpected frenzy.

This passionate outburst occurs a second time with Ashwell and Bodley whose lewdness and lack of moral and ethical propriety and constant interest in prostitutes anger Agnes. She calls one of them a "fat drunken dog" (Faber 2002: 427) and then blurts: ""You are useless and ... and ridiculous, the pair of you!" (…) ""Nothing is dear to you except filth! Mucksniffers! Sewer-rats! Your hair smells like rotten banana! Your skulls are full of slime! Get out of my house!"" (…) ""I'm merely trying to rid my house of some garbage before I step in it!" (Faber 2002: 428). The lexical field Agnes uses to describe these men, closely associated with filth and pollution, is rude and even violent. Admittedly, it goes against not only her docile nature, but more significantly against Victorian etiquette, for ladies were supposed to refrain from using such inappropriate vocabulary. Indeed, though it is possible to see an uncontrollable mad woman in this passage, these signs of excess manifestly display Agnes's fury and rebellion.

Significantly, Agnes's angry voice as she loses her composure with William, Ashwell and Bodwell, is also a moral one as it reflects her attachment to spirituality. In fact, what these male characters have in common is their doubt about faith. In contrast to her deeply-religious person, "William Rackham is what might be called a superstitious atheist Christian" (Faber 2002: 68), while Ashwell and Bodwell explicitly mock Henry for his decision to become a clergyman, for they believe it a waste of "[a] fine manly specimen" (Faber 2002: 106). This repressed rage makes Agnes resort to writing. Indeed, besides these moments of vocal expression, she turns to another means of silent protestation. In the fashion of Victorian ladies, and like Fowles's Ernestina, Agnes keeps a private diary in which she scribbles down her every thought and any daily event, be it minor or important. Unable to express her feelings or vocalize her thoughts to people around her, her diaries represent her inner voice. They are the only place where she can speak out her inner thoughts without being judged as either ill or mad by the male figures of the husband and the doctor. Her written diaries reveal many details about her evolution as a person and maturity from childhood to adulthood. What is interesting about Agnes's diaries is that the text as well as its silences, gaps and lacks are equally significant and revealing. While the first passage Sugar reads exposes Agnes's suffering from Dr Curlew's intrusive examinations and the harm they inflict upon her, the absence of personal passages about both William and Sophie is equally important. Agnes seems to be traumatised for she both represses and suppresses any memories related to the two individuals. "Sugar flips through the pages: more and more of the same. Where is William? Where is Sophie? Their names don't

appear. [...] Such roll-calls fill the pages, stitched together with a tireless embroidery of I, I, I, I, I, I, I, I" (Faber 2002: 395). This absence reflects woman's suffering in a masculine environment. Such repression may be metaphorically read in reference to Victorian women authors' incapacity to voice their anxieties in a male-dominated and strictly-regulated literary realm in the early Victorian era. Agnes's silenced voice thus symbolizes how the feminist fight for female representation the early years of feminism was initiated.

Following her escape on Christmas night, Faber interrupts the narrative by allowing Agnes a narratorial position as she takes on the 'I'. In a rather supernatural/ metaphysical passage, Agnes confides in the readers of her Book of Illuminations her thoughts about the Convent of Health. The written monologue – long and verbose – sounds mystical and full of incomprehensible gibberish:

> But now, my dear Children--for that is how I think of you, blessed readers of my Book throughout the world--I have taught you all the Lessons I know. And yet I hear your voices, from as far away as Africa and America, and as far removed as the Centuries to come, clammering Tell Us, Tell Us, Tell Us Your Story! Oh, Ye of little understanding! Have I not told you that the details of my own case are of no consequence? Have I not told you that this Book is no Diary? And still you hanker to know about me! Very well, then. I will tell you a story. I suppose, if you have read all my Lessons and pondered them, you have earned that much. And perhaps a book looks better if it is not quite so thin--though I believe there is more substance in this little volume of mine than in the thickest tomes written by unenlighted souls. But let that pass. I will tell you the story of when I witnessed a thing that none of us is permitted to see until the Resurrection--but I saw it, because I was naughty! (…) Curiosity, which is the disparaging name that men give to women's' thirst for Knowledge, has always been my greatest flaw, I admit. And so, dear readers, I left the confine of my cell. I moved stealthily, as Wrongdoers do, and looked into the key-hole of the next chamber. What a surprise! I had always presumed that only our sex could be offered Sanctuary at the Convent of Health, but there was Henry, my brother in law! (i didnt mind in the least, for Henry was the decentest man in the world!) (Faber 2002: 484)

Religious discourse dominates Agnes's monologue through the semantic field of theology 'Convent', 'Resurrection', 'Holy Sister', 'Wrongdoers', 'Sanctuary' as well as the recurrent capitalized words 'Lessons', 'Book', 'Curiosity', 'Knowledge', bringing together scripture and science. Thus, the passage foregrounds Agnes's voice as one of a moral preacher, religious guide, scientific thinker and writer. She assuredly assumes such position as she repeatedly uses the possessive pronoun 'my', not only confidently claiming property of her book, but attesting to the quality of her writing. Interestingly, she makes an analogy between 'women's thirst for knowledge', and her own curiosity, thus establishing a parallel between her literary genius and female genius, recalling *fin-de-siècle* women authors who confidently assumed the pen and called for a female literary tradition. While Agnes's initial diaries filled with gaps and silences hinted at the beginning of the feminist fight for female voice, her later writings which are more audacious and assertive concretize the attempt. Besides, the passage points out how reality and imagination are blurred in Agnes's confession. Though her story might give the impression that she evokes her eventual escape to the Convent aided by Sugar, the presence of Henry jeopardizes the reality of her story since he has been dead for some time. Faber's insistence on ambiguity gives the allusion that Agnes's account is instinctive and spontaneous, as if Agnes speaks impromptu directly to the reader. Either way, Agnes's (un)verbal report allows access into her complex interior life.

In brief, Agnes's voice in Faber's text is plural and multifarious, for it alternates between softness and harshness, and orality and silence, since it is both spoken and written. Furthermore, it is transformed from a voice of enchantment and musicality, to one of religious sermons and scientific lectures. Interestingly, though Agnes seems out of place in the narrative for other characters simply disregard or ignore her voice, she nonetheless manages to be both heard and understood particularly by Sugar.

In contrast to her soft soothing voice, Sugar's arises as more manly and grave. She describes it as "so ugly and unmusical compared to Agnes Rackham's" (Faber 2002: 252). She thinks to herself: "Oh, to have a voice like that! Not hoarse and low, but smooth and lilting. How can anyone with such a voice possibly be the burdensome nuisance that William makes her out to be?" (Faber 2002: 277). While this opposition between the two voices reflected in the use of adjectives of opposite semantic fields, may instinctively lead the reader to think of feelings of jealousy and envy, the narrative quickly dissolves such impression, for Sugar's stream of consciousness further highlights the empathy she feels towards Agnes. Corroborating the idea of sisterhood demonstrated in the previous section, this modernist technique aptly foregrounds the politics of female relations in Faber's novel.

Interestingly, when the tonality of Sugar's voice is described by William, it "is not overly feminine, rather hoarse even, but wholly free of class coarseness" (Faber 2002: 77). This proximity to masculinity which is synonymous to affirmation and certitude in traditional patriarchal discourse might be to foreshadow her resonating voice which would prove to be assertive and effective when it concerns not only William's business and finances, but also other characters. In fact, Sugar manages to infiltrate this world of business by advising William in his correspondence with his work associates, revising the advertisement motto of his perfumeries as well as writing work-related letters, effective interferences which William would later describe as "her masculine appetite for business" (Faber 2002: 613).

Importantly, Sugar has recourse to role-playing. She not only performs multiple personas, but more significantly commands multiple voices. She has the capacity to modulate her timber and tone for particular objectives. Sometimes, "Sugar's voice is small and unobtrusive" (Faber 2002: 222) or "weightless, a mouse's tread" (Faber 2002: 223), so as to give the allusion of submissiveness and subservience. Then, her hoarse voice becomes tender and soft when she assumes the role of the mother to Sophie, as she talks to her in "murmurs" and "in her sincerest, most encouraging voice" (Faber 2002: 416). Other times, she uses implicit and covert ways of expression such as manipulation in order to give the impression of her innocence. For example, she manages to direct William's actions without even having to utter the words. Indeed, when she decides to take advantage of him to enjoy a more comfortable accommodation, she does not articulate her desire but rather manipulates him. As previously illustrated, she evokes pollution in Greek Street, the risks of diseases and infections and the constant threat on her life. Then, she fantasizes about a clean and calm life outside over-crowded London. And so, her manipulative voice affects the events and allows the plot to move forward. Significantly, while Agnes's voice alternates between softness and harshness in accordance with her passionate outbursts, Sugar's constant shifts are more carefully studied, so as to suit her objectives.

Among the other instances of intended duplicity, Sugar often employs the technique of masking. When William confesses his decision to send Agnes to the lunatic asylum, her utterances openly reflect support and approval, for she is aware that it is what William needs:

> With the lightest, tenderest touch, Sugar strokes his hair and cossets his head with kisses. "There now," she croons. "You have done your best, my love. Your very best: always, since you first met her, I'm sure. You ... you are a good man." He utters a loud groan, of misery and relief. This is what he

> wanted from her from the beginning; this is why he summoned her out of the nursery" (Faber 2002: 489).

Combining physical gestures of affection and supportive utterances becomes her form of expression as well as her strategy of manipulation, for "[t]o her relief, this does the trick" (Faber 2002: 488). Yet, her stream of consciousness uncovers her true feelings: "Sugar holds him tight as he sags against her, and her heart fills with shame; she knows that no degradation to which she has ever consented, no abasement she's ever pretended to enjoy, can compare in lowness to this" (Faber 2002: 489). This outer/inner duplicity manifestly demonstrates not only her lucid awareness and skilful understanding of the world and more particularly the people around her, but also the appropriate way to deal with every delicate situation. Following this confrontation with William, Sugar starts to question whether he is apt to take care of his wife and assumes the role of the friend and the saviour, as she helps Agnes escape the house and liberates her from William's imprisonment. Hence, Sugar's voice greatly impacts the progression of the plot.

Sugar also turns to written forms of expression, as her final exchange with William takes place through the intermediary of a written letter of dismissal by the former and a demand for reconsideration from the latter. Though both are not vocalized, they signal the nearing denouement of the plot. Hence, the narrative stops at the politics of writing and emphasizes the different steps of the process through a succession of interior rhetorical questions. She "reads and re-reads this missive, listening to its tone reverberate in her head" and asks:

> Will William take it the right way? In his state of alarm, will he interpret the phrase "as you can discover to your own satisfaction" as argumentative, or can she rely on him to perceive the bawdy suggestion behind it? She draws a deep breath, counselling herself that of all the things she has ever written, this must not fail to hit the mark. Would the saucy humour be clearer if she inserted the word "perfect" between "own" and "satisfaction"? On the other hand, is sauciness what's needed here, or should she substitute a more soothing, blandishing tone? (Faber 2002: 594)

Hence, the passage highlights the importance of the writing process as well as the medium of language for Sugar. From the start, it has been her weapon to both charm and take advantage of William. Interestingly however, Sugar's first and second letter – for she writes another one in the absence of a response from William– both reflect a position of inferiority and weakness.

For the first time in the narrative, Sugar's voice resonates as beseeching, supplicating and piteous:

> Dear William, Please--every hour I wait for your reply is a torture--please give me your reassurance that our household can go on as before. Stability is what we all need now-- Rackham Perfumeries no less than Sophie and myself. Please remember that I am devoted to assisting you and sparing you inconvenience. Your loving Sugar. (Faber 2002: 596)

The repetition of the word 'please' as well as the adjectives 'devoted' and 'loving' in contrast to 'torture' are meant to amplify Sugar's suffering and urgent need for reassurance. Yet, reading this letter in light of both her grand scheme of socio-economic ascension and sincere desire to preserve her dear roles of governess to Sophie and confidante to Agnes, would encourage the reader to revise this initial interpretation. Weakness is simply a strategy which Sugar has come to master. She makes use of the medium of language to manipulate William and protect her position in the Rackham household. Unfortunately, this final attempt fails as language proves inefficient and Sugar finds herself compelled to leave the house.

Though Sugar's voice is initially one of a marginal character like the prostitute, it emerges as early as the first pages of the narrative as resonating and potent. Because of her capacity to role-play different personas as the seductress, the comforting partner, the soothing governess, and the rescuer, and her mastery of camouflage insofar as she manages to hide her real intentions as she speaks varying her timbre in accord with her objectives, her voice decisively impacts both characters and plot. Finally, Sugar assumes a literary identity and is thus endowed with an authorial voice, this authorial identity will be studied in a separate following section.

1.3 Queer Voices in *Fingersmith*

Fingersmith is co-narrated by two female characters: low-life fingersmith Sue and high-born pornographic secretary Maud. Through these two peculiar characters, Waters gives voice to queer subjects. As used herein, the term 'queer' has two meaning. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the adjective refers first to someone who is "strange, odd, peculiar, eccentric" and "of questionable character; suspicious, dubious". The second meaning is colloquially used to "[denote] or [relate] to a sexual or gender identity that does not correspond

to established ideas of sexuality and gender, especially heterosexual norms". The starting point of this analysis is Annamarie Jagose's claim that queer is always an identity under construction, a site of permanent becoming within the prevalent discourses of the society s/he lives in (Jagose 1996). In Waters's novel, Sue and Maud are protagonists who become queer, constructing their identities through multiple discourses, notably the fictions fabricated for them and by them, but also the narrative itself.

Unlike Fowles, Waters privileges her characters over an external narrator figure and opts for a double-voiced narration. As previously demonstrated, Waters's text is organised into three parts wherein each heroine narrates her own version of events. Thus, Sue takes over the narration of the first part of the novel and assumes first-person narrator position. Despite being a pickpocket living on the dark margins of society in a thieves' den, she discloses her account from her perspective, thus echoing some popular Victorian characters as Dickens's *Oliver Twist*. The characterial voice in the first part of the narrative is closely associated to its owner's role and position in the story. Though a marginal character, we find Sue at the centre in Waters's novel. Her character largely controls the narrative space, as she is presented through first-person narration, third-person narration, flashbacks, vocal utterances, stream of consciousness and interior monologue. Indeed, Waters focuses on the psychological lives of her characters by means of both techniques of stream of consciousness and interior monologue. Compared to the other two novels of this corpus, *Fingersmith* is by far the most 'psychological' one for its frequent use of techniques such as stream of consciousness and interior monologue. This can be explained by two factors. Its date of publication in early twenty-first-century aligns it with postmodernist literary tradition. Its authoress is seen by many as "one of the most prominent authors of her generation [who] enjoys both popular and critical acclaim" because of her engagement with the literary devices of domestic melodrama, gothic fiction and the sensation novel (Delnieppe 2017: para. 1).

Using direct discourse, Sue remembers her childhood and introduces herself as a little child. Her voice sounds sharp and acute, as she overtly gives all the necessary details to present a person: name, year of birth, mother and father, and place of residence.

> My name, in those days, was Susan Trinder. People called me Sue. I know the year I was born in, but for many years I did not know the date, and took my birthday at Christmas. I believe I am an orphan. My mother I know is dead. But I never saw her, she was nothing to me. I was Mrs Sucksby's child,

> if I was anyone's; and for father I had Mr Ibbs, who kept the locksmith's shop, at Lant Street, in the Borough, near to the Thames. (Waters 2002: 2)

Interestingly, her speech is declarative and orderly. It sounds almost disengaged and dispassionate insofar as it shows no personal attachment to the mother- and father-figures mentioned. The people she considers her parents are strangers with no biological tie to her. For this reason, she appears not to be of the sensitive or emotional type. Simply put, the kind of life she leads has shaped her as a thief, a thick-skinned fingersmith. Thus, the impersonal tone of her voice echoes a key characteristic of her identity as a pickpocket.

In the following pages, Sue continues recalling her childhood memories narrating first daily incidents related to Mr Ibbs's activity and her role in it. Then, she selects the most pertinent ones, notably occurrences which involve her supposed mother's alleged crime which directly impacts her persona, as well as other incidents which ultimately lead to Gentleman's introduction into the plot and his proposed scheme. What stands out in Sue's long narration is her selection of memories as well as the language she uses. For example, she recalls one particular incident where she went begging with Flora at the theatre. She describes the scene as "very terrible", with a "drunken woman", a "snarling, pink-eyed dog", and people shouting "you beast! You villain" (Waters 2002: 3). The episode is so horrific that "[she] became gripped by an awful terror" (Waters 2002: 3). Not only is the event shocking for a twelve-year-old girl who witnesses such violence, but the dictum she uses manifestly brings the scene to life. We, as readers, are immersed in the theatre witnessing the brutality first-hand. We discover Sue, the story-teller whose skilful account is so sensational and exciting, thus borrowing from Victorian sensation its attention to suspense. Besides, her voice allows the reader to predict what kind of girl she will grow into: hard and raw. By dint of repeatedly witnessing such scenes, she becomes immune to violence and soon starts to reproduce it. Indeed, later on, we read Sue's narration of different stories where she becomes the assaulter herself, threatening John Vroom with a pair of scissors against his neck.

Sue's long interior monologue also illustrates her capacity to express herself and to act on her free will, she abruptly stops her harangue and firmly addresses the reader: "Do you follow? You are waiting for me to start my story. Perhaps I was waiting, then. But my story had already started—I was only like you, and didn't know it" (Waters 2002: 13). In a postmodernist tradition and in the style of the neo-Victorians from Fowles to Faber, the character directly addresses the reader. Thus, Sue's voice transcends the boundaries of the fictional text and blurs the limits between fiction and reality. The title of the novel can also be read in light of Sue's

capacity for creativity. In fact, etymologically, 'fingere' means to form or to shape. Associated with fiction which refers to an invented statement, one may suggest that Sue fashions her own narrative and creates her own story.

At the same time, subsequent instances of her interior monologue dramatize her oscillating state between the determination to move forward with Gentleman's plot and the nostalgic desire to return home. A case in point is her first night in Briar as she suddenly feels nostalgic of the Borough and Mrs Sucksby's house and longs for the familiarity of her previous life. It seems that Waters insists on an ambivalent characterisation as Sue narrates:

> I took off my dress, and for a second held it against my face. The dress was not mine, either; but I found the seams that Dainty had made, and smelled them. I thought that her needle had left the scent there, of John Vroom's dog-skin coat. I thought of the soup that Mrs Sucksby would have made, from the bones of that pig's head; and it was quite as strange as I knew it would be, to imagine them all sitting eating it, perhaps thinking of me, perhaps thinking of something else entirely. (Waters 2002: 61)

The memory highlights her longing for familiar habits, places and moments. Missing her usual points of reference, Sue yearns for the life she used to lead in Mrs Sucksby's house. Thus, Sue's direct voice, and inner voice are utterly contrasted. While initially, her direct and unemotional self-introduction misleads the reader into thinking that she is neither sensitive nor vulnerable, her anguish after leaving the Borough which stands for security and comfort quickly deconstructs such binary representation. This suggests that the process of her identity construction is variable and complex, making Sue a composite character. Interestingly however, despite these nostalgic feelings, she quickly regains her composure and refuses to be a sentimental girl, as she maintains a tempered-steel character, affirmingly stating that "[i]f [she] had been a crying sort of girl, [she] should certainly have cried then, imagining that. But [she] was never a girl for tears" (Waters 2002: 61).

In the third part of the narrative, Sue's narrative focuses on another topic insofar as it dramatizes her incarceration in the lunatic asylum. Part three resumes where her narration stopped in part one, with Sue being held down and brought into the asylum. Waters plays with narrative composition shifting from one narrative voice to another, and with narrative time taking an abrupt and long pause and proceeding with narration as if the text were a cinematographic representation shifting from one scene, setting, temporal frame to another,

giving the allusion of disorder and ambiguity. The first-part ends with Sue's direct address to the reader: "You thought her a pigeon. Pigeon, my arse. That bitch knew everything. She had been in on it from the start" (Waters 2002: 175). The third reads: "I shrieked. I shrieked and shrieked. I struggled like a fiend. But the more I twisted, the tighter I was held" (Waters 2002: 393), while in between, the ending of the second sends us back to "[t]he start" narrated by Maud (Waters 2002: 175).

In her long narrative passages, Sue recounts the different encounters with the nurses and particularly Nurse Spiller focusing mainly on extreme violence and torture. The lunatic asylum in Waters's text differs from Victorian literary representations of the mad house. Sue notes that "it had once been an ordinary gentleman's house; (…) but that now, it had all been made over to madwomen" (Waters 2002: 406). Yet, despite this seeming ordinariness, "the idea was worse and put me in more of a creep than if the place had looked like a dungeon after all. I shuddered and slowed my step, then almost stumbled" (Waters 2002: 406). In fact, Sue points out that terror does not emanate from the place itself, but rather from the people in it. Doctor Christie whose male patriarchal voice is the only one which resonates in the asylum, works to silence other female voices. Though he discusses the female patients' cases, he does not allow them to express themselves or share their concerns. He immediately suppresses their voices both literally and metaphorically.

> She [a female patient] moved her lips, and swayed on her feet. Then all at once she cried out: 'Thieves!' I jumped at the sound. Dr Christie looked up at her. That's enough,' he said. 'Remember your tongue. What have you upon it?' 'Thieves! Devils!' 'Your tongue, Miss Wilson! What do we keep upon it? Hmm?' She worked her mouth; then said, after a minute: 'A curb.' 'That is right. A curb. Very good. Draw it tight. Nurse Spiller—' He turned and called the nurse to him, and spoke to her quietly. (Waters 2002: 411)

The asylum has for a project to curb all sorts of emotions among women and suppress any sense of identity they have insofar as the doctor's discourse emphasizes the necessity to remain quiet. Despite his incessant reminders of the rules of silence in the asylum, Sue attempts to convince him of the error made and her wrongful incarceration. She reiterates her true identity but fails at every endeavour, unable to have her voice heard because a female voice is assumed to be of madness and irrationality. It becomes evident that the mental institution is another apparatus by which women are subjugated, silenced, and effaced. It is another process of conditioning at the

end of which women are no longer subjects, but rather objects made docile and passive. Waters' stylistic techniques differ from Fowles's in the sense that she privileges Sue's interior monologue to critique social evils and individual dilemmas to vocal speech. In contrast, we have read Sarah's long exteriorized discourses in which she condemns her prejudicial society and puts emphasis on woman and governess's constant struggle. Indeed, in Waters's novel, inner discourse and first-person narration are more telling than external discourse.

The focus on interior monologue and stream of consciousness serves to highlight the psychological and moral effects of such imprisonment as well as the physical torture. While Sue is initially believed to be an accomplice to the trickster, she eventually turns out to be the victim. Thus, her feelings of disappointment, anger and rebellion are magnified. She expresses her rebellion by means of verbal utterances such as crying and shouting and physical actions like kicking with her legs and convulsing into fits of passion. In the midst of her anguish, Sue recalls the moments in Briar where her only desire was to protect Maud from Gentleman's cruelty. "To think I had loved her! To think I had thought she loved me! To think I had kissed her, in Gentleman's name. To think I had touched her! To think, to think—!" (Waters 2002: 400). In a rare moment of direct frankness and exposure, Sue shares with the reader her overpowering feeling of hatred and deception which soon turns into a desire for vengeance. Sue is overwhelmed with rage against both Gentleman and Maud, but mostly against Maud because of the feelings she has for her. Tricked and deceived, love turns into fury.

> *Him* I suppose I expected no better of. It was *her* I thought of most—that bitch, that snake, that— Oh! To think I had ever looked at her and taken her for a flat. To think I had laughed at her. To think I had loved her! To think I had thought she loved me! To think I had kissed her, in Gentleman's name. To think I had touched her! To think, to think—! To think I lay on the night of her wedding with a pillow over my head, so I should not hear the sound of her tears. To think that, if I had listened, I might have heard—might I? might I?—the sound of her sighs. I could not bear it. (Waters 2002: 400)

The repetition of the expression 'to think' enhances the musicality of the passage and raises the intensity of the rhythm. As readers, we almost hear Sue's outcry; an emotional outburst exposing her vulnerability. This passionate stream of consciousness reflects honesty and sincerity. Though Sue has long affirmed not being a sensitive girl, her relationship with Maud unexpectedly teaches her to unveil her emotions and express her feelings. Indeed, tracing her

interior monologue throughout the narrative makes it possible to discern the different stages of growth and maturity. Allowing her emotions to rise to the surface is not a sign of weakness as the young Sue believed, but is rather a recognition of one's human nature: ambivalent and encompassing: both rational and irrational, prudent and emotional. Besides, by showing her vulnerability, Waters chooses to put the focus on betrayal to highlight Sue's humanness. Despite being a pickpocket who willingly participates in a plot of fraud, the reader sympathizes with this deceived protagonist.

Surprisingly, as Sue is locked up in the lunatic asylum and strives to rebel against this new state of imprisonment, she finds herself completely helpless: her kicks are not strong enough, her voice is muffled and her story is not heard. Moreover, her foul language and hard temperament don't seem to be helpful in this particular situation, for the nurses are used to tantrums and fits of passion. She alternatively turns to her initial skills as pickpocket and devises a plan to escape from the asylum, by taking advantage of Charles, Gentleman's gullible boy. She succeeds in stealing the key of the asylum from one of the nurses and forging a perfect copy. Triumphant, Sue elates: "I ran—lightly, at first, across the strip of gravel—then fast and hard, across the lawn. I didn't look back at the house. I didn't think about the ladies, still inside it. I didn't save anyone but myself. I was too afraid" (Waters 2002: 462). Waters exposes the deficiencies of language as a medium for communication. While Sue fails to convince the nurses and the doctor of her sanity, her skills of theft and forgery seem more effective insofar as they allow her to free herself from imprisonment.

Sue's narrative which is extremely interiorized unveils the intensity of her feelings for Maud:

> 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. All day I sat or walked with her, so full of the fate I was bringing her to I could hardly touch her or meet her gaze; and all night I lay with my back turned to her, the blanket over my ears to keep out her sighs. But in the hours in between, when she went to her uncle, I felt her—I felt her, through the walls of the house, like some blind crooks are said to be able to feel gold. It was as if there had come between us, without my knowing, a kind of thread. It pulled me to her, wherever she was. It was like— *It's like you love her*, I thought. It made a change in me. It made me nervous and afraid. (…) 'What have I done?' I imagined I'd say. 'I haven't

> done anything!' And I hadn't. It was only, as I've said, that I *thought* of her so, that I *felt* her so. Her very clothes seemed changed to me, her shoes and stockings: they seemed to keep her shape, the warmth and scent of her —I didn't like to fold them up and make them flat. Her rooms seemed changed. I took to going about them—just as I had done, on my first day at Briar—and looking at all the things I knew she had taken up and touched. Her box, and her mother's picture. Her books. (Waters 2002: 136, emphasis in original)

This long passage is rich in stylistic and aesthetic techniques. First, there is the use of the lexical field of thought and cognitive functions: verbs like 'think', 'imagine' or 'know' and nouns like 'idea', are meant to signal the gradual torment and confusion towards recognition. Like in any experience of discovery, one goes through different steps until the ultimate unveiling of truth and knowledge. Furthermore, there is the amalgam of different senses to describe the growing feelings. Sue combines feeling, touching and seeing, a complete sensory experience transporting the reader into Sue's metaphysical world of emotion. Though silent, the passage manifests an almost musical dimension by means of the repetition of similar structures and short phrases in the simple past as well as the same verbs. Besides, the passage sounds spiritual – almost mythical or utopian – as if Waters believed that these feelings are so pure that they must be elevated. Hence, there is the combination of immateriality and materiality insofar as thoughts gradually materialize and take the form of things. We notice from the beginning to the end of the passage, a transformation of thoughts into objects, aptly highlighted by Waters by means of the repetition of 'change'. Hence, the passage brings Sue's characterial internal voice closer to Waters's authorial creativity, thus blurring the boundaries between author and character, and subsequently, fictional text and reading experience.

As the plot gradually centres on the girls' relationship, Sue's stream of consciousness allows the reader access into her thoughts and exposes the nature of her feelings towards Maud. Waters chooses this technique in order to convey the authenticity and innocence of these growing feelings. Unlike in external narration, Sue's first-person narration depicts explicit monologues by which Waters romanticizes lesbianism and dramatizes the journey of sexual self-exploration for both protagonists. Sue's voice becomes more daring for her narrative becomes sexually explicit. Indeed, as they get romantically closer to each other, feelings become more passionate and carnal. Sexual desire controls Sue's journey towards discovery. Hence, she narrates to describe their first kiss:

> Kissing Maud (…) was like kissing the darkness. As if the darkness had life, had a shape, had taste, was warm and glib. Her mouth was still, at first. Then it moved against mine. Then it opened. I felt her tongue. I felt her swallow. I felt— I lay with my mouth on hers and felt, starting up in me, everything I had said would start in her, when Gentleman kissed her. It made me giddy. It made me blush, worse than before. It was like liquor. It made me drunk. I drew away. When her breath came now upon my mouth, it came very cold. My mouth was wet, from hers. (…) I kissed her again. Then I touched her. I touched her face. I began at the meeting of our mouths—at the soft wet corners of our lips— then found her jaw, her cheek, her brow—I had touched her before, to wash and dress her; but never like this. So smooth she was! So warm! It was like I was calling the heat and shape of her out of the darkness— as if the darkness was turning solid and growing quick, under my hand. (Waters 2002: 141/143)

The passage highlights a complete sensory experience bringing together all senses of sight, touch, taste, and hearing by means of multi-layered imagery, for Sue's carnal voice stresses both corporeal and emotional impacts. We can read similar passages narrated by Maud as she too assumes a sexual voice in order to illustrate her lesbian identity.

In the same narrative style, the second part of the novel introduces Maud as the first-person narrator recollecting memories of her past. Maud's long monologue brings the reader back to her early years of childhood in the lunatic asylum, her first encounter with her uncle and how her life evolves from that point forward. By means of these memories, the reader deciphers some aspects of Maud's character as she narrates a specific incident with her maid. In fact, influenced by her uncle and life under his roof abiding by his rules, the adolescent Maud develops a sadist tendency. The scene where she psychologically bullies her maid Agnes and then physically hurts her with a needle admittedly foregrounds her portrayal as abusive and cruel. Over the years, Maud has turned into a female version of her uncle not only as a pornographic bibliographer, but as a female sadist.

> I find her at work at a piece of sewing. She sees me come, and flinches. Do you know how provoking such a flinch will seem, to a temperament like mine? I stand and watch her sew. She feels my gaze, and begins to shake. Her stitches grow long and crooked. At last I take the needle from her hand and

> gently put the point of it against her flesh; then draw it off; then put it back; then do this, six or seven times more, until her knuckles are marked between the freckles with a rash of needle-pricks.
> (…) Here, turn your hand.' She does, and I jab the needle harder. 'Now, say you don't like it, having a prick upon your palm!' She takes her hand away and sucks it, and begins to cry. The sight of her tears— and of her mouth, working on the bit of tender flesh that I have stabbed— first stirs, then troubles me; then makes me weary. I leave her weeping, and stand at my rattling window, my eyes upon the lawn that dips to the wall, the rushes, the Thames. 'Will you be quiet?' I say, when her breath still catches. (Waters 2002: 201/202)

In order to depict the image of the sadist as the person who derives pleasure from inflicting pain on others, the passage relies on both a sensorial and sensory description as it brings together the senses of touch, sight, taste, and hearing, and emphasizes the resulting effect on Maud. The act of piercing the maid with the needle not only causes a material impact on her skin in the shape of a prick, but more importantly 'stirs' Maud. Maud's character revisits the literary trope of sadism, exemplified by numerous characters as Magdalen Vanstone and Lydia Gwilt in Collins's *No Name* (1862) and *Armadale* (1866) respectively, who in quest of control over their own lives turn to masochism and sadism, practices which eventually lead to identity loss and self-destruction. Though these Victorian characters resort to sadism to control the men in their lives, the approach to Maud's character is different insofar as it foregrounds her as a predator preparing to attack her prey. By means of this process of self-narration, Maud constructs herself as a sadist. Susana Onega claims that "Maud's absolute lack of moral scruples and empathy, and the secret pleasure she derived from her sadistic treatment of those under her" turn her into a "'Sadeian woman', that utterly free, and therefore monstrous, type of woman Angela Carter saw in the great women imagined by the Marquis de Sade as counterparts to his sexually voracious and murderous statesmen, princes and popes" (Onega 2015, para.17/18).

The intensity in these two passages gradually increases and the tone becomes more morose and alarming. By means of her interior voice, Maud recognizes that she is no longer the innocent little girl raised in the lunatic house by the maids whom she considered mothers and for whom she longed, and that she has turned into a heartless creature because of her uncle's conditioning. Controlled and subjugated by her uncle, she assumes a position of power and superiority vis-à-vis her weak maid. She becomes a matriarch – an accomplice to patriarchy –

and even compares Gentleman's skills to hers, as she proudly states: "[h]e has a talent for torment, quite as polished as my own; and I ought, in observing this, to grow cautious. I do not. The more he teases, the more bewildered Agnes becomes, the more—like a top, revolving faster at the goading of a whip!—the more I taunt her myself" (Waters 2002: 232). As Maud assimilates herself to Gentleman, both of them emerge as villainous figures. Yet, though Gentleman's wickedness is motivated by financial gain, Maud's comes as natural and instinctive, for like a hunter, she is satisfied with tormenting her poor victim.

Voice is particularly important in Maud's life and Sue's adventure in Briar since the main male character Mr Lilly demands constant quiet, if not complete silence in Briar. When Sue meets Lilly for the first time and utters the first words, he instantly represses it claiming: "'I don't care for her voice,' he said. 'Can't she be silent? Can't she be soft'" (Waters 2002: 75)? In the same manner, when Lilly first meets Maud as a child in the lunatic asylum, his first remarks concern her size, the noise she makes with her feet, her voice, and her ability to nod and keep quiet. Unquestionably, Lilly aims to silence female characters and suppress their voices in the manner of patriarchs.

In brief, by means of its double-voiced narration, the text creates a space for polyphony as the unconventional and transgressive female protagonists take over narration. Although a criminal, Sue's narrative voice dominates the text instead of being marginalized. Her narrative is mostly internal. Interior monologue and stream of consciousness allow the reader access into Sue's thoughts and feelings. These techniques emphasize the psychological life of the protagonist. She is presented as a multi-dimensional ambivalent character alternating between strength and vulnerability and reason and passion, whose role oscillates from agent of her own fate to victim of others' plotting. In both cases, her character is at the centre of the plot. In a similar way, Maud's inner speeches unveil her feelings of imprisonment, suffering and constant longing for liberation. Indeed, vocal utterances and dialogues in Waters's text are so limited that the novel can be labelled 'psychological', insofar as these techniques literally expose the female subject and unveil its interiorized self. Both female characters assume highly-sexual voices as they express their carnal desires for each other, making Waters's text an elaborate narrative for an exploration of lesbian identity.

2. Feminist Authorship in the Neo-Victorian Novel

2.1 Authorship and Authority: Sugar, Maud and Sarah as Characters/Authors

Three female characters of this corpus stand out not only in regard to their complexity but also their literary creativity since they are attributed an authorial identity, to varying degrees. In fact, Sugar in Faber's text and Maud in Waters's are characters engaged in the task of literary writing: the first writes a crime novel to take revenge against the men who abused her and her sisters, and the second ultimately becomes a writer of pornography to earn her living. Sarah in Fowles's text however, is associated with creative artistic circles, for she becomes the muse to Dante Gabriel Rossetti and his followers. Such literary creativity aligns them with the New Woman figure of *fin-de-siècle*.

A major transgressive icon of the 1890s, the 'New Woman' is embodied in a number of memorable *fin-de-siècle* female heroines who question traditional gender roles, promote sisterhood among women, proclaim women's control over their own bodies, reject normative sexuality and assert their right to shape their own lives. Importantly, New Woman narratives often follow women's struggles to make their voices and ideas heard through their art or their writing, as is the case for example with Mary Erle in Ella Hepworth Dixon's *The Story of a Modern Woman* (1894), Hadria in Mona Caird's *The Daughters of Danaus* (1894), Elizabeth Caldwell Maclure in Sarah Grand's *The Beth Book* (1897) and Hester Gresley in Mary Cholmondeley's *Red Pottage* (1899). The emergence of the Victorian woman as an author/artist figure may be considered as a recurrent trope in 1890s novels written by female writers, like in the above-mentioned list. Lyn Pykett claims that "New Woman fiction is littered with would-be literary artists, painters and musicians" (Pykett 1999: 136), most of whom were writers (Pykett 1999: 135). Interestingly, in the eyes of the Victorians, the figure of the New Woman was often conflated with that of the decadent aesthete, since both equally challenged gender binaries.

In Faber's novel, the narrative follows Sugar in her journey of literary creativity: a journey initiated by her and directed towards herself with her heroine as a proxy since "this namesake of hers shares her face and body, right down to the freckles on her breasts" (Faber 2002: 309). Unlike New Women who attempted financial independence through their writings, Sugar's artistic creation remains a project in process. The text dramatizes the different stages of this endeavour until the final scene where the novel is "spewed out of its cardboard jacket all along the street for three body-lengths or more" (Faber 2002: 609). Though one may suggest that this attempt ultimately fails and does not bring Sugar the freedom she seeks, her secret act

of writing is nonetheless an expression of protest. She states: “My name is Sugar--or if it isn’t, I know no better. I am what you would call a Fallen Woman, but I assure you I did not fall-- I was pushed. Vile man, eternal Adam, I indict you!” (Faber 2002: 251). Indeed, she considers herself a representative of all prostitutes in their struggle against dominant men. Her exclamation “There’s a new century coming soon, and you and your kind will be DEAD!” foregrounds her position as the leader of a movement for women’s rights (Waters 2002: 129).

Her fiction which is aggressive and most often murderous links her directly to madness from patriarchy’s perspective. Towards the end of the narrative, William considers her a “madwoman” when he reads some bits and pieces of her novel (Faber 2002: 613). Yet, her critical thinking and comments on the literature of the time align her with the New Woman of the *fin-de-siècle* who is both creative and subversive. Furthermore, her determination to speak up and make her voice as well as her sisters the prostitutes’ voices heard highlights her belief in female sisterhood, a notion strongly defended by New Women. Ann Heilmann writes “By the 1890s, Grand attributed healing qualities no longer to the medical profession but instead to the political potential of women’s solidarity” (Heilmann 2004: 29). In fact, while women may turn into revolts for they develop a wild and self-destructive anger, or turn to revenge against other female figures, other women seek refuge among fellow sisters – notably victims of the same crimes and fallen women chastised by patriarchy – to express their anger towards and rebellion against a patriarchal abusive system. This reaction is reverberated in Sugar’s novel: the heroine and her sisters the prostitutes form a sort of union and her book epitomises their rebellion against men who wronged them. Such perspective echoes Butler’s words that “Feminism is a crucial part of these networks of solidarity and resistance precisely because feminist critique destabilises those institutions that depend on the reproduction of inequality and injustice” and “inflict violence on women and gender minorities” (Butler 2016: 20).

When the reader is introduced for the first time to the genre of fiction Sugar writes, we learn that not only are her novels about murder and revenge against abusers of prostitutes, they are so savage and horrid that most people would find them repulsive and quite shocking. Interestingly, the narrator zooms in on Sugar at her desk, moving in and out of the protagonist, depicting her gestures and thoughts, as well as giving us a sneak peek of her writing.

> Glistening on the page between her silk-shrouded elbows lies an unfinished sentence. The heroine of her novel has just slashed the throat of a man. The problem is how, precisely, the blood will flow. Flow is too gentle a word; spill implies carelessness; spurt is out of the question because she has used

> the word already, in another context, a few lines earlier. Pour out implies that the man has some control over the matter, which he most emphatically doesn't; leak is too feeble for the savagery of the injury she has inflicted upon him. (Faber 2002: 148)

Through the use of a clever mise-en-abyme, the narrator presents Sugar engaged in her writing task. The passage is meant to ironically emphasize the effort Sugar makes in order to translate the horridness of torture. She clearly enjoys writing, but what she seems to enjoy more is writing about crimes with an exaggerated savagery and violence. Through her novel, Sugar vicariously experiences the pleasure of imagined revenge. Furthermore, as the novel borrows codes of the Victorian detective fiction through its focus on crime, it precisely brings to light how her writing actualizes the potentialities of Victorian writing, radicalizes them and expresses them in an explosive style. Unable to rebuke the male invasion on her body, her blood is symbolically transformed into a creative power, making the image in her text even more pertinent with regard to prostitutes in general, and Sugar in particular since she evokes the scene of her deflowering. In fact, one may suggest that Sugar brings to light how "the sacrificial suffering of the inarticulate female body is revealed in the bloody ink print, which is the result of the hymen's penetration" (Gubar 1981: 253). By making the male body spill its blood, Sugar reverses the symbolism of blood insofar as she transforms it into an emblem of female creativity: the more blood is spilled, the more articulate woman and woman/author can be.

Her novel can also be read as a reversal of the story of Jack the Ripper whose crimes typically involved female prostitutes who lived and worked in the slums of the East End of London and whose throats were cut. Interestingly, in Sugar's novel, the roles are inverted as the heroine becomes the murderer, a female version of the Ripper with the same skills of brutality. By means of the same writing act which procures her with the power to create and so to dictate fictional creations' destinies, she insists on denying male characters any form of agency and control. Gubar establishes a parallel between creativity and subjectivity, and claims that the roles traditionally attributed to the male creator and the female creation regulate the subsequent power politics. The former enjoys authority and autonomy while the latter is relegated to submission and passivity (Gubar 1981: 247). Here, Sugar attempts to reverse this order by turning male into *creation* while becoming the *creator* herself (the italics meant to emphasize the trait of agentivity or the lack of it). Whether her creative act is successful is of secondary importance. Indeed, we can recall Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* which closely deals with a number of different (un)successful acts of creation. For example, Walter

Hartright paints a watercolour portrait of Laura and reads her as his own creation. Besides, when she marries Percival then Walter, her identity is constantly written by men who create and re-create her. It is not surprising that her artistic creations are deemed worthless at the end of the novel as they "reflect her lack of self-confidence as a creator" (Collins 1859: 479). On the other hand, both Marian in Collins's novel and Sugar in Faber's text finally succeed in liberating their creations into the world: Marian's diary is published and Sugar's novel is accidentally released, allowing them thus, to gain a limited power thanks to the creative feminine.

Agnes as well engages in a similar process of creation. She takes up dress-making by slicing, cutting and reassembling the pieces of different dresses and fabrics. Her creative act does not involve a male figure, but is rather an attempt at self-expression. This mania for creation echoes Cixous's bursting desire for a woman to write and masturbate in an attempt to express herself. Though this attempt fails and Agnes is compelled to artistic frustration, she resorts to writing a book of illuminations which is kept hidden from the public eye, buried in the garden and then hidden by Sugar under her bed. In her exploration of New Woman fiction, Nathalie Saudo-Welby argues that there is often a gap between the spoken voice "*la voix parlée*" and the inner voice "*la voix intérieure*", between thought and speech (Saudo-Welby 2019: 244). The Focus on the cognitive processes leading to the utterance dramatizes the protagonist's decision to speak up her voice or remain silent often translated in the 'not-said' or the 'ifs'. Thus, female voice is often intermittent as the protagonist is torn apart between moments of orality and others of mutism. Like Evadne in *The Heavenly Twins* (1893) who is thirsty for knowledge but settles for developing her own theories – often in opposition to her father's – in her *Commonplace Book* (a scrap-book containing some notes, articles from newspapers and some personal thoughts), Agnes's diaries are the same as Evadne's book. Unable to speak up her opinions and the discord with her husband, she engages in a personal task of writing her personal religious reflections. This book then can be read as a form of "silent dissension" (Saudo-Welby 2019: 248). Agnes's escape at the end of the narrative may also symbolise the need for women to move freely in order to give space for artistic freedom. Faber at least then, hints at the possibility for women to attempt the pen and assume the role of creator.

Indeed, the creative act is a pursuit of potential freedom. Like Marian in Collins who keeps a diary which she considers her refuge, Sugar believes that her novel could help her envision a future of liberation. At the same time, it enables her to overcome her trauma. Writing about the male abuse through her years of prostitution entails a constant re-enaction of trauma, but simultaneously, this putting into words distances her from her past self:

> Her story chronicles the life of a young prostitute with waist-length red hair and hazel eyes, working in the same house as her own mother, a forbidding creature called Mrs Jettison. Allowing for a few flights of fancy--the murders, for instance--it's the story of her own life--well, her early life in Church Lane, at least. It's the story of a naked, weeping child rolled into a ball under a blood-stained blanket, cursing the universe. It's a tale of embraces charged with hatred and kisses laced with disgust, of practised submission and the secret longing for vengeance. It's an inventory of brutish men, a jostling queue of human refuse, filthy, ginstinking, whisky-stinking, ale-stinking, scabrous, oily-nailed, slime-toothed, squint-eyed, senile, cadaverous, obese, stump-legged, hairy-arsed, monster-cocked-- all waiting their turn to root out the last surviving morsel of innocence and devour it. (Faber 2002: 172)

The novel she sees as "a cry of unappeasable anger" not only encapsulates her suffering as a prostitute at the hands of cruel men, but also expresses the rage and fury she has buried deep within her (Faber 2002: 172). Thus, Sugar writes her past, a past from which she has difficulty to move on. One might argue that erasure would be worst; here expressing her rage is the beginning of a form of healing. All the traumatic memories of her childhood keep resurging in her narrative, as she projects herself onto the text, all the while maintaining a distance through the projecting of her own pain onto imagined characters like a young prostitute, Mrs Jettison and a weeping child. The novel is an attempt to get rid of this pain and to heal from her traumatic past. Romero Ruiz argues that "making this confession can be therapeutic for Sugar as well as for all the victims of sexual violence and abuse" (Romero Ruiz 2018: 7), an attempt which, I argue, ultimately fails to give her freedom.

In fact, from the start, Sugar is determined to write a tragic ending for her heroine, for she is convinced that prostitutes are fallen women who should not be rewarded in any way. "Her story's ending, therefore, is one of the few things Sugar has planned in advance, and it's death for the heroine" (Faber 2002: 173). In an intertextual reference to Jane Eyre's concluding declaration 'Reader, I married him', Sugar resists writing a happy denouement for her novel. Though both heroines are not quite similar, Sugar refuses a fairy-tale closure for her heroine, and by extension for herself. Though Faber's text portrays Sugar as confident and strong for she constantly dreams about taking action against these men, Sugar's novel in fact exposes her protagonist as a victim of her own self-doubt and self-abasement. Though Sugar is convinced that a happy ending following her life of sin is not what she deserves and death is "inevitable"

(Waters 2002: 173), Faber seems to reject such closure through his novel's ending. Sugar's ultimate escape symbolizes a second chance at redemption and liberation.

Intriguingly however, following the act of writing, Sugar contemplates the possibility of publishing one of her novels, a revolutionary novel that would shock and appeal at the same time. As a historical metafictional reference, Faber hints at Collins's *The New Magdalen*, by means of which Sugar concludes that readership has evolved and become more willing to read about topics which were previously considered grotesque such as women's lack of chastity, (over)sexuality and prostitution. Unlike *Jane Eyre* which she despises so much because of the ending in which Jane finds happiness alongside Rochester, her novel will be about a prostitute who suffers terribly at the hands of patriarchal figures and ultimately dies trying to regain control over her destiny. She recognizes that her novel would cause a sensation, but at the same time would convey the truth and reflect the reality of prostitutes.

> She must finish her novel. Nothing like it has ever been published before; it would cause a sensation. If conceited fools like William's school cronies can make a stir with their feeble blasphemies, think of the effect she could have with this, the first book to tell the truth about prostitution! The world is ready for the truth; the modern age is here; every year another report appears that examines poverty by means of statistical research rather than romantic claptrap. All that's needed now is a great novel that will capture the imagination of the public --move them, enrage them, thrill them, terrify them, scandalise them. A story that will seize them by the hand and lead them into streets where they've never dared set foot, a tale that throws back the sheets from acts never shown and voices never heard. A tale that fearlessly points the finger at those who are to blame. Until such a novel is published, prostitutes will continue to be smothered under the shroud of The Great Social Evil, while the cause of their misery walks free ... (Faber 2002: 249)

Sugar aims to preserve the traditional sensational effect of the genre, but relies more on its realist aspect. She considers that her protagonist's dramatic suffering from a harsh reality would be more sensational than a heroine's torment about her lover. Decidedly, Sugar's novels: *Women Against Men, An Angry Cry from an Unmarked Grave* and *The Fall and Rise of Sugar*, epitomize the alliance between literature and social reform. Though the content is extremely violent, the ultimate objective is to raise social awareness about the phenomenon of prostitution.

Thus, Sugar's novel echoes late-Victorian activist Sarah Grand's claim: "[T]hanks to our efforts, the 'novel with a purpose' or the 'sex novel' are more powerful at the present time, especially for good, than any other social influence" (Grand 1896: 56). Thus, by means of her novel, Sugar not only embodies the New Woman figure, but illustrates New Woman literature's socio-political engagement in "adapting and transforming" female issues such as prostitution "to deal with the specifically cultural and aesthetic scripts with which women writers and artists had to contend" (Heilmann 2004: 2). While prostitution is evoked as a social phenomenon through statistics and reports, Sugar's novel can be seen as a sample of "New Woman fiction [which] established a tradition of feminist political literature written for and consumed by a female mass market" (Heilmann 2004: 2). Accordingly, her novels put to the fore female characters, investigate prostitution from a female perspective and advocate women's liberation.

The Crimson Petal and the White follows Sugar's evolution as a scholar and author and tracks the change in both her literary interests and crime novel. With the socio-economic conditions of her life improving drastically and eventually allowing her a certain degree of quietude especially with her new role as mother to Sophie, Sugar gradually retreats from the prostitute's daily life of suffering and progressively discards the rage she once felt for the men who tormented and abused her. Curiously, Sugar no longer recognizes herself as an author.

> Who am I? My name is Sugar. So says her manuscript, shortly after the introductory tirade against men. She knows all the lines by heart, having re-written and re-read them countless times. My name is Sugar--or if it isn't, I know no better. I am what you would call a Fallen Woman ... Rather than see the embarrassingly pompous sentence: Vile man, eternal Adam, I indict you! that lies in wait at the end of the paragraph, she flips the page, then the next, and the next. With sinking spirits, she leafs through the densely-inked pages. She'd expected to meet herself here, because this namesake of hers shares her face and body, right down to the freckles on her breasts. But in the yellowed manuscript she sees only words and punctuation marks; hieroglyphs which, although she remembers watching her own hand write them--even remembers the ink drying on particular blotted letters--have lost their meaning. (Faber 2002: 309)

The tone of the passage is both melancholic and cynical, as it dramatizes Sugar's self-division and alienation. Indeed, since her novel is about prostitutes' psychological and financial anguish,

she starts to detach herself from the fictional text onto which she has long projected herself, hence the use of the analogy between person: 'name', 'face', 'body', 'breast' on the one hand, and text: 'words', 'punctuation marks', 'hieroglyphs', 'ink' on the other. By means of this imagery of severing and fragmentation, the passage points out how her text becomes a stranger to her and so, her novel loses its real-life dimension, insofar as she even questions the use of expressing this hatred to both herself and her fellow sisters. Her stream of consciousness exposes an inevitable author's dilemma.

> These melodramatic murders: what do they achieve? All these straw men meeting grisly ends: what flesh-and-blood woman is helped by it? She could ditch the plot, maybe, and substitute a less lurid one. She could aim to tread a middle ground between this gush of bile, and the polite, expurgated fictions of James Anthony Fronde, Felicia Skene, Wilkie Collins and other authors who've timidly suggested that prostitutes, if sufficiently deserving, should perhaps be excused hellfire. (Faber 2002: 309)

Will the fictitious killing of these men erase the past of agony and misery? Will it give actual 'flesh-and-blood'-women back their dignity and self-respect? Sugar, the author is doubtful about the impact of crime fiction on real life and even ponders the possibility of throwing away this novel of hatred and writing a new one in the more respectable genres of the Victorians, as she eventually states that "[n]o one in the world will ever want to read this stuff, and no one ever shall", "all [this] poisonous ugliness in her despicable story...." (Faber 2002: 311). Besides, in the course of her surveillance of the Rackhams, Sugar gets the chance to attend different social and cultural occasions such as concerts and musical shows, and learns to appreciate the higher classes' taste for refined arts. She is so immersed in this new society that she realizes she is gradually withdrawing from her previous position as a prostitute and moving towards a new one as a Victorian lady. Indeed, apart from her present profession as a prostitute, her dress, tastes, literary interests and speech align her more with respectability. Thus, as she rereads the notes in her novel, she is ashamed that the language is "crude" and inappropriate (Faber 2002: 310). These realizations are a rite of passage not only for Sugar, the prostitute, but more importantly Sugar, the author who earnestly searches for her authorial self.

As a sexual dissident and the heroine of a neo-Victorian *Künstlerroman*, Maud also bears resemblance to the *fin-de-siècle* New Woman. Her sexual emancipation enables her self-awareness as a female writer as well as her financial independence. Like 1890s female New

Woman novelists who secured an unusually prominent position in the literary marketplace and achieved commercial success, popular appeal and (sometimes) critical recognition, Maud is eventually able to make her living as a professional writer and as a woman writing about women from the point of view of women. In 1894, William Stead defined New Woman fiction precisely in those terms:

> The Modern Woman novel is not merely a novel written by a woman, or a novel written about women, but it is a novel written by a woman about women from the standpoint of Woman. Many women have written novels about their own sex, but they have hitherto considered women either from the general standpoint of society or from the man's standpoint, which comes, in the long run, to pretty much the same thing … But in the last year or two, the Modern Woman has changed all that. Woman at last has found Woman interesting to herself and she has studied her, painted her and analysed her. (Stead 1894: 64)

Among the few *fin-de-siècle* writers who openly celebrated the sexually audacious side of the New Woman, the short-fiction writer George Egerton (the pen name of Mary Chavelita Dunne Bright) and the lesbian poets known as Michael Field (pseudonym for Katharine Harris Bradley and Edith Emma Cooper) stand out. Like them, Waters's Maud articulates a new poetics rooted in female sexuality. If Waters chooses not to include any extract from male pornography (except through indirect or intertextual references), it is significant that she offers long passages in which Maud and Sue alternately and explicitly describe their lesbian encounters and shared sexual ecstasy, as in the following paragraph:

> [Sue's] lips are cool, smooth, damp: they fit themselves imperfectly to mine, but then grow warmer, damper. Her hair falls against my face. I cannot see her, I can only feel her, and taste her. She tastes of sleep, slightly sour. Too sour. I part my lips—to breathe, or to swallow, or perhaps to move away; but in breathing or swallowing or moving I only seem to draw her into my mouth. Her lips part, also. Her tongue comes between them and touches mine. And at that, I shudder, or quiver. For it is like the finding out of something raw, the troubling of a wound, a nerve. She feels me jolt, and draws away— but slowly, slowly and unwillingly, so that our damp mouths seem to cling

> together and, as they part, to tear. [...] I feel it as a falling, a dropping, a trickling, like sand from a bulb of glass. Then I move; and I am not dry, like sand. I am wet. I am running, like water, like ink. I begin, like her, to shake. (Waters 2002: 279)

Because such highly sexualized passages are narrated in turn by Sue and by Maud, they serve to emphasize reciprocity and the shared nature of their experience. But in Maud's case, they also insist on lesbian sexuality as the source of Maud's creativity, through the allusion to the flowing of 'ink' and the 'tearing' of paper/mouths.

Interestingly, Maud's slow acceptance of her lesbian identity is repeatedly linked to her gradual journey towards writing. The narrative follows the different stages of her sexual awakening as she moves from rejection and denial to exploration and ultimately to recognition and nurture. First, her embrace of Sue is barely a thought: "I would like to touch [Sue], to be sure that she is there. I dare not. But I cannot leave her. I lift my hands and move and hold them an inch, just an inch, above her— her hip, her breast, her curling hand, her hair on the pillow, her face, as she sleeps" (Waters 2002: 269). Then, it becomes more specific, as her sexual imagination is fired up by textual reminiscences from the pornographic works she has been made to read: "I think of the books I have lately read, to Richard and to my uncle: they come back to me, now, in phrases, fragments […] I feel my legs, very bare inside my gown. I feel the point at which they join. […] The warmth of her limbs comes inching, inching through the fibres of the bed" (Waters 2002: 277/278). Fittingly for a future novelist, Maud's sexual awakening is simultaneously a linguistic experience, a "feel [for] words" (Waters 2002: 278). As her interior monologue becomes longer and takes up more narrative space, the description become more physical, until Maud accepts her newly-discovered feelings, takes one of her uncle's books and admits that it "is filled with all the words for how [she] want[s] [Sue]" (Waters 2002: 551).

The narrative closely tracks Maud's evolution as a scholar much like the heroines in New Woman fiction. She starts from the margins of the library away from the books, then moves to assist her uncle in the rewriting of the pornographic bibliography, and ultimately dethrones him and emerges as a writer in her own right, while he is simply excluded from the narrative. The novel dramatizes her position within the sphere of the library through spatial markers. As a child, she is ordered by her uncle to remain at a clear distance from his desk and books for fear of "spoiling them" (Waters 2002: 76). He has "a desk and a stool for [her] close to the pointing finger on his library floor" (Waters 2002: 190). As she grows up, her desk is

moved a bit closer. She recalls "One day I arrive at my uncle's room to find my little desk removed, and a place made ready for me among his books" (Waters 2002: 193). The last scene of the narrative portrays her as she usurps her uncle's place literally by sitting at his desk as well as figuratively by assuming the literary vocation. Such a profile distinguishes Maud from stereotypical Victorian representations of women often domesticated and imprisoned in the private sphere and thus, establishes her as a symbol of individual creativity, self-sufficiency and emancipation from patriarchy.

Admittedly, Maud's scholarly journey takes place in the private sphere, more specifically in the library. In her investigation of 'New Woman strategies', Ann Heilmann recalls Charlotte Perkins Gilman's metaphor of 'room as tomb' indicating that confining and burying female sexuality and/or creativity induces an implosion of madness. Mr Lilly's library is not only the space where Maud acquires most of her artistic knowledge, but also where she is most confined as if in a tomb and realises the urgent need for freedom. Maud is constantly ordered either to remain silent or read pornography. Her existence is reduced to these two states, both in which she is denied her subjectivity. Thus, in her reimagination of the library, Waters turns it into "an emblem of the womb, the locus of individual and artistic rebirth and self-realisation" (Heilmann 2004: 105). This process of transformation requires both time and strategies. At first, Maud simply fears the materials her uncle subjects her to. "The books fill me, at first, with a kind of horror: for it seems a frightful thing" (Waters 2002: 195). Then, she starts to compare their essence to reality and finally decides that they are "filled with falsehoods" (Waters 2002: 196) and "common enough obscenities" (Waters 2002: 208). Gradually, the books lose their effect on her and she becomes immune to them. "The restlessness turns all to scorn. I become what I was bred to be. I become a librarian" (Waters 2002: 196). In fact, Maud must assimilate the tools by which she is confined and then succeed in dismantling them to resurge as her own creator for the purpose of subversion; which eventually occurs in the same space: the library. It is only natural that the ending portrays her in the library sitting at her uncle's desk. The tomb then becomes the symbol of birth of a literary career and rebirth of a liberated Maud.

Both Ann Heilmann and Lyn Pykett argue that the woman artist in New Woman fiction functioned as "a figure of authorial self-reflexivity" since she encompasses multiple femininities: the feminist intruding on masculine sphere as well the female with conflicted interior femininity exploring the contradictions between the dominant definition of middle-class femininity and female sexuality (Heilmann 2004: 5). By usurping her uncle's authorial identity and becoming a woman author, Maud interferes in the masculinist sphere represented

by Mr Lilly and his gentlemen friends. As previously mentioned, this authorial journey is equally accompanied by a journey towards the self. Aided by Sue, Maud learns about her sexuality in a different light. Since the New Woman character is often an intrinsically contradictory character, it engages her in a constant dialogue with herself and initiates a process of adaptation, evolution and change. Thus, she surpasses all typological characterisations. Maud is at once virgin and whore, rebellious and submissive, intelligent and deceivable, knowledgeable and ignorant. Though she clings to the idea of freedom, she hesitantly accepts Gentleman's proposal out of fear of the unknown. Despite her ability to analyse Gentleman's deceitful behaviour, she blindly falls into his trap and finds herself Mrs Sucksby's hostage. The most shocking contradiction nonetheless remains her fear of and inability to understand how sexual intercourse takes place despite having been subjected to pornography from a young age. Indeed, prior to her wedding to Gentleman, she tells Sue: "'I wish,' (..) 'I wish you would tell me what it is a wife must do, on her wedding-night…'" (Waters 2002: 278). In theory, Maud knows very well the different actions to be performed by the two parties in an intercourse. She even admits: "And at first, it is easy. After all, this is how it is done, in my uncle's books" (Waters 2002: 278). But she quickly loses control over her body and surrenders to the practical knowledge Sue brings her. Drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of polyphony, Maud's character gives the narrative a dynamic dimension opening it to multiple possibilities – hence the numerous plot twists – and initiating a journey of self-questioning and discovery.

Maud ultimately takes on the identity of a writer of pornography and fully assumes pornography as a primordial part of her existence claiming that "[my uncle i]s dead. But I am still what he made me. I shall always be that. Half of the books are spoiled, or sold. But I am here" (Waters 2002: 549). It seems that Waters does not call for the obliteration of the memory of male pornography, but advocates a female re-appropriation of this genre to create another form of female text. In the narrative, Waters establishes implicit comparisons between two different sorts of pornography. Whereas the uncle's books propose objectifying representations of women always from the domineering perspective of a male gaze's, Maud's version of pornography expresses her own feelings and desires for Sue; a book proposing a "tradition of female erotic literature [which] promises to include: a loving relationship between two consensual partners, as opposed to the female victimization, objectification, and exploitation encouraged by male-dominated pornography" as Kathleen Miller argues (Miller 2008: 11). Arguably, Maud is no longer a mere reader and reciter; she becomes an active producer of her own pornography. The utterance "Look how I get my living" entails action, activity and labour. Onega believes that Maud participates in the liberation of patriarchal pornography from

universal patterns of sexuality and hence, "crosses the boundary from morally unbounded and monstrous consumer and enforcer of sadomasochistic pleasure and pain to active agent in the demystification and liberation of all forms of sexuality from patriarchal constraints" (Onega 2015: para. 24). Indeed, through her re-appropriation of the genre and its transformation into a literary mode by which females can express their own desires and sexual fantasies, Maud deconstructs a whole literary tradition initially and principally produced by and destined for men. Redefining female sexuality in order to voice female desires rather than metaphors representing patriarchal stereotypes of male domination and female submission, Maud substitutes her uncle's pornography with her new writing.

In her investigation of some examples of contemporary fiction, Michelle Ryan-Sautour argues that there is often an overlap between the narrator and the author in contemporary fiction, notably but not exclusively in autobiographical fiction and claims that this represents the reason behind much criticism of contemporary fiction in general and authors in particular as deceptive for they create an "authorial mask/persona" and are engaged in a literary 'game' or a '*mise en scène*' by means of "a narrator/character" (Ryan-Sautour 2014: 7). Reading *Fingersmith* in this light, one may suggest that there is indeed an overlap between Maud's character and Waters's authorial figure, for it seems that both share not only the vocation of writing, but also the same political agenda of speaking up for female literature and female authorship in a male market.

In its reworking of the codes of the Victorian period in regard to the representation of female, Fowles's text initially accords Sarah the status of creator, as she assumes an authorial position as to the creation of her story. By means of fabricating the plot around the French lieutenant, she conceives of a fiction of her own. More intriguingly, the ending further corroborates her identity as artist surrounded by numerous objects of art, sketches, and "many paintings, so many the place seemed more an art gallery" (Fowles 1969: 188). She is likened by Charles to "Miss Christina Rossetti" with whom she shares "a certain incomprehensible mysticism[.] A passionate obscurity, the sense of a mind too inward and femininely involute" (Fowles 1969: 195). Such comparison brings to light Sarah's creative capacity, since Christina Rossetti is herself an artist and a poet. Thus, Sarah participates in the creation and production of Pre-Raphaelite art. Through the association with the Pre-Raphaelites, Fowles depicts Sarah as "blossomed, realized, winged from the black pupa" (Fowles 1969: 189). The author employs insect imagery to refer to the stage in the life cycle that is transitional between larva and adult, and which is typically a quiescent resting phase, signalling thus Sarah's debut as artist and ultimate evolution into a mature artistic figure. Hence, Fowles transforms Sarah's character into a fictional incarnation of the Pre-Raphaelite woman, as painter, poet and model. In fact, by

bringing together her role as both muse and artist, one may suggest that Sarah challenges the patriarchal gender dichotomy of male artist/female object. Fowles acknowledges having turned to Elizabeth Siddall[34] as the archetypal Pre-Raphaelite New Woman (Huffaker 1980: 145). Though Margaret Goscilo argues that the author "has limited her importance to her beauty as a model while egregiously omitting the most feminist aspect of her association with Rossetti: nothing less than her own emergence as an artist" (Goscilo 1993: 73), one may suggest that Sarah's position as artist in her own right is not circumscribed, but rather foregrounded by means of this historical association to Siddal.

2.2 The legacy of *Künstlerroman* and New Woman Fiction in the Representation of Neo-Victorian Female Authorship

The tension surrounding the issue of female authorship can be traced back to female anxiety of entering the field of literary creation, appropriating a space originally exclusive to male authors and competing with male canons. Indeed, Sean Burke suggests that some of the main hardships women had to face over the centuries have been to gain legitimacy as authors: "It would scarcely be an exaggeration to say that the struggles of feminism have been primarily a struggle for authorship – understood in the widest sense as the arena in which culture attempts to define itself" (Burke 1995: 45). Thus, it is only legitimate that we find writing and authorship as one of the most recurring themes in neo-Victorian fiction primarily constructed around a female heroine/ artist in quest of identity as both woman and creator as demonstrated with Sugar, Maud and Sarah.

Mary Eagleton discusses how women authors sought to create a literary space of their own within contemporary fiction.

> Second-wave feminism always presumed that access for women applied to the cultural sphere as much as any other and the reshaping in the last thirty years of our cultural history, the establishment of feminist publishing companies or of feminist listings within mainstream companies, the importance of feminism as an academic discourse and the current visibility of women as not only writers but as artists, musicians, cultural workers generally are all testament to that. (Eagleton 2005: 1)

[34] Elizabeth Siddal was Dante Gabriel Rossetti's wife, and one of his two best models.

In other words, there has been an increase of female-produced works of art in the aim of establishing a female literary market which puts to the fore a feminist cultural and literary tradition. Arguably, one may suggest that this wave of female authors is in the continuity of the emergence of *fin-de-siècle* women writers, which was in its turn inspired by nineteenth-century female authoresses like George Eliot, Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley and others who played an important role in this regard. Thus, it is in the context of the early twentieth-century activism for women's education and their right to vote that the idea of the New Woman appeared as an alternative for the angel in the house.

Furthermore, as Showalter points out in the introduction to her study of gender at the *fin-de-siècle*, the two final decades of the nineteenth-century were a period of "sexual anarchy", during which the terms 'feminism' and 'homosexuality' were coined and redefinitions of masculinity and femininity were undertaken by New Women and others (Showalter 1991: 3). During the final decades of Victorian epoch, "feminism, the women's movement, and what was called 'the Woman Question' challenged the traditional institutions of marriage, work, and the family" (Showalter 1991: 7). Therefore, it is not surprising that the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries not only staged the gradual emergence of Modernism, followed by its heyday, but also the massive production of works by female writers.

Eagleton also draws attention to the period of late 1980s which witnessed the publication of canonical writings proposing two opposite views vis-à-vis authorship. Roland Barthes's 'death of the author' on the one hand, and feminist writings of Cixous, Gilbert and Gubar, Showalter and Irigary which promoted the birth of the woman author on the other, both contended that the author as a sole source of meaning was in fact dead, but the figure of the author was resurrected in different forms. Towards the end of the twentieth-century, two of the most significant Anglophone female writers, Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Virginia Woolf, considered their sex an encumbrance and therefore argued for a form of androgyny. Gilman wrote "The true artist transcends his sex, or her sex. If this is not the case, art suffers" (Gilman 1911: 79). Woolf agreed with her in *A Room of One's Own*: "It is fatal to be a man or woman pure and simple; one must be woman-manly or man-womanly" (Woolf 1992: 102). Whereas certain feminists in the 1970s and 1980s repudiated this stance and defended the right to be 'feminine', the female Modernists considered the concept of androgyny one of many innovations that Modernism made possible.

Hence, in this following section, I will study the two novels of this corpus wherein the female protagonist assumes the identity of author in *The Crimson Petal and the White* and *Fingersmith*. Though the former is written by a male author and the second by a female one, I

argue that the author's sex does not limit but rather allows the female character to have varied authorial experiences. In this first part, I am interested mainly in investigating to what extent Sugar can be considered a resurrection of the *Künstlerroman* heroine, the woman artist in quest of self-liberation and fulfilment. In the subsequent part, I will ask the following question: How aptly can we consider *Fingersmith* a neo-New Woman fiction by means of Maud, the character-author who revives the New Woman figure?

2.2.1 Metafiction in *The Crimson Petal and the White*: The Woman Artist's Quest in Sugar's Writing

The Crimson Petal and the White follows Sugar's journey towards maturity. Therefore, it can be seen as a *Bildungsroman.* Though the term was first coined by Karl Mongstern in 1819 and later popularized by Wilhelm Dilthey, the genre of *Bildungsroman* precedes these dates[35]. A *Bildungsroman* is a "novel of all-around development or self-culture with a more or less conscious attempt on the part of the hero to integrate his powers, to cultivate himself by experience" (Suzanne Howe qtd. in Buckley 1974: 13). J. H. Buckley provides a whole list of specific characteristics of the *Bildungsroman*: "childhood, the conflict of generations, provinciality, the larger society, self-education, alienation, ordeal by love and the search for a vocation and a working philosophy – answers the requirements of the Bildungsroman as I am here seeking to describe and define it" (Buckley 1974: 18). To put it simply, it is the story of a child who is not well-liked by their father and not particularly enthusiastic about their first encounter with school and education, who leaves home for a city where they discover real life by means of love affairs and diverse interactions with other people, and who eventually reaches maturity. While Sugar's trajectory in Faber's text does not follow the same clear-cut plot Buckley suggests, there is no doubt that the model of the *Bildungsroman* is useful with regard to her development in the narrative. The use of techniques such as flashbacks and constant back and forth movements in time between past and present by means of memories in order to recall her childhood years leads to have a model of *Bildungsroman* which is slightly different from the traditional one.

Buckely points out that the genre of the *Bildungsroman* had become popular "in Germany among the Romantics and in England by the time of the early Victorians" (Buckley 1974: 13). Male and female Victorian writers alike wrote *Bildungsromane*. Some examples

[35] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* which is considered the "prototype of the Bildungsroman" by Jerome Hamilton Buckley was published between 1795 and 1796 (Buckley 1974: 12).

include Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield* (1849) and *Great Expectations* (1861), Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (1895), Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), and George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860).

The 1970s however, witnessed the re-emerging interest of feminist critics for the female *Bildungsroman*; "the novel of the development of a female protagonist" (Fuderer 1990: 1). Ellen Morgan's 1972 article considers the female Bildungsroman "a "recasting" of an old form that was distinctly male until the twentieth-century" and a result of neo-feminism because "woman as neo-feminism conceives of her is a creature in the process of becoming, struggling to throw off her conditioning, the psychology of oppression" (Morgan qtd. in Fuderer 1990: 2). Indeed, Sugar seeks total freedom, isnofar as her journey is meant for a double liberation not only from her mother's imprisonment in the role of prostitute since childhood, but also from patriarchy's limiting possibilites for women first, and prostitutes more particularly. According to Esther Kleinbord Labovitz, the female subcategory of this genre was "made possible only when Bildung became a reality for women" especially in the light of the development of feminism for example (Labovitz qtd. in Fuderer 1990: 3). The female *Bildungsroman* was not a twentieth-century invention then, but its plot did undergo major changes in the transition from the nineteenth- to the twentieth- century. Thus, one may wonder what model of female *Bildungsroman* Faber offers a century later.

Rachel Blau DuPlessis interprets nineteenth-century female *Bildungsromane* as "scripts of heterosexual romance" (DuPlessis 1985: 2). She argues that the nineteenth-century female *Bildungsroman* contradicts "love and quest", thus offering only one solution: "an ending in which one part of that contradiction, usually quest or Bildung, is set aside or repressed, whether by marriage or by death" (DuPlessis 1985: 3/4). This is what renders nineteenth-century texts like Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* or Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* so different from twentieth-century novels like Virgina Woolf's *To The Lighthouse* for example. In *The Crimson Petal and the White*, we witness the resurrection of the heterosexual romance. From the start, Sugar is involved with a central male character. We track the usual stages of romantic relationships: the acquaintance in The Fireside – a contemporary pub –, the sexual attraction, and then the intimacy. This fluid relationship is disturbed with a loss of intimacy coinciding with a transformation into a business-like relationship, especially during William's reconvalescence. Sugar is no longer the romantic (sexual) partner – since we are talking about a prostitute providing service to a client – but rather becomes the advisor on Rackham perfumeries and the assistant in charge of professional correspondences. Thus, Faber's first

revisionist act of nineteenth-century romance is the introduction of an air of contemporaneity: the professional within the personal, the public within the private.

The Crimson Petal and the White takes from nineteenth-century *Bildungsroman* elements of the romance plot that defined the genre. This plot was transformed in twentieth-century *Bildungsroman* because it "muffles the main female character, represses quest, valorizes heterosexual as opposed to homosexual ties, ... separates love and quest, values sexual asymmetry, including the division of labor by gender" (DuPlessis 1985: 5). I argue that Faber uses "the romance plot ... as a major site for [his] intrepid scrutiny, critique, and transformation of narrative" (DuPlessis 1985: 4). While maturity for a nineteenth-century heroine is considered closely dependent on male appreciation and love, Sugar's romantic involvement with William proves to be for mere socio-economic interests and not for personal development. She strategically manipulates, deceives and influences him in order to ascend the social ladder and guarantee a comfortable financial situation. Thus, it is only legitimate that throughout the narrative as she matures and gets closer to other female characters, she gradually loses her initial interest for the sake of a more authentic achievement, such as her newly-discovered roles of sister and mother-figure. As part of this romance plot, Faber then questions to what extent romantic relationships can help one reach individual – both psychological and social – harmony.

When this financially-inspired romantic plot proves inefficient, Sugar does not hesitate to abandon it and quickly discards her relationship with William for the sake of hers with Agnes and Sophie. Like the women authors who invented alternative endings, apart from the usual marriage or death, and thus drastically altered the plot of the female *Bildungsroman,* Faber equally opts for an innovative ending by which he scrutinises the gendered roles and finds a solution for the either/or dilemma of his female protagonist. At the end, Sugar is neither dead nor married, she rather becomes a surrogate-mother to her ex-lover's daughter and a saviour to his supposed-mad wife. By means of this altruistic perspective, Sugar succeeds in her quest of self-fulfilment thanks to the 'Other'. As I have demonstrated in the previous chapter about female individuation by means of the other, alternative models of female relationships founded on sisterhood and solidarity as well as on maternalism which proves to be encompassing and fulfilling, actively participate in Sugar's maturity as woman. Thus, Faber's ending echoes feminism's call to seek the feminine as collective, the self in relation to the other (female).

There are several subcategories to the genre of *Bildungsroman*, one of which is the *Künstlerroman*, "a tale of the orientation of an artist" (Buckley 1974: 13). In other words, not only does the genre follow the journey of maturity of one individual, this same protagonist is or strives to be identified as artist. Towards the end of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-

centuries, the genre became the most popular type of *Bildungsroman* in England. Some famous illustrations may well be James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1917) as well as Virginia Woolf's *To The Lighthouse* (1927). When considering these works prototypes of the English *Künstlerroman*, it becomes clear that the genre does not merely focus on the development of the artist-protagonist, but also provides a "study of the inner life, the essential temper, of the artist in his progress from early childhood through adolescence" (Buckley 1974: 14). This definition indeed recalls Sugar since we simultaneously follow her journey of development as a woman, accompanied with her quest for her self as author since she assumes the secret identity of novelist. While we can simply refer to *The Crimson Petal and the White* as a contemporary female *Bildungsroman*, such statement is disturbed by the fact that the female protagonist is also an artist in search of her artistic vision in the narrative. As I have already argued, the narrative depicts the novelist Sugar going through different stages of authorial anxiety. She is often described at her desk writing, revising, correcting and re-reading her crime novel. First, like any novice – and especially female – novelist, she is uncomfortable about exposing her fiction not only to her mother and friends, but also to William who represents Victorian critical reception, most often both masculine and patriarchal.

> But Holy Jesus, she'll have to keep him from seeing what's on her writing-desk. (…) Still, she'll have to be more careful in future: her papers can't be in the open like this, for him to sniff at. (…) Could it be that horrid little pamphlet concerning ... oh Lord, yes! She blenches at the thought of what, if she hadn't led him away, he might have stuck his nose into. (Faber 2002: 129)

Judith Butler's notions of performativity and gender norms as the theoretical background for this section may help to elucidate the female protagonist's concern about searching for and occupying an alternative feminine position. In fact, Sugar's progress in terms of gender and art is intertwined because of the specifics of the female role: women were not expected to be artists and therefore their intellectual and artistic growth is unavoidably connected to their departure from the gender norm. Even though she works hard to keep her fiction hidden, the fact that she assumes the pen is a departure from gender-imposed normality. Strikingly, despite being partly influenced by gender norms, she attempts to subvert them. Faber adapts the pre-existent originally male-oriented genre and innovates/subverts it in order to produce a story about the growth of a female artist. The gender-biased perception of female authorship is illustrated in a medical tract stolen by Sugar from the public library's reading room in Trevor Square:

> No woman can be a serious thinker, without injury to her function as the conceiver and mother of children. Too often, the female "intellectual" is a youthful invalid or virtual hermaphrodite, who might otherwise have been a healthy wife. Let us close our ears, then, to siren voices offering us a quantity of female intellectual work at the price of a puny, enfeebled and sickly race. Healthy serviceable wombs are of more use to the Future than any amount of feminine scribbling. (Faber 2002: 129)

In other words, femininity cannot be equated with authorship. Consequently, becoming an author challenges the perception of gender roles which professes that femininity equals wifehood and motherhood. In *The Crimson Petal and the White*, Sugar's literary writing is depicted as a catalyst for the subversion of gender norms. Because this is a female *Künstlerroman*, the artist's development is influenced by gender norms, much more so than in a male *Künstlerroman*, since women are not easily allowed to become professionals, let alone authors of crime novels. In other words, there are double boundaries for Sugar to cross.

Furthermore, in the above-quoted passage, there is a telling reference to female androgyny. In fact, a female author is no longer considered strictly female but rather a 'hermaphrodite', a biologically complex creature with both female and male sexual organs and a human being with both female and male attributes. Unsurprisingly, Sugar is described from the beginning of the narrative as androgynous. Physically, she is both male and female. From Butler's perspective, Sugar performs both male and female gender roles. She transcends her biological sex as well as the female gender role initially attributed to her. Her body thus foreshadows the complex identity of woman and authoress at once. Both obedient and subversive of gender norms, Sugar literally embodies the essence of (post)-modernist female author. In Julia Kristeva's feminism, we distinguish three tendencies. The first focuses on equality between men and women, the second is radical feminism while Kristeva herself prefers the third type in which "women reject the dichotomy between masculine and feminine as metaphysical" (Kristeva qtd. in Moi 1985: 12). As Toril Moi points out, this final position "is one that has deconstructed the opposition between masculinity and femininity, and therefore necessarily challenges the very notion of identity" (Moi 1985: 12). Kristeva's theory of sexual identity converges with Butler's notion of gender: they both agree that there is no naturally fixed boundary between masculinity and femininity.

The reference to 'siren voices' with regard to Faber's perception of woman author recalls Linda Lewis's claim that the nineteenth-century British literature by women is

influenced by and inspired from Greek figures of mythology, biblical figures, and Romanesque characters as well. In fact, studying Germaine de Staël's *Corinne* (1807) and George Sand's *Consuelo* (1843), she shows that the heroines were first inspired from Greek mythology, and then became inspiring references for later British literature. Both novels are

> representatives of the two generations of Romantic art . . . consciously carefully brought mythic properties to their female heroes, and each connected Wisdom myth to herself. Both mythologize their artist/heroines by connecting them to the Sibyl/Minerva/Sophia traditions and to the radical empowerment humanity inherent in the Prometheus myth. Myth created *Corinne* and then in England *Corinne* and *Consuelo* became the mythology for British artists of the remainder of the century. (Lewis 2003: 22)

In other words, the British artist's novel is the outcome of a lineage of literary heroines and their mythological and biblical foremothers. Following this same line of thought, one may suggest that Faber's Sugar is equally inspired from these Greek figures. By means of the power to create, she recalls the figure of Prometheus. Her well-informed readings and interpretations of high literature align her directly with archetypal figures of wisdom as Minerva and Sophia. William exclaims:

> Why, the girl's a *prodigy*! She has an amazing *knowledge* of literature, lacking only Latin, Greek and the male's instinctive *grasp* of what is major and minor. In terms of sum total of pages she seems to have read almost as much as he (…). Yet she's *well-versed* in many of the authors he holds in high esteem--and she adores Swift! Swift, his favourite! (…) Sugar can even pronounce "Houyhnhnms" (…) And Smollett! She's read *Peregrine Pickle*, and not only that, she can *discuss* it *intelligently*--certainly as intelligently as he could have done, at her age. (…) "But that's not possible!" she *protests* demurely, when he confesses that he hasn't yet read James Thomson's *The City of Dreadful Night*, even now, a full year after its publication. (Faber 2002: 79, emphasis added)

Because of these literary talents, Sugar has a great impact on William insofar that he is mesmerized. Faber's characterisation of his female protagonist in his twenty-first-century neo-

Victorian novel is still in accord with Lewis's claim that Victorian women writers addressed familiar and pertinent questions ranging from the effect of gender (in this case feminine) on genius and artistic production to "the female artist's mesmerizing power over her male audience and whether her artistry should - or could - be judged apart from her sexual charms" (Lewis 2003: 249).

In her quest for authorial identity, Sugar also experiences the stage of confusion and loss. She is depicted as insecure about her writing and hesitant on what vocabulary to use, transition to choose and closure for the male character to opt for. By means of stream of consciousness and interior monologue, Faber exposes the crisis any author goes through in the process of writing. As I have demonstrated in the section devoted to Sugar's authorial voice, her novel chronicles her own life as a prostitute who has long suffered from male's supremacist and dehumanizing attitude and who strives to liberate herself as well as her fellow sisters from such haunting past. Thus, the process of self-creation within one's work of fiction sums up Carol Hanbery MacKay's definition of the 'female quest' as 'creative negativity'. She defines it as "a complex of rhetorical and performative techniques by which certain women of the period construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct themselves" in order to step outside the structure a defined existence (MacKay 2001: 3). Echoing detective Victorian fiction's recourse to crime scenes, Sugar uses an explosive style to exaggerate the violence of the narrative, only to foreground female suffering of male invasion. Thus, her style allows her to write and ultimately re-write her self inside the text, as she questions the appropriateness of such choices. To further explain these techniques, MacKay divides creative negativity into six elements:

> (1) it grows out of *negativity*, either philosophical emotional; (2) it evokes a *focal point*, often a place; (3) it combines *reality and illusion*; (4) it suggests a shift in *magnitude*, a sense of multifariousness or zooming out; (5) it includes an altered sense of *time*; and (6) it evokes *self-referentiality*, an aesthetic of formal invocation in a work of art, a sense of self-consciousness in social contexts. (MacKay 2001: 3, emphasis in original)

We find these elements in Sugar's novel. First, it is the outcome of years of ill-treatment at the hands of her own mother and later male clients. This past creates trauma and consequently an emotional imbalance, which leads to the eruption of the act of writing. Thus, the narrative revolves around Greek Street, a place where she is initiated to child-prostitution and grows into one, and which ultimately becomes a symbol of this activity. Consequently, she aptly entitles

her novel *The Fall and Rise of Sugar*. On the one hand, it is an account of her own past life, notably the fall into prostitution. On the other, it is a prediction of the future fall of all those who took advantage of her youth and innocence. Interestingly enough, she keeps her name in the title though it links her to a history of colonialism and slavery, all the while signalling its significance as a simple commodity exchanged in triangular trade. Her text also employs frequent alterations in narrative time: pausing, ignoring past phases, juxtaposing past and present memories and moving forward to later scenes of vengeance and liberation. Finally, how her plot moves forward is closely related to her own evolution from prostitute, kept mistress, governess to mother-surrogate. Throughout these different stages, she contemplates different endings, constantly looking for both her self within the narrative and her authorial self.

In defining the female quest, Mackay also notes that unlike the male quest, it is communal and collaborative in nature. It is chiefly governed by the two principles of separation as well as unity, and it is usually not one individual's quest alone. Indeed, Sugar's narrative is not only about herself as woman, but rather about the social group of prostitutes brought together by the same suffering and the same objective. Generally, female quest is often driven by illusion, i.e. the imaginative material necessary for the creation and recreation of reality itself. Through her novel, Sugar aims to change prostitutes' fate and condemn the race of men summed up in her phrase "Vile man, eternal Adam, I indict you!" (Faber 2002: 309). Thus, her female quest constitutes both a response and an approach to empiric reality, with the fundamental goal of redefining women's roles and accomplishments in relation to the opposite sex of men.

Despite these multiple inetrfaces of continuity – with regard to the varied changes – between nineteenth-, twentieth- and twenty-first-centuries, we find nonetheless a number of features which signal some divergences. The ultimate question is the following: What fate is there for the woman-artist in female *Künstlerroman*? While in nineteenth-century *Künstlerroman*, marriage is to reward the woman who ultimately suppresses her artistic self, and death is to punish those who privilege art over family, some twentieth-century novels seem to favour art over all – though the essentialisation is very much debatable. In *To The Lighthouse* (1927), Virginia Woolf's Lily Briscoe ultimately reaches her 'lighthouse' and experiences an artistic epiphany allowing her to re-create her painting. On the other hand, Kate Chopin's aspiring painter Edna Pontellier in *The Awakening* (1899) wades into the sea to die, so as to symbolise her unfinished artistic mission. Sugar can be placed between the two: she is neither punished nor rewarded, in the traditional sense of nineteenth-century *Künstlerroman* and yet, at the same time, she is unable to find her authorial self since she ultimately comes to question

and even discard her fiction altogether. She thinks to herself: "She could ditch the plot, maybe, and substitute a less lurid one. (…) Look at this stack of papers--her life's work--there must be hundreds of things worth salvaging! But as she skims the pile, she doubts it" (Faber 2002: 309). Her ultimate deception with her novel is illustrated in this brief statement: "she opens her precious manuscript, at random, hoping against hope to find something she can be proud of" (Faber 2002: 310). In this neo-Victorian *Künstlerroman*, there is a sense of incompletion, a constant quest which goes on.

Interestingly, a modernist female *Künstlerroman* deviates from the default model with a male protagonist. Therefore, and because the female protagonist desires an alternative feminine position while being so critical of the obligation of heterosexual relationships and all the implications of such a system, Butler's theory about the heterosexual matrix and subversions of the gender norm may prove to be useful as the theoretical framework for this analysis. In fact, *Künstlerroman* authors invent transgressive narrative strategies that deviate from the dominant narrative, such as "reparenting, woman-to-woman and brother-to-sister bonds, thus scrutinising the rigid social and ideological organisation of gender" (DuPlessis 1985: 5). Indeed, Faber invests in female relationships for Sugar gradually develops a closer relationship with both Agnes and Sophie by the end of the narrative as was thoroughly investigated in a previous section.

Butler's heterosexual imperative or 'heterosexual matrix' as the binary system of masculinity and femininity is reinforced by the gendered performances and acts of everyday-life. This binary system is repressive and exclusionary: "Performances that do not serve to reinforce this law are repressed, mocked, denied recognition. Small girls who don't like dolls will learn to play properly; knights will not grow up to marry other knights" (Loxley 2006: 120). Faber responds to Butler's call to denaturalise this heterosexual matrix in order to rid society of the misconception of its presumed naturalness. He first highlights how Sugar's mother conditions her to an eventual life of prostitution. Then, as she grows up, Sugar starts to deviate from these normative performances, assuredly reading and interpreting male literature and going against her mother's – and Victorian codes for that matter – recommendations. She writes a novel without her mother's knowledge and approval, adopts an attitude of command and control vis-à-vis her clients, disobeys her mother's wishes to be compliant and docile, and ultimately tries to become an appropriate mother-figure to Sophie, a model completely different from her mother. In other words, she breaks away from both moulds of gendered female and gendered prostitute.

DuPlessis argues that the mother in the twentieth-century female *Künstlerroman* functions as the muse of her daughter (DuPlessis 1985: 94). Mrs Castaway who forces Sugar into prostitution since childhood inspires a character in her novel, Mrs Jettison who "is blamed for many, many things--principally the violation of her own innocent daughter, the intrepid heroine" (Faber 2002: 202). The mother is often an artist herself, albeit a silenced one: she plays the piano, writes letters and engages in other creative activities, but does not have the means to enter a "dominant art form" (DuPlessis 1985: 94). Indeed, Mrs Castaway's house is decorated with many frames of "all those Magdalens and Virgin Marys" (Faber 2002: 259). Besides, she is described busy in her handiwork collecting a scrapbook "of Magdalen and saints" (Faber 2002: 213). Artistically speaking, she is rather a hybrid character. On the one hand, she is not an artist, nor does she like art either. On the other hand, she recognises its importance in Sugar's education as well as her future personae as a literate prostitute. She teaches Sugar "folk tales (the nastier the better), selected episodes from the Old Testament (sugar can still list each of Job's trials), and true-life accounts: indeed, anything with a full complement of undeserved suffering and apparently motiveless deeds" (Faber 2002: 406) along with "some grown-up poetry (…) Not Wordsworth and such (…) Pope. No, better still: try Rochester" (Faber 2002: 417). Therefore, the daughter "can make prominent the work both have achieved... In these works, the female artist is given a way of looking back and re-enacting childhood ties, to achieve not the culturally approved ending in heterosexual romance, but rather the re-parenting necessary to her second birth as an artist" (DuPlessis 1985: 94). As a stage necessary to her maturity, Sugar gradually departs from her mother and becomes her own version of motherhood. Indeed, one of Sugar's most important subversions of gender norms is breaking with the gendered identity inherited from her mother. Nancy Chodorow in *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1999), points out that the role of women as we knew it – as baby machines – is a historical product. She seems to agree with Butler's statements on the reproduction and reiteration of gender roles, which are culturally and historically defined, rather than naturally obtained and embedded within the self. In the same vein, Chodorow stresses that boys and girls obtain their gender personalities as a result of women's mothering (Chodorow 1999: 173). By the end, Sugar transgresses this matrilineal heritage and subverts internalising gender personalities from her mother.

In brief, *The Crimson Petal and the White* is inspired from both nineteenth- and twentieth-century *Künstlerromane* and *Bildungsromane*, making the narrative an adapted version which follows Sugar's journey of growth both as woman and artist. It signals the hardships and obstacles the woman artist must face in the quest for her self.

2.2.2 T/Sexuality in *Fingersmith*: Maud as a Neo-New Woman[36]

One of the recurring themes explored in neo-Victorian fiction is that of the construction of women's (sexual) identities. Marie-Luise Kohlke's concept of 'sexsation'[37] encapsulates the genre's fascination with the nineteenth-century erotic as a way to expose our era's sexual imaginary and its link with the Victorians. A case in point is Waters's *Fingersmith* (2002). In this artist's novel reminiscent of the late-Victorian female *Künstlerroman*, the woman writer's growth to maturity is inextricably linked to the consumption, production, and aestheticization of pornography. Thus, the aim will be to explore how such a sexsational narrative enables a radical revision of patriarchal discourses on sexuality. To what extent is Waters' plot of female solidarity and lesbian creativity indebted to the artist's novel of the 1890s and to the late-Victorian New Woman novel? With its emphasis on 'dissident'[38] sexualities and woman's emancipation through writing, to what extent can Waters's *Fingersmith* be considered as neo-New Woman fiction?

The novel follows the contrasted trajectories of Susan, the criminal raised in a thieves' den and Maud, the aristocratic young woman who has been specifically trained by her uncle to assist him in his work as a collector of pornographic works. Their paths cross in a plot of fraud, forgery and murder which leads them to help each other, fall in love and discover their lesbian identities as well as their true origins. The narrative ends with their final reunion and the emergence of Maud as a new figure of female authorship intent on re-writing/ 're-righting' centuries of patriarchal discourse on female sexuality (Zabus 2006: 57).

Though sexual fantasy in patriarchal discourse is often associated with asserting power over the subjected exploited female, Waters uses the sexual motif for the sake of her political and textual project of deconstructing heteronormativity. Indeed, despite the lucrative aspect, generally defined as a committed realist novel centred around a rebellious heroine fighting Victorian codes most often related to sexuality, New Woman fiction is mainly interested in woman's condition and invested in the debate on sexual roles and definitions of femininity. The New Woman novel celebrates the feminist fights and conquests from both conservative and/or more progressive perspectives (Saudo-Welby 2019: 16). By means of its explicit focus on

[36] This section is adapted from a published article. Lilia Louati, "Sexsation and the Neo-New Woman in Sarah Waters's *Fingersmith (*2002)", *Études britanniques contemporaines*, 62. 2022.

[37] Marie-Luise Kohlke first coined the term in "Sexsation and the Neo-Victorian Novel: Orientalising the Nineteenth Century in Contemporary Fiction", in *Negotiating Sexual Idioms: Image, Text, Performance, Pages* (2008), pages 53 – 77.

[38] This term is borrowed from Richard Dellamora's book *Victorian Sexual Dissidence.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.

sexual identity and eroticism, *Fingersmith* can be classified among the more daring narratives which challenge cultural assumptions by constructing a new sexuality: a decadent perverse sexuality for the male characters and a non-normative lesbian sexuality for the female ones. Mr Lilly and his gentlemen friends indulge in the pursuit of a libertine sexuality and male pleasure experimenting with pornography. Besides, Maud learns to discover a lesbian identity long repressed by the patriarch. Her journey puts to the fore not only woman's struggle against an imprisoning patriarchy, but also the female voice long suppressed and finally liberated, calling for an alternative female sexual identity. Thus, the novel portrays Maud as a beacon of an enlightened and liberated feminism. Indeed, the heroine of New Woman fiction expressed her quarrel with Victorian culture chiefly through sexual means by heightening sexual consciousness, candour, and expressiveness. Taking into account that there is often an overlap between the narrator and the author, notably but not exclusively in autobiographical fiction, in contemporary fiction – which may represent the reason behind much criticism of contemporary fiction in general and authors in particular as 'deceptive' evoking dichotomies like 'literary mask/persona', literary 'game'/ literary '*mise en scène*' and a narrator/character, I argue that having a fictional character-author liberates further the woman author herself. Thus, it echoes Eagleton's argument that "[th]e figure of the woman author provides the living woman author with opportunities to explore, to some extent at least, her own situation, her aspirations and anxieties. A number of texts play on the notion of the creation of a 'real' authorial life by their use of biographical and autobiographical modes" (Eagleton 2005: 4/5).

In *Fingersmith,* male pornography is represented as a multi-secular discourse embodied in the bibliography compiled by Mr Lilly, a Victorian gentleman whose ambition is to establish and preserve a pornographic canon for the ages to come. His gatherings with the collectors and publishers of pornographic writings parallel the Victorian cultural circles Victorian cultural circles in which, as Sarah Bull's historical study has shown, the reading of pornography was considered as a scientific pursuit. The character of Lilly is inspired from Henry Spencer Ashbee, the first Victorian bibliographer of pornographic literature and a prominent figure in what Bull names "the secret museum" wherein scholars indulge pornography under the guise of pursuing knowledge (Bull 2017).

Indeed, Lilly is engaged in providing material for the consumption of gentlemen and catering to their misogynistic, paederastic and sadomasochistic tastes through the regular sessions of reading pornography aloud often performed by Maud herself. Taken as a whole, the titles Lilly records, tracks down and collects form an oppressive narrative which keeps his niece

entrapped and alienated from her own subjectivity and her own body, as it has more generally entrapped women for centuries.

Interestingly, the name "Lilly" connects Waters's protagonist to Angela Carter's Bluebeard, who hunts females to please his sadistic desires, keeps them in subservience and then disposes of them. Driven by perverse sexual tendencies, both Lilly and Bluebeard take pleasure in stripping females out of their 'virginity', which is symbolised by the flower. "The plate bears his emblem, a clever thing of his own design—a lily, drawn strangely, to resemble a phallus; and wound about with a stem of briar at the root", Maud states (Waters 2002: 214). Subjected to pornography from a very young age, Maud has thus been deprived of the innocence of childhood.

According to Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon, pornography as a system of representation, is responsible for promoting an ideology based on a number of images that reflect the "sexually explicit subordination of women, graphically depicted, whether in pictures or in words ....." (qtd. in Sandler 1985: 912). In *Fingersmith,* this oppressive ideology is evident when Maud becomes haunted by the graphic language of her uncle's forced reading sessions. Vivid book fragments insinuate themselves in her consciousness: "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—" (Waters 2002: 277). Not only do such passages bear obvious resemblance to the highly suggestive language used in Henry Spencer Ashbee's writings[39], but they also evince the characteristics of pornographic works in general, i.e. they present women "as dehumanized sexual objects, things or commodities", while "women's body parts—including but not limited to vaginas, breasts, and buttocks—are exhibited, such that women are reduced to those parts" (Dworkin and MacKinnon qtd. in Sandler 1985: 912).

Waters insists in the 'Notes' printed at the end of her novel that "[a]ll of the texts cited by Maud are real. They include: *The Festival of the Passions*, *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, *The Curtain Drawn Up*, *The Bagnio Miscellany*, *The Birchen Bouquet*, and *The Lustful Turk*"[40]

[39] Ashbee for example writes: 'The sight of our red smarting bottoms and bursting pricks was too much for Annie and Rosa, and they were inflamed by lust, so throwing themselves backward on the bed, with their legs wide open and feet resting on the floor, the two dear girls presented their quims to our charge, as with both hands they held open the lips of their delicious cunts, inviting our eager cocks to come on.' (261)

[40] Waters is inspired from a number of pornographic works which share the same characteristics despite being published in different periods and contexts (both French and English): *The Festival of the Passions* (1818), *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (1749), *The Curtain Drawn Up* (1788), *The Bagnio Miscellany* (1830), *The Birchen Bouquet* (1770), *The Lustful Turk* (1828).

(Waters 2002: 553). She even confirms that though Lilly is a fictitious character, his "statements on book-collecting echo those of Ashbee" (Waters 2002: 553).

In her study of the obscene canon, Sarah Bull demonstrates the male-centricity of the "forbidden works" reviewed and circulated by Victorian scholars such as Henry Spencer Ashbee and William Laird Clowes, arguing that such discourse served to reinforce hetero-patriarchal control over female subjugates (Bull 2017: 226). Pornography can be understood as an "ideology apparatus", to borrow Louis Althusser's expression, by which gender roles are dictated, assigning inferiority and passivity to women and superiority and agency to men. Thus, pornography becomes a tool of not only maintaining power but also dictating sexual hierarchies. In *Fingersmith*, Mr Lilly detains power in Briar since he is in sole control of the creation of the pornographic archive, while Maud is relegated to the position of reciter/ executant in front of a male audience. Her subservient position is symbolized by the gloves she is made to wear so as to protect the revered books from her touch: as she points out, she has been "bred to the task [of reading and cataloguing pornography] as servants are" (Waters 2002: 206), and she often thinks of herself as no more than one of her uncle's pieces of property to be "ticketed and noted and shelved" (Waters 2002: 214).

Tracking the emergence of the pornographic genre, Susan Gubar argues that there is a long history of pornography that stretches from the Renaissance in the writings of François Rabelais through the Marquis de Sade and to the contemporary times primarily initiated by male authors. In *Fingersmith* too, pornography seems to be "a gender-specific genre produced primarily by and for men but focused obsessively on the female" (Gubar 1987: 713), since it revolves around Mr Lilly, Mr Huss, Mr Hawtrey and Gentleman, who use female objectification and sexuality as the means for their arousal. After a séance of reading, Maud indeed observes that "Mr Hawtrey claps, and Mr Huss's pink face is pinker, his look rather troubled. [Her] uncle sits with his spectacles removed, his head at an angle, his eyes screwed tight" (Waters 2002: 208). Though Maud is not physically exploited during these sessions, she is reduced to being the mere instrument of these men's private enjoyment. Her reading performance turns her into "some fabulous creature […] whom Lilly has trained, like a chattering monkey, to recite voluptuous texts for gentlemen—perhaps to do worse" (Waters 2002: 220). Maud's value as a commodity lies in her forced innocent reading of sexually stimulating texts for the libidinal pleasure of male consumers. She thus embodies a titillating and typically (neo)Victorian masculine fantasy, by being paradoxically at once virgin *and* whore, child *and* femme fatale, pure *and* depraved, knowing *and* unknowing, promiscuous *and* inaccessible.

Historians have shown that in the mid-nineteenth century, the production and consumption of pornography rose proportionately to the gradual enforcement of strict policies of censorship (Gubar 1987: 727). Waters's novel alludes to this fact by stressing the abundance of material constantly being brought to Mr Lilly by his associates, Mr Huss the collector and Mr Hawtrey the publisher. Another indication of the proliferation of late-Victorian pornographic material is the length of the volumes Mr Lilly produces: "a thousand pages […] for the first volume. The second shall be greater" (Waters 2002: 133). Moreover, each time a new manuscript arrives, it causes a flurry of excitement. In the following example, the eager unwrapping of the newly acquired volumes is described as a veritable striptease, causing the collectors to salivate over the concealed body of the book/woman:

> Mr Hawtrey produces a package, bound in paper and string. He hands it to my uncle, who fumbles with the wrappings. 'So, so,' he says; and then, with the book uncovered and held close to his eyes: 'Aha!' He works his lips. 'Look here, Maud, look, at what the little grubbian has brought us.' He shows me the volume. (Waters 2002: 134)

Such passages remind the reader that, even though pornography was illicit, its wide circulation indicated ethical double standards which paved the way for what Peter Michelson calls "moral anarchy" (Michelson 1971: 18). Indeed, in Briar, Mr Lilly maintains a respectable image among the servants, who believe him to be a highly educated and virtuous gentleman. As soon as Maud comes to Briar, he claims to be determined to give her a proper upbringing to turn her from a "naughty" to a "good" girl. But, ironically, he secretly commands her to read inappropriate, pornographic books. When Maud utters salacious words in front of a servant, claiming she learnt them from her uncle, the servant does not believe her: "'Oh, you liar! Your uncle's a gentleman" (Waters 2002: 196). Indeed, Mr Lilly succeeds in protecting his image as gentleman to the point that no one outside his library questions his morality.

Yet for Maud, pornography becomes inextricably associated with physical and psychological violence, because of her uncle's often brutal behaviour towards her. Andrea Dworkin notes that it is a characteristic of pornography that it becomes a means of "physical injury and physical humiliation and physical pain: to the women against whom it is used after it is made; to the women used to make it" (Dworkin 2000: 27). Indeed, as a consequence of being subjected to pornography, Maud becomes afflicted with nightmares and has to resort to sleeping draughts. At first, she internalizes what she reads as documentary evidence mirroring

actual sexual relationships, in which perfect female bodies are used for the goal of male orgasm and victorious ejaculation. However, Maud gradually becomes more critical as she compares women's bodies in the books with her own real body and her maid's. If books are full of "common enough obscenities" (Waters 2002: 135), Maud thus slowly realizes that the kind of pornography Mr Lilly aims to preserve is not only false, i.e. ideological, but also gender-biased. She concludes: "I understand my uncle's books to be filled with falsehoods, and I despise myself for having supposed them truths" (Waters 2002: 196).

At this particular juncture in the plot, Waters's novel seems to confirm Angela Carter's view of the pornographer as women's "unconscious ally", insofar as the pornographer helps reveal the full extent of masculine tyranny over women as reduced to bodies (Carter 1979: 22). Indeed, by focusing exclusively on male sexual pleasure, it blatantly ignores female desire, *jouissance* and orgasm. So, when Maud and Sue become intimate, the former is surprised to discover that a real sexual relationship entails an overwhelming euphoric sensation which "haunts and inhabits [her…] covers [her], like skin" (Waters 2002: 274). She wonders: "Is this desire? How queer that I, of all people, should not know!" (Waters 2002: 274) Having experienced something which is absented from her uncle's books, Maud realises the shortcomings of this pornographic discourse. She deduces that a sexual relationship involving mutual feelings must not entail a power struggle where the female party is sexually taken advantage of and denied pleasure, as is the case in her uncle's books. In this sense, Waters's treatment of pornography both dramatizes women's struggle against repression and the hardship of attaining sexual equality and liberation. As Maud experiences an alternative model of sexual relationship with Sue, she is energized to break free from the shackles of objectification she had become accustomed to through her reading.

As a system of representation principally produced by and for men and having women as its object, pornography is as controversial today as it was in the Victorian age. In her re-imagination of women's oppression through Victorian male pornography, Waters explores sensational representations of the Victorians' sexual lives in order to establish critical links between Victorian and contemporary sexual practices or discourses. Not only does Waters look into "women's role in the male-dominated marketplace in which these publications were and have since been created and circulated", as Nadine Muller points out (Muller 2012: 115), but she also examines the possibility of women's creative agency as producers and consumers of a different kind of pornographic imaginary, thus suggesting that pornography is in fact a vital contemporary feminist issue.

Interestingly, by articulating her critique of pornography and sexuality with a reflection on the act of writing, the novelist contributes to the reactivation of the figure of the *fin-de-siècle* New Woman writer. Thus, the sexsationalism of *Fingersmith* consciously builds on the legacy of first-wave feminism as exemplified in late-Victorian New Woman fiction.

Nathalie Saudo-Welby claims that New Woman fiction is a discourse of heteroglossia not only because of the different subgenres it channels, but also because of its discursive complexity. *Fingersmith* is partly sensation fiction as it reinstates recurrent sensational elements such as the rebellious heroine – Waters even employs two –, the love plot, and the antagonists in the characters of Mr Lilly, Mrs Sucksby and Gentleman. It also arouses the reader's senses by means of numerous plot twists and secrets long kept and then ultimately unravelled. The novel is equally influenced by postmodernist narrative techniques which make the work multi-layered and complex. The narrative is mainly construed in the form of 'entangled discourses' varying from first-person and omniscient narration to direct speech by two autodiegetic narrator-characters, interior monologue and stream of consciousness as argued in the previous section. *Fingersmith* displays such diversity as it is composed of a first and third parts narrated by Sue and a second by Maud. In each of these parts, we can register some instances of direct address to the reader. The protagonists also often resort to flashbacks to recall their pasts, hence the use of interior monologue and stream of consciousness dramatizing their feelings and thoughts. In brief, alternating narrative techniques and playing with narrative time make *Fingersmith* a dynamic and complex text. Furthermore, New Woman fiction offers a plurality of discourses instead of a single authoritarian one. As previously seen, Waters's alternative pornographic discourse revises the patriarchal masculinist one while calling for a female version at the same time and by no means advocates the obliteration of pornographic discourse. Besides, Waters's fierce insistence on a renovation of the sexual relationship becomes, in this context, the very epitome of the *fin-de-siècle* desire to bring avant-gardist modernity to the fore.

Maud's final role as a writer of pornography constitutes a feminist issue of the novel that cannot be ignored. For decades, pornography has been indeed the cause of disagreements between feminists ranging from pro- to anti-pornography writings. Hugh Stutfield – a very conservative critic – described New Woman fiction as "the psysiologico-pornographic school", a writing whose objective is to "describe at length their sensations in various interesting phases of their lives" and which ultimately leads to the production of "erotomaniac fiction" (Stutfield 1895: 836). *Fingersmith* itself, has been object of much debate because of its sexsationalism and focus on both lesbianism and pornographic discourse, and Waters has been "pigeonholed

as a lesbian neo-Victorian novelist" (Delnieppe 2017: para. 1). Nonetheless, as Waters explained in one interview, *Fingersmith* "ultimately tries to at least gesture towards the possibility that women could write their own porn themselves" (cited in Dennis 2008: 43). Melanie Waters comments on this potentially positive development in relation to third-wave feminism:

> By describing sexual experiences and fantasies in their own words, but in an established pornographic rhetoric, it might be argued that the authors of these works successfully utilise the tools by which anti-pornography feminists claimed women were oppressed in order to subvert the gendered power differentials that were suspected to underlie this oppression. (Waters 2007: 261)

In the same vein, Nadine Muller argues that what makes the strength of Waters' text is its transformation of the masculine genre of pornography and its "suggestion [of] the appropriation of something previously employed for another purpose and/or in another context" (Muller 2009/ 2010: 127). In the context of third-wave feminism and at the heart of the relationship between past and present, *Fingersmith* highlights a central concern about devising constructive ways to transform what has come before and to adapt it to present traditions for the purpose of voicing female concerns. In this sense, by means of her character/author Maud, Waters re-invests in lesbianism, and revises and re-appropriates pornography to create an alternative female discourse. Through *Fingersmith*, Waters seems to put to the fore Melanie Waters's argument that female authors of pornographic literature can "successfully utilize the tools by which anti-pornography feminists claimed women were oppressed in order to subvert the gendered power" thanks to this capacity of transformative power (Waters 2007: 261). Aware of the different kinds of obstacles women authors face in general, and especially when writing erotica, Waters seems to challenge and even subvert a long masculinist literary lineage. As a neo-Victorian writer, she does so by building on and reactivating a long neglected Victorian tradition of feminine writing, of which the New Woman novel constitutes a decisive moment. In her study of *Fingersmith*'s feminism, Cora Kaplan points out the common aspects between Waters's novel and Victorian studies: "to critique and disestablish the canons and conventions of traditional disciplines from within", and to "[break] down (…) disciplines in order to develop a comprehensive analysis" (Kaplan 2011: 43). Waters's novel may be read in this light as one

of the "[a]cts of retrieval and revaluation of women writers [which] have given us an infinitely more detailed and fine tuned understanding of the Victorian literary scene" (Kaplan 2011: 45).

While Waters's novel evinces the typical 'sexsational' elements that Kohlke considers characteristic of neo-Victorianism, it broadens and sharpens the reflexion by stressing the importance of female creativity in (sexual) identity formation. This results in Waters's construction of a specific type of neo-Victorian heroine, the subversive Neo-New Woman protagonist, who is inspired from British New Woman writers and fictional New Women of the 1890s. Interestingly, like her late-Victorian forebears, Waters's Neo-New Woman novel has been criticized for being too commercial. Yet, in its exploration of lesbian desire and creativity and in its revision of pornographic representations, *Fingersmith* effects a powerful deconstruction of patriarchal discourse on female sexuality, masculinist writing and male authorial figures. Kaplan even reads it in the light of "Feminism [which] began an analysis taken up by gay, lesbian and queer critics, historians and theorists that, at its boldest put the heteronormativity of the Victorian period into question" (Kaplan 2011: 47). Indeed, *Fingersmith*, more importantly, offers a compelling alternative female erotic, articulated by her female protagonists, and especially by Maud, a Promethean figure who steals the creative fire from her uncle in order to author her own t/sexuality, her own Cixousian *écriture féminine*.

In brief, the neo-Victorian novel brings to light various political orientations of the female protagonist as the authors weave complex links between their characters' female (fictional) histories and contemporary presents. As they revisit Victorian predecessors of the female character, the authors re-employ popular Victorian tropes as the fallen woman, the angel in the house and the female villain, only to deconstruct such characterisation, for the neo-Victorian character deviates from the *type* in order to break such Victorian moulds; essentialisations that have often entrapped women in binary gender roles. Furthermore, in the vein of these complex genealogies, female relationships prove to be axial into their identity construction. Thus, they equally revise traditional perceptions of female antagonism by putting to the fore complicity: only when the female relationships are foregrounded on sisterhood, motherhood and lesbian love that the female characters manage to find resolution within the plot, thus illustrating how the process of female individuation depends on female's relation with female others. Consequently, female voice in the neo-Victorian novel emerges as multifarious and plural. While both Faber and Waters rely heavily on stream of consciousness and interior monologue, thus allowing their female characters to construct a subjectivity of their own, Fowles opts for third-person narration which makes his characterisation mostly external. Arguably, even though the female characters are initially prescribed to be marginal characters

as representatives of the fallen woman, prostitute, mad woman, pickpocket and lesbian, they are able to act out multiple personas, thus displaying their capacity to role-play. More interestingly, this leads to the emergence of a particularly authoritative voice, that of authorship. Indeed, three female characters of this corpus are distinctive thanks to their literary creativity which aligns them with Pre-Raphaelite as well as New Women artists. Faber's and Waters' texts particularly celebrate their protagonists as successors to *fin-de-siècle* New Women writers: creative, rebellious, and subversive, especially with regard to their interest in discussions around female sexuality. This analogy leads to consider the (sexual) representations of the female character in the neo-Victorian novel.

Part III: Embodied Subjectivity and Somaesthetic Reading of the Neo-Victorian Female Character

Representing the female body in literature has always been a central concern. In *The Second Sex*, Simone De Beauvoir picks up on some of the arguments outlined by Mary Wollstonecraft and argues against the mould forced upon women by showing the ways in which male authors constructed women as the Other. Both have pointed out that male writers used their pens to create a world of duality. In such a world, men occupy a transcendental space whereas women are limited to the physical realm. Beauvoir writes "He is the transcendent, he soars in the sky of heroes; woman crouches on earth beneath his feet" (Beauvoir 1982: 676). This conventional dichotomy may have been an outcome of the conceptualisation of the split between the mind and the body in Descartes's thought for example. Elizabeth Grosz writes: "Descartes instituted a dualism which three centuries of philosophical thought have attempted to overcome or reconcile" (Grosz 1994: 6). This dualism eventually led to distinctions between male and female, making the rational associated with male and the material with female.

Laurence Talairach-Vielmas goes as far as to argue that the Victorian genres of fairy tales and sensation which proliferated thanks to the growing advertising and consumer cultures of the time may have participated in presenting the female body as an object of femininity: "Woman's social and economic position in society is reworked through heroines who provide us with powerful images of the construction of femininity, placing particular emphasis on the female body, its shape and meaning, especially when viewed through the lens of consumer culture" (Talairach-Vielmas 2007: introduction). She further claims that "[f]eminine representation, caught within a commodity culture saturated with advertisements and dominated by representation, transforms feminine identity into a literary exhibit where the woman's body is only figured in sets of similes" (Talairach-Vielmas 2007: introduction). Consequently, the female body was often seen as a commodity by means of ideals as the angel in the house or the woman from across 'the looking glass', which put the focus on the process of reshaping and remodelling it to perfection. The male body on the other hand was mostly characterised as masculine power, potency and virility and "often normalised as the epitome of Victorian values", of Victorian masculinity and its embodied physicality (Parsons and Heholt 2019: introduction).

Interestingly however, femininity was also a tool of subversion for Charles Dickens, Mary Elizabeth Braddon and Wilkie Collins who investigated the discourse of femininity through female characters that turn themselves into fashionable images and art objects. In fact, Dickens's *Bleak House* (1853), Mrs Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862), Wilkie Collins's *No Name* (1862), *Armadale* (1864) and *The Law and the Lady* (1875) provide plots that represent marriage as a market and foreground women who skilfully turn themselves into

objects to be looked at, thereby showing women's subversive use of their own aestheticization. The looking glass is thus turned into a device for agency and self-assertion. One may suggest that the neo-Victorian genre, since it not only confronts the reader to a multiplicity of female protagonists, but also explores their use of their bodies for the sake of subversion, may be engaged in the same project of re-exploring definitions of the female body, definitions which aim at fusion between mind and body instead of fragmentation and disembodiment.

Indeed, over the last decades, different theories centred around the corporeal have emerged to (re)-position the female body both in life and literature by investigating its representations and proposing positive images of women. While Simone de Beauvoir's reactionary thought focuses on biology in order to question the same reductive patriarchal definition of the female body and signal its *difference* and biological particularities, Elizabeth Grosz's corporeal feminism offers a more comprehensive approach to the body combining the material and the spiritual, "bodies and minds are not two distinct substances or two kinds or attributes of a single substance, but . . . through twisting . . one side becomes another" (Grosz 1994: xii). Judith Butler highlights the *constructive* process of female subjectivity which encompasses numerous factors influencing individual development. Hence, Butler's more recent criticism pays special attention to the role of the body in identity formation.

Furthermore, what makes the representation of the female body even more problematic in Victorian fiction is its inextricable link with sexuality, for the sensational heroines are often entangled in plots of visual stimulation and are sometimes implicitly or overtly branded with sin. The British art historian Roszika Parker points out that:

> Frequently efforts to give new meanings to women [have] been viewed through entirely traditional spectacles. For example, feminist photographs and paintings of our genitals have often been received not as the intended celebration of women's autonomous sexuality but simply as titillation, or even as obscenity. [Whereas] [m]en's bodies have never stood simply for sex, rather they have represented a wide spectrum of emotion and experience. (Parker 1985: 44/45)

Thus, when studying a neo-Victorian female character, it is necessary to dwell on her corporeal dimension to explore its role in identity construction. Neo-Victorian contemporaries who advocate a more rebellious agenda in order to foreground a female aesthetics which allows both narrative and female protagonist to speak and write female sexuality have specifically

accentuated the materialisation of the female body in the literary text through the intermediary of Marie-Luise Kohlke's concept of sexsation. Indeed, this idea signals the extensive return to matters of sex and gender and sheds light on the potential of the female body to create an individuated subjectivity. This notion is at the core of the neo-Victorian corpus under study where each female protagonist, to varying degrees of recurrence and explicitness, is constantly confronted to her sexual identity, be it as dictated by patriarchy or self-constructed. Fowles's and Faber's texts initially present Sarah as a fallen woman, and Sugar as a prostitute respectively, as defined by their communities, but gradually dramatize how their bodies are redefined, for example by means of the maternal inclination, as it becomes central in foregrounding a female subjectivity. Waters dramatizes the process of exploration of lesbian identity insofar as both Sue and Maud participate in constructing each other's subjectivities. Thus, the third part of this project focuses specifically on how the neo-Victorian text re-writes the female body. How do the neo-Victorian texts represent the materiality of the female body? To what extent does neo-Victorianism challenge and subvert traditional perceptions of the female body as well as the male (body)'s gaze at the female one? How does the overtly-sexualised female body give room to a subjective individuated experience? And finally, is it possible today to talk of the body as a site for identity construction without falling in the trap of reiterating patriarchal limiting definitions?

On the other hand, phenomenological theories have argued for the individuation of the female body by means of its lived experience: sensory, spatial and temporal to name but a few aspects. The material body is essential in understanding human existence especially in the case of female subjects not only because of biological factors, but also socio-cultural contexts which directly impact this material experience. Thus, as we investigate female bodily experience, we are constantly confronted to affect, for each space not only marks the female character's subjective existence, but equally becomes marked with a female emotional dimension. Indeed, the neo-Victorian novel builds on the sensorial in order to foreground the link between the female body and space, body and emotion, emotion and space. Though all human senses are put to the fore in the vein of this phenomenological experience, two senses remarkably arise in their impact on the construction of female identity particularly for Maud, Sue and Sugar: touch and smell. In fact, both Waters's and Faber's texts are embedded with skin leitmotifs, starting from Sugar's patterned skin to the recurrent use of the motif of the glove in both texts, as well as the significance of skin in the sexual relationship. Thus, I am particularly interested in studying how the sense of touch through the intermediary of skin becomes the borderline between the body and the outside world and impacts the female experience of space. As for the

olfactory, Faber's text stands out in its investment in odours, especially considering the context of the perfume business which is central to the plot and thus, its direct impact on Sugar's character.

In their representation of corporeality and affectivity, how do texts by means of the senses help produce a somaesthetic narrative experience for the female character? As an interdisciplinary field of inquiry aimed at promoting and integrating the theoretical, empirical and practical disciplines related to bodily perception, performance and presentation, somaesthetics sets out the theoretical framework to the study of the relation between senses and subjectivity, body and identity, character and reader. In fact, the sensorial ultimately connects the neo-Victorian novel to Victorian sensation, for is it not the sensational which represents the common grounds between both genres? Keeping in mind that Victorian sensation targeted the reader's affect, would it be legitimate to consider the ways in which the sensorial can bring the neo-Victorian female character and the contemporary reader closer to each other? A phenomenological/ somaesthetic approach may serve as a critical tool to enlighten our investigation of the affective and cognitive relation between the neo-Victorian character and its contemporary reader. The underlying question is the following: to what extent does the focus on the sensorial in the neo-Victorian text lead to a somaesthetic reading experience?

Chapter 5: Writing the Materiality of the Body

1. Representing the Body in the Fictional Text

1.1 (Un)covering the Female Body

Hannah Aspinall writes: "the female body has been idealised, objectified and fetishized and this can be seen particularly in Victorian culture" (Aspinall 2012: n.d.). In fact, the Victorian era witnessed the emergence of a whole etiquette on how the female body should look and how it should be dressed. Since the ideal Victorian woman was pure, chaste, refined and modest, the female body which was equated with what is material and by association improper and immoral, had to be ignored in the representation of the female character. Thus, covering the body both literally with clothes and metaphorically in the fictional text by ignoring any discussion of its materiality became a moral and cultural obligation.

1.1.1 Hair Symbolism in Neo-Victorian Fiction

While the Victorian female body is supposed to remain covered, the hair emerges as the one body part which is exposed. Although the description of hair has been a recurrent trope in Western oral culture and written literature, representations of hair in mid- to late-Victorian culture are especially prevalent and symbolic, for novelists bestowed great attention on the physical properties of women's hair: its length, texture, colour, style, curliness. Thus, there is scarcely a female character in Victorian fiction whose hair is not described and often a woman's hair is described repeatedly and in considerable detail. Elisabeth G. Gitter goes as far as to argue that women's hair "for the Victorians became an obsession" (Gitter 1984: 936).

Hair was not regarded only aesthetically since it could portray the social, cultural and moral position of the woman. The Victorians discovered in painting and literature, as well as in their popular culture, a variety of rich and complex meanings in the image of women's hair. Galia Ofek writes that

> during these decades, hair attracted increasing attention as a focus for tensions and at times uneasy compromises between natural forces and cultural codes; 'low' and 'high' culture; sensuality and spirituality; private and public spheres; potentially disruptive self-assertion and reassuring social conventionality; personal subjectivity and communal identity; originality and

> reproduction; authenticity and artificiality; the requirements of realism and the powers of the imagination. (Ofek 2009: ix)

Thus, what became more interesting than simply describing the hair was reading its symbolism. One may wonder how neo-Victorian fiction re-utilizes the motif of the hair in its characterisation of its female protagonists.

John Fowles's Ernestina is a Victorian lady who was raised to conform to the model of the angel in the house. Interestingly, as she gazes at herself in the mirror and admires her beauty, sexual thoughts cross her mind and the erotic is stirred within her. Early on in the text, the narrator stresses that Ernestina herself is conscious of the sin she commits when she loosens her hair. "[S]he raised her arms and unloosed her hair, a thing she knew to be vaguely sinful, yet necessary, like a hot bath or a warm bed on a winter's night. She imagined herself for a truly sinful moment as someone wicked—a dancer, an actress" (Fowles 1969: 13). As her hair is loosened, she associates herself with the category of dancers and actresses, another social group destined for the pleasure of a male audience looking for sexual and erotic excitement. Yet, the gazer in this scene is no one but herself. Ernestina then consciously takes pleasure at admiring how the sexual within her rises to the surface of the mirror.

Furthermore, the reference to the figures of the actress and dancer may recall the story of Salomé wherein she willingly dances to seduce Herod and his guests, thus embodying the sexually transgressive female figure. Indeed, while Victorian ladies are not allowed to wear their hair so freely, to avoid attracting attention to their bodies and arousing inappropriate desire among gazers, fallen women and performers do it intentionally for the exact same purpose. It is then unsurprising that following this act of loosening her hair, Ernestina is instantly immersed in sexual thoughts, for untying her hair becomes synonymous with unleashing a carnal desire, long buried within her. Fowles's narrator does not stop at gazing at her, but allows the reader access into her sexual thoughts like a symbolic act of penetration:

> For what had crossed her mind—a corner of her bed having chanced, as she pirouetted, to catch her eye in the mirror—was a sexual thought: an imagining, a kind of dimly glimpsed Laocoon embrace of naked limbs. It was not only her profound ignorance of the reality of copulation that frightened her; it was the aura of pain and brutality that the act seemed to require, and which seemed to deny all that gentleness of gesture and discreetness of

> permitted caress that so attracted her in Charles. She had once or twice seen animals couple; the violence haunted her mind. (Fowles 1969: 13)

Looking at her self in the mirror, Ernestina recreates her self as sexual and erotic. The scene foregrounds Lacan's mirror stage as Ernestina assumes the position of the seer herself, and so, the passage depicts an instance of (sexual) self-love in which she, as an individual, matures. Her position as seer can also be read in light of the Greek myth of Laocoon in which he breaks his oath of celibacy and makes love to his wife, disobeying Apollo's command. Though Ernestina does not actually commit a sexual act, her fantasy may be read as an instance of sexual dissidence, thus disobeying her Victorian society.

Furthermore, Ernestina fantasizes about the sexual act in an unrealistic way, either in terms of detached dreams or horrid reality. Like the Victorian angels who are ignorant of the most natural facts of sexuality because of the life of chastity and innocence to which they are subjected since childhood and are forced to suppress the sensual and sexual within them, Ernestina pictures the sexual act in terms of violence and aggression. It is possible to argue that Ernestina's sexual fantasy is the return of the repressed. On the one hand, female sexuality is buried within her as a Victorian taboo and something frightening, for she fears intimacy with her future husband. On the other hand, it is an intriguing mystery as she feels the desire to discover her body and sexual potential. Though Narjes Tashakor Golestani reads Ernestina as the embodiment of ideal femininity insofar as she is "a conformist character who constitutes her identity by taking on the ideal gender norms of the era" (Tashakor Golestani 2015: 322), one may suggest that such instance of sexual communion between her and herself signals her disobedience of the "norms and values of society" (Tashakor Golestani 2015: 324), and thus, of the role imposed on her. Nonetheless, such instance eventually eludes her for the fantasy ends with negation, suppression, and burial, as should ladies do: "of course Ernestina utter[s] her autocratic 'I must not' just as soon as any such sinful speculation cross[es] her mind" (Fowles 1969: 32).

Though Sarah is identified as a fallen woman by East Lyme society, it is a rather unexpected choice to present her hair "[surprisingly] pulled tight back inside the collar of the black coat" on her first appearance in the novel (Fowles 1969: 5). Her hair does not seem to conform to the traditional representation of fallen women. In fact, towards the end of the nineteenth century, loose flamboyant hair became an axial symbol of dissidence, and so had to be restrained like any form of female passion. Elizabeth Gaskell's *Ruth* (1853) dramatizes how hair can be symbolic of sexual deviance. Sally, the housekeeper puts to the fore this association,

as she exclaims: “I’ve lived with the family forty-nine year come Michaelmas, and I’ll not see it disgraced by any one’s fine long curls. Sit down and let me snip off your hair, and let me see you sham decently in a widow’s cap to-morrow, or I’ll leave the house” (Gaskell 1853: chap. 13). Similarly, Pre-Raphaelite paintings of the time manifestly celebrate women’s hair. Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s *Lady Lilith* (1866/1868) for example highlights the auburn hair with long, thick and wanton tresses. Ultimately, such hair became strictly associated with the fallen woman whose moral corruption is epitomised through her unregulated hair.

Figure 3: Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Lady Lilith* (1866-1868)

Playfully, Fowles opts for a gradual exposure of Sarah’s hair by means of an act of uncovering, perhaps to prevent his readers from being alarmingly shocked at his audacity. First, her hair is completely tied. Then, progressively and as she assumes her identity of free woman, a “[p]art

of her hair had become loose and half covered her cheek"; a dark brown hair with "red tints" (Fowles 1969: 30). Through the reference to red – a colour typically associated with flame, passion and desire – Sarah's physical description becomes more material and hence, eroticized through Charles's gaze. As if through the lens of a camera, we read Charles's decryption of her hair: he "noted (…) the red sheen in her dark hair. He guessed it was beautiful hair when fully loose; rich and luxuriant; and though it was drawn tightly back inside the collar of her coat, he wondered whether it was not a vanity that made her so often carry her bonnet in her hand" (Fowles 1969: 71). Finally, her flamboyant hair is completely revealed. During Sarah's and Charles' climactic sexual reunion in Exeter, hair is further highlighted insofar as Charles's description explicitly associates her with the figure of the *femme fatale*. He focuses on the sensuality of her body which looks "so invalid" in her night gown and stresses the luxuriant hair which looks "ravishingly alive where the firelight touched it" (Fowles 1969: 148) and which strikes him with its "never before fully revealed richness" (Fowles 1969: 147). The tone becomes quite sexual, for the description combines attributes of passivity and submission through the body, and passion and dominance through the hair. Sarah's portrait as the *femme fatale* is provocative and sensual. And so, under the influence of the dichotomy frailty/ passion, "he was overcome with a violent sexual desire; a lust a thousand times greater than anything he had felt in the prostitute's room" (Fowles 1969: 148). In Fowles's text, Sarah's hair is sexualized through Charles's male gaze, thus exposing the masculinist point of view towards female hair. One may argue that this deliberate authorial choice is meant to foreground how female hair is fetishized so as to connote sexuality. In his Marxist reading of Fowles's text, David Landrum believes that Sarah is an erotic construct by a male author for catering to historical fantasies of the presence of female transgressive sexuality in a sexually repressive era (Landrum 2000).

In brief, the narrative consciously follows Sarah's characterisation by means of her hair. The more she assumes her identity of free woman, the further her hair is exposed. It is not surprising then, that when she is completely transformed into the New Woman of the New World living with the Pre-Raphaelites, her "hair was bound loosely back by a red ribbon" (Fowles 1969: 189). Sarah's portrayal as the fallen woman whose loose red hair embodies her freedom directly recalls Rossetti's *Lady Lilith* (1866/1868). As a temptress, she fully accepts her sexuality and resists domination by men. Such sexualization leads some critics like James Acheson to go as far as to contend that the text is of special interest because of its sexual content (Acheson 1998: 1). Peter Conradi believes that Fowles is a "bourgeois pornographer expert in

the aesthetics of frustration – but which expertise is itself put at the service of a censorious sexual moralism" (Conradi 1982: 16).

Yet, Fowles's text does not stop at portraying Sarah as a temptress Eve or a Mary Magdalene, but foregrounds her image in the religious discourse, by borrowing multiple biblical figures. In fact, in need for redemption, Charles goes to church, and suddenly imagines Sarah as Mater Dolorosa who symbolises sorrow and pain. Sarah is then both a whore and a Madonna. Even more, as Charles "stared at the crucifix; but instead of Christ's face, he saw only Sarah's" (Fowles 1969: 153), Sarah is transformed into a female Christ. Fowles borrows the Christian idea that Jesus dies crucified on the cross to redeem his people of all their sins in order to foreground Sarah as a saviour of the world, condemned, tortured and crucified for the sins of others, especially his deflowering of her. Sarah's image as both sexual and religious is doubly transgressive. This is further concretized by Charles's dream of marrying her:

> Rather she seemed there beside him, as it were awaiting the marriage service; yet with another end in view. For a moment he could not seize it—and then it came. To uncrucify! In a sudden flash of illumination Charles saw the right purpose of Christianity; it was not to celebrate this barbarous image, not to maintain it on high because there was a useful profit—the redemption of sins—to be derived from so doing, but to bring about a world in which the hanging man could be descended, could be seen not with the rictus of agony on his face, but the smiling peace of a victory brought about by, and in, living men and women. (Fowles 1969: 155)

Charles suddenly feels that the path opened up by Sarah (and her very free way of living her life by rejecting social norms) frees him from the constraints weighing on him: 'to uncrucify' here means the liberation of the social and moral prison which Charles manages to imagine as the horizon aimed at by Sarah. Sarah thus becomes a harbinger of the time to come when men and women will be able to live freely. Though Fowles borrows Lilith's image as temptress, he constructs a doubly transgressive image for Sarah, insofar as she combines both sexuality and religion. Like Lilith who was considered a symbol of the feminist movement for she represented a wild woman whom society could not control, Sarah epitomises freedom for Fowles: social, religious, and moral. Though Brooke Lenz praises Fowles for such imagery and notes that "Sarah remains, like the women in The Magus, a mysterious threat, admirable and able to inspire male activity", she nonetheless notes that she is "never coherently motivated or

explored" for it is precisely her mysteriousness which foregrounds her "inaccessibility" (Lenz 2008: 101).

At first glance, readers may be tempted to consider that Fowles's neo-Victorian text reiterates some Victorian patriarchal representations of women. In the early and even contemporary critical reception of the novel, Fowles is sometimes accused of presenting a masculinist perception of femininity. Magali Michael for example rids the text of any feminist interests and argues that Sarah is portrayed as an image, a femme fatale who always remains elusive and rebellious, actions that render her an attractive and unattainable female to the rest of characters, notably to Charles (Michael 1986: 235). As for her physical representation, the critic highlights that Sarah's description turns her into an object of desire and sexual intensity. Furthermore, Sarah's role as saviour is one of the elements which make Fowles's work anti-feminist to some critics like Gwen Raaberg. In fact, the latter believes that "Fowles's work has so often been read from the perspective of the male protagonist that it has become critical commonplace . . . that his female characters function to activate male character development" (Raaberg 2010: 524). She adds that throughout the novel, there is a "persistent focus on Charles's development and Sarah's role as his teacher and muse rather than as an active character also in development" (Raaberg 2010: 524). Besides, Fowles often associates Sarah's acts of defiance and rebellion with a sexual aura that not only attracts Charles, but foregrounds her objectification as a sexual character. This leads according to Magali Michael to reiterating the same patriarchal masculinist Victorian representations of women, for she concludes that the novel is a traditional representation of women's role and thus "falls short of being a feminist novel", which can be explained by Fowles's chronological proximity to the Victorians and the nascent engagement in explicitly (sexual) feminism (Michael 1987: 235).

Others like Deborah Byrd however, see Sarah's sexual description as a sign of empowerment and freedom, insofar as it does not reproduce the patriarchal model, but rather gives room for women to liberate their sexuality and release their passion (Byrd 1984). Indeed, Fowles's text contends that just like men, women are sexual beings and that female sensuality does exist and it seems rather illogical and unnatural to deny woman such feelings or the pleasure derived from them. As the narrative focuses on Sarah's sexual agency in her relationship with Charles, it emphasizes the active role women have. They are no longer simply objects of men's sexual desire, insofar as they put to the fore their own cravings and become sexual subjects. Brooke Lenz admits that Sarah's character is somewhat fragmented because she is presented from male characters' partial analyses, yet, represents "a prototype for the 'New Woman' whose unconventional attitudes and actions expose the oppressive machinations of

both social and narrative authority" (Lenz 2008: 102). She ultimately concludes that "Fowles validates a feminist standpoint approach by presenting a woman character who pursues and enacts a politically engaged and practically grounded standpoint" (Lenz 2008: 102).

In Faber's novel, hair is an equally important element of his description of all female characters. The significance of hair can be assessed quantitively since the word 'hair' occurs 253 times in the narrative, with different connotations for each character. When the reader first meets Caroline, her hair stands out as exceptional, a "splendid nest of hair" (Faber 2002: 14), "hair so thick and dark that even the crudest men have been known to stroke it in admiration. It has a silky texture, and is warm and pleasant against her cheeks and eyelids" (Faber 2002: 7). The imagery may recall the Greek myth of Circe who is described as "lustrous" and presented as "the nymph with the lovely braids", a sorceress first seen weaving at her loom. Through this comparison, Caroline seems to represent women's sexuality by expressing female desire and criticizing the subordinate role given to women in heterosexual politics. Furthermore, like Circe who uses her magic power to turn some of Odysseus's men into animals, Caroline is endowed with the reverse skill to tame crude men. Faber follows in the footsteps of the female Victorians who often revisited the myth of Circe, notably the English poet Augusta Webster in *Portraits* (1870). Christine Sutphin argues that

> Male poets often represented female desire filtered through a male persona. Augusta Webster's "Circe" and "Medea in Athens" contribute to the discourse on women's sexuality by voicing the desire of the women personae and their critique of heterosexuality. Circe and Medea's status as mythological women, which apparently distances them from constructions of Victorian womanhood, serves both to undermine and affirm their versions of the complexities of female desire within heterosexual politics. (Sutphin 2006: 1)

Hair as the one element which is remarkable from the exterior is re-employed in its symbolization of a feminist movement which started with the Victorians and seems to find its way in Faber's text.

On the other hand, Agnes is earnestly focused on tidying her hair insofar as she is incessantly preoccupied with the way it looks. The seriousness of the task which likens it to a ritual and her absorption in it make it seem like a life-deciding moment. "Then [the maid] gives Agnes her favourite brush, and Agnes automatically begins to groom her hair, worrying at the

tangles caused by her fall. “How do I look?” (…) “*Heartened* now by the sensation of soft tidy hair on her head, she lays down her brush and settles back against the pillows” (Faber 2002: 117/118, emphasis added). The passage draws heavily on some Victorian writings which expose how well-tidied hair was conventionally considered as a sign of chaste regulated womanhood, while loose hair was an indication of dissidence and rebellion. In *Jane Eyre*, we read a dialogue between Mr. Brocklehurst, the headmaster, and Miss Temple, the schoolmistress: “‘Julia’s hair curls naturally’, returned Miss Temple, still more quietly. ‘Naturally! Yes, but we are not to conform to nature; I wish these girls to be the children of Grace: and why that abundance? I have again and again intimated that I desire the hair to be arranged closely, modestly, plainly. Miss Temple, that girl’s hair must be cut off entirely’” (Brontë C. 1847: chap. 7). In *Wuthering Heights*, Catherine Earnshaw’s disorderly hair stands for the sexually and emotionally volatile woman, as she protests: “‘Oh, Nelly!’ she added petulantly, jerking her head away from my hands, you’ve combed my hair quite out of curl!’” (Brontë E. 1847: chap. 8).

Through the intermediary of Agnes’s character, Faber exposes how having the perfect hair colour “that’s currently in fashion: her own!” (Faber 2002: 268) became an object of competition between Victorian ladies, pushing them to turn to different dye techniques like exposing their hair to the sun drenched in oil or applying a mixture of saffron, lye and vinegar to get a lighter colour. In fact, the importance of having particular attributes to a female’s hair not only put much pressure on women and naturally created a competition among the female race, hence the use of the term “rivals” (Faber 2002: 268), it also led to an incessant pursuit of uniformity and conformity. All ladies had to look alike and wear their hair similarly, insofar as it ultimately produced an ethos for Victorian hair. The use of the determiner ‘the’ associated with a singular noun ‘hair colour’ highlights the fact that only one hair colour was to be had among ladies who followed the trend. Admittedly, Agnes’s diary informs us contemporary readers that from an early age, Victorian ladies were instructed not only to behave in a particular manner, but also to get accustomed to the set of rules they must abide by as they ‘came out’ to society, wearing “her hair (swept back from the ears, two thick ringlets on each side, “sealed” with a small chignon at the nape of the neck)” (Faber 2002: 414). Thus, the motif of the hair is revisited in Faber’s text not simply to provide a physical description of the female character, but mostly to expose Victorian reality and unveil the pressure girls had to face in order to be normalised.

It is rather unsurprising that Sugar’s red hair is different not only in terms of colour, but style and texture as well. Such difference evidently widens the gap between both social

categories, thus making hair a symbol of class. The text foregrounds the dissimilarity between Victorian ladies who had blond hair and Sugar's red hair. While this exoticism is among the factors which make Sugar so interesting and attractive not only to William, but to all male clients who search for her in magazines, it once again sheds the light on the mythology of Victorian hair. Thus, the former expands his description of her hair, a description so scrupulous that it almost becomes alive.

> Her abundant hair, not flame-red just now but black and orange like neglected coal embers, is all disordered, and loose curls of it are dripping. (Faber 2002: 76)
> (…) Several locks of hair have come loose from her elaborately styled fringe, and these sway in front of her eyes. (Faber 2002: 77)
> (…) Sugar's little demonstration of fashion's absurdity has left her hair even more disordered than before. Her thick fringe, quite dry by now, has tumbled loose, obscuring her vision. William stares, half in disgust, half in adoration. (Faber 2002: 80)
> (…) Her own hair, he suddenly notices, is absolutely glorious, a lush corona of golden-orange curls. (Faber 2002: 88)

The juxtaposition of imagery of colour and light and the use of comparison, metaphors and adjectives reflect richness and complexity. Sugar's hair is no longer inanimate, but rather moving and alive. Interestingly, such portrayal is narrated from William's masculine point of view. Thus, Sugar's hair is both sexualized and eroticized so as to reflect the male gaze. Besides, the focus on the variations of its colours is symbolic of Sugar's shifting personas. The description of "all the unexpected colours to be found in it, hidden inside the red: streaks of pure gold, wisps of blond, single strands of dark auburn" foreshadows the multiple roles she is to play in the narrative (Faber 2002: 130). Indeed, when she assumes the role of governess, Sugar ensures that her "her unruly abundant hair [is] wound into a tight chignon" so as to fit her now decent position in a respectable household (Faber 2002: 397). In this respectable environment, "the redness of her hair is a curse rather than a blessing" (Faber 2002: 272). Yet, when seen from William's perspective – who is intent on limiting her role to sexual partner at this stage of the narrative – her hair instantly retrieves its associations with sexual and carnal desires. "He recalls the lushness of her hair when she's naked" (Faber 2002: 231). By juxtaposing her bare body and lush hair, William maintains the link between hair and sexuality.

Both Sarah in Fowles's text and Sugar in Faber's novel whose hair is uniformly described as lavish with tones of red recall the Victorian figure of the fallen woman inextricably and indistinguishably associated with sexuality.

Though the same attention to hair can be observed in *Fingersmith*, it is attributed different connotations. In fact, Mrs Sucksby carefully cares for Sue's from an early age. As she gives an account of her childhood years, the protagonist recalls the ritual: "My hair (…) was very fair then—though it grew plain brown, as I got older—and Mrs Sucksby used to wash it with vinegar and comb it till it sparked" (Waters 2002: 5). Ironically, Mrs Sucksby devotes much time and effort to this task even though Sue lives in the Borough where hair is inconsequential; she does not belong to upper class wherein caring for a lady's hair is an obligation for she must attend different social occasions or participate in the Season for example. Besides, the colour brown is by far the most common colour, another indication of ordinariness. It follows that despite Mrs Sucksby's efforts, Sue confirms that it "turned out plain after all" (Waters 2002: 5). Like Agnes who recalls the ritual of caring for her hair, Sue also describes how she used to wear it, "like lots of the Borough girls wore theirs, divided in three, with a comb at the back and, at the sides, a few fat curls" (Waters 2002: 33). Indeed, the description of Sue's hair– unlike in Fowles's text or Faber's – is rather inanimate and motionless, no movement is detected in her hair. This may be in part because of the female point of view. Unlike Sarah's hair which is described from Charles's point of view and Sugar's from William's, Sue's hair is described from her own point of view. Thus, it is not sexualized. Furthermore, associating it with the colour 'brown' and the adjective 'plain' and equating it with the rest of the Borough girls are meant to highlight the link between physical attributes and social belonging, for hair becomes a manifestation of social category. Interestingly, when Gentleman initiates the plot for Sue to become Maud's maid – the position of a lady's maid is inevitably by far much better than that of a thief in the Borough – her hair is among the elements which must be changed as part of the new persona. "[H]e thought the style too fast for a country lady: he made [her] wash [her] hair till it was perfectly smooth, then had [her] divide it once—just the once—then pin it in a plain knot at the back of my head" (Waters 2002: 33). Evidently, hair becomes a tool to complete the impersonation process.

Intriguingly, Sue recounts that Maud's hair "was fairer than [hers]—but not very fair" (Waters 2002: 65). The description is brief and almost dull, which not only reflects Sue's lack of interest in upper-class fashion requirements, but most importantly puts to the fore Maud's nonconformity with her class. Unlike Agnes in Faber's novel, Maud does not seem to have the model Victorian hair, which foreshadows her eventual unbelonging to upper-class. What is

worthy of note however is that Maud always wears her hair attached with hairpins and a net. Indeed, both become symbols of containment and restriction. “Her hair, inside its net, was fixed with half a pound of pins, and a comb of silver” (Waters 2002: 82). In Briar where Mr Lilly demands that everything be in order, Maud’s hair-do is a manifestation of the patriarch’s rules.

Hair in Waters’s text is not sexualised insofar as both girls have average hair, dark to varying degrees. It is neither lush nor lavish. Adjectives like ‘dull’, ‘pale’, ‘common’, and ‘tangled’ and associations with grease and sour smell do not put to the fore the attractive appeal of hair. This can be explained by the fact that both protagonists are non-conformists. Maud does not belong to the class of ladies in the traditional sense: she does not appear in public occasions or receive visitors for tea or dinner. Sue, if anything, is working-class. Interestingly however, at the end of the narrative, when Maud adopts a new lifestyle by becoming a writer and moving back to Briar, her hair echoes her decision of ordinariness as well as liberation from her uncle’s rules. “Now it was smooth, unpinned, she had put it back and tied it with a simple ribbon” (Waters 2002: 547). In brief, hair is considered an indicator of both character and social belonging, in a Victorian society which demands that rules be respected by women. Hence, any sign of nonconformity becomes a symbol of transgression and/ or liberation. The neo-Victorian text by means of its diverse portrayals of the hair of female protagonists, rebuffs linearity and celebrates multiplicity and plurality.

1.1.2 Fashioning the Female Body

The etiquette of female hair extended to clothing and consequently to the shape of the body. In fact, the Victorian age signalled a shift in the perception of the ideal female body. Genre paintings of the eighteenth century celebrated voluptuous women with big bellies, breasts, buttocks and thighs. As Anne Hollander suggests “there seems to have been no impulse to constrict what we call the waist … In the erotic imagination of Europe, it was apparently impossible … for a woman to have too big a belly” (Hollander 1978: 98). Hence, paintings displayed “expanses of belly and thigh” for “breasts and buttocks were seen as subsidiary attendants of these” (Hollander 1978: 104). By the end of the nineteenth century, the female body’s eroticism was more centred on relatively small waists and bellies. The late-nineteenth century is best understood as the moment in Western culture when what has come to be called the anorexic body was placed more or less permanently at the very centre of the sexual imagination. Consequently, the wasp waist became a highly-important element in the material description of the Victorian female body. In fact, in order to reduce consequentially their waist,

women had recourse to different techniques that shifted their body forms, namely the use of the corset among middle-class women, as well as tight lacing among upper-class. The corset became so popular in late-nineteenth century England that Elizabeth Ewing claimed that "by 1868 Britain produced three million corsets a year, while another two million were imported from France and Germany" (Ewing qtd. in Davies M. 1982: 619). The corset, an assault on the midriff and emphasis on the breast, began an overall movement of reducing the female waist toward the hourglass shape. In Faber's novel, Henry Rackham claims "She is bosomy, but thin in the waist--very like the women used in advertisements for shoe polish, or his brother's perfumes for that matter" (Faber 2002: 242). This shape became the body-type, the model to be advertised and displayed nationwide.

In Fowles's novel, the narrative does not associate Sarah with a small waist. This may be explained by the fact that the narrative illustrates her becoming a "New Woman, flagrantly rejecting all formal contemporary notions of female fashion" (Fowles 1969: 189). At the Pre-Raphaelites', Charles is surprised to see that "[h]er skirt was of a rich dark blue and held at the waist by a crimson belt with a gilt star clasp; which also enclosed the pink-and white striped silk blouse, long-sleeved, flowing, with a delicate small collar of white lace, to which a small cameo acted as tie" (Fowles 1969: 189). Faithful to the persona she embodied throughout the narrative, her final dress assuredly highlights her rejection of Victorian standards of fashion and beauty. In fact, Sarah's dress reflects the drastic changes which occurred at the end of the century at the level of female fashion[41] and aptly situates her at the period where the New Woman ultimately impacted female dress "partly by her demand for physical freedom and partly by setting up a reaction, in the fashionable world, in the opposite direction" (Cunnington 1937: 857). There is mixture of both masculinity and femininity in colours, fabrics and items: dark blue, rich fabric, belt, collar and tie on the one hand imitating the male suit, and white and pink silk and lace with a flowy movement which recall the fluidity of female garments. Through her clothes, Sarah establishes a direct connection with the Rational Dress Movement of the 1890s which not only directly challenged the whims of Victorian fashion, for "Rational designs allowed women to move more freely, unencumbered by trailing skirts and tight corsets" (Simpson 2001: 55), but symbolized the broader issue of social progress for women. Furthermore, one may suggest that Fowles touches upon the "faintly masculinized Victorian

[41] See Cecil Willett Cunnington's *English Women's Clothing in the Nineteenth Century: A Comprehensive Guide with 1,117 Illustrations* (1990) where she tracks the evolution of women's style throughout the century.

female" (Huffaker 1980: 91) by means of her "strong Pre-Raphaelite undertones, and strong sociological ones, for she is metaphorically trying to break from the tight stays … of masculine wishful thinking about woman's humble role in life. There is, as with so many of Rossetti's female faces, a distinctly masculine cast about her" (Fowles qtd. in Huffaker 1980: 144).

Tight-lacing the corset became a ubiquitous technique among Victorian women to reduce their waist and have an ideal wasp waist. In Waters's novel, Sue notices that Maud's waist "was astonishingly narrow" (Waters 2002: 65). In the early nineteenth century, while average waist measurements varied between 20 and 23 inches, wasp waist measurements of 16 to 18 inches were often striven for as the reigning standard of feminine beauty in the period. Sue ironically retorts: "I wasn't about to do myself an injury, for the sake of a sixteen-inch waist" (Waters 2002: 102). Alarmingly, in their pursuit of an ideal body figure, Victorian ladies often caused themselves many injuries. Women were often laced so tightly that their breathing was restricted, leading to faintness. Physicians blamed corsets for causing a host of ailments such as organ displacement. Compressing the abdominal organs could cause poor digestion and over time the back muscles could atrophy. In fact, long-term tight lacing led to the deformation of the rib cage. Sue adds that "[Maud's] corset was long, with a busk of steel; her waist, as I think I have said, was narrow: the kind of waist the doctors speak against, that gives a girl an illness" (Waters 2002: 82). This controversial fashion finds echoes in Faber's text through the intermediary of Agnes whose frail body is described at multiple occasions. Interestingly, the weak body exemplifies the efforts made by ladies to conform to the ideal form.

> As for her figure: another stroke of luck! The near-skeletal arms and waist given her by her illness are exactly what the times require; in fact, she's a good few ounces ahead. While other ladies are torturing themselves with starvation diets, she has inherited la ligne effortlessly. Is it any wonder, then, that she still doesn't eat much, even now that she's well enough? Gorging herself when she has the thinnest waist she's ever had would be criminal[.] (Faber 2002: 268)

Indeed, by means of Agnes, the text signals the repercussions of the race among upper-class women to attain the ideal shape which caused much controversy both ethically and physically. Valerie Steel claims that "[m]any women did reduce their waists by several inches but accounts of tight lacing to extreme tenuity usually represent fantasies", a fantasy of becoming more beautiful and more attainable (Steele 1985: 2). Not only did the perfect waist cause torment for

many ladies who found themselves in a constant struggle to look like the ideal Victorian lady, it often drove them to turn to harmful ways such as deliberate anorexia. Fashion became the context where disease was self-inflicted. These dressings "upheld the [Victorian women's] beliefs in putting up a courageous appearance while enduring pain" (Rodrigues 1989/1990: para. 9).

Besides the fashionableness conferred by the corset, the latter also became a metaphor for virtue and sensibility, since it stood for restraint and curtailment. As Bernard Rudofsky points out, "uncorseted woman *reeked* of license; an unlaced waist was regarded as a vessel of sin" (Rudofsky 1972: 110/111, emphasis added). In Faber's novel, Mrs Fox's conversation with a prostitute in the street illustrates the fuss over such garment by putting to the fore its association with respectability. The prostitute intentionally mistakes Emmeline for a prostitute because she is not wearing a corset ""You'd make a good whore yerself!" the giggling trollop assured her. "I c'n tell! You ain't wearin' a corset, are yer? I c'n see yer teats!"" (Faber 2002: 438). The corset as a revolutionary piece of clothing became symbolic not only of social class, but manners. Even Sugar is surprised at Mrs Fox's deliberate choice not to wear a corset, though she is in no natural position to judge Mrs Fox's propriety. "And, as she [Mrs Fox] waves, her ample bosom swings loosely inside her bodice, suggesting she hasn't a corset on. Sugar is no expert when it comes to the finer details of respectability, but she does wonder if these things can be quite comme il faut ..." (Faber 2002: 530). Emmeline, avant-gardist and modern, retorts that "in any case, modesty has nothing to do with corsets, for decent women existed long before such garments were invented" (Faber 2002: 438). She decisively rebuffs any natural link between clothes and demeanour or class. Through the character of Emmeline, Faber exposes the double significance of such garment. Though it was initially seen as a symbol of curtailment, it was transformed into an emblem of female rebellion and empowerment in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Ironically however, the corset got equally popular among prostitutes, thus, shocking the more 'respectable' citizens. Sugar herself wears one for she is often described paying close attention to her image. Early in the narrative, Faber's narrator does not neglect to stop at her "wasp waist" as he gives her physical portrayal (Faber 2002: 35). One may suggest that for Sugar, wearing a corset is both out of concern for respectability and/or an attempt to maintain her sexual attraction. In fact, quite contradictorily, though it was seen as an emblem of restriction, it turned into a tool for seducing men. Thus, the corset could be seen as a garment of adverse morals. On the one hand, it created the fashionable silhouette that marked out the woman who wore it as delicate and feminine, all the while making her body shape more defined

and attractive of adorning gazes. On the other hand, the female that denied the corset was often tarred with charges of sexual promiscuity or moral laxity, which led to the use of the term "loose morals", referring to the absence of a corset (Steele 2001: 26). Thus, the fact that Sugar wears a corset is problematic since it foregrounds how she evades all classifications, both social and moral.

As significant as the corset was the Victorian crinoline, a bell-shaped series of horizontal, concentric hoops hanging from the waist and held together by vertical bands of tape, including materials as sharp as wood or metal. Hence, below the voluptuous breast and the slender waist restrained by the corset, expanded the large crinoline, perfecting the hourglass shape. It was very popular for it "marked a modified and exaggerated version of the hoop-skirt, or rather, a newly combined form of the hoop-skirt and the petticoat" (Finch 1991: 345). In Waters's novel, Gentleman focuses on the task of clothing a lady because of the different layers it comprised: "[a]fter the corset came a camisole, and after that a dicky; then came a nine-hoop crinoline, and then more petticoats, this time of silk" (Waters 2002: 36). Despite the aspect of embellishment, the crinoline soon turned out of fashion for it was big, heavy and rather unpractical, especially with the Rational Dress Movement. Waters's narrator ironically points out that "Maud had to press her crinoline flat, and walk quite sideways, in order to leave the house at all. It was odd to see her stepping out of that gloomy place, like a pearl coming out of an oyster" (Waters 2002: 78). In contrast to Sue on whom the fashion of lower-classes does not impose a crinoline, Maud must abide by the etiquette of ladies' fashion and is compelled to wear one below her dresses. It is rather unsurprising that as soon as she leaves Briar in the light of her scheme of identity usurpation, she leaves the crinoline behind, an ancient garment which stands for her previous life. Similarly, Fowles refers to "another wind [which] was blowing in 1867: the beginning of a revolt against the crinoline and the large bonnet" (Fowles 1969: 2). As his narrator describes Sarah, he voices, "[s]he too was a stranger to the crinoline; but it was equally plain that that was out of oblivion, not knowledge of the latest London taste" (Fowles 1969: 5). Faber also hints at the possibility of change towards the end of the century, with the introduction of the bustle. Though it had had many prototypes, the bustle's first official appearance came in 1868, explicitly described, for instance, in an issue of the Young Ladies' Journal from that year as a hybridization: "The full tournure added to the modem jupon gives quite a different appearance to a lady's figure" (qtd. in Cunnington 1951: 113). As Sophie plays with her doll, she "[tries], with the insertion of crumpled balls of paper under its skirts, to change the outmoded crinoline into a bustle" (Faber 2002: 597). In brief, the neo-Victorian novelists

re-utilize the Victorian crinoline only to undermine the clothing conventions of the time and to foreground their female characters' evasion from rules and limitations imposed on women.

While "the female body in the Renaissance was freed from its clothes [and] its "essence" was revealed as an absolute corporeality" (Finch 1991: 338), in late-nineteenth century England, the material body became inextricably linked with clothes, for they were seen as a metaphor for self-containment and restraint, and thus, "*coats* of cultural meaning" (Finch 1991: 338, emphasis added). The corset, crinoline and bustle became emblems not only of refined fashion, but propriety and respectability. Victorian culture expanded the perpetual contrast between the naked body and the clothed body. It is believed that the myth of the piano leg in reference to the erotic ankle – still debatable and highly divisive – may have emerged in the midst of this opposition between the naked and clothed female body. While the Victorian era has often been termed as repressed both socially and sexually, the myth of the covered piano legs becomes metonymic of this fact. The latter may have begun with Frederick Marryat's satire of nineteenth-century Americans wherein he recounts a comic incident which starts with the interchangeable use of limbs and legs in British and American English and ends with the school mistress choosing to cover the legs of furniture with little trousers, fearing the confusion between legs of furniture and limbs of female. Whether this myth is true or not remains subject to speculation. In both cases, it has since referred to the traditional view of Victorians about sexuality: Victorians were so prude that they felt compelled to cover up the legs of their pianos. In other words, they obscured signs of the body even where these existed only by inference. Certainly, Victorian dress codes denote that female legs and ankles remain covered under swathes of fabric and to bare them is considered wholly indecent. Yet the idea that the Victorians covered the legs of their pianos and other types of furniture as they were evocative of the hidden female form is a common misconception. Waters utilizes this myth in *Fingersmith* by means of Maud's bare ankles. The latter is uncommonly dressed. From top to ankles, she seems to conform to the strict Victorian fashion etiquette with the crinoline and corset. Yet, Sue is surprised at the sight of her skirt, she reports: "The skirt—I had never seen such a thing before, on a girl her age—the skirt was full and short and showed her ankles" (Waters 2002: 65). The narrative repeatedly refers to "her ankles slender like her waist" (Waters 2002: 83) and "un-skirted ankles" (Waters 2002: 261). In popular thought, it was scandalous for women to show either their ankles or elbows in public because those were sexualized body parts – that is why women wore long skirts and ¾ or full-sleeve gowns. It would have been inappropriate for anyone of the genteel class, man or woman, to show any part of their leg without a stocking. However, lifting one's skirts to expose the stocking-footed ankle was quite common. After all,

it would have been dangerous to ascend stairs or enter a carriage without arranging one's skirts to do so. Strangely, Maud is constantly made to wear such short skirts which reflect the eroticism of the female body. This choice of clothing becomes more problematic on her sessions of reading to her uncle's male friends in the library. The bare ankle becomes an erotic tool to arouse men's sexual fantasies as Maud combines both innocence of childhood and passion of womanhood. So, is she a girl – in this case her bare ankles would not be so problematic, or an adult? Maud's ambivalent character in the library is one of her most interesting – and controversial – characteristics, for the bare ankle becomes symbolic of multiple dichotomies at once. She thus embodies a titillating and typically (neo-)Victorian masculine fantasy, by being paradoxically at once virgin *and* whore, child *and* femme fatale, pure *and* depraved, knowing *and* unknowing, promiscuous *and* inaccessible.

Lilly imposes on Maud another piece of garment which is typical of Victorian ladies: the gloves, for "[h]er hands had clean white gloves upon them, buttoned up tight at the wrist" (Waters 2002: 65). As soon as she comes to Briar as a child, Lilly's first action to tame the girl is to force her to put on gloves at all times inside the house. White silk or cotton gloves are to be put on whenever she is at the dinner table or at the library in her uncle's presence. Narrated from Maud's perspective, it becomes clear that gloves have a major significance especially in relation to her uncle's books. In fact, the obligation to wear gloves is not to protect Maud's hands or to adhere to Victorian dress codes, but rather to protect his books from the touch of her hands. Though Maud shows signs of rebellion such as taking off her gloves, a major demonstration of her disobedience according to her uncle, being immediately punished for such transgression foreshadows her failed attempts at rebellion. Ultimately, her first rite of literary passage takes place when her desk is moved closer to her uncle's books and he commands her to take her gloves off for the first time. Though Waters re-utilizes the motif of the gloves, they have a different meaning in Maud's story since they are closely associated with pornographic books. They are not simply the gloves that cover women's bare limbs to preserve their respectability. By means of an ironic reversal in Victorian dress codes, gloves in Waters's text become indistinguishably associated with pornography and indulgence, instead of ladyhood and respectability.

In Faber's novel, gloves are not systematically associated with upper-class ladies, but rather with prostitutes. Prostitutes are publicly referred to as fallen women in allusion to the fall from grace and loss of virtue and chastity. Sugar both recognizes and assumes her position of a fallen woman despite her roleplay and disguise as a lady by means of her walk, behaviour, discourse and clothing choices. What is interesting however is that she enjoys the freedom to

either play the role or drop the act whenever it pleases her or suits her needs. While in Trafalgar Square, she maintains the image of the respectable lady – despite being recognized as a prostitute after close inspection – she stops acting and assumes her identity of fallen woman as soon as she arrives to Silver Street.

> But being a fallen woman has its small advantages, and she claims one of them now. The rules governing outdoor dress are clear, for those who can understand them: men may wear gloves or not wear gloves, as they please; poor shabby women must not wear them (the thought alone is ridiculous!) or the police are likely to demand where they got them; respectable women of the lower orders, especially those with babes in arms, can be forgiven for not wearing them; but ladies must wear them at all times, until safely indoors. Sugar is dressed like a lady, therefore she must on no account bare her extremities in public. Nevertheless, glove-tip by glove-tip, finger by finger, Sugar strips, even as she walks, the soft green leather off her hands. (Faber 2002: 34)

In this passage, the narrative ironically exposes the double standards in Victorian fashion with regard to gender and social class. Not only do men have the choice to wear gloves, this simple garment has the power to divide society into classes and categories; poor and wealthy, ladies and fallen women. By means of the glove, Faber presents a comprehensive inventory of Victorian society all the while highlighting the rigidity of such stratification. Interestingly however, Sugar is able to evade such classification: by means of a simple act of taking off her gloves – an inadmissible act for a respectable lady – she not only liberates herself from the social decorum of propriety, but manages to move from one social group to the other freely. Besides, Faber's use of the word 'strip' closely links the glove with sexuality and thus, loose morality. One may suggest that taking off her gloves becomes synonymous with a sensual act of striptease, precisely to rid herself of sexuality. The narrative paves the way for her subsequent role of mother-surrogate to Sophie, for the metaphor could be read in light of third-wave feminism, insofar as Astrid Henry argues that "transforming (…) feminism generally – into a mother requires that she be stripped of her sexuality; in fact, she must be asexual, if not explicitly anti-sex, to represent the maternal" (Henry A. 2004: 14). Taking off her gloves becomes essential for Sugar's growth in her journey of social mobility as she assumes another role, different from hers as a lady or a prostitute. Nadine Muller comments that "[t]hird-wave

politics in particular are often frame as both as a response to and participation in what has variously become known as 'striptease culture'" (Muller 2011: 28).

Ultimately, the narrator mockingly suggests that nineteenth-century female fashion both covers and uncovers the female body. Though it is initially meant to make the lady look respectable, garments like the corset and crinoline as well as techniques like tight-lacing participate in the sexualization of the same body.

> Morally it's an odd period, both for the observed and the observer: fashion has engineered the reappearance of the body, while morality still insists upon perfect ignorance of it. The cuirass bodice hugs tight to the bosom and the belly, the front of the skirt clings to the pelvis and hangs straight down, so that a strong gust of wind is enough to reveal the presence of legs, and the bustle at the back amplifies the hidden rump. Yet no righteous man must dare to think of the flesh, and no righteous woman must be aware of having it. (Faber 2002: 52)

In an ironic tone, Faber's narrator exposes the Victorian double standards vis-à-vis the morality of the time, assuming the position of a contemporary observer. His statement comes from hindsight as he detects the contradictions in the significance of female Victorian clothes and their association with women's righteousness. Curiously, Victorian female fashion is equated with science through the use of the verb 'engineer'. In other words, the different pieces of clothing are meticulously designed. Indeed, by means of the various garments which discipline and fashion the female body, women's bodies are contradictorily transformed into suggestive and provocative vehicles for men's carnal desires. The adjective 'cuirass' which refers to body-armour may be interpreted differently. First, it suggests that the female body is constantly regulated and restrained since the armour usually consists of a breast-plate and a back-plate, buckled or otherwise fastened together. The reference to the armour may also be to establish a soldier metaphor, which entails training, obedience and submission. Furthermore, since the cuirass is usually made of leather and is associated with the bosom in the passage, it may also have an erotic significance. Hence, the narrator exposes the duplicity of the age which calls for female chastity yet promotes clothing which uncovers the female body.

The neo-Victorian novelists revisit Victorian symbolism of Victorian hair as well as clothing items in order to rewrite the female body graphically. Such explicitness makes Maria Teresa Chialant go as far as to contend that "works like Faber's *The Crimson Petal and the*

White expose details that Dickens and his fellow authors knew but couldn't or wouldn't write about" (Chialant 2011: 48). Such rewriting gives the Victorian motifs new connotations so as to foreground the feminist attitudes of the neo-Victorianists' female characters and to emulate the Rational Dress Movement of the *fin-de-siècle*. Furthermore, the redefinition of such Victorian codes is broadly meant to question traditional representations of femininity and masculinity.

1.2 Subverting Binary Perceptions of Masculinity and Femininity

As the nineteenth century neared its end, the discussions on the position of woman and her role in society became more explicit especially with the 'Woman Question' at the centre of debates. More particularly, female as well as male writers started to interrogate the archaic essentialisations of the female body. Elizabeth Gaskell, the Brontë sisters and Mary Elizabeth Braddon created uncontrollable and nonconformist heroines in discourse, appearance and demeanour, thus challenging the decent female behaviour. Passionate protagonists such as Jane Eyre and Lady Audley magnified the tensions between the dichotomies body/passion essentially associated with femininity and mind/reason, with masculinity.

Neo-Victorian fiction questions these binarities only to undermine their stability and unveil their deficiencies by means of their male and female characters. Through a proto-feminist lens, the neo-Victorian characters can be read as rewritings of the dichotomy masculinity/femininity. One may suggest that as neo-Victorian novelists present ambivalent forms of masculinity and femininity, they not only expose the Victorians' double standards vis-à-vis gender identity, but also question the reliability of such dichotomies. Hence, they allow the narrative space for their characters to perform equivocal nondescript identities.

1.2.1 Challenging the Victorian Ideal of Masculinity

Publications such as Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (1859) and Friedrich Nietzsche's statement "God is dead!" (1882) foregrounded an ethos of masculinity centred on the development of mind. In his exploration of Victorian masculinities, John Tosh claims that one of the problems with the concept of manliness "is its cerebral and bloodless quality" (Tosh 1994: 182). He explains: "While manliness can in theory be defined as a mingling of the ethical and the physiological, a great deal of the literature of the day left the overwhelming impression that masculine identification resided in the life of the mind (heavily overlaid by conscience) rather than the body" (Tosh 1994: 182). Fowles explores the culture of Victorian masculinity

as he constructs his main male character. His text focuses on the intellectual insofar as we are constantly confronted to the influence of the advance of sciences like geology: Charles is interested in fossils, the growing interest in Darwinian thought as he repeatedly digresses into scientific discussions with the male characters around him notably Ernestina's father and the doctor, as well as the rising conflict between science and religion which is illustrated in Charles's existential torment epitomised in the final scene of the church.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century however, the male body started to receive more attention since it was closely associated with "the more general agitation about health". J. A. Mangan writes: "In *The Healthy Body and Victorian Culture* Bruce Haley has argued persuasively that 'no topic more occupied the Victorian mind than Health' (…) 'To a nation preoccupied with health', Haley asserted, 'the athlete was the new hero and the "human from divine"'" (Mangan 1987: 7). Physical rigour was needed for men to be fit enough. Late-Victorian ideals of manhood as war-ready are evident in the literature of the time: Rudyard Kipling's poems as he boasts about male ideals of perfection combining both physical capacities and rational attributes are a case in point. To ensure a perfect body, men must control all forms of passion. It is unsurprising then that Charles often reiterates the expression 'control' so as to stifle the passion of female characters such as Ernestina and Sarah. Mangan claims "The ideal of the Christian Gentleman maintained an absolute standard in controlling dangerous impulses" (Mangan 1987: 39). In the neo-Victorian novels of this corpus, one can clearly observe the prevalence of the image of male as a sexually-driven character, with varying degrees of self-control and restraint, especially in the cases of Charles in Fowles's novel and William and his male friends in Faber's novel. Both novelists opt for ambivalence as they depict their male characters' sexuality, alternating between restraint, and loss of control on the one hand and agency and submission on the other. In fact, while Charles in Fowles's text constantly attempts to control his sexual desire for Sarah as well as other prostitutes, William in Faber's text repeatedly surrenders to his carnal desires. Both narratives put to the fore an alternating state of control and submission, failure and success, thus challenging Minister Hugh Stowell Brown's view of manliness as control. As explained in one of his 1858 lectures, what constituted true manliness was men's control of their bodies and emotions. If left unregulated, their manliness would be jeopardized:

> I, virtue, I am manliness. I alone am manliness; without me you may be a fool, you may be a brute, you may be a demon, but you cannot be a man. I must be enthroned in your heart; I must have the absolute government of your

> physical, intellectual, moral being; I must regulate your life; I must direct you in your going out and your coming in; I must have the control of your thoughts, feelings, words and deeds; on such conditions only is it possible for you to be manly! (Brown 1858: 34)

Brown explicitly equates manliness and virtue, thus elevating the male body to the immaterial world. By contrast to the female body, the male body is often – if not always – eulogized. While the former symbolises weakness and disembodiment, the masculine body embodies perfection, combining both rational and physical ideals. Furthermore, Brown uses a rich lexical field of mastery and agency; the repetition of the pronoun 'I' which reflects subjectivity and the enumeration of masculine physical and intellectual attributes put to the fore the masculine ideal. Thus, the focus on both physical and emotional self-command is meant to highlight the necessity of both actions in order to acquire manly attributes, to reach the masculine ideal.

Fowles explicitly and minutely describes Charles's sexual relationship with the prostitute in chapter 40, as his narrator recounts the prostitute's every movement focusing on how she daringly approaches the gentleman and commands the sexual relationship: she voluntarily undresses, puts on a white peignoir in reference to angelic purity, sits on Charles's lap, takes his hand under her naked breast and passionately kisses him. She controls the rhythm of the intercourse while the gentleman simply receives her actions. By contrast, he seems both hesitant and reluctant to respond to her approaches, as if it were a sign of his manliness. Interestingly, such scene where male prowess ultimately fails tragically with Charles vomiting, and which echoes a similar scene in Faber's text where William falls asleep before the sexual act with Sugar and wakes up drained in urine, challenges patriarchy's binary perception of sexual relationships which are often based on male sexual potency. While Fowles capitalizes on Charles's endeavour at self-restraint, so as to conform to Brown's definition of manliness, his male character's attempts to control his desires fail when he meets Sarah in Exeter. Thus, the narrative highlights the power of emotion even for Charles; "[s]eeing her was the *need*; like an *intolerable* thirst that *had* to be assuaged. He *forced* himself to look away. (…) He *had* to look back to her. (…), he was *overcome* with a violent sexual desire; a lust a thousand times greater than anything he had felt in the prostitute's room" (Fowles 1969: 148, emphasis added). Fowles suggests that passion can be equally overwhelming for the male, thus challenging Brown's phallogocentric definition. Contrarily to his anterior experience with the prostitute who was in command, the following passage emphasizes Charles's agency:

> Raising himself a little, he drew up her nightgown. Her legs parted. With a frantic brutality, as he felt his ejaculation about to burst, he found the place and thrust. Her body flinched again, as it had when her foot fell from the stool. He conquered that instinctive constriction, and her arms flung round him as if she would bind him to her for that eternity he could not dream without her. He began to ejaculate at once. (Fowles 1969: 149)

The use of the active mode as well as verbs of action such as 'drew', 'found', 'thrust', 'conquered' help establish a war metaphor so as to assert Charles's sexual efficiency. The text presents him as manliness embodied, for he ultimately conquers Sarah's body. Through this alternation in describing male sexuality, Fowles rejects essentializations of manliness as either sexual agency or control, efficiency or restraint. One may suggest that by means of this ambivalent masculinity, Fowles allows Sarah the narrative space to display her agentivity.

In Faber's novel, Rackham as well as his friends Ashwell and Bodley think of themselves as sexual beacons, hungry predators incessantly chasing objects of sexual desire, thus illustrating the portrayal of masculinity as the embodiment of sexual potency. The description of their sexual fantasies as well as acts highlights their quest for agency and command and echoes the masculine focus on physical capacities like strength and athleticism, as well as sexual agency such as virility and potency. Hence, like in pornographic discourse, Fowles's narrative stops at the act of ejaculation as an instant of masculine accomplishment and prowess, for these were vital aspects of Victorian masculinity as early as mid-nineteenth century. In fact, during the long reign of Queen Victoria and even some decades after, there were certain social conventions to which the separate genders were expected to adhere, for the study of Victorian masculinity is based on the assumption that "the construction of male consciousness must be seen as historically specific" (Sessman 1992: 370). Victorian patriarchal culture with its binary perceptions of male and female gender reinforced such view of the masculine ideal. It follows from this binary view that the representation of masculinity as such widens the gap with the depiction of femininity which is to be seen as weakness and submission, particularly in the sexual act. Yet, both Faber and Fowles subvert dyadic model, as they endow their female characters with the same sexual agency. Sarah assumes the position of sexual agent as she commands the sexual act. Similarly, Sugar directs her sexual relationship with William as it suits her.

In Faber's text, Rackham's manliness is threatened for the ending portrays the decline of his male body which used to be a site of sexual prowess and a symbol of manliness.

> Rackham is being led along in near-blackness, stumbling and limping on wet, mucky cobble-stones. He has his arm slung around the shoulder of a woman, and with every step, he groans in pain and mortification. One trouser-leg is torn and sopping-wet with blood. […] His ears are throbbing, swollen, as though he's been boxed across them by an angry parent. […] His body shivers too, in fear of its own injuries: what sort of shape will he be in when this is all over? Is he destined to be a cripple, a figure of fun who lurches lamely from armchair to armchair, who writes like a child, and stutters like an imbecile? What has become of the man he once was?" (Faber 2002: 625).

In contrast with Fowles's description of Charles's sexual agency, the passive mode as well as the lexical field of incapacity are utilized to show the vulnerability of the male body. At the end, here was a man utterly unmanned by failing to control his appetites and therefore his passions, the result being the destruction of job, family, and health. One may suggest that the neo-Victorian novels precisely employ the Victorian trope of virile masculinity only to challenge and subvert it. Through the intermediary of the rhetorical question, one may even go as far as to argue that the narrative mocks William's lost manliness.

To mirror the same process of corporeal degradation, Faber re-employs the motif of the hair as a symbol of the male body's materiality: William's hair witnesses a radical transformation from youth to adulthood. "Once upon a time William's hair was his proudest feature: all through his childhood it was soft and golden-bronze, cooed over by aunts and passing strangers. (…) A long hair [which] stood for Shelley, Liszt, Garibaldi, Baudelaire, individualism--that sort of thing" (Faber 2002: 43). Yet, like his hair which had degraded throughout the years, his masculinity as well was impacted by a rough journey of self-doubt and self-demise. In fact, while he used to believe himself a peer to the above-mentioned renowned figures because of his long ravish hair, his now "mop of unruly hair" signals his loss of control of all aspects of his life (Faber 2002: 68). Thus, Faber mockingly points out William's hair, "released into the atmosphere", 'remarkable in how it sits, or more accurately jumps around, on his head" (Faber 2002: 35). The man "from the forehead up is a comic delight: a flip-flopping crest of curly golden hair, like a small furry animal fallen out of the sky onto the head of a man" (Faber 2002: 35). Indeed, when William's golden locks refuse to submit to his inclination, his stream of consciousness highlights his state of disorientation, and bewilderment. Hair is attributed different connotations. By means of this comic imagery, Faber suggests that manliness is variable, unstable and inconstant. It is not immutable as posited by Brown for it

undergoes the passage of narrative time and changes in the plot. Through the character of William, one may argue that Faber challenges patriarchal assumptions of the male ideal founded on its contrast with femininity insofar as he points out the vulnerability of masculinity and suggests that femininity is not necessarily contradictory.

Sexuality is not the only impulse Victorian men had to control. A widely-spread technique both eighteenth- and nineteenth-century-men adopted to control their bodies was food regulation. In his article "Manhood Incorporated: Diet and the Embodiment of "Civilized" Masculinity", Christopher Forth explores how dietary practices were part of constructing the male body both symbolically and materially (Forth 2009: 582). So, self-discipline was rewarded because it entailed a gradual proximity to manliness and distancing from effeminacy. What Victorian gentlemen probably feared the most was the risk of effeminacy, an unmanliness which would undermine their vigour and virility. Thus, restricted diet increasingly took on a more extreme form, for example by abstaining from eating meat. In Faber's novel, Henry seems to abide by such call for he is often described feeding his cat all sorts of meat, kidney and livers, while he simply eats a soup or an omelette. He even exclaims: "It's frightening to think how easily one can spend an entire lifetime gratifying animal appetites" (Faber 2002: 473). He embodies manliness from 1880 to 1914 which Stephanie Olsen defines as a "cluster of carefully honed, controlled and directed emotions that were to ensure the embodiment, the emotional constitution of morality" (Olsen 2014: 166). On the other hand, William indulges in eating. "Eggs still steaming, rashers of bacon crisp enough to spread butter with, sausages cooked so evenly that there isn't a line on them, mushrooms brown as loam, roulades, fritters, kidneys grilled to perfection: all this and more is set before the Rackhams" (Faber 2002: 99). Similarly, Mr Lilly in Waters's text equally enjoys bloody dishes of "meats, and hearts, and calves' feet" (Waters 2002: 191) and strongly believes that meat is a reward to performance and achievement, hence denying it Maud: "'No meat,' he says, laying a napkin across his lap, 'for idle girls. Not in this house'" (Waters 2002: 198). So, considering both Rackham and Lilly examples of agent patriarchy, their lack of control and indulgence in food may be read as a sign of their effeminacy. This may also suggest that that both of them are less manly than Henry who deprives himself of a bodily pleasure as food.

Besides food, Henry also abstains from sex, which causes other male figures' bewilderment. Bodwell is surprised that "[a] fine manly specimen like Henry--best rower in our set, champion swimmer, (…) running around Midsummer Common stripped to the waist" – all illustrations of exceptional physical capacities – deprives himself of sexual pleasure (Faber 2002: 107). To Bodwell, it is only natural that a well-abled male body should indulge in sexual

satisfaction. On the other hand, the risk of sexual abstinence is the recurrence of sexual fantasies and masturbation, for Henry has one unattainable object of desire: Mrs Fox.

> With just a few words and a certain quality of voice, she artlessly penetrated his Platonic armour, and he was helpless with impure thoughts. All sorts of lurid scenarios would flash into his mind like tableaux vivants: Mrs Fox's skirts catching on the branches of a tree, and being torn right off; Mrs Fox being attacked by a degenerate ruffian, who might succeed in baring her bosom before Henry smote him down; Mrs Fox's clothing catching fire, necessitating his prompt action; Mrs Fox sleepwalking to his house, in the night, for him to restore to dignity with his own dressing-gown. (Faber 2002: 138)

Though Henry's physical desires are restrained, they infiltrate his subconscious. Besides, not only does he sexually fantasize about Emmeline, he masturbates in his dreams. In his study of masturbation as one cause of insanity, William Acton focuses his investigation on patients in asylums and cites Robert Ritchie who states that a masturbatory man was a patient who was "marked out by his unsociability, pale colouring, emaciated slouching frame, and flaccid muscles" (Acton 1867: 97). Joanne Begiato adds: "Masturbation was seen as unmanning in a very physical way" (Begiato 2018: 58). It altered the body's built and rendered it rather effeminate.

In the light of this continual alternation between manly and unmanly traits attributed to the male body in the neo-Victorian text, constantly torn apart between self-indulgence and self-control and permissiveness and restraint, both Faber and Fowles subvert the ideal of manliness as proposed in Brown's argument. Indeed, the neo-Victorian novel challenges the binary perception of the human body as a rational male and passionate female. This points out the ambivalence in the construction of masculine identity insofar as some unmanly adjectives like lecher and epicure from Brown's perspective turn out to be applicable to masculinity. Besides, both authors suggest that femininity is not to be regarded in contradictory terms to masculinity. Thus, they devise an alternative form of femininity for their female characters precisely by subtly subverting Victorian binarities.

1.2.2 Rewriting the (Dis)embodied Female Body

If the female body is not consciously absented, morally covered or immorally displayed, it is portrayed as sick or disembodied. Through the recurrence of the motif of the sick woman in Victorian fiction, the female body becomes a site of disease, vulnerability and fragility. Meredith Miller argues that "it is a critical commonplace that Victorians saw consumption as a female illness and a pathology, but also an expression of feminine virtue and gentleness" (Miller M. 2018: 108). Feminising consumption extends even to the reading of male characters in Victorian fiction. Katherine Byrne reads Ralph Touchett, hero of James' *The Portrait of a Lady*, as feminised by tuberculosis and concludes that "the portrayal of a male consumptive in *The Portrait of a Lady* emerges as a portrayal of a female consumptive after all" (Byrne 2011: 169). The consumptive body becomes a feminine attribute *par excellence*, a defining feature of the female/ effeminate body. What makes the motif of sickness particularly important in this study is the fact that consumption is associated with two female characters in Faber's *The Crimson Petal and the White*. As early as the first pages of the narrative, Sugar is described as "flat-chested and bony like a consumptive young man" (Faber 2002: 20). Later in the narrative, Mrs Emmeline Fox is diagnosed with consumption. If invalidism is to be read as inherently associated with females, the aim is to explore how this motif is redefined and re-read in Faber's text.

Tuberculosis or consumption in Victorian England strangely became the standard of beauty among upper-class women who would be thin, pale and of delicate health. Tuberculosis is the only disease of the time which provided a woman with flattering features: a skeletal body shape with a ghostly pale skin, bright sparkling eyes, and red cheeks and lips without harming her natural beauty (smallpox disfigured the body while cholera was rather associated with poor areas and lower classes). Charlotte Brontë wrote in 1849: "Consumption, I am aware, is a flattering malady". These signs later became signs of beauty and refinement, indicators of class. And so, the ideal woman was a delicate frail creature who needed to be cared for by men, a prevalent figure in the literature of the time. Bram Dijkstra refers to a "cult of invalidism" around women of the nineteenth century for numerous female consumptives appeared in novels from Charles Dickens' *Dombey and Son* (1848) to Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1854). Indeed, the notion of invalidism entailed that a physically weak woman was more likely to be docile and submissive, hence reinforcing the link between body and cultural significance and gender roles. By encouraging female fragility, invalidism encouraged dependence and passivity. Moreover, invalidism also perpetuated the stereotype of people with disabilities as

defenceless, deserving pity and compassion. In Faber's novel, it is Mrs Fox who represents the figure of the consumptive woman as "Curlew comes to a stop well above Henry's head. 'It's confirmed: she has consumption'" (Faber 2002: 300). Sugar describes her from a distance:

> The invalid, still escorted by a maidservant, moves not as a lame person does (that characteristic three-legged step), but bears down upon her walking stick as if it were a railing at the edge of a vertiginous cliff. She's as pale and thin as a stripped branch, and the left hand which hangs over the servant's arm looks very like a twig; the right, wrapped tightly around the handle of her cane, looks more like a knotted root. In the torrid heat that's giving everyone around her pink or (in the case of some of the more elaborately dressed ladies) red faces, hers is white, with two mottled crimson blushes on her cheeks that flare and fade with each step. (Faber 2002: 319)

Mrs Fox displays all common symptoms of tuberculosis. Yet, from Sugar's perspective, consumption is not described in flattering terms, for Mrs Fox is anything but beautiful and her body is anything but genteel. The imagery of a dry and barren nature through the 'stripped branch', the 'twig' and the 'knotted root' foregrounds the idea of infertility and unproductiveness. Besides, the emphasis on disability through the use of description as well as of metaphor reinforces meanings of impotence and handicap instead of delicate fragility. Though Faber borrows the same Victorian motif of feminine invalidism especially with regard to the desired female colour by means of the reference to pink, red and crimson blushes, he subverts it so as to rebuke its association with the Victorian romantic perception of ladyhood. From a contemporary perspective, it is simply a disease which makes the body weak and dependent, not to be confounded with delicacy. Besides, as Mrs Fox – against all odds – survives her sickness and her body regains some of its strength, the idealized myth of invalidism is simply shattered and we are eventually confronted to the natural progression of disease.

If not sick, the female body is portrayed as disembodied and fragmented. Rosi Braidotti in her investigation of phallogocentric discourse critiques Freudian theory which assumes that there is "an identification between human subjectivity and rational consciousness", thus totally ignoring the physical body (Braidotti 1994: 18). Similarly, Elizabeth Grosz argues that phallocentric representations often divide mind and body and claim a sort of disembodiment for women (Grosz 1994: 188). Phallogocentric discourse can be summed up in a Freudian preference to rational consciousness, a Cartesian reaffirmation of the body's cognitive functions

and a Descartesian split between mind and body. In brief, the female body is simply disregarded and detached from the mind.

Objectified representations of the female body and women's body images are dictated by a patriarchal discourse ranging from literature to mass media. Consequently, women internalise a sense of disembodiment as generated by these discourses and develop inauthentic images of their bodies. Abigail Bray and Claire Colebrook argue that "[p]hallocentric representations contaminate women with potentially fatal body images" giving the example of the anorexic body (Bray and Colerbrook 1998: 46). Faber presents two distinct situations of female disembodiment. Both Agnes and Sophie are strangers to their own bodies. Totally ignorant of female biological functions, Agnes believes that menstruation is a sign of her deteriorating health. "Please, no, please, no, please, no, she recites constantly, as if from a rosary. I don't want to bleed again. To Agnes, bleeding from the belly is a terrifying and unnatural thing. No one has told her about menstruation; she has never heard the word nor seen it in print" (Faber 2002: 178). Besides, she is unable to understand pregnancy. According to her, getting pregnant is a demonic possession, a ghostly phenomenon.

> Riddle: I eat less than ever I did before I came to this wretched house, yet I grow fat. Explanation: I am fed by force in my sleep.…Now I know that it is true. Demon sits on my breast, spooning gruel into my mouth. I turn my head, his spoon follows. His vat of gruel is as big as an ice pail. Open wide, he says, or we shall be here all night. (Faber 2002: 617)

The passage can be read in parallel with scenes of force-feeding imprisoned suffragettes in the 1910s. The wretched house can be read as the Holloway prison, the demon embodies prison warders, wardresses and medical staff, while the gruel represents mixtures of milk, eggs or other liquid foods which were poured into the stomach through rubber tubes. Emmeline Pankhurst, founder of the Women's Social and Political Union, observed the appalling practices in a London prison during the period of force-feeding: "Holloway became a place of horror and torment. Sickening scenes of violence took place almost every hour of the day, as the doctors went from cell to cell performing their hideous office" (Cook 2018: n.d.). Agnes appropriately describes the riddle using imagery of gruesomeness. Besides, her desire to escape her own body becomes typical of an internalized phallocentric disembodiment. Furthermore, the blank pages in her diaries following her wedding night are symbolic of the utter divide between body and mind.

Like Agnes who is detached from her own body, Sophie cannot control herself and urinates in her bed during her sleep. In their states of bodily alienation, both Agnes and Sophie are portrayed as disembodied subjects. The former constantly succumbs to tantrums and collapses echoing what Grosz formulates as "getting consciousness outside the body and thus, creating detachment and alienation for the female subject" (Grosz 1994: 188). The latter is simply relegated to a dummy-like position in the eyes of characters around her, notably her parents. Yet, this position is soon undermined with Sugar's help, for the latter helps both female characters reconnect with their bodies. Unfamiliar with how her body functions, Sophie learns how to command it with Sugar's help; a lesson she finds exceptional. "Indeed, Sophie seems to regard [Sugar] with awe, if only for her miraculous power to cure bedwetting" (Faber 2002: 415/416).

The disembodied female body was also often associated with hysteria. In fact, Showalter establishes a parallel between hysteria and the female condition insofar as hysteria in the nineteenth-century was widely regarded as a "female malady" (Showalter 1996). Women not only were more likely to be affected by the disease, the link between hysteria and the female body is already revealed in the noun. Etymologically stemming from the Greek word "hysterikos", hysteria literally refers to "diseases of the womb" (Dmytriw 2015: 44). If we read the female body in Waters's text from such angle, we find that it displays various signs of disembodiment. Some of Maud's behaviours can be seen as symptoms of hysteria. First, she suffers from constant nightmares and restlessness, thus she medicates with a sleeping draught, an almost-sacred ritual to perform every night before sleep. She becomes so dependent on these drops to calm her that she even needs them in daytime: "'I am too nervous. (…) I lean and seize his coat—find the pocket, the bottle of drops—but he sees, comes quickly to me and plucks it from my hand. 'Oh, no,' he says, as he does it. 'I won't have you half in a dream—or risk you muddling the dose, and so spoiling everything! Oh, no. You must be quite clear in your mind.'" (Waters 2002: 294). She also displays some obsessive-compulsive behaviours like her nightly routines of kissing her mother's portrait, for she "[finds she] must do it or lie fretful in [her] bed" (Waters 2002: 193). Other rituals are related to personal neatness like her obsession with the colour, cleanliness and stitches on her gloves, a fixation inherited from her uncle. Furthermore, her physical weakness and unusual paleness are symptomatic of her disembodied state, for she is described as having "a troubling kind of paleness" (Waters 2002: 82). In addition, Maud is depicted as an anxious character. She is often nervous about her own body: "For I open my eyes and am bewildered—perfectly bewildered—and filled with dread. I look at my form in the bed and it seems shifting and queer—now large, now small, now broken up

with spaces; and I cannot say what age I am. I begin to shake" (Waters 2002: 244). She is also anxious about her food, for she refuses to have eggs and meat, and prefers only clear soup: "'Clear as you can make it. All right?'" (Waters 2002: 91). Besides, she is alarmed at her mother's madness and terrified that she might turn mad because it is a hereditary disease. By means of these symptoms, one may suggest that Waters foregrounds the link between Maud and hysteria, and thus, creates a fragmented image of Maud's self as well as her body, only to overthrow such state of disembodiment later on thanks to the discovery of her sexual lesbian self and ultimate liberation.

As the neo-Victorian texts rewrite the female body and foreground its potential in order to find a state of embodiment, they simultaneously question definitions of corporeal femininity. Among these definitions, hospitality is a "performed activity directed at particular individuals" wherein "[b]oth the guest and host live a corporeal existence [insofar as] acts of hospitality are intimately linked to attending to the body" (Hamington 2010: 32). What makes the study of the concept of hospitality central in this investigation is its association with femininity in Western theory. In fact, both Jacques Derrida and Emmanuel Levinas posit that hospitality is essentially feminine. Yet, the female state of disembodiment complicates such association. Can a disembodied female subject manifest hospitality? In other words, if the female body is on the one hand associated with disembodiment and on the other with hospitality, where is the female subject to be placed in-between these opposite notions? What reality does the female subject have in terms of identity construction in light of this feud between body and mind? Furthermore, if we focus our attention on sexual hospitality, what sort of sexual identity is the female character allowed to have?

2. Neo-Victorian Re-appropriations of the Female Body

2.1 Renegotiating Female (In)hospitality

As defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, hospitality is "the act or practice of being hospitable, the reception and entertainment of guests, visitors, or strangers, with liberality and goodwill, or an instance of this friendly act". As Derrida emphasizes the centrality of hospitality, he focuses on the inextricable link between hospitality and culture:

> Hospitality is culture itself and not simply one ethic amongst others. Insofar as it has to do with the ethos, that is, the residence, one's home, the familiar place of dwelling, inasmuch as it is a manner of being there, the manner in

> which we relate to ourselves and to others, to others as our own or as foreigners, ethics is hospitality; ethics is so thoroughly coextensive with the experience of hospitality. (Derrida 2001: 16/17)

Though individual, hospitality is also seen as a manifestation of social togetherness. In other words, Derrida perceives hospitality as a universal concept which might be defined as a human virtue as part of a system of communal relations. Yet, though the dictionary definition does not distinguish between the socially-prescribed roles of those who manifest hospitality and those who receive it i.e. the positions of host and guest, one may wonder how hospitality can be defined by gender. What significance does the act of hospitality entail in regard to both male and female identity construction? Derrida first defined hospitality in terms of the privacy of one's home and intimacy of self/being associated with this private realm of dwelling: one welcomes others into one's home, or into one's being. Levinas took a step further in his definition of hospitality as feminine. Hence, studies of hospitality from this perspective often target the questions of subject and identity formation through welcoming others and being welcomed.

Catherine Malabou points out that while Heidegger's *Dasein* refers to a being without characteristics and ethics thus, underlining the universality of the human condition of existence, Levinas insists in *Totality and Infinity* (1961) that the ethics of hospitality is embedded within femininity insofar as he believes in the "feminine of giving" and "femininity as giving" (Malabou 2012: 238). Indeed, there is a clear connection between sexual difference and welcoming, as Derrida points out: "whatever we might speak about later, and whatever we might say about it, we would do well to remember, even if silently, that this thought of welcome, there at the opening of ethics, is indeed marked by sexual difference" (Derrida 1999: 44/45). In other words, since sexual difference impacts the meaning of hospitality, one may suggest that the relationship of hospitality is indistinguishably associated with gender roles. Accordingly, Levinas stresses the link between home –a typically private place of hospitality– and woman – the principal actant in the home. By association, the hospitable is considered by Levinas as feminine.

> The home as a possession is not a possession in the same sense as the movable goods it can gather and keep. It is a possession because it is now and henceforth hospitable for its owner. This refers us to its essential interiority, and to the inhabitant that inhabits it before every inhabitant, the welcoming

> one par excellence, welcome in itself—the feminine being. (Levinas 1961: 157)

Levinas equates the home with the female sexual organ, its microcosmic representation. It follows that femininity is essentially hospitable because of the female's morphology as her sexual organs are penetrable, allowing for the hospitable act to take place.

In Faber's novel, Henry fantasizes about Mrs Fox in his erotic dream; "as with one sure hand she finds his manhood and guides it into the *welcoming* place that God has made, it seems, for no other purpose than to receive him" (Faber 2002: 352, emphasis added). Sugar as well associates hospitality with the welcoming capacity of her sexual organs "With a muffled cry he falls inside her; and, contrary to her fears, her cunt gives him a *welcome* more lubricious than she could have organised with half an hour of preparation" (Faber 2002: 409, emphasis added). In the same vein, William thinks of the prostitutes in terms of a welcoming hospitality for he describes them as "an *invitation* to be safe, a murmured *welcome* into a charmed embrace that wards off all misfortune, an affectionate entreaty to keep firm hold of the woman who knows the way" (Faber 2002: 82, emphasis added). Thus, feminine hospitality becomes synonymous with the female genitals' warm display of affection, meant to reassure both male ego and body.

Levinas's reading of the feminine as essentially hospitable is equally problematic since it poses the question of choice. Maurice Hamington believes that in the case of women, "'host' is not always a freely chosen role nor does it always entail power or decision-making ability" (Hamington 2010: 22). In *The Crimson Petal and the White*, Faber complicates this notion of female hospitality and underlines the absence of choice amongst women who are portrayed as naturally hospitable to males' objectifying gaze. In other words, their mere existence gives evidence to hospitality. William, Ashwell and Bodley have an objectifying gaze at women in general and prostitutes more particularly.

First, male characters stop at scopophilic desire of women and the latter are rendered human exhibits and objects of "prurient voyeurism" (Heilmann and Llewellyn 2010: 114). In Faber's text, the male protagonist's perception of women's bodies is triggered by his sexual needs and his quest for satisfaction as a sign of his virile masculinity. Women's bodies are imagined as a battlefield to invade, an arena in which a soldier can display his prowess and exceptional physical capacities.

> All these attractively clothed women circling his park bench (albeit at a distance)--have they made him ripe and ready for a naked one? Nearly. (…)

> he imagines himself as a restless beast, pacing the confines of a cage wrought in sterling silver (…) Ah, if only he could spring out! (…) And so the passing strollers in St James's Park are transformed unwittingly into sirens, and each glowing body becomes suggestive of its social shadow, the prostitute. And to a blind little penis, swaddled in trousers, there is no difference between a whore and a lady[.] (Faber 2002: 52)

Through the metaphor of the beast about to start hunting, the passage explicitly portrays William as a predator of female prey. Besides, equating all women to prostitutes highlights not only his belief in the 'natural' availability of the female body, but equally in the male instinct for sexual pleasure. From William's perspective, it is evident that the feminine is essentially hospitable for it welcomes the male voyeuristic gaze and arouses fantasies of sexual action. The scene puts to the fore the sexual masculinist gaze which considers women objects of contemplation. William takes the role of the seer while passing women are simply seen. From a male's perspective, women are imagined as hospitable to both the sexual gaze and the fantasy of penetration.

Indeed, with regard to the social group of prostitutes, hospitality takes on a more material dimension for the male figures actually seek sexual intercourse accessible thanks to money. Thus, the question of choice is dramatized through the intermediary of the figure of the prostitute who – by the means of her profession – is predisposed to participate in the exploitation of her body, and thus inclined to display a warm welcoming behaviour vis-à-vis her male clients. Clearly, in such relationship, the balance of power is dictated by the social roles of hospitality, host and guest. To whom does power belong? Is it to the host i.e. woman, or the guest i.e. man? Interestingly, William, Ashwell and Bodley are proponents of power as they view female bodies as objects for men's pleasure and try to regulate them as such. Foucault's notion of technologies of power entails that the body as a socially inflected entity is administered and controlled by social norms imposing a sense of normalcy. Male characters' view is supported by the norm, which in Foucauldian terms represents "an element on the basis of which a certain exercise of power is founded and legitimized" (Foucault 1975: 50). William considers the bodies of both the prostitute Sugar and his wife Agnes a place for occupation. Thus, Sugar and Agnes, two female subjects, among many others in the novel, are 'imprisoned' in the position of "comfort women", constantly facing masculine "assumptions about men's right to power over women's bodies" (Stetz and Oh 2001: Introduction xv).

Indeed, as if on a hunting mission, William claims the occupation of the bodies of both his wife Agnes and his mistress Sugar and turns them into "comfort women". Stetz and Oh investigate the "comfort system" that was established to allow Japanese soldiers the "relief" they needed after battle using Asian women as objects of pleasure, and condemning them to being victims of mass rapes, sexually transmitted diseases, injuries and even death. Similarly, Rackham resorts to female bodies in order to boost his male ego in his moments of doubt. While Sugar's body is naturally made available to satisfy his needs because of her position as a prostitute, he literally buys her like a merchandise in order to concretise his ownership of her body. The most flagrant instance of the occupation of the female body in Faber's text is epitomised by the transaction between Mrs Castaway and Rackham in exchange for his exclusive patronage of Sugar. In her study of how female bodies are regulated, Danijela Petković claims that the novel puts to the fore the "vulnerability this gender and this social position involve" (Petković 2012: 86). Like any other goods, Sugar's body is traded and obtained by William and the deal is concluded with a simple scribble of a pen. "So, bowing his head to Mrs Castaway's writing-desk, he watches her draw up the contract, on this, the twenty-fourth day of November, 1874" (Faber 2002: 126). The formalities are meant not only to ironically trivialise the simple business deal, but also to dramatize the worthlessness of the female body in both the male's and patriarchal mother's view. Indeed, William's bargain for Sugar's ownership exemplifies the commodification and objectification of the female body. In fact, patriarchy as a technology of power legitimizes William's perception of women's bodies as well as his subsequent actions. Hospitality becomes not an instance of choice, but rather a manifestation of female weakness and submission.

Furthermore, Agnes's body is constantly made available to Doctor Curlew's repetitive examinations. As a representative of phallogocentric discourse, the Victorian doctor is a symbol of patriarchal domination and subjugation and may very well be the reason behind some of Agnes's severe psychological instabilities. The scene(s) of her examination by Doctor Curlew highlight her discomfort. Like a defenceless victim/ prey, she is unable to fend off this attack and simply "leans back in her chair, allowing her eyes to fall shut" (Faber 2002: 121). These violations lead to her detachment from the real world in an attempt to spare herself the psychological pain and humiliation she must endure every week. Physically unable to fend off this invasion on her bod, she attempts an illusory momentary escape. One may suggest that Agnes's reaction, as she "fixes her attention on a clutch of extinguished candles, counting the drips of hardened wax on their shafts, (…) loses count, starts again, loses count again" (Faber 2002: 221), shows that the female body in Faber's novel, despite its vulnerability to male

intrusion, may display some signs of inhospitality which reflect a stronger desire for resistance and an ultimate objective of liberation. Delphine Gardey argues that since hospitality has always been associated with the home and the private, and the host and the guest, it inextricably links the domestic, the public and the territorial, and the intimate and the enemy and raises questions about notions of welcoming and rejection (Gardey 2016: 125/126). Derrida argues that the hospitable subject welcomes the guest, as relationships are formed with guests.

> The host who welcomes, the one who welcomes the invited guest, the welcoming host who believes himself the owner of the house is in reality a guest welcomed in his own home. He receives the hospitality that he offers in his own home, he receives hospitality from his own home—which ultimately does not belong to him. The host, as host, is a guest" (Derrida 1995: 41).

As part of the relationship of hospitality, the territory becomes a terrain for "other", as it was for "self" and "home". Doctor Curlew, initially the guest, and Agnes, the host, swap roles for she becomes the Other, and consequently loses all power of selfhood and subjectivity. As soon as she displays – or rather is forced to display – hospitality, she must give up all control not only of her body "as Doctor Curlew lifts her dressing-gown over her legs", but also of her territory for "she acquiesces, and takes her position on the bed" while he "opened the curtains" (Faber 2002: 121). As the doctor takes liberty with both her body and room, Agnes believes him to be a "bully", and fantasizes about "dismissing" him and regaining command and mastery of her self/ home.

If we consider the female body as the space where hospitality is manifested, what are the sexual implications on married women, more particularly when we examine Rackham's sexual relationship with his wife, a relationship essentially foregrounded on inhospitality? Indeed, Foucauldian technologies of power may also explain William's first act of rape of his innocent wife on their wedding night, as well as the second one in her sleep, both acts as manifestations of conjugal control. Actually, as he recalls their wedding night following her death, the memory sheds light on the scene of Agnes's rape. In the particular case of rape, is it still valid to talk of the feminine as hospitable, and the victim as host?

> As he lapses once more into a doze, he sees Agnes before him, as she was on their wedding night. (…) Yet she is rigid with fear, and gooseflesh forms on her perfect skin. Shyness and unease dry his tongue; the look of dumb horror

> on his wife's face obliges him to continue in silence. With only his own laboured breath for company, he presses on, hoping she might, by some magical process of communion, or emotional osmosis, be inspired to share in his ecstasy; that the eruption of his passion might be followed by a warm balm of mutual relief. (Faber 2002: 547)

The passage highlights Agnes's absence from the sexual act, for the use of the active mode is exclusively reserved to William. In this case, one may suggest that by means of displaying passivity, Agnes renounces her role as host to William's body. It follows that Agnes's wedding night becomes a sexually traumatic experience for her. Even though she lacks all knowledge of sexual intercourse, William intrusively forces himself upon her and insensitively ignores her gullibility, thus raping her. The act of rape exemplifies men's natural right over their wives' bodies, and both instances of rape thus become instances of female rejection. Indeed, Malabou looks for another meaning of the feminine which is not essentially hospitable since this claim poses the risk of reducing femininity to domesticity. While Levinas thinks of the female labia as a place welcoming intimacy, Malabou claims that this same place can be read in terms of defencelessness and fragility, "the silent folds of the labia, offered and defenseless, in the anatomical sex of the feminine being, allows an understanding of absolute fragility, of defenselessness" (Malabou 2012: 240), as manifested in the act of rape. But if the female body which has long been defined by patriarchal thought as a place essentially hospitable turns into a place of inhospitality, is it possible to claim that in Agnes's case, her inhospitality is precisely a manifestation of resistance to and rejection of the male guest?

As she investigates how the female body may acquire the tools to resist all sorts of discourses of normalization, Susan Bordo thinks of "our [female] bodies as arenas of control--perhaps one of the few available arenas of control we have left...." (Bordo 1993: 141). This notion entails that the body which had been supposed a natural place of hospitality by phallogocentric discourse may turn into a site of inhospitality, and so a challenge and reversal of the order, foregrounding what Kohlke posits as an "inhospitality, [which accounts] for neo-Victorian violations of 'otherness' and [invites] to question our own liberal subjectivity" (Kohlke 2020: 208). Accordingly, Faber dramatizes some rare but different occasions of the inhospitality of the female body vis-à-vis the male sexual desire. Indeed, while William supposes an evident right to own his wife's body, Agnes's refusal to participate in the sexual act may be read as an attempt which leads to a case of inhospitality. In fact, though Agnes's rape is traumatic to her, it can also be read as an attempt to rebel against William's intention to

occupy her body. “How she fears to be alone with him! How she loathes his touch!” (Faber 2002: 226). Though this attempt fails, it nonetheless dramatizes her struggle against the male’s dominating body. It follows that except on these two cases of rape, William is denied her body, for Agnes rejects the guest. Furthermore, her recurrent losses of consciousness can be seen as another means to resist this intrusion on her body. It is how she escapes both her traumatic past as well as her stifling present. By means of her body, she rebuffs all attempts of infiltration on the part of the male.

Like Agnes, two prostitutes similarly reject William’s attempted invasion at their bodies. Believing that they are naturally expected to fulfil all sexual desires, he is shocked and extremely frustrated when they refuse to allow him one of his sexual fantasies. “William rests his hands on his naked knees, speechlessly outraged. His blood, redistributed from below, flushes his cheeks and neck” (Faber 2002: 57). This denial triggers his memory of the first instance of refusal on his wedding night. This rejection is even harder to swallow for William who is already fragilized by his degrading financial status. Since money and sex procure men with power and control, masculinity is automatically associated with domination and mastery. Naturally, the absence of both money and sex endangers his virility. As a consequence, he is determined to look for another prostitute whose body he will be able to conquer and so, re-establish his self-confidence and manliness.

Contradictorily, hospitality can also be read as a manifestation of control over one’s body. Early in the narrative, Sugar displays a great knowledge of her body and manipulates it for diverse objectives. Though Petković reads Sugar’s character as absence and even a “ghost” or a mere name in the men’s magazine (Petković 2012: 87), one may argue that Sugar on the contrary both shows and establishes her physicality, for example by transforming her skin disease into an exceptional quality to attract men and amaze her clients. Besides, even though her body is described as androgynous: “[a] long body […] stick-thin, flat-chested and bony like a consumptive young man, with hands almost too big for women’s gloves” (Faber 2002: 20), she embellishes it with fashionable dresses, nice colours and an encompassing charisma, thus accentuating her exoticism. She is aware of her body’s differences and knows how to make of it her ally to boost her reputation as an exceptional prostitute in *More Sprees in London*. Furthermore, she is able to transform repulsion into “stupefaction” as she demonstrates her “special talent” to “shoot water from [her] sex” (Faber 2002: 315). Unexpectedly, such performance is followed by laughter and embrace, which reveals Sugar’s skilful manipulation of her body to charm Rackham. Thus, contrary to Petković’s claim that “Sugar is (…) captive and docile, body and mind appropriated and exploited” (Petković 2012: 87), it is possible to

posit that Sugar's knowledge and mastery of her material body creates a terrain of harmony refuting all phallogocentric notions of disembodiment and thus foreshadowing her eventual liberation. In brief, hospitality which signalled woman's violability in both Levinas and Derrida may well be a point of entry into feminism. Suitably, Gardey asks: "What if hospitality were essential to the idea of feminism?" (Gardey 2016: 125).

One may also suggest that Sugar's pregnancy can be read as an instance of hospitality where host and guest are one, thus, foregrounding the relationship of complicity between the two within the same body. Yet, such relationship is not easily founded insofar as Sugar does not instinctively accept this guest, for the narrative dramatizes how she repeatedly attempts to end her pregnancy using different methods.

> For the first time since falling pregnant, Sugar imagines the baby as ... a baby. Up until now, she's avoided seeing it so. It started as nothing more than a substanceless anxiety, an absence of menstruation; then it became a worm in the bud, a parasite which she hoped might be induced to pass out of her. (…) Now, (…) she suddenly realises her hands are laid upon a life: she is harbouring a human being. (Faber 2002: 554)

Sugar's stream of consciousness follows the gradual transformation from a mere thought to a material human being in order to shed light on how pregnancy allows her to reconnect differently with her body. Though she often used her body to welcome male clients, her pregnancy allows her to redefine its potential. One may suggest that Faber proposes that feminine hospitality is not only sexual but also maternal and that hospitality is not to be reduced to a sexual act wherein the guest is necessarily male.

Faber's text proposes another case of hospitality where both host and guest are female. In fact, by means of Sugar's and Caroline's affective relationship, the author capitalizes on the possibility for the female body to nurture another female body, which the narrator ironically refers to as "this unexpected physical intimacy outside working hours" (Faber 2002: 31). Indeed, though accustomed to intimacy in the line of their work, the female body in Faber's text is attributed another dimension, thus subverting reductive definitions of female hospitality.

Fowles also dramatizes some instances of subjective female hospitality. Sarah's hospitable welcoming of Charles in Exeter may be read as a manifestation of her control not only of her body, but also of the male partner. Hospitality in Sarah's case entails the ownership of her body. For example, unlike most women who are seen by William and his fellow male

friends, Sarah in Fowles's text plays the role of the seer with Charles. "Sarah was all flame. Her eyes were all flame as she threw a passionate look back at Charles. He withdrew his hand, but she caught it and before he could stop her raised it towards her lips" (Fowles 1969: 106). She is portrayed as a sexual agent for she assumes control and invites Charles to the sexual act. She uses her body to embody a true *femme fatale* who does not hesitate to foreground her sexual beauty and femininity in order to express her passion, by means of a sensual look, affective gestures and daring actions (Faber 2002: 148). In her study of the female hospitable, Irina Aristarkhova claims that "[a]s ancient stories of hospitality tell us, many of which Derrida and others recite, women do not themselves own anything - nor even own their very selves, for that matter - and therefore they cannot, supposedly, give themselves in any form that could be described as hospitality" (Aristarkhova 2012: 171). Yet, by being hospitable, Sarah claims ownership of her body and thus, denies Charles – and by association any male figure – the capacity to declare dominance over it and confines him to the position of other in the host/ guest relation.

The notion of ownership foregrounds the impact of hospitableness on identity formation. In her critique of Levinas, Tracy McNulty regards his treatment of the feminine Other as displaying sexist biases. She claims that despite attributing hospitality to the feminine, Levinas finds women lacking in identity formation because they lack the masculine qualities, notably the property of the house. McNulty finds the link between property and subjectivity inextricable: "[I]n the paradoxical logic of the hospitality relation itself, . . . the host's mastery is defined by his ability to offer up or dispose of his personal property in furtherance of his hospitality" (McNulty 2007: xxiii-xxiv). She ultimately asks: "Can one speak of hospitality in the absence of personal property?" (McNulty 2007: xxiv). In other terms, if a woman does not own her body, can she really be considered a host? Thus, both Sugar's and Sarah's ownership of their bodies while displaying hospitality towards William and Charles respectively, becomes indicative of their character as strong, independent and liberated women.

The notion of (in)hospitality sets the theoretical ground for the study of the indistinguishable link between the female body on the one hand and sexuality, subjectivity and ownership on the other. This interrelation makes the discussion of female identity more problematic since the body as a field of battle between female host and male guest may well be the same place where woman fights for an independent subjectivity. The feminine is both changeable and irreducible. Malabou concludes: "The question is that the feminine or the feminine being (one can say either now), by remaining one of the inescapable terms of ontological change, themselves become animated, metabolic places of the identity that make

one see, like others, the words inscribed at the heart of gender" (Malabou 2012: 244). One may wonder which subjective identity(ies) the body allows the neo-Victorian character to construct for herself. In the following sections, I will turn my attention to the discussion of maternalism and homosexuality as two possible re-definitions of the female body.

2.2 Redefining the Body of the Prostitute as a Site of Subversion

Within a capitalist society of consumerism, a prostitute's body is made available to please male desires as part of the economic relationship between prostitute and client. Nonetheless, in Faber's novel, the prostitute's body is given another dimension, different from that of sexual availability. Gradually, the narrative shifts its focus from Sugar's relationship with Rackham to her relationship with other female characters in an atmosphere of mutual protection, nurture and support. In fact, the novel proposes different instances of a close female relationship in which the expression of body is paramount. Besides Sugar's relationship with Agnes, a bond based on sisterhood and solidarity, the narrative focuses on another axial relationship between Sugar and Sophie. Moving into the Rackham household is a new chapter in Sugar's life wherein the focus in her characterisation shifts from her relationship with the lover to that with the daughter. As she moves to the Rackham residence, the narrative devotes more space and time to their daily interactions, newly-acquired habits and constantly evolving complicity. At this point, it becomes clear that Faber roots for maternalism as a way of healing from her horrid past of prostitution. Yet, unlike masculinist thought which considers subjectivity in terms of corporeal difference and thus, reduces womanhood to motherhood because of the biological role of procreation, Sugar combines both: her body expresses both her individuated femininity as well as her devoted mothering. It is only legitimate that her relationship with William – who is a constant reminder of her present and past as a prostitute – is gradually degraded. Interestingly and quite unexpectedly, physical proximity to William – when she moves to live in his house – does not lead to a stronger emotional bond. We observe a reversal in relationship taxonomies: the stronger her bond with Sophie grows, the more distant hers with William becomes. With Sophie, her body previously gendered by masculinist thought and conditioned for either sexual pleasure or breeding children, acquires another dimension, more encompassing and self-fulfilling. Gradually, daughter and mother-figure develop a mutual understanding and complicity: Sugar's protective maternal instinct grows fiercely, for example, she gets furious at Lady Bridgelow's remarks on Sophie's fragile health, and her body reflects such feelings:

> Back at the house, in the suffocating warmth of the nursery, Sugar can barely control herself. Her body wants to tremble--to shake--with indignation, on her own behalf, and Sophie's. All her sinews and nerves are tingling with the undischarged desire to propel her body through the air, a whirling fury of claws and feet to tear that smug little bitch apart. (Faber 2002: 433)

Interestingly, the passage explicitly illustrates how the female body can become the means by which feelings of motherhood come to light bringing closer both body and emotion. Sugar's body which was conditioned to perform for the sake of male sexual pleasure is transformed into a maternal body.

Furthermore, as Sugar develops these maternal feelings for Sophie, she craves a sense of belonging to a family structure. Lacking a family of her own, she assumes the position of a mother to Sophie. It seems that she re-lives her childhood through Sophie's. The latter helps her forget her past as a child thrown into prostitution, and her present as a prostitute whose body is constantly trespassed on. Having been denied a caring and protective mother, Sophie is Sugar's chance at connecting with her own maternalism and compensating for a childhood where she lacked appropriate motherhood. In other words, the girl allows her to close the gap between past and present, repair the past which was broken and fill the void in her newly-whole present. Thus, both childhood and motherhood are embodied in Sugar. Besides being a mother-figure, Sugar's maternalism is also accentuated through indications in the narrative at her own pregnancy. Though the latter is intentionally terminated out of fear of losing position in the Rackham household, Sugar is nonetheless deeply touched by the potential of the maternal: both intensely moved and guilty, she incessantly thinks about "[t]his baby--this creature--this tenacious clump of flesh" (Faber 2002: 555).

Sugar's body acquires other bodily functions, no longer sexual but rather maternal. By means of her employment as governess, she gradually becomes a mother-figure to the child. She experiences for the first time the sensation of motherhood insofar as she feels the need to protect and nurture the little girl. Faber's narrator emphasises the sensorial experience as he brings together the bodies of the two female characters:

> At the first touch of the child's warm fingers, Sugar feels something she would never have guessed she could feel: the thrill of flesh against unfamiliar flesh. She, who has been fingered by a thousand strangers, and grown insensible to all but the crudest probings, now experiences a tingle, almost a

> shock, of tactile initiation; and with that shock comes shyness. How gross her own fingers are in comparison with Sophie's! (Faber 2002: 387)

As the narrator sheds light on the wholeness of the sensorial experience, the narrative illustrates the gradual birth of a female physical proximity. In highlighting the harmony between the sense of touch and emotion as the two bodies of the mother-figure and daughter are brought together, the text suggests that Sugar's body which was accustomed to all modes of physical proximity with men experiences another form of bodily contact resurging from actual feelings of affection and tenderness, and not sexual exploitation. Sugar literally feels the desire to enwrap the child:

> All of a sudden, Sugar rushes forward, scoops the child into her arms and swings her to the ground in one dizzying, playful swoop. (…) in that long moment Sugar feels more physical joy than she's felt in a lifetime of embraces. The soles of Sophie's dangling feet brush the wet grass, and she lands; Sugar releases her, gasping. Thank God, thank God, the child looks tickled pink: clearly this act has her blessing to happen again sometime. Lately, Sugar has been confounded, even disturbed, by how intensely physical her feelings for Sophie have become. What began, on her arrival in the Rackham house, as a determination to do her hapless pupil no harm, has seeped from her head into her bloodstream and now pumps around her body, transmuted into a different impulse entirely: the desire to infuse Sophie with happiness. (Faber 2002: 529)

By means of the lexical field of feeling and the extended imagery which combines body and emotion, the passage highlights the intensity of pure physical feelings of unison and harmony between mother and daughter. It brings together both a physical and emotional experience which leads to a euphoric sensation, suggesting that the body has the power to heal, and echoing Bray and Colebrook's claim that "[t]he body has been targeted as the redemptive opening for a specifically feminine site of representation" (Bray and Colebrook 1998: 35). Female is then both feminine and maternal for Sugar. "Without knowing why, Sugar suddenly longs to crawl into bed with Sophie, to hug her tight and be hugged in return, to kiss Sophie's face and hair, then clasp the child's head against her bosom and rock her gently until they're both asleep" (Faber 2002: 515). Through her role of surrogate motherhood, Sugar comes to acquire another kind of knowledge of her body and its capacities, not to satisfy men's sexual desires but to

comfort and nurture a child. By means of this new awareness, Sugar turns into what Grosz denominates "[an] embodied subjectivity of physical corporeality" (Grosz 1994: 22). In fact, though Sugar is quite aware of her body as early as the start of the narrative, she gradually constructs another embodied identity for herself: it is no longer lived as sexual, but maternal.

Through this new model of bodily female relationships in which maternal love is celebrated, Faber foregrounds a new female neo-characterisation which conceives of the body as force and control and echoes the 1990s' return to phenomenology focusing on the body as lived experience. Neo-characterisation highlights the constant state of becoming which Simone de Beauvoir points out

> Woman is not a completed reality, but rather a becoming, and it is in her becoming that. .. her *possibilities* should be defined. What gives rise to much of the debate is the tendency to reduce her to what she has been, to what she is today, in raising the question of her capabilities; for the fact is that capabilities are clearly manifested only when they have been realized-but the fact is also that when we have to do with a being whose nature is [endless self-overcoming], we can never close the books. (Beauvoir 1989: 33/34)

Throughout her journey of *Bildung*, Sugar experiences a process of becoming. It seems that her maternalism – a force she had not known and had discovered thanks to the female characters around her – allows her to regain the possibilities of which she was robbed. As a prostitute, Sugar's body had been exploited to satisfy male sexual desires and exclusively defined as object for pleasure. Faber challenges this definition by endowing this same body with the potential for nurture allowing Sugar to heal from her motherless past. Though Sugar's first endeavour to recover from a traumatic childhood through novel-writing proved inconclusive, healing is ultimately complete thanks to maternalism.

Interestingly, her knowledge of her body is what allows her to write a female novel wherein language flows like her own blood. It is like ink which both embodies her rage at the men who abused her and helps her survive her present of prostitution. The parallel between the movement of flowing liquid/blood and the action of writing puts to the fore the Cixousian *écriture féminine* which illustrates this same unison between body and text. Cixous herself suggests that flowing styles have a more female tone than traditional discourse. Thus, Sugar's focus on the variation of flow breaks with patriarchal realist tradition often organised around binary opposition between body and mind, man and woman, writing and female, and so on.

Besides, it is possible to argue that it is Sugar's body is what allows her to create and creation is equally motivated by this same body. In fact, Cixous associates sexuality, creativity, and repression and argues that women are ignorant of their bodies and their selves. In order to retrieve them and "to return to the body which has been […] confiscated from [them]", they must create (Cixous 1976: 880). It is crucial that Sugar's body is sexual in order for her to create successfully.

As Sugar takes the pen, her novel becomes an embodiment of her experience and her body brings the fiction to life. Gubar's idea of the "blank page" by which she foregrounds "woman's image of herself as text" (Gubar 1981: 247), and Grosz's claim of "body as text" (Grosz 1994) serve to illuminate the transformation of Sugar's body in Faber's novel. Like her novel, it was initially a *blank page*, then was written by masculinist thought as space for male occupation and a means for sexual pleasure when she was thrown into prostitution. Later, she re-inscribes it thanks to her experience as mother-figure. Her body *re-becomes* socially, historically and culturally. Eventually, she heals and starts to rid herself of the anger which has long inhibited her. In a narrative gesture suggesting her liberation from her past, "Sugar's novel, spewed out of its cardboard jacket all along the street for three body-lengths or more, its densely-inked pages whipped up into the breeze in unbelievably rapid succession" (Faber 2002: 609). Her novel fills the public space, thus allowing the maternal power within to erupt and the subversive energy to explode.

Though Faber's text is sometimes criticized for his over-sexsation of the female body which can be seen as a commodity particularly in the bargain for Sugar's body, this same body is ultimately endowed with a maternal power which somehow purifies it from a horrid past of exploitation and liberates Sugar from the position of sex object. Nadine Muller writes that Faber's depiction of late nineteenth-century prostitution "exemplifies the objectification of female sexuality in the sex industry and in the marketplace as much as it explores the oppressive as well as the liberatory potentials of prostitution" (Muller 2012: 41). Hence, one may suggest that the sexualisation of the female body in neo-Victorian fiction can be considered a continuity of the legacy of the early waves of feminism as exemplified in late-Victorian New Woman fiction. If Faber's sexsational narrative sheds light on the traditional perception of a prostitute's body, it simultaneously works to redefine this same body and point out its capacity for revaluation and subsequent emancipation.

2.3 Feminist Politics of the Female (Homo)erotic in *Fingersmith*

Waters re-utilizes the culture of female eroticism which emerged towards the late-nineteenth century as she concocts a plot of lesbian discovery and love in a broader context of female liberation. In fact, while homosexuality was criminalized by British law[42], lesbianism remained relatively invisible in legal discourse until the early twentieth century[43]. Deliberate silence surrounding female sexual activity was intentionally adopted. Debating the necessity of a legislation to restrain lesbianism, the Earl of Malmesbury stated: "Let me point out to your Lordships that in passing a clause of this sort you are going to do a great deal more harm than good" ("Commons Amendment" 1921: 569). In fact, many Victorian women lived together and little attention was given to their lifestyles and the degree of their intimacy. The Earl added: "Women are by nature much more gregarious. For instance, if twenty women were going to live in a house with twenty bedrooms, I do not believe that all the twenty bedrooms would be occupied, either for reasons of fear or nervousness, and the desire for mutual protection" ("Commons Amendment" 1921: 570). This type of relationship probably finds its origins in the legacy of the chaperon or the lady's maid. We find references to this common Victorian phenomenon in *Fingersmith*, as Sue herself confesses: "For all I knew, it might have been an ordinary thing, for a mistress and her maid to double up like girls. It was ordinary at first, with Maud and me. Her dreams never bothered her. We slept, quite like sisters. Quite like sisters, indeed. I always wanted a sister" (Waters 2002: 88). It is rather unsurprising that models of female friendships are quite common in New Woman fiction. Sally Ledger argues that "writers of feminist New Woman fiction by and large preferred the 'romantic friendship' model of same-sex female relationships" and gives a list of examples: "Hadria Fullerton and Valeria Du Prel, in Mona Caird's *The Daughters of Danaus*, Lucretia Bampfylde and Kitty Manners in Isabella Ford's *On The Threshold*, and Rosalind Dangerfield and Leslie Ardent in Gertrude Dix's *The Image Breakers*, all enjoy intimate companionship relationships", though most protagonists eventually settle in heterosexual marriages (Ledger 1997: 125).

In "Sexual Inversion in Women", Havelock Ellis admits that even though it is extremely difficult to find documentation proving lesbianism, "[it] is certain that homosexuality is by no means less common in women than in men" (Ellis 1897: 118). While female friendship and companionship are often the topic of numerous literary works like in the above-mentioned list, lesbianism however is not explicitly discussed in Victorian fiction, though there is evidence of

[42] The Labouchère 1895 Amendment particularly led to Oscar Wilde's legal punishment.

[43] A Criminal Law Amendment Bill was introduced in 1921 to create an offence of "gross indecency between females". It passed the House of Commons but was rejected by the House of Lords.

its existence in actual life by means of diaries and letters written by women to express their erotic desires for each other. Eleanor Marx and Olive Schreiner, as two of the most prominent figures of *fin-de-siècle,* shared a passionate friendship. The former wrote a letter which, according to Ledger, "can only be described as a love letter": "I have such a terror of losing your love … I keep wanting to hear you say you love just a little. You do not know, Olive, how my whole nature craves for love… If I dared to I should have gone off to you this evening. (…) Just one line – say you love me. That will be such a joy" (cited in Ledger 1997: 122).

Ledger claims that the lesbian prototype developed first in men's fiction (Ledger 1997: 125) and gives an example of Thomas Hardy's *Desperate Remedies* (1871) which portrays a passionate relationship between Cytherea Graye and Miss Aldclyffe. In *Fingersmith*, there is reflection on the influence of male-authored representations of lesbianism by distancing the novel from masculinist discourses. In contrast to the heterosexual act, the queer reflects a distinct identity with its own potentialities. Hence, there is always interplay between the real and the fictive for Waters aims to propose an alternative to histories in which there is possibility for a new system of class, gender and sexual identity. She recuperates a lesbian history left out of the Victorian public record – apart from negative mentions in medical discourses on sexual perversion and degeneracy – through her subtle development of the love plot which parallels sexual knowledge for Maud and Sue. She hints at this negative conception of lesbianism in her novel through multiple references. Gentleman uses the adjective 'squeamish' to address both Sue and Maud as he evokes the possibility of lesbianism. Having a pejorative connotation, the adjective reflects his own point of view: utterly patronizing and bitterly judgemental. Besides, he never explicitly uses the term lesbianism: he simply refers to Sue's "sweet ways" (Waters 2002: 132) and questions whether Maud had grown "soft about the heart" (Waters 2002: 222). Similarly, when Sue is forced into the asylum, she is immediately thought to be mad not only because of her irrational delusion, convulsions and rebellious attitude, but also because of her sexual orientation. The nurses – as representatives of the patriarchal medical discourse in the narrative – point out: "'What's her trouble? Delusions?' 'And the rest', said the dark nurse. She dropped her voice. 'She's the one—you know?' The new nurse looked more interested. 'This one?' she said. 'Looks too slight for that. Well, they come in all sizes…'" (Waters 2002: 403). Like Gentleman, the nurses speak in codes without referring overtly to lesbianism, for it appears to be a taboo topic not to be discussed explicitly. Yet, their discourse on female homosexuality can be read in light of the medical theories on degeneration by German psychiatrist Carl Von Westpahl and his successors Richard Von Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis.

By means of her neo-Victorian characters, Waters transforms what was initially referred to as Victorian friendship and companionship into neo-Victorian romance and sexuality, maintaining the same objective of subjective individuation, inspired by some New Woman writings. Female companionship is a positive factor in women's self-development in Sarah Grand's *The Beth Book* (1897). In *The Wings of Azrael*, Caird gives much significance to the role of "those happy friendships which play so large a part in a girl's existence, and which sometimes last on through the more sombre years of womanhood as a never-failing solace and joy" (Caird 1889: 173). Thus, emerges a desire for female solidarity, what Caird refers to as 'brotherhood' wherein the focus is on women:

> This sense of brotherhood was strongest with regard to the poorer members of the congregation: the labourers with their toil-stained hands and bent heads, the wives, the weary mothers, their faces seamed with the ceaseless strain of child-bearing, and hard work, and care and worry. In their prematurely ageing faces, in their furrowed brows, Hadria could trace the marks of Life's bare and ruthless hand (…) And the same savage story was written, once more, on the faces of the better dressed women: worry, weariness, apathy, strain (…) (Caird 1889: 465)

This passage unveils the evolution of feminism in the late-nineteenth century. Nathalie Saudo-Welby writes: "Sympathy, solidarity and expansion out of oneself and empathy towards the other" represent the common tone of New Woman fiction written by women (Saudo-Welby 2019: 372). New Woman novelists sought a distinctive tradition of their own, thus demonstrating their "*courage de déplaire*" (Saudo-Welby 2019: 377), courage to displease.

As manifestations of their rebellious tendencies, *fin-de-siècle* novelists turned to the sexualisation of the public space and eroticisation of private space. In her study of the ambiguous forms of late-Victorian eroticism, Rachel Teukolsky focuses essentially on the images of women showing off their legs to the male gaze while problematizing at the same time female agency by means of "same-sex eroticization of the domestic space" (Teukolsky 2020: 1). The arena of interest is what she calls the "intimate public sphere" where "sexuality, privacy and citizenship intersect" (Teukolsky 2020: 2). Bourgeois classes peeped at these stereographs – both literally and metaphorically – looking for obscene images, for the exposed leg in late-nineteenth century private sphere which first appeared to be directed to a male heterosexual gaze offering a voyeuristic display of women's femininity behind closed doors. Considering

Victorian dictum of acceptable social behaviour, no woman – except dancers or entertainers – was allowed to expose her leg, thus, the hem of the dress significantly always covers the ankle. In *Fingersmith*, Maud is often dressed in short dresses that show her ankle as a display of eroticism. Both virgin and whore, Mr Lilly transforms her into an erotic object for his male companions' voyeuristic gazes. An exposed leg exhibits the woman's desire to sell her body and links her hence to prostitution.

Yet, at the end of the century, erotic femininity or the female erotic presented a more complicated image, for the visual tropes of erotic femininity unexpectedly and quite strangely became a site for feminism. Abigail Solomon-Godeau compares the dancer's bare leg meant for eroticism which embodied female objectification and the New Woman's bare leg (barber/ bicyclist) which exposed the paradoxes of the intimate public sphere: the woman's body invaded the public sphere. This New Woman figure "approaching mannishness" released the woman from strict forms of femininity (Teukolsky 2020: 14). Seen through a proto-feminist New Woman lens, the bare leg scenes overlapped with New Woman scenes featuring the heroine in a petticoat baring her legs with a razor preparing to shave a terrified male victim. In contrast to the former titillating bare-leg scene, the New Woman image in petticoats is indistinguishably associated with an intimidating female power.

However, this positive attitude vis-à-vis the female erotic ended abruptly with Maud Allen's trial for having created a "cult of clitoris" because of her performance of Salomé's dance, a highly provocative and erotic dance widely spread among women in afternoon saloons. Teukolsky writes:

> "The Cult of the Clitoris" stands as one endpoint for the tame-yet-titillating erotic spectacles of women in the 1890s, indicating the presence of a female observer with a desiring gaze increasingly troubling to conservative authorities. Female homoeroticism itself came to stand for broader freedoms of body and gaze, as women occupied ambiguous positions as both subjects and objects of erotic desire. (Teukolsky 2020: 12)

Because of female performance and female viewership in the same erotic arena, lesbianism publicly came to the fore as an alarming topic of debate. "Historians of sexuality have compared Allen's trial with that of Oscar Wilde: just as Wilde's trial brought male homosexuality into unprecedented visibility, so too Allen's trial brought lesbianism into the public eye, inventing a conservative hysteria surrounding same-sex female eroticism" (Teukolsky 2020: 12).

From a twenty-first century perspective, by means of sexsation, Waters has recourse to lesbian love to trace the journey of self-discovery and identity formation for both Sue and Maud. With the evolution of queer studies, Waters makes use of queer narrative invention in her novel to deconstruct heteropatriarchal Victorian discourses. Unlike Victorian discourse which portrays women according to fixed and stable social and sexual roles, Waters comes to disrupt this balance and creates "non-normative fictional subjects" (Lee 2018: n.d.). Thus, in her description of both sexual encounters between the protagonists, the scenes are "wholly of the flesh", "this literal materialisation arguably accounts for Waters' explicit and extended sexual representations" (Kohlke 2008: 9). Indeed, lesbian desire serves as a counterfeit for male desire. While initially, Maud and Sue were supposed to remain antagonists within the plot of deception in which they were engaged, they develop romantic feelings for each other and gradually start to express lesbian desire. By killing Mr Lilly and Gentleman, Waters opens the literary space for females to express this lesbian desire which puts to the fore heroines and discards male characters. She cuts the link with inherited male narratives that embody passive female victims and dominant male patriarchs. Waters makes use of a new kind of language which highlights the bodily senses. We read in Maud's description of her sexual relation with Sue:

> Her lips are cool, smooth, damp: they fit themselves imperfectly to mine, but then grow warmer, damper. Her hair falls against my face. I cannot see her, I can only feel her, and taste her. She tastes of sleep, slightly sour. Too sour. I part my lips—to breathe, or to swallow, or perhaps to move away; but in breathing or swallowing or moving I only seem to draw her into my mouth. Her lips part, also. Her tongue comes between them and touches mine. And at that, I shudder, or quiver. For it is like the finding out of something raw, the troubling of a wound, a nerve. She feels me jolt, and draws away— but slowly, slowly and unwillingly, so that our damp mouths seem to cling together and, as they part, to tear. She holds herself above me. I feel the rapid beating of a heart, and suppose it my own. But it is hers. Her breath comes, fast. She has begun, very lightly, to tremble. Then I catch the excitement of her, the amazement of her. […] I thought I longed for her, before. Now I begin to feel a longing so great, so sharp, I fear it will never be assuaged. I think it will mount, and mount, and make me mad, or kill me. [..] She *reaches*. She reaches so far, she catches the life, the shuddering heart of me: soon I seem to be nowhere but at the points at which my flesh is gripped by hers. And

> then, 'Oh, there!' she says. 'Just there! Oh, there!'—I am breaking, shattering, bursting out of her hand. (Waters 2002: 279/ 280)

In contrast with male phallocentric language in which women cannot occupy the subject position as Luce Irigary argues, Waters opts for a new female language wherein all bodily senses: sight, touch, taste, hearing and smell, come together so as to highlight female lesbian pleasure. No longer an object of desire, the female subject is centred in the discourse by means of materialising the female body and its different senses. As both protagonists assume their sexual identities, they liberate themselves from heterosexual constraints and come together in a scene which brings them – as lesbian partners – closer, echoing Teukolsky's claim: "The scene of a woman's homoerotic gaze came to connote a new liberation for women, even in contexts that were apparently normative and heterosexual" (Teukolsky 2020: 17).

Furthermore, the second stage in Maud's individuation – the first being her liberation from her uncle – takes place thanks to Sue as she helps her discover a new type of sexual relation based on mutual pleasure rather than on domination and subservience. Then, as she realises that the sexual reality of women is different from Mr Lilly's pornographic representations of lesbianism, this new awareness leads to her transformation from a Sadeian woman to a moral pornographer. She is no longer the enforcer of sadomasochistic pleasure, but rather an active agent in the demystification and liberation of all forms of sexuality from patriarchal constraints. Susana Onega concludes that *Fingersmith* provides "the contemporary readers with a liberating alternative to the binary oppositions between man/woman, self/other, master/slave, subject/object of desire that have been ruling sexual and social relations in Western culture since the pre-Socratic philosophers" (Onega 2015: 9).

Indeed, in Waters's novel, Victorian sex is politicized. Though sexual fantasy is associated with asserting power over the subjected exploited female and expressing such desire within a plot of criminality and fraud, thus reinforcing stereotypes which equate lesbianism and deviance, Waters uses the sexual motif for the sake of her political/textual project of deconstructing heteronormativity by appropriating the male-dominated realm of pornography. Mitchell argues that Waters' lesbian project "silently inserts her depiction of nineteenth century female homosexuality into our cultural memory of Victorian fiction" (Mitchell 2010: 118). Her modern literature is the space where gay voices which were silenced in the past and gay interests which were suppressed are allowed to be heard and spoken of explicitly. Waters' protagonists are not characters conceived of in the modern age then simply reinserted in the Victorian era. They are complex constructions with queer identities that serve not only to rewrite Victorian

history, but also to interrogate it and shed some light on its gaps and silences in regard to female sexual characterisation. Jane Lee argues that "[t]he work of the neo-Victorian novel, then, is to reveal and then subvert the narrative hegemony that moderates women and their desires in Victorian literature" (Lee 2018: n.d.).

The nineteenth century offers itself then as a psychological landscape in which female consciousness about sexuality came to the fore, for it provides a queer setting for such discussions of lesbian sexuality. Interestingly, it also proposes the ground for a phenomenological study of the female character whose body is materialised by means of its sensorial experience.

Chapter 6: Embodiment and Subjectivity: A Phenomenological and Somaesthetic Approach to the Representation of Female Bodily Experience

In recent decades, the body in its relation with senses and identity has received increasing critical attention. At the heart of such debate is Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological theory which has gained a renewed interest since the 1970s. Rosario Arias points out that "[i]t is not an easy task to define phenomenology since, depending on the phenomenologist, the philosophy can be conceived differently" (Arias 2017: 42). The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines phenomenology broadly as "the metaphysical study or theory of phenomena in general". In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty establishes an inextricable link between the body and one's perception of the world. He suggests: "by thus remaking contact with the body and with the world, we shall rediscover ourself, since, perceiving as we do with our body, the body is a natural self and, as it were, the subject of perception" (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 239).

Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology is initially centred on the perception of the real world. Through the lens of Merleau-Pontian theory, "there is a need to rediscover the perceived world (in the philosopher's terms, the real world) through the senses which organise experience and situate the subject as another object in the world of objects, with the indispensable help of modern art and philosophy" (Baldwin cited in Arias 2017: 43). Nonetheless, one may establish an analogy between the real and fictional worlds brought together through the senses. More particularly, in the scope of neo-Victorian fiction, one may explore the phenomenon of the (female) body as a consciousness, as a body which embraces and constitutes the (fictional) world. The aim then is to investigate to what extent the female protagonists' experience of the world is constructed through the representation of their bodily experiences. The subsequent objective is to study the impact of such bodily experience on the perception of one's self. In other words, to what extent does embodiment reflect female subjectivity in the neo-Victorian text?

Despite his interest in the real world, Merleau-Ponty points out the sensorial impact of language, for words "carry a top coat of meaning" (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 212). He argues:

> The process of expression, when it is successful, does not merely leave for the reader and the writer himself a kind of reminder, it brings the meaning into existence as a thing at the very heart of the text, it brings it to life in an organism of words, establishing it in the writer or the reader as a new sense

> organ, opening a new field of a new dimension to our experience. (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 212)

Merleau-Ponty's theory suggests that the senses can function as intermediaries between the real world and fictional text and between the reader and character and their respective bodies. This bodily reception can be further elucidated through a somaesthetic approach. Etymologically, 'soma' is derived from the Greek word for body and aesthetics, a word derived from the Greek *aisthesis*, meaning sensory perception. In literary studies, Richard Shusterman, who laid the cornerstones of somaesthetics, defines it as "the critical, meliorative study of the experience and use of one's body as a locus of sensory aesthetic appreciation (*aisthesis*) and creative self-fashioning. It is therefore also devoted to the knowledge, discourses, practices, and bodily disciplines that structure such somatic care or can improve it" (Shusterman 1999: 302, emphasis in original). As in phenomenology, the body is paramount in somaesthetics. Shusterman further argues:

> As an object grasped by our external senses, the body (of another or even one's own) can provide beautiful sensory perceptions or (in Kant's famous terminology) 'representations'. But there is also the beautiful experience of one's own body from within-the endorphin-enhanced glow of high-level cardiovascular functioning, the slow savoring awareness of improved, deeper breathing, the tingling thrill of feeling into new parts of one's spine. (Shusterman 1999: 299)

As a field of study which brings together knowledge and sensory perception, the aim of somaesthetics then is to explore to what extent the reception of the neo-Victorian female character can be centred on a bodily/cognitive experience.

1. A Phenomenological and Somaesthetic Reading of the Neo-Victorian Female Character

1.1 Senses and Female Embodiment

In the preface to *Bodies that Matter*, Butler insists on the process of materialisation of the body as she questions: "What about the materiality of the body, Judy? … an effort … to recall me to a bodily life that could not be theorized away … for surely bodies live and eat; eat and sleep; feel pain and pleasure; endure illness and violence; and these facts … cannot be dismissed as mere construction" (Butler 1993: ix). Yet, even though she hints at the role of the senses of the body in its process of materialisation, her work has been criticized for a "flight from the material" which has excluded attention to "lived material bodies and evolving corporeal practices" (Alaimo and Hekman 2008: 3). Kathleen Lennon claims that "the insight of the new materialist discussions has been to ensure that matter, the material, is accorded an active role in the relation between biology and culture" (Lennon 2019: n.d.). Elizabeth Grosz claims that there is "an elision of the question of nature and of matter in Butler's work. Mattering becomes more important than matter! Being "important", having significance, having a place, mattering, is more important than matter, substance or materiality" (Grosz 2003: n.d.). In Grosz's work, such materiality is conceived of in terms of active forces insofar as the body is involved in a process of active becoming within culture.

The interrelation between nature, culture, matter and meaning is one of the major interests of phenomenological studies. Merleau-Ponty points out "everything is both manufactured and natural in man, as it were, in the sense that there is not a word, not a form of behaviour which does not owe something to purely biological being—and which at the same time does not elude the simplicity of animal life" (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 220). Thus, at the centre of phenomenological accounts of embodiment is the lived experience of the body. Lisa Given believes that

> Lived experience, as it is explored and understood in qualitative research, is a representation and understanding of a researcher or research subject's human experiences, choices, and options and how those factors influence one's perception of knowledge. Lived experience speaks to the personal and unique perspective of researchers and how their experiences are shaped by subjective factors of their identity including race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, political associations, and other roles and

> characteristics that determine how people live their daily lives. (Given 2008: 489)

In other words, lived experience leads to a self-awareness, for the study of individual experiences leads to the discussion of the collective. Furthermore, lived experience is not simply about the description of experience, but rather about how the body/ person responds to that experience. For such feminist phenomenologists of the 1970s as Sandra Bartky and Iris Marion Young, embodiment is our "mode of being-in-the-world" (Young 2005: 9). Hence, feminist writers such as Bartky, Young, and Linda Martín Alcoff among many others work to make visible the variable experiences of gendered, raced, classed, differently abled and differently aged bodies to reflect on the way such experiences mediate social positionality and constitute our sense of self.

Young points out the distinction Merleau-Ponty makes between "lived space, or phenomenal space, and objective space, the uniform space of geometry and science in which all positions are external to one another and interchangeable. Phenomenal space arises out of motility and lived relations of space are generated by the capacities of the body's motion and the intentional relations which that motion constitutes" (Young 1980: 149). In order to talk of female or rather feminine experience, one must focus on analysing the body's movement within this phenomenal instead of objective space. Furthermore, one may posit that it is not only the body's movement but rather its sensorial involvement in and with space as well which ultimately produces a feminine lived experience and mediates the female's sense of her identity as woman. Accordingly, one may wonder how the neo-Victorian text illustrates the female body's experience of space by means of its senses.

One particular space which stands out in the novels of this corpus as uncommon is the employees' restroom in the soap factory in Faber's text. It is a typically neo-Victorian space since it postdates 1872 and 1873, the temporal setting of the text. Though factories rapidly multiplied during the Victorian period as a consequence of the Industrial Revolution, the latrines in their modern forms were rather rare. Faber's narrator describes this new invention highlighting its modernity:

> The employees' latrine has a much more modern and streamlined appearance, in Sophie and Sugar's eyes, than the rest of the soap-works. A row of identical white glazed stoneware pedestals, each attached to a brilliant metal cistern bracketed under the ceiling, exhibit themselves like a phalanx of futuristic

> mechanisms, all proudly engraved with the name of their maker. The seats are a rich brown, glossy with lacquer, brand new it seems; but then, according to the address inscribed on all the cisterns, the Doulton factory is only a few hundred yards down the road. The pedestals are so tall that Sophie, having clambered onto one, dangles her feet in space, several inches from the eggshell-blue ceramic floor. (Faber 2002: 587)

What makes the latrine highly important in Faber's text is first how it brings together the Victorian and neo-Victorian in the narrative. On the one hand, it is a "futuristic' invention, and on the other, it is decorated with ceramics made by the Royal Doulton faience factory which was founded in 1815. Moreover, the latrine is particularly interesting mostly because of its significance for Sugar, her sense of self and sense of body. In fact, the latrine is where the climactic event of her miscarriage takes place. In the lavatory, "[t]he pain in her guts is so sharp now that it catches her breath and makes her shiver; she longs to relieve herself, but the prospect of doing it in front of the child worries her (…) Hugging herself tight and biting her lip to suppress the cramps, she stares at the wall" (Faber 2002: 587). After having described the spatial environment, Faber's narrator moves to the bodily, to how Sugar feels her body within this space.

> Suddenly she must – absolutely must – sit down. Her stomach is skewered with agony, and every inch of her skin prickles with cold sweat; the flesh of her buttocks, bared in desperate haste as she claws handfuls of her dress onto her bent back and yanks down her pantalettes, is wet and slippery as a peeled pear. She lets herself drop heavily onto the seat, and with a stifled cry of anguish she slumps forward, her bonnet falling to the tiled floor, her hair unravelling after it. Blood and other hot, slick material erupts and slithers between her thighs. "Oh God!" she cries. "God help me ...!" and a flush of dizziness seems to flip her upside down before she loses consciousness altogether. (Faber 2002: 588)

In this passage, the female subject experiences space by means of her body, thus leading to a symbiosis between corporeality and sensoriality. Keeping in mind Butler's performative theory, the female-gendered self is the outcome of the stylization of the body through bodily gestures, movements and various enactments of different kinds. It is in this particular space that the

importance of approaching gender from a phenomenological perspective lies. Sugar's female-gendered body is the result of her sensorial engagement with geographical space. Thus, the toilet inscribes upon her body a politically-gendered experience, that of the miscarriage. Interestingly, in contrast to the detailed and minute description of the latrine as a new and uncommon space, the narrative does not explicit Sugar's miscarriage. The narrator simply stops at Sugar's corporeal suffering and the text abruptly ends with Sophie taking her mistress's hands, giving no further details as to what happens next. Seen in this light, a phenomenological reading privileges a focus on the body's sensorial expression rather than on the text's explicit external description. In other words, the interest is no longer in space as merely geographical, it is rather oriented towards the female body's sensorial experience of this place. "Young stresses that it is *such everyday ordinary experiences of embodiment*, variable as they are, that constitute women's sense of their identity *as* women" (Lennon 2019: n.d., emphasis in original).

In her reading of feminist theory, Toril Moi proposes alternative definitions of woman's body based on Beauvoir's theory and argues that the former is "lived experience", "a situation" (Moi 1999: 63). She writes:

> To claim that the body is a situation is to acknowledge that the meaning of a woman's body is bound up with the way she uses her freedom. For Beauvoir, our freedom is not absolute but situated. Other situations as well as our particular lived experience will influence our projects, which in turn will shape our experience of the body. In this way, each woman's experience of her body is bound up with her projects in the world. (Moi 1999: 65/66)

The body as "an embodied intentional relationship to the world" (Moi 1999: 67) represents the research axis in the following sections. In fact, my contention here is that the materiality of the body, particularly illustrated through the senses of touch and smell, foregrounds a lived experience for the female character. It produces a situation which both affects and is affected by the (fictional) world of the narrative. The female character's encounter with particular stimuli leads to a phenomenological experience between body and space, self and the world, one and other (object). It follows that the female character's experience of the world exhibits Moi's claim that "[o]ur subjectivity is always embodied" (Moi 1999: 67). In order to avoid falling in the traps of biological reductionism, Moi proposes to replace both categories of sex and gender with the category of the lived body. Though the concept of lived body does indeed

reduce the risk of essentialising femaleness since it captures the way the materiality of women's bodies plays a role in their subjective sense of self without giving a biological account of such embodiment, this study proposes nonetheless that gender remains an important factor in exploring female subjectivity, insofar as "the body lives out its positions in social structures of (…) hierarchies of power and norms of sexuality" (Young 2005: 26).

1.1.1 Skin as a Marker of Subjective Existence

"The sensorial turn has mainly privileged the sense of touch, while sight had always ranked highest in the scale of senses" (Arias 2017: 44). The sense of touch plays a predominant role in the dialogue between self and the world, between subject and object, and between Victorian and neo-Victorian. Rosario Arias claims that "[f]lesh in its ample incarnations as individual flesh and as 'flesh of the world', the sense of touch and bodies have recently come under renewed scrutiny in this approach [carnal hermeneutics]" (Arias 2017: 44). It is rather unsurprising then that skin is a predominant motif in neo-Victorian sensation fiction, particularly in Faber's novel. As early as the first pages, Sugar's skin is highlighted for its particularity. Thus, one may wonder how Faber's neo-Victorian sensational novel discusses the role of skin in locating/ creating subjectivity. The marks on Sugar's skin are first described by Caroline as "an unsightly skin ailment" and a "defect" (Faber 2002: 22), and by the contemporary narrator as symptoms of a skin condition which is similar to psoriasis, "a rarer and more spectacular condition called ichthyosis" (Faber 2002: 131). Yet, William compares the marks to "[t]iger stripes. Swirling geometric patterns of peeling dryness alternating with reddened flesh. They are symmetrical, as if scored on her skin by a painstaking aesthete, or an African savage. (…) To [him], the patterns are beguiling, a fitting mark of her animal nature" (Faber 2002: 131/132). Interestingly, Sugar's skin condition is interpreted differently by external gazes. Merely a skin condition to both Caroline and the narrator, her marks are symptomatic of an animalistic nature from William's perspective. With regard to the sexual context in which the relationship is founded, Sugar is both exotic and savage, remarkable and wild, and in all cases sexual. Indeed, the reference to Africa along with the comparison to animals reinforce the link between Sugar and (sex) slaves, for African slaves were often considered animals to be tamed, controlled and exploited. Furthermore, Sugar's skin materializes William's sexual fantasy of exoticism and wildness. This interpretation is foregrounded by the fact that Sugar indulges in subversive sexual intercourse. While other prostitutes refuse to yield to William's sexual fantasy, Sugar seems rather inclined to perform

all divergent forms of sexual acts. Sugar consciously and willingly adopts this animalistic identity constructed for her by others, for "she wears her attire like a second skin, seamless and, by implication, irremovable" (Faber 2002: 78). Besides, her skin is also like a snake skin, something which seems to flake and shed, so she can recreate herself again. This reading foregrounds the notions of reinvention, reincarnation, fluidity of her roles and her selves: Sugar as a creature in transition. Furthermore, the use of the word 'aesthete' to describe Sugar's skin suggests that the latter can be considered as a work of creative art to be appreciated and interpreted. Such reading echoes the claim posited by Pamela K. Gilbert and reiterated by *La Peaulogie* that the skin is "a text to be read, a medium for the expression and interpretation of interiority" (Gilbert 2019: 1). Gilbert explains that "nineteenth century scientific and philosophical perspectives had reconfigured the purpose and meaning of this organ as more than a wrapping, and instead a membrane integral to the generation of the self" (Gilbert 2019: 1).

Interestingly, though the novel is construed in the Victorian tradition, the different interpretations of the motif of the tiger stripes referring to a history of big-game hunting and a history of slavery, colonialism and Orientalism, surely partake of neo-Victorianism's tendency to consider the past from a present perspective and to provide a metatextual outlook on some of the ideologies or discourses that were prevalent in Victorian England, in particular on race or gender. Jaine Chemmachery aptly poses the question: "Are such traces a way to suggest the violent impact of history on people, especially on these female characters?" (Chemmachery 2009: 71). Keeping in mind Gilbert's argument, one may suggest however that by claiming ownership of her body, Sugar reverses the balance of power, and in this case, her tiger stripes become empowering images which reflect her attempts at sensing and expressing herself. In other words, her skin translates, performs and makes visible her subjective identity.

Faber's focus on the significance of skin on identity formation as he constructs his character may be explained by the recent interest in skin studies. In fact, within the broad field of cultural studies, notably materialist studies, the human skin has attracted much critical attention over the past two decades. Since Claudia Benthien's *Haut* translated in English as *Skin: On the Cultural Border between Self and the World* (2002), Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey came forth with their collection *Thinking through the Skin* (2001) and Steven Connor followed in their footsteps with his *Book of Skin* (2003). These publications dwell on the cultural significance of skin in the human experience. Indeed, scholars have grown more interested in the changing significations of a bodily surface that – by virtue of its susceptibility to being

inscribed, imprinted, and interpreted – seems to lend itself particularly well to cultural and literary analysis.

Through Faber's interest in the significance of skin, one may suggest that he invests in the scientific advances which were made in the nineteenth century in the fields of dermatology and physiognomy, which led to the establishment of skin-as-self metaphor. This metaphor is the product of what Judith Halberstam sees as "an emergent conception of the self as a body" that was formed during the nineteenth century (Halberstam 1995: 1). In this metaphor, the skin is considered the face, the external membrane of the human body. Since skin was subjectively viewed and interpreted as an object of culture, epidermal marks such as moles, scars, and blemishes, as well as the skin's colour, texture and elasticity served as indicators of character, context and value within culture due to the popularization of the skin-as-self metaphor. For example, a female's pale skin meant the absence of exposition to sun and thus commonly referred to a high social status, while a darker one may indicate labour and symbolize belonging to working classes. Yet, despite such advances in the nineteenth century, it is surprising that the skin has relatively rarely and only partially been examined in Victorian studies. Thus, Pamela Gilbert's extensive scholarship on the (un)healthy Victorian urban and social body provides a study of the cutaneous contours of that body. Reading for patterns in Victorian literature, Gilbert employs four 'thought categories' in her examination of skin. The first considers skin as a way of sensing and expressing self, another regards it as a permeable boundary, a third as alienable substance and a final one as a site of inherent or inscribed properties. In her reading of Collins, Arias contends that the author is keen on articulating the link between interior and exterior "by emphasizing the senses and the role played by the skin in providing both the means and the barrier between the embodied subject and the world" (Arias 2015: 17/18). In the same manner, Sugar's skin embodies the relationship between self and the world.

Since the skin-as-self metaphor has been contemporaneously problematized and politically and academically disrupted, it allows us to perceive embodied subjectivity in another light. Sugar's skin condition is indeed transformed into a characterial marker, both personal and cultural. Her body is inscribed with traces of her subjective identity, a subversive, empowered, and liberated one. It thus echoes Arias's claim that "Touch is an enigmatic sense, but also extremely philosophical because 'touch crosses all the senses' (Kearney, "What?" 103)" (Arias, 2017: 45).

Neo-Victorian sensation fiction emphasizes female characters' bodily experience and senses not only to re-present the Victorian past and its senses, for Arias argues that focusing on tactility reflects the "sensuous interplay between the Victorian past and today's culture by

employing critical approaches such as phenomenology and sensory studies" (Arias 2017: 42), but also to highlight the permeable boundary to use Gilbert's terms, between world and subject, reality and experience, and exterior and interior. Indeed, among the human senses, skin marks the boundary between the external world and the human body, between spatial experience and sensorial existence. In other words, it is skin which transforms an exterior place into an interior experience. In *Fingersmith*, Waters makes use of the sense of touch to highlight tactile engagement. In Briar generally, and in the library particularly, Maud has to wear gloves because her uncle takes great care of his books and fears the risk of damaging them. Naturally, while she wears her gloves, Maud lacks any physical contact with the outside world. Since she is forced to keep her gloves on at all times, the day her uncle asks her to take her gloves off, she "shudder[s] to touch the surfaces of common things" (Waters 2002: 194). Gloves are the barrier to a sensorial experience of space. Once removed, the shock of touch is instantaneous since Maud experiences spatiality through her senses for the first time.

Besides, as ideological tools, the gloves become symbols of discipline and order, often accompanied with violence, both physical and psychological. They are meant to teach Maud to obey the rules and conform to the regulations posed by her uncle. By contrast, both the sight and touch of skin become emblematic of transgression and rebellion. Maud recounts the nurse's exclamation: "'Thank God she wears gloves, at least,' I hear her say. 'That may keep her from further mischief…'" (Waters 2002: 196). Accordingly, the narrative puts to the fore Maud's rebellious behaviour as she refuses to put on the gloves.

Gloves are equally a social barrier since they inhibit (physical) interaction. Indeed, touch is essential to female bodies as Maud and Susan gradually nurture a close (bodily) relationship. Interestingly, the instances of interaction between the protagonists are signalled by an absence of gloves. In other words, as Maud takes off her gloves, she regains the capacity/ liberty to interact with Sue. Their sexual touch turns into a romantic one as feelings are developed subtly throughout the narrative. Sensorial experience and affect are at the heart of Waters's text and become a means to represent her protagonists' sexual nonconformity through their lesbian relationship. Ultimately, transgressive women as they are, they claim Mr Lilly's house as the space where the sense of touch is heightened and inextricably linked to affect.

The link between home and skin is highly significant on two levels. On the one hand, Maud and Sue manage to transform the same space which prevented their physical proximity into an alternative space in which they celebrate their newly-found complicity. Forced to obey Mr Lilly's rules, their physical interaction was only possible at night and in secret in Maud's bedroom. Yet, it is the liberation of skin which allows them to claim ownership and control of

Briar, making it a space for a sensorial existence. Accordingly, Briar is transformed from house to home; the narrative's ending hints at it as a nest in which they would start a life together. On the other hand, skin allows the protagonists to explore their lesbian identities and nurture mutual feelings. The sense of touch, no longer merely physical, leads to an emotional attachment. Both of these dimensions point out how the skin-as-home metaphor which explores the role of touch in generating empathy, a feeling for the other can illuminate our study. Caroline Rosenthal and Dirk Vanderbeke comment on this metaphor: "To refer to our skins as homes is to suggest that they are required for living (like shelters) and are sensuous, intimate and familiar, they also mediate our experiences with others. The word "home" conjures up an image of a place where the physical, psychic, and sensual parts of our selves dwell" (Rosenthal and Vanderbeke 2015: 250). In other words, by means of touch and acts of dwelling, Maud and Sue have managed to transform their skins into homes. Maud eventually recognizes that the feeling she has for Sue "covers [her], like skin" (Waters 2002: 274).

The neo-Victorian characters' sensorial experience puts to the fore the inextricable link between sense and affect, body and emotion, self and other. Inspired by Sara Ahmed's reworking of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, Arias argues that "our embodied subjectivity is oriented towards others, as objects, and their place in sexual desire, and their perspectival orientation in turn affects other bodies and spaces" (Arias 2017: 44). Through the sense of touch, precisely when they manage to take off their gloves do Maud and Sue succeed in uncovering their lesbian embodied subjectivities. This recognition is only possible when both characters orient their existence to each other, "by attending to how the bodily direction "toward" such objects affects how bodies inhabit spaces and how spaces inhabit bodies" (Ahmed 2006: 23). Eventually, not only do they discover each other, they also re-discover themselves all whilst transforming and being transformed by Briar.

Interestingly however, some passages of Waters's novel which bring together all senses so as to represent the wholeness of the bodily experience illustrate an authorial insistence on depicting the fullness of such existence for there must not be a predominance of one sense over the others. Sue recounts:

> All day I sat or walked with her, so full of the fate I was bringing her to I could hardly touch her or meet her gaze; and all night I lay with my back turned to her, the blanket over my ears to keep out her sighs. But in the hours in between, when she went to her uncle, I felt her—I felt her, through the walls of the house, like some blind crooks are said to be able to feel gold. It

> was as if there had come between us, without my knowing, a kind of thread. It pulled me to her, wherever she was. (Waters 2002: 136)

The passage shows a symbiosis between external space made up of places and objects on the one hand and Sue's bodily experience of them on the other, stitched together by means of one invisible thread, their mutual love. David Howes and Constance Classen argue that the literary text should "draw attention to the manifold relations among the different senses, which can be called "intersensiorality" (Howes and Classen 2014: 5). In light of the bodily experience, senses are to be seen as "part of an interactive web of experience, rather than each being slotted into a separate sensory box" (Howes and Classen 2014: 5). Sue's description of her stay at the lunatic asylum illustrates this intersensiorality: "It was a kind of creeping misery, that crept so slow, and was so much a part of the habits of the house—like the colour of the walls, the smell of the dinners, the sound of weeping and shrieks—I did not know it had gained upon me, until too late" (Waters 2002: 432). Misery is experienced through the intermediary of the senses. It is no longer a simple feeling but a whole material existence, an existence which is seen, smelled, heard. Indeed, in the neo-Victorian text, the senses of touch, smell and taste are experienced together with sight and hearing, hence leading to a textual instance wherein sensations complete each other.

Like touch, the sense of smell is of paramount importance in Sugar's experience of space and of herself in Faber's text.

1.1.2 Materialising the Olfactory

"Scent is both an essential and seemingly impossible-to-recover aspect of material culture" (Friedman 2016: 2). Though scent is one of our strongest ties to memory, to remember a smell without external stimuli is almost impossible for most people. Emily C. Friedman argues that "human beings' (specifically Western humans) ability to smell has been diminished through a process of increased emphasis on odour-removal, hygienic practices that emphasize de-odorization (rather than the covering of one odour by another)" (Friedman 2016: 7). While other intangibles of the human experience have been placed into the context of the eighteenth-century novel, scent has so far remained largely side-lined in favour of discussions of the visual for the age of the Enlightenment was labelled "first and foremost a culture of sight" (Vila 2006: 1).

Yet, the past decade has seen a great expansion of our understanding of how smell works physiologically, psychologically and culturally and impacts our material perception of the world. Hence, numerous scholars focused their research on olfactory studies, more particularly on the Victorian period, which witnessed the birth of modern perfume industry and thus, led to the invasion of material culture by the olfactive. A major reconceptualization of the imagination that reinstates its hidden links with the historically neglected sense of smell, *Scents and Sensibility: Perfume in Victorian Literary Culture* (2017) is the first to examine the role played by scent and perfume in Victorian literary culture. Catherine Maxwell posits that "perfume-associated notions of imaginative influence and identity are central to this study, which explores the unfamiliar scented world of Victorian literature, concentrating on texts associated with aestheticism and decadence" (Maxwell 2017: 1). Maxwell's research questions find echoes in Faber's text which portrays the main protagonist as the owner of a perfume business in a changing Victorian world, a world gradually interested in materialism. Hence, we may wonder what role scent – perfume and other types of odours – plays in the novel. Is it merely an aesthetic ornament – embellishment or repulsion – which signals a cultural change, or is it inextricably linked to an authorial agenda of sensational Decadence for instance?

The Crimson Petal and the White is redolent of historical odours. From cheap, democratic perfumes to the smell of excrement and bodily fluids, odours feature prominently in the neo-Victorian agenda of Faber's historical narrative. They are spatial, cultural, and subjective markers of (neo-)Victorian experience. Indeed, smells in Faber's text are inextricably linked with space for they are a marker of both spatial setting and the cultural background associated with it. Like the characters that were presented following an upward movement from the bottom to the top of the social ladder, the narrative stops at the foul-smelling odours of the East End, "smells of sour spirits and slowly dissolving dung" before putting an emphasis on rather fragrant odours illustrated by perfume and associated with West End London and the suburbs (Faber 2002: 4). Not only do the nasty smells refer to poverty and pollution, the slums also epitomise the phenomenon of prostitution. Hence, the text focuses on the odours inside the brothels where one can instantly detect the "smell of wax and semen and old sweat" (Faber 2002: 8). At the Fireside, the bar which Sugar chooses to attract a better, wealthier and more respectable clientele, odours are transformed from filthy to rather pleasant smells. William "smells roasting meats, wine, and even perfume" (Faber 2002: 69). As the narrator tracks the protagonists' physical movements in space, the narrative signals a major upgrade for "[m]ercifully [for William], Sugar's bed-chamber is bright and airy, free of that waxy smell which so sickened him in Drury Lane" (Faber 2002: 86). Types of odours then seem to be in

accord with the geographical and social classification of London. The higher one gets on the ladder, the more fragrant the smells become. Hence, scents are no longer merely associated with senses, but are rather a socio-economic marker of culture.

Furthermore, when Sugar visits Rackham's lavender fields, seeing the poor farmers at work is a wake-up call insofar as she immediately becomes aware of the miserable conditions and hardships the working-class must endure. Hence, in her novel, she assumes the role of a social critic who denounces the status-quo, writes her dissatisfaction with one of the negative consequences of the Industrial Revolution on the lower social classes and even becomes a representative of this poor working-class.

> Each one of those workers, as they shrivelled meekly away from the sweep of her skirts, was convinced she couldn't possibly know what it's like to lie shivering under a blanket that's too thin for the season, or have shins bloody with flea-bites, or hair infested with lice. "But I do know these things!" protests Sugar, and indeed the pages that lie before her on the ivory-handled writing-table were conceived in poverty, and are full of it. (…) "But I am their voice!" she protests again, and hears, in the intimate acoustic of her silent study, a subtle difference in the way her vowels sound today, compared to how they sounded before the Season. (Faber 2002: 308)

The scent of lavender is not only a trigger to Sugar's social activism and literary engagement, but also symbolizes the suffering of workers at the end of the nineteenth century. Sugar notes that Rackham's field workers work for long hours and in difficult conditions for wages so small that do not allow them to face the adversities of life: poverty, famine, diseases. While Rackham only sees profit in his lavender fields, Sugar is touched by the conditions of the workers. Lavender is hence interpreted differently by both characters, thus marking a subjective experience

Furthermore, scent is given an epistemological dimension for it becomes both a field of research and a topic for essay writing for the male protagonist, the capitalist entrepreneur. No longer associated solely with the material sense of smell, scent becomes studied and written.

> He [William] flips backwards through the handwritten essay his father has prepared for his illumination, and re-reads a paragraph or two. There's a missing link in the life cycle of lavender as his father chronicles it (if life cycle

> is the correct term for what happens to a flower after it is cut). Here on this page, the newly filtered oil is described as having an undesirable "still smell"; on the next page, the smell is apparently gone, with no mention of how it was removed. (Faber 2002: 105)

This idea is further concretized as William engages in the perfume industry. A gentleman, of respectable social class and fair financial status, he represents another facet of society. He has turned into a businessman, an owner of factories, a symbol of the past Industrial Revolution which revolutionized the English economic system and marked the advent of the secondary sector. Indeed, the olfactory became a modern business, the methods of which were revolutionized and industrialized as part of the advance of manufacturing, for the sake of increasing capital and profit. Hence, the narrative focuses on the creation process of William's perfume catalogues. Though cataloguing became a marketing strategy to sell more perfumed products, it still consisted first and foremost of language: "Rackham's Bath Sweetener. One bottle lasts a year. Do your feet smell? To spare your blushes, use Rackham's Sulphur Soap, does not contain lead, one shilling and sixpence" (Faber 2002: 177). Sugar's dissatisfaction with some phrases in the old Rackham catalogue and determination to make them more 'elegant' proves that using perfume catalogues, period advertisements, and etiquette books is significant of how perfume became as complex a Victorian language as flowers themselves. No longer merely a sensorial experience, scent increasingly became discursive.

Besides being textualized, Victorian scents were also highly sexualized, for Victorian perfume – soaps, bouquets, nosegays – was assigned gender. For example, women were encouraged to "favour light and floral fragrances" rather than those containing "animalic extracts such as musk and civet" more appropriate to men (Maxwell 2017: 29). Hence, Victorian feminine fragrances often simply conjured up the scent of a particular flower, such as jasmine, lavender, roses, or honeysuckle. Thus, it is rather unsurprising that Rackham's perfume industry lavender is centred on the plantation, industrialization and commercialization of lavender, for it was among the most popular scents destined to upper-class Victorian ladies.

> But, elsewhere, the sun is shining on his lavender fields, which this year are bound to surrender a juicier crop than they ever did in his father's time. All over England, in shops and homes alike, the unmistakable R insignia is on prominent display. Aristocratic ladies, all of whom bear a remarkable

> resemblance to Lady Bridgelow, are perusing Rackham's Spring catalogue, uttering discreet sounds of approval over each item. (Faber 2002: 186).

Lavender is at the centre of a business strategy to increase capital. Though Victorian men also used perfumes, the consumption of such products was mainly female. Hence, Rackham Senior cleverly opted for the flower of lavender.

If lavender is a Victorian female scent according to both Rackham Senior and Junior, one may wonder if Sugar as a neo-Victorian character conforms to this aesthetic ideology. The narrator notes that she smells sweet. It is a reference to the delicious smell of sugar, hence her name. Yet, "[s]he smells like an animal too: or what [William] imagines animals smell like, for he's no animal lover" (Faber 2002: 131). To William's nose, Sugar's smell is sexual and erotic, for "[h]er sex is luxuriantly aromatic" (Faber 2002: 131). Though he is pleased with this carnal smell, his distinction establishes the gap between aristocratic ladies and prostitutes. Whether as an incessant attempt to please her or an unconscious endeavour to assimilate her to upper-class ladies, William fills Sugar's apartment with all types of flowery products. As she explores her new housing, Sugar is irritated by the omnipresent scents of flowers:

> The red roses in the hallway are another matter: they get up her nose, quite literally. How long ought she leave them there in that vase, before tossing them in the garbage where they belong? Always she has detested cut flowers, and roses in particular: their smell and the way they fall apart when past their bloom. (…) Damn those roses! They're filling the whole place with their stink ... but no, that's not possible, not from one vase of blooms. There's a mysterious surfeit of perfume in the atmosphere, as if the entire building has been sponged with scented soap. (Faber 2002: 203/204)

The different scents in this passage are overwhelming, stifling and oppressive. Sugar longs to 'toss' all roses which she associates with 'garbage' and 'stink'. Thus, the olfactory experience is both personal and subjective, for if one who longs for the scent admires it, others like Sugar and the workers in lavender fields submerged in it on a daily basis are rather suffocated by it. Rackham Senior admits: "They [the workers] *reek* of it just by working in it" (Faber 2002: 230, emphasis added). Similarly, on the second visit to the lavender fields on the day of the great bonfire, Sugar's "breath wheezes, her tongue feels swollen with lavender, the earth on which she stands is slowly beginning to revolve, like a giant piece of flotsam on an ocean too vast and

dark to see" (Faber 2002: 370). The description alludes to some sort of poisoning and a subsequent loss of consciousness. Interestingly, despite walking around in the open air of the vast fields, Sugar feels out of breath. As scent changes her spatial experience of the fields, walking around turns into a sensorial encounter between smell, taste, sight and touch. Sugar's experience of lavender can be read as a phenomenological interaction between body and space, which results in "the mind-body and the subject-object dichotomies [becoming] redundant: the sensorial field and the sensorial flows encompass material substances... gestures, and movements, as well as discourses, affects, memories, and ideas, which, as far as sensoriality is concerned, are of equal ontological status" (Hamilakis 2013: 115).

Though Sugar moves to a private apartment where she expects to enjoy freedom and liberation, she finds herself constantly surrounded by the fragrant shadow of overbearing Rackham. Each Rackham product further marks her state of imprisonment. In order to relieve herself from such suffocating atmosphere, Sugar seeks fresh air, an air that smells natural and unindustrialized.

> Sugar wrenches the French windows open, and fresh night air shoots up her nostrils. She pokes her face out into the dark, breathing deeply, sniffing the subtle odour of wet grass and the unsubtle absence of all those smells she's so accustomed to: meat and fish, the droppings of carthorses and ponies, sullied water gurgling down drainpipes. A warm reflux of semen trickles down her thighs and into her pantalettes as she stands sniffing; she winces, clutches herself, pushes the windows shut with her free hand. (Faber 2002: 203/204)

The sense of smell is at the centre of Sugar's sensorial experience through the use of different verbs associated with the nose like 'breathe', 'sniff', and 'wince'. Faber juxtaposes two opposite lexical fields: one of adornment and a second of repulsion as all kinds of scents come together. In contrast to the smells of roses, grass and food, the odours of animals' excrements, unclear water and semen are not only nasty, but highly decadent. In many instances of his materialist novel, Faber opts for a vocabular of olfactory decadence, an excessive language which is at once shocking and telling, for it uncovers how he uses scent to bestow a transgressive nature upon his protagonist. Both her corporeal smell and preferred scents show Sugar to be a non-conformist character, both as female and prostitute. Faber's decadent olfactory language is best illustrated in his daring use of explicit repulsive descriptions of particular scenes and objects

plunged in the scatological. “The sharp stink of stewed piss wafts up, inches from Sugar’s nose, but she doesn’t flinch. For the all the effect the stench has on her unblinking gaze, her serene brow, her secret half-smile, it might as well be perfume” (Faber 2002: 89). As for the objects, one particular item which stands out for its olfactive dimension is the chamber-pot.

The chamber-pot as an ordinary Victorian object associated with the scatological and foul odours had always been kept under the bed in the private bedroom of both adults and children, before houses had indoor toilets, to save a trip to the outside ‘privy’ at night. If it was used, it had to be emptied in the morning either by the owner or by the chambermaid in more prosperous homes. With the arrival of plumbing in the 1880s, wealthier people installed indoor toilets, thus resolving the problem of both privy and chamber-pot. It became a marker of socio-economic status. Thus, it is rather unsurprising that Rackham is shocked to find a chamber-pot in Sugar’s room, while Sugar is amazed not to find one in her private apartments but a whole inner bathroom instead.

Besides its social and class significance, the chamber-pot is almost always inextricably linked to the olfactory. If it is not emptied and cleaned, it has a repulsive smell, “spewing a vile mixture of pennyroyal and brewer’s yeast” (Faber 2002: 554). It serves as an indirect way of unveiling the interior of the body since Sugar probably drank tea and beer. Like the skin which is the boundary between body and world, the chamber-pot performs the same function by uncovering the inside of the body. The chamber-pot in Faber’s text directly refers to a sensorial experience, for the body is made at the centre of the senses of touch, hearing, sight, and smell. Whenever Sugar uses her chamber-pot, the narrator minutely describes her body’s movements and reactions. First during urination, “[a] barb of pain burrows down through Sugar’s guts. With a groan she perches on the chamber-pot and doubles over, her loose hair piling up in the lap of her night-gown, her forehead resting on her knees, prickling with sweat. She balls her fists, but nothing comes, and the spasm passes” (Faber 2002: 394). As she vomits, “Sugar hunches over the chamber-pot, stares down into its glossy porcelain interior, and inserts three fingers in her mouth. It takes a lot to make her gag, and her fingernails are scratching her gullet before she’s rewarded with a retch. But nothing substantial comes, only saliva” (Faber 2002: 519). Both passages depict a highly-explicit language which focuses on the bodily senses. One may suggest that the richness of Faber’s language is intended to materialize the scene, to incarnate the language of the female body. Indeed, Sugar expresses her feelings not through language, but through her body’s reactions. It is the fusion of her body’s performance and interaction with the chamber-pot which depicts emotions. In both of these instances, the senses are brought together to translate a whole bodily experience. Furthermore, in *Fingersmith*, the chamber-pot

is associated with the murder scene and Gentleman's flowing blood to be collected in a bucket: "The sound of the blood striking the china—and the sight of the red of it, against the white, and against that great dark eye—was worse than anything" (Waters 2002: 508). Waters brings together all human senses in this scene around the chamber-pot. It seems through Faber's and Waters's texts that this object is meant to contain all kinds of human fluids: urine, vomit and blood. Besides, in Waters's novel, appalling odours are combined insofar as "the smoke came rising through the floor, to mix with the smell of the meat, the chamber-pot, the sheets on the bed" (Waters 2002: 165).

Because of their explicit nature, both Faber's and Waters' texts include numerous scenes where the chamber-pot and its inextricable link with human odours is at the centre. Both Faber and Waters thus opt for an excessive language which materializes their settings and translates their characters' sensorial experience. One may wonder if the focus on a repulsive olfactive experience signals the move to an aesthetics of (neo-)Decadence. As the Decadent Movement of the end of the nineteenth century followed an aesthetic ideology of excess to discuss themes "among which disgust with the self and the world, perversion, scepticism, and vulgar humour" (Kearns 1989: 15), one may argue that Faber's excessive language similarly creates a horrid and repulsive reality. Furthermore, through his focus on his female character's sensorial experience, the narrative creates a sensual text, not to put to the fore beauty as in nineteenth-century aestheticism, but rather repulsion and degeneration, equally human. Indeed, while aestheticism propelled "an interest in literature as a material thing of beauty", "[t]hemes of perverse sexuality or cruelty and violence shockingly dismantled what many Victorians felt were necessary or even natural lines drawn between aesthetic beauty and repellent or 'ugly' morality" (Burdett 2014: para. 2). Like New Women who also opted for a sensual language in order to tackle numerous issues around female sexuality and were frequently associated with Decadence, Faber combines the use of an excessive fluid language which puts to the fore repelling scenes and a critique of social, moral and cultural values and phenomena often read as a manifestation of deviance. In Fowles's text however, interestingly and unsurprisingly, there is not a single mention of the chamber-pot particularly, or any kind of olfactory experience for that matter, be it positive or negative. This can be explained by the fact that Fowles's text may be considered the least material of all three texts, especially because of its chronological distance from the advance of materialist studies in the last decades of the twentieth- and early decades of the twenty-first-centuries.

This phenomenological reading of the female character, by means of its focus on the body's senses, has allowed to explore neo-Victorian tendency to invest in the materiality of the

female body to further materialize a subjective female experience. Yet, though phenomenology has been the main academic tradition of philosophical body-consciousness, one may turn to somaesthetics, a much later concept which has been stimulated by the objective to bring theory and bodily practices into a dialogue. Our study of the female body does not stop at a phenomenological bodily experience, but further explores the epistemological dimension of this same body.

1.2 The Female Body as Archive

The body as material reality by means of its sensorial experience does not preclude from reading the body as a trope/ metaphor. Reading the body as a metaphor suggests to the reader that any specific marker of this body, be it skin or smell as explored, has a bearing on a universal plane and invites the reader to see the generality of issues it raises through the individual. Thus, the meaning of the body may lie in the abstract domains of ethics, language, or history. In other terms, it serves to present the universal by means of the specific and individual, as well as the public by means of the private and personal. Such contention concurs with Roy Porter's claim that we must read "the body as the inexhaustible generator of representations for society at large, and as a crossroads of power, the new pineal gland mediating between personal and public, private and political" (Porter 1989: para. 2).

Porter's leading work "Body History" and more particularly his view that human bodies are the main signifiers of all medical, religious and political meanings have led in recent decades to an increasing interest in the significance of the body in domains of medical culture, power, politics, art, religion, literature, anatomy and history, right up to the most recent studies on ethical and gender issues. With particular focus on the female fictional body, my contention here is that it is not "a passive record" as posited by Derrida (Derrida cited in Currie 2007: 12), but rather an active one. In fact, Derrida theorizes the archive by associating it with the notion of command and the interplay between private and public authority. He returns to Greek antiquity to study the *arkheion*, that home of the archive that was "initially a house, a domicile, an address, the superior magistrates, the *archons*, those who commanded" (Derrida 1996: 2, emphasis in original), thus suggesting a state of "house arrest" (Derrida 1995: 10). Though my interpretation of archive echoes Derrida's, it differs from his insofar as it further emphasizes the performative aspect of the body. My interest here lies in exploring how the body is instead transformed into a "sentient archive" to borrow Bill Bissell and Linda Caruso Haviland's term in the title of their book *The Sentient Archive: Bodies, Performance, and Memory* (2018).

Though their study gathers multiple works of scholars and practitioners in dance, performance, science, and the visual arts, it is possible to suggest that their theorization of sentient archive may help elucidate our study of the different interpretations of how the body serves as a repository for knowledge, especially with regard to its material dimension.

In the scope of our study of the neo-Victorian female character, the female body then may be read as multiple. The maternal body has the double power of (pro)creation as mother and artist. The lesbian body serves as a historical repository for a transgressive discourse of/ on sexuality. Consequently, the female body functions as a site for re-memory in its self-reflexivity. These metaphorical readings bring together both the materiality and immateriality of the body and ultimately put to the fore the unification of body and mind. The female body serves as a container of historically approved narratives, but also the space for questioning and rewriting these narratives. Thus, the ultimate objective of this study is to bring phenomenology and somaesthetics in a dialogue centred on the female body of the neo-Victorian fictional character since both have an interest in the body's feelings, perceptions and presence in the world.

1.2.1 The Maternal Body's (Pro)creation

In the neo-Victorian novel, there is often the character of the mother so as to allow the narrative to re-present the maternal body from a new perspective and breathe new life into the debate on motherhood. I have argued in a previous section in the fourth chapter of this thesis that maternalism not only allows female protagonists such as Maud and Sue to reconstruct their own identities precisely by breaking ties with their maternal heritages but more importantly lies at the heart of female relationships, insofar as Faber celebrates its capacity to heal Sugar from her past wounds notably caused by her mother. I would like now to go a step further in the analysis of motherhood by focusing mainly on the maternal body and its potential in its association with the intellectual. As early as the first pages in the narrative, Sugar is presented as a novelist. Later on, she is closely associated with the maternal be it in relation to her mother and her own surrogate-motherhood to Sophie, but also to her actual motherhood to her unborn aborted child. As I have previously argued, Sugar is portrayed as ambivalent and constantly evolving, performing different social roles from prostitute to governess and mother-figure. Interestingly, her body is allowed this same quality of multiplicity, for it has the double power of (pro)creation as mother and artist.

In her exploration of women's writings in Quebec, Lori Saint-Martin stresses masculine assumptions of their exclusive capacity to create and affirms that "Les écrivains qui utilisent cette métaphore s'approprient le double pouvoir de la création et de la procréation symbolique, dont ils écartent les femmes" (Saint-Martin 1994: 117)[44] . In fact, to avoid the binarity of masculine creation and feminine procreation whereby the intellectual would be given to the male while the corporeal to the female, the metaphor of the female body as mother and creator in Faber's text is deployed for multiple objectives. Interestingly, though Faber is a male author and Saint-martin is exclusively interested in women's writings, one may posit that by means of the character of Sugar, Faber challenges this masculine assumption and allows the body of his female character the double power of both symbolic creation and procreation. One may claim that this double power is meant to celebrate the female body's capacity to create, both intellectually and physically. Though it is corporeal, it is endowed with the genius of the intellectual. For example, as Sugar "itches for pen and paper" (Faber 2002: 433), the use of the idiomatic expression may be intentional insofar as the narrative brings closer the act of writing and the female body by means of the reference to skin. In other words, it seems that Sugar feels her writing via her body. "Sugar leans her chin against the knuckles of the hand that holds the pen. Glistening on the page between her silk-shrouded elbows lies an unfinished sentence" (Faber 2002: 148). The narrative creates a kind of symbiosis between body and writing, the material and the intellectual, the corporeal and the literary. Furthermore, this harmony is foregrounded by how her novel focuses primarily on the bodily experience of both prostitutes and male clients in violent scenes of corporeal ill-treatment and revenge, as if the book were the intellectual product of the body and so must be as bodily as possible. Thus, we read long and minutely-detailed scenes of body mutilations. Paradoxically, towards the end of the narrative, Sugar ultimately "pronounced her novel dead" (Faber 2002: 530), like a mother who is confronted to her new-born's death. Curiously, at the end of the novel, William associates Sugar's "unnatural intellect" with her "reptilian skin" (Faber 2002: 602). Though he means to foreground Sugar's traits of madwoman, such lexical choices nonetheless put to the fore the indissociable link between body and mind, exterior and interior, reason and materiality, and thus challenge such patriarchal divisions.

Saint-Martin claims that it is equally possible to argue that the metaphor is used to demystify motherhood, "démythifier la maternité, de parler de ses tâches sans romantisme, aux

[44] Lori Saint-Martin suggests that "authors who use such metaphor appropriate the double power of creation and symbolic procreation, from which they exclude women" (Saint-Martin 1994: 117; my own translation).

antipodes de l'image en rose et en blanc" (Saint-Martin 1994: 118)[45]. As Sugar explains the origin of babies to Sophie, she claims: ""If I had a husband," says Sugar, proceeding with caution, "he could ... plant a seed in me, and I might grow a child." "Where do the husbands get the seeds, Miss?" "They make them. They're clever that way"" (Faber 2002: 514). Sugar's ironic tone, especially reflected through the adjective 'clever', may be meant to ridicule or caricature the image of male creation. Her description of the act of procreation gives the impression of a mechanical process wherein the product is likened to an agricultural good and made almost industrial.

Contradictorily however, the scene of her miscarriage in the factory toilet signals the violence of the experience of motherhood and the pain woman's body has to endure in order to (un)become mother for she "she wakes on the floor, sprawled on the chilly damp tiles, her thighs slimy, her heartbeat shaking her body, her ankle throbbing as if caught in a steel trap" (Faber 2002: 588). The narrative utilizes monstrosity and gothic imagery to describe the baby: "Is it contorted with fear, its skin scalded with sulphate of zinc and borax, its mouth gasping for clean nourishment amidst the poisons that swirl in Sugar's innards?" (Faber 2002: 554). Such lexical choice is not only meant to highlight the difficulty of (pro)creation for women, but also to shatter male binary perceptions of motherhood: idealism and repulsion. "Traitant de la mère, les hommes sont partagés entre l'idéalisation de son altruisme et le dégoût devant sa corporalité" (Rich 1976 cited in Saint-Martin 1994: 119)[46]. In Faber's text, Sugar voluntarily aborts her child, thus rebuking any association with altruism. The text also uses explicit language to magnify and emphasize the corporeal experience.

Interestingly, the scene of the miscarriage can also be read as the miscarriage of Sugar's creative power, of the child-book or book-child, as if Sugar, the author, eventually gets rids of her artistic creation. One may claim that like the image of the baby which entails danger, artistic creation is equally challenging for the female (body). Thus, such scene may be read in parallel with the final scene which depicts Agnes's diaries and Sugar's novel scattered on the street.

> The Gladstone bag falls to the ground, disgorging its contents all over the footpath: Agnes's diaries, tumbling in more directions than seems scientifically possible, opening their pages like the froth of milk boiling over,

[45] Saint-Martin claims that the metaphor is used to "demystify motherhood, to talk about its tasks without romanticism, at the antipodes of the image in pink and white" (Saint-Martin 1994: 118; my own translation).

[46] Saint-Martin argues that "Dealing with the mother, men are torn between the idealization of her altruism and disgust at her physicality" (Saint-Martin 1994: 19; my own translation).

> a spillage of wind-blown paper releasing a confetti of dried flower petals and faded prayer cards. And Sugar's novel, spewed out of its cardboard jacket all along the street for three body-lengths or more, its densely-inked pages whipped up into the breeze in unbelievably rapid succession. (Faber 2002: 609)

The use of the verbs 'disgorge', 'spill' and 'spew out', as well as the reference to fluids like (maternal) milk foreground the link between the female body and artistic creation. It seems as if both Agnes's and Sugar's artistic creations are expressions of their own bodies.

The metaphor of body as mother and creator breathes fresh perspectives onto the representations of motherhood in fiction. Not only does it celebrate the link between (pro)creation and the female body, it equally sheds light on the challenges and risks of both. Faber's neo-Victorian text, puts to the fore a phenomenological approach to the female, particularly the maternal, body so as to bring together a whole sensory experience of (pro)creation and seems to echo Sylvie Bauer's argument about the centrality of the body in fiction. Even though Bauer focuses on contemporary American writings, one may draw parallels with neo-Victorian writing.

> Il s'agit alors de retrouver le corps dans la fiction à travers les souffles et les sonorités de la langue, quand l'écriture devient palpable dans la densité sonore de la phrase. (…) l'écrit devient un 'corps dansant' qui sature la page de lettres, de taches et de striures pour substituer au délitement corporel la chair des lettres, des traces et des signes scripturaux. (Bauer 2012: 6)[47]

Through the intermediary of Sugar's maternal/creative body, one may suggest that Faber contributes in his own way in the renewal of novelistic forms, which results in the development of a new ethic. In fact, the literary trope of the maternal metaphor is revisited in Faber's text in order to open up a new textual space for the body and consequently to question historical narratives around motherhood. Telling new stories by means of the body therefore makes it possible to influence the course of literary history.

[47] Sylvie Bauer argues: "It is then a question of finding the body in the fiction through the breaths and the sonorities of the language, when the writing becomes palpable in the sound density of the sentence. (…) the writing becomes a "dancing body" that saturates the page with letters, stains and streaks to replace the disintegration of the body with the flesh of letters, traces and scriptural signs" (Bauer 2012: 6; my own translation).

1.2.2 The Lesbian Body as a Historical Repository

What stands out in Waters's text is her portrayal of the female body which is no longer to be seen simply in terms of sexsation, but rather in terms of identity formation, as it becomes a means of existence. In fact, it is through the intermediary of the body that both female protagonists explore their romantic feelings for each other. More importantly, what is particularly interesting about Waters's protagonists is that they allow her to insert a heritage of lesbianism into our cultural memory of the Victorians, as Waters herself notes, "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 2000: 15). Thus, the text focuses on queer narration so as to point out how this lesbian identity is (re-)modelled and (re-)constructed. *Fingersmith* as a novel is thus also a rewriting of the archive, with Waters effectively giving a voice to those who have traditionally been denied one, notably here the lesbian; a voice which focuses on lesbian bodily experience. I have argued in chapter 4 of this thesis that Waters gives her protagonist Maud a queer voice, one which enables her not only to uncover her lesbian identity, but also to foreground her emergence as a writer of erotica in her own right. In fact, through the intermediary of Maud's character and by means of the sensorial experience, Waters brings together female creation and bodily experience.

While male pornographic writing often decomposes the female body into parts meant for sexual pleasure – lips, tongue, breast and vagina as in Ashbee's text – Maud's whole body becomes alive inside the text while bringing life to its lines at the same time. In her erotic texts, writing the body for Maud becomes a form of *jouissance* as there is harmony between the artist's "libidinal body and the creative urges of her mind, suggesting that feminine writing – a writing recreative of the female body – is born from the dynamic fusion of the two within a natural setting" (Heilmann 2000: 81). The female body may be read in this light as *double*: both lesbian and creator. For this reason, Maud is often associated with flowing ink notably in the last chapter of the narrative.

> Her hands were bare, her sleeves put back, her fingers dark with smudges of ink. (Waters 2002: 543)
>
> Her hands did not tremble. They were bare, and marked, as I have said, with spots and smudges of ink. Her brow had ink upon it, too, from where she had pressed it. (Waters 2002: 547)

> Maud stood very still, her hand upon the desk. I wiped my eyes. Then I looked again at the smears of ink on her fingers. (Waters 2002: 549)
>
> Her fingers left more smudges of black there. I still couldn't bear it. I quickly reached and stopped her wrist; then wet my thumb and began to rub at the flesh of her brow. I did it, thinking only of the ink, and her white skin [...]. The smudge stayed black upon her brow; and after all, I thought, was only ink. (Waters 2002: 551)

In these excerpts, Waters equates the female body and the female text through ink. Both become one, thus demonstrating the fusion between body and writing. In *Fingersmith*, female creativity is encoded as natural and spiritual, it is a non-deductive essence of the female body. Llewellyn claims that "for Maud, the fictions come to life at the same moment as her desires in a scene in which Waters seems to offer not only a sense of how Maud's own reading (supposedly innocent and unknowing) influences her understanding of her relationship with Sue, but also an indictment of the male-authored and male-centred world of such literary production" (Llewellyn 2007: 203).

Interestingly then, Maud's characterisation reverberates Hélène Cixous's conception of "*l'écriture féminine*" highlighting how feminine writing celebrates the female body much like New Woman novelists whose art exhibits traces of this experimental writing. For instance, Marina Cano connects New Woman fiction to French feminism by examining two of Mona Caird and Olive Schreiner's novels through the lens of feminine writing. Similarly, I argue that Waters transforms the female body from a male to a more female medium of expression emulating nature. As if in a cinematographic production and by means of narrative focalization, Sue's gaze, like the lens of a camera, closely follows Maud's movements describing the different parts of her body as reflected in the light of the fire.

> Then she moved away from the fire, for me to put her into her nightgown. (..) She stood shivering, (..) and my fingers were cold and made her jump. They grew warm, though, after a minute. (..). Her corset was long, with a busk of steel; her waist, as I think I have said, was narrow[.] Her hair, inside its net, was fixed with half a pound of pins, and a comb of silver. (..) I saw her bosom, her bottom, her feather and everything[.] Her hair was good, and very long let down. I brushed it, and held it, and thought what it might fetch. (Waters 2002: 82)

The passage has a special musicality which echoes the varying sounds of fire through the alliteration and alternation of the sounds /s/, /ʃ/, /g/ and /h/, soft voices which mimic the burning of wood and its hissing sounds, while at the same time focusing on a fluid imagery. In fact, though it is an external focalization, the simultaneous stress on the different senses of sight, touch, hearing – and later on, taste and smell – breaks with patriarchal realist tradition often organised around binary opposition between body and mind, exterior and interior, man and woman, and so on. It puts to the fore the female body seen as a whole by Sue's female eye, using Waters's female language. Keeping in mind Maud's coming into writing, it seems that the novel, through form and content, conveys how Maud's mind and body have finally 'caught fire'.

Because the female body's desires have been repressed, its description in *Fingersmith* focuses on the different senses of sight, touch and smell that translate its fluidity. Waters often resorts to a rich lexical field that accords well with Cixous's conception of the female body/writing, "overflow, luminous torrents, burst, these waves, these floods, these outbursts, ebullient, infinite woman" (Cixous 1976: 876). Indeed, in Sue's words, Maud "[is] soft and smooth as butter. Too soft, [she] thought her. [She] imagined her bruising. She was like a lobster without its shell" (Waters 2002: 53). She also imagines her like a statue with no clear borders. "She was as pale as a statue on a pillar in a park. So pale she was, she seemed to shine" (Waters 2002: 82). Indeed, when an object is associated with a bright light, it often turns into a holographic apparition lacking a fixed shape and clean lines. In brief, the narrative then, and particularly Maud's monologue, illustrates the different phases of self-knowledge both as a lesbian and authoress, and highlights how her body is paramount in her journey of self-discovery.

Though the female body in the neo-Victorian novel may be seen as "a marketing tool which plays to the sexual immaturities of our age", it nonetheless "can in more sophisticated textual constructions, serve to address contemporary identity politics by 'mainstreaming' gay coming-out-stories (as Waters's novels do)" (Heilmann and Llewellyn 2010: 107). By inserting a heritage of lesbianism, Waters also puts to the fore the interrelation between female body, fiction and history.

1.2.3 Embodied Memory

Kate Mitchell establishes an analogy between the maternal body, photography, memory and (the loss of) history. She affirms that "Kerwin Klein identifies the photograph as a familiar

trope in contemporary memory discourse" (Mitchell 2008: 89) and posits that "the mother's body [is] the centrepiece of [the novel's] portrayal of loss and potential restoration" (Mitchell 2008: 88). In Faber's novel, Agnes is gravely saddened by the loss of her mother's photograph "shivering under his hands" with "cheeks shining with tears" (Faber 2002: 280). Losing the photograph which stands for a memory of her mother symbolizes losing her past, and thus history.

Besides, following Agnes's death, one particular photograph further illustrates the association between (losing) the female body and (losing) history, though it is rather about the wife's body than the mother's. For "Countless times [William]'s stared at this photograph, reminding himself that it captures an *incontestable* truth, a history that *cannot* be rewritten" (Faber 2002: 448, emphasis added). Like "for Barrett Browning [to whom] the photograph promises proximity, the erasure of time and distance" (Mitchell 2008: 89), Faber's male character laments the loss of his wife's body and thus, history, and so strives to recuperate it by staging a photoshoot. "Agnes is gone forever; she exists only in his memories; there isn't even a photograph of them together, more's the pity" (Faber 2002: 545). Thus, the staged photoshoot is meant to fill in the void of such loss by combining Agnes's face on the photograph as a memory of the past and Sugar's body as an embodiment of the present and hope for an eternal future. Indeed, William's decision "encapsulates the idea of photography as a resurrection of past persons or places, not merely representing them but, in an important sense, re-presenting them, or remembering them, restoring them to a time and place in which they no longer exist" (Mitchell 2008: 89).Foregrounded by the male photographer's repetition of the adjective "Ideal, ideal" (Faber 2002: 553), Agnes's body serves as a tool to the absolute reconstruction of History. One may posit that the female body is at the centre of rewriting history, "[making] of the (…) body the original origin, the home par excellence, and, in Barthes' phenomenology, the quintessential photograph" (Mitchell 2008: 88). Rackham eventually sums up this process of re-composition: "Queer, isn't it, the way will-we know that this photograph was made in an upstairs room in a crowded street, and yet here am I, standing in the will-wilds of Nature. But that's what we must all do, Sophie: present ourselves in the best light. That's will-what A-A-Art is for. And History too" (Faber 2002: 557). From Rackham's male perspective, history serves to present humans in 'the best light'. Ironically, the product of such process of reconstruction which is described in surgical terms is strange and distorted, "a most peculiar photograph of the Rackham family all together, with Agnes Rackham's head transplanted from a summer long ago, abnormally radiant, like one of those mysterious figures purported by spiritualists to be ghosts captured on the gelatin emulsion of film, which were never visible to

the naked eye" (Faber 2002: 556). It is possible to suggest that William's masculine attempt to redefine the female body fails because he follows a reductionist approach by decomposing the former into head and other body parts. William seems to ignore the materiality of the female body which is abridged in his staged photograph. It is thus unsurprising that Agnes's head is described as immaterial insofar as it is associated with spirits and ghosts, the abstract part of a person. Furthermore, one may claim that the process of transplantation fails because it disregards the specificities of each female body. Though William supposes a perfect likeness between Agnes and Sugar attempting to make them look like one, the disfigured product is proof of the female body's refusal to be dismembered and condensed.

In contrast to William's staged recreation, Agnes deploys another strategy for rewriting both body and history. She engages in an episode of cutting and re-sewing her old dresses, eventually deemed by William as "an irresistible mania" (Faber 2002: 167). This act may be interestingly read as an attempt to re-write the "[f]abric remnants and outmoded curtains" of history from a new perspective, her own, and make them into "humming-birds" instead (Faber 2002: 167). Borrowing the metonymy of the female body acting as cover from Heilmann and Llewellyn (Heilmann and Llewellyn 2010: 108), or dress more precisely in Agnes's case, one may posit that her desire to change her dress and rewrite her body as a 'humming-bird' is an attempt to overrule patriarchy's determination to write her body as one of wife/ mother. The hummingbird was particularly mesmerizing to nineteenth-century Victorians[48]. Diana Thomson that Charles Dickens "wrote a detailed article called "Tresses of the Day Star" for his weekly newspaper, *Household Words*" in which he "describes a luxuriant, tropical scene: 'They hang amidst fuchsia flowers, or float over beds of bromelia… They dart long beaks into deep, tubular flowers, hovering beneath the pendant bells'" (Thompson 2017: para. 3). Thus, the hummingbird which is unique and exotic, combined with Agnes's metaphysical and existentialist writings add to her mystique as character. Interestingly, the action of cutting her dresses is described in pejorative terms like an act of violence and 'ruin': "Odd, how some of her dresses were ruined instantly, as if the scissors had punctured them like a bladder, while others more or less kept their shape and were merely ... disfigured" (Faber 2002: 167), suggesting women's anger at being shaped and modelled by men. Yet, as disfigured and unpleasant as Agnes's re-created hummingbird may turn out to be, the text nonetheless insists

[48] Native to the Americas, the Victorians were obsessed with the humming-bird. John Gould devoted fifty years of his life to the collection and creation of displays in "the Hummingbird House, showcasing the wonders of bird life in the Americas to excited crowds in Victorian-era London" (Thompson 2017: para. 1).

on the female body's capacity to challenge masculine definitions and to re-memory the past from a female perspective.

Though Fowles's text is the least material of the three neo-Victorian texts and has long preceded the material turn, Sarah Woodruff's character may be read as a metaphor for the self-reflexive dimension of the neo-Victorian novel. Sarah's character transcends the barriers of fiction and reality, for she creates her own identity and becomes representative of both New Woman and the modern New World. Hutcheon goes as far as to argue that "Sarah is the greatest fiction maker of the novel, creating her own identity" (Hutcheon 1980: 65). One may further contend that it is more particularly her body in the ending, which functions as an archival repository of past, present and future, an embodiment of the passage of time, and even a re-making of memory. In fact, as Sarah "gradually develops a feminist consciousness" (Byrd 1984: 306), she "transcends her role in the Victorian metaphor by being conscious of her historical position" (Eddins 1976: 51). Thus, such view highlights Sarah's emancipatory development in her attempts to free herself from the constraints of her age and the identity it attempted to impose upon her. This interpretation entails that Fowles constructs a female metahistorical character which transcends history. Though Mitchell affirms that the body "becomes a medium for the repetition of the past, [and] its unbidden persistence in the present" (Mitchell 2008: 94), it is possible to claim that in the case of Sarah Woodruff, her body is given a much greater historical dimension. In fact, she is a contemporary creation within the Victorian world insofar as she consciously breaks Victorian conventions in the name of twentieth-century freedom. It is rather unsurprising that she is despised by her fellow Victorians and considered to be mad because they are not time-travellers like her. Sarah's body may be considered as History, not in the sense of the past, but rather of the passing of time from past to future. Sarah's re-memory of History, which is inscribed upon her flesh through her ultimate transformation in attire and appearance, offers a counter-narrative to both Charles's and patriarchy's representation of her history as a fallen woman. In this sense, her body is no longer a cataloguer of memory, but plays a pivotal role in memory-making and memory-remaking, for she eventually rewrites the history of the French lieutenant's woman, and becomes a woman on her own terms.

Furthermore, by bringing closer the Victorian past, the twentieth century and the contemporary reader, her body makes possible "the impossible: History reduced to a living stop, a photograph in flesh" (Fowles 1969: 196). Besides, Sarah's daughter Lalage may also be read as the ultimate embodiment of History, for she represents both Victorian past and modern present and future. Thus, "the body is engraved by time, etched with past experience. In this sense memory is carried with us bodily, not so much remembered as 'membered,' or embodied"

(Mitchell 2010: 162). In fact, Sarah's maternal body is given the capacity to conceive (both as in construe and bear a child) an alternative present and future, different from an unsatisfactory past. In brief, Sarah's body in Fowles's text is both a metaphor for the self-reflexivity of the neo-Victorian novel, and eventually a tool for the embodiment of re-memory.

The underlying issue here is that all women in the novels voluntarily and deliberately employ strategies that place their bodies outside the reach of male influence. In Waters's novel, both Maud's and Sue's embodied fluidity continually disrupts patriarchal desires to define women in conventional heterosexual terms and foregrounds their lesbian identities. In Fowles's novel, Charles struggles to transform Sarah's bodily re-memory of History into a narrative of male control over wives and mothers, for she ultimately refuses his marriage proposal and so, both statuses associated with him. In Faber's novel, Agnes's rejection of her (bodily) role as mother can also be read as a "[disruption of] teleological history, [for it] marks too her rejection of history, stories and things made to happen and the meaning that accrues to them" (Mitchell 2010: 81). Though Sugar's abortion is problematic in how it was initiated to keep Rackham's interest, it may also be read as "an attempt to abort history itself" (Mitchell 2010: 89), for the child would eternally be associated with Rackham's narrative of control over her body. Thus, her abortion may be symbolic of the female body's capacity to rewrite its past, present, and future and thus, to act as "a continual reminder of her power to intervene in history" (Orr 2016: 90). Thus, paradoxical as it may seem, an embodied act of "unhappening" to borrow Mitchell's term (Mitchell 2010: 89), un-mothering in both Agnes's and Sugar's cases, can be just as influential in shaping history and constructing cultural memory as an act of happening. From a feminist perspective, this neo-Victorian novel thus explores the association between male narratives and the re-memories of female bodies, whose capacity for corporeal agency turns out to be an underlying force in the narrative. Ultimately, Sugar's decision to rescue Agnes from Rackham's marital control, escape the Rackham household and take Rackham's daughter with her not only places all three female bodies out of Rackham's reach, but challenges the idea of man-made history and posits the possibility of construing a female one.

In the early pages of this thesis, I have presented neo-Victorianism as a genre which means to re-activate readers' memory of the past, not as they revisit the Victorian age with nostalgia, but rather as they critically engage with it and question its meanings from a contemporary vantage point. One may now take a step further so as to contend that the female body of the neo-Victorian character functions as the corporeal manifestation of collective memory as well as of historical narrative. In fact, the neo-Victorian novel seems to respond to Grosz's call for an alternative vision of accounting for the past, whereby "a completely different

set of perspectives – this time based on women's specificities, experiences, positions, rather than on those of men, who hide themselves and their specificities under the banner of some universal humanity – is possible and needs to be explored" (Grosz 1994: xi). Through the focus on the female body, be it in its materiality or in its metaphorical dimension, the experience of the body constitutes a fundamental element of constructing, or rather reconstructing the continuity of the historical narrative. In this formulation, the body becomes the place in which the past, the present, and the future converge. Furthermore, the body becomes, then, not only the locus of ancestral memories, but also a tool of resistance against the hegemonic historical narrative and an arena to propose alternative female narratives. It even becomes a 'sentient archive'. In establishing associations between body, memory and history, it becomes legitimate to read the female body as a site of knowing, remembering, and performing which serves to generate and store information for recall, retrieval, or re-enactment. Through the intermediary of the female character, the text brings together memory and corporeality, for the body feels, and we read physical traces of sensation on her body. "The memory of that sweet man fetches her a sly blow in the pit of her stomach, for she's had no warning, and memories can be cruel when they give you no warning. She flinches, claps one hand protectively to her breast" (Faber 2002: 623).

In brief, the neo-Victorian novel focuses on female sensorial experiences in its characterisation of its female protagonist. As I have demonstrated, the texts put to the fore a female sensorial experience which allows the female protagonist a material interaction not only with characters around her, but also with space and objects in general. Interestingly, this sensorial experience is inextricably linked with affect, for when the female subject sees, smells, touches, tastes and hears everything around her, she cannot but feel it. Indeed, the body is the interface between the material subject and the world according to William Cohen. Sensationalists "present a fluid exchange between surface and depth, inside and outside — a type of materialism that understands the organs of ingestion, excretion, and sensation not simply to model but to perform the flow of matter and information between subject and world" and understand the body "as a sensory interface between the interior and the world, as a process of flux and becoming" (Cohen 2008: xii). Thus, neo-Victorian sensation fiction makes use of bodily experience and senses not only to re-present the Victorian past and its senses, but also to highlight the links previously mentioned between body and world, interior and exterior, subject and object. Past and present are brought together in neo-sensation fiction thanks to bodily means.

Through the lesbian body by which history is questioned and challenged, one may suggest that Waters's project lies in encouraging the reader to engage in a process of "reparative reading", a notion Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has developed in the scope of queer criticism. To read reparatively is to read without any "proscribed object choice, aim, site or identification", to read for "important news about herself, without knowing what form that news will take", to read with "only the patchiest familiarity with its codes; without, even, more than hungrily hypothesizing to what questions this news may proffer an answer" (Sedgwick 1997: 2/3). This process of reparative reading entails engagement and commitment on the part of readers, for they must be active participants in the reading – and subsequent creation – processes. As Joseph Litvak notes in a personal communication in 1996, "Doesn't reading queer mean learning, among other things, that mistakes can be good rather than bad surprises?" (Litvak cited in Sedgwick 1997: 147). Thus, exploring the bond established between character and reader seems essential in the scope of this phenomenological/ somaesthetic reading of the female neo-Victorian character.

2. The Character-Reader Bond between the Affective and Cognitive

> Aux confins de la littérature et de la philosophie, les articles réunis ici montrent combien la question du corps s'invite dans toute écriture, comment ce toucher concerne tout autant les bruissements de la langue que le corps du lecteur, sollicité dans sa chair – certains de ces textes sont parfois douloureux à la lecture, comme le rappelle Michel Feith. La carnation de la lettre, le grain du papier, la langue corporelle touchent au sens, dans un mouvement d'asymptote qui, s'il confine parfois à la vérité, se refuse à toute stabilité rassurante. (Bauer 2012: 7)[49]

The question of the body does indeed invite itself, or rather forces its way and imposes itself, in our reading of literature, particularly in the neo-Victorian novels under study. Yet one may ask: Which body is in question? Is it only the body of the fictional character and/ or also the

[49] Sylvie Bauer writes: "On the borders of literature and philosophy, the articles brought together here show how much the question of the body invites itself into all writing, how this touch concerns as much the rustling of the language as the body of the reader, solicited in his flesh - some of these texts are sometimes painful to read, as Michel Feith reminds us. The carnation of the letter, the grain of the paper, the bodily language touch on meaning, in an asymptotic movement which, if it sometimes borders on the truth, refuses any reassuring stability" (Bauer 2012: 7; my own translation).

reader's? One may contend that a phenomenological approach which inherently emphasizes experiential and lived aspects of a particular construct, the female fictional character in our case, ultimately targets a sensorial response on the part of the reader. As a hallmark of phenomenology, our discussion of the materiality of the female body leads to exploring the impact of this same body on the reader's experience.

Rosario Arias argues that there is an inextricable association "between the sensorial and the affective because the senses contribute to activate and evoke affectivity, and unlock affect when they operate" (Arias 2017: 43). On the other hand, our study of the various metaphors of the female body suggests that the act of reading entails an epistemological dimension, for it demands a cognitive effort on the part of the reader. Arias adds that "the senses function as a reservoir of material memories" (Arias 2014: 43) and "every sensorial perception is at the same time past and present" (Hamilakis 2013: 122). The aim then is to explore the bond founded between the fictional character and its reader, a relationship which encompasses both affect and cognition and demands a phenomenological – sensorial and somaesthetic – perception of this same character.

2.1 A Bodily Reading Act

I have started this investigation with an exploration of the multiple definitions of character. The narrative contours of character are both evasive and illusive. Structuralist and narratological studies propose a theoretical framework for defining character as part of the narrative structure of the text. For example, Philippe Hamon proposes a semiotic reading of the figure of the character using three different categories: referential characters based on defined signifiers, ambiguous characters which represent either author or reader, and anaphoric characters which organise the narrative according to a set of unified structures. For both Barthes and Hamon, character remains a being of paper which is made of linguistic and semantic signs.

Yet, in light of the development of materialist and phenomenological studies which stress the importance of the representation of the material existence and experience of character, what implications does this focus on material contours have on our reading of character? Karin Littau claims that "[w]hen literary theorists therefore approach the 'thousands of possible relations' a reader has to a text (Cixous 1990: 3), they rarely take into account the one factor which, apart from historicity, is central to cultural historians of reading: materiality" (Littau 2006: 2). Thus, one may ask how such sensorial proximity affects the relations between character and reader.

Wolfgang Iser's phenomenological theory presents a communicative model of reading. For Iser, "a literary text contains intersubjectively verifiable instructions for meaning-production" (Iser 1978: 25). His reading model emphasizes not a message extracted from a text, but a meaning assembled and experienced by a reader. The strategies in the text orient the reader's search for the intention underlying the author's selection and combination of conventions, and the "communicatory function" (Iser 1978: 61) of literature ensures "that the reaction of text to world will trigger a matching response in the reader" (Iser 1978: 99). Iser's theory will be taken here as a point of departure insofar as this project examines the ways in which the act of reading neo-Victorian literature involves a dynamic interplay between the cognitive and the affective. In other words, what brings the reader to both feel and reflect on the fictional text, with a special focus on its female character? But first of all, one may wonder what kind of reader neo-Victorian fiction demands.

I have highlighted in the introduction to this study the neo-Victorian novelists' opinions about their readers: all three have stressed their preoccupation about their readers' reactions to their respective fictions. In our study of the bond these readers (may) have with the fictional character, the argument to emphasize here is Heilmann and Llewellyn's position vis-à-vis the requirements of the reader of neo-Victorian fiction, for they put forth the claim that the latter must be of the "knowing" type, one who is able to acknowledge the points of Victorian references in neo-Victorian texts, in contrast to the "ordinary" reader (Heilmann and Llewellyn 2010: 17/18). This concurs with Jonathan Culler's suggestion that "[t]o intend a meaning is to postulate reactions of an imagined reader who has assimilated the relevant conventions" (Culler 1975: 30), the relevant conventions in the context of neo-Victorian fiction being knowledge of Victorian culture. Interestingly however, Kohlke has challenged this argument pointing out that extensive historical knowledge and other kinds of cultural capital are not necessary for the enjoyment of these texts, as she puts forth:

> The success of neo-Victorian revisitations with variation is not necessarily dependent on any clear-cut recognition of *what* exactly is being replicated or *how* it is being varied. It stems as readily from the manipulation of readers' generalised, frequently stereotyped, and ritually comforting preconceptions of the 'Victorian' and the 'Victorians'. (Kohlke 2014: 25, emphasis in original)

Though Kohlke does not explicit which kind of success she means, whether purely economic and lucrative, and/or intellectual and literary, one may contend that the pleasure of reading neo-Victorian fiction is not limited to a self-confirming critical knowingness. Indeed, Muren Zhang claims that "Kohlke proposes a different approach to the study of neo-Victorian literature: one that focuses on the needs, desires, and anxieties of the present featured in neo-Victorian literature" (Zhang 2017: 17). In other terms, neo-Victorian fiction targets mainly the affective in the reader all the while challenging the cognitive thanks to its self-reflexive dimension.

Thus, the underlying question here is: How is it that a work of art can cause us to feel an emotion? More specifically, how is it possible that we have emotional responses to fiction and fictional characters when we are conscious that these characters are in fact imaginary? Commonly known as the 'paradox of fiction', Jerrold Levinson describes this problem in his "Emotions in Response to Art" asking: "[h]ow can we coherently have emotions for fictional persons or situations, given that we do not believe in their existence?" (Levinson 2006: 38). To answer such question, David Markwell emphasizes that all fictional characters have the capacity to trigger such emotive effect in their readers. He suggests:

> There is little doubt in my mind that when we read fiction we are sometimes, perhaps often, moved by the character and the plot of the novel. This is one of the factors that make reading a novel more enjoyable (for some people) then reading a history textbook. A great piece of fiction elicits responses from us that other types of written texts may not. (Markwell 2015: 3)

The analogy Markwell establishes between fictional and historical texts recalls our comparative study of neo-Victorianism and historical fiction in the first chapter of this project. One may now point out another similarity between both subgenres which concerns mainly the relation between the reader and the character. Scott Dalton argues that since in historical fiction, the interest is mainly in characters that allude to real persons, it is the writer's role to dramatize the psychological and emotional dimensions of the character, which expand onto the reader. When history is told, it is a collection of events and facts. But when history is fictionalized, the reader can feel history, either as it happened or as the writer imagined it, and is transported into history through the fictional character. "So historical fiction is a close relative of history, but not simply a retelling of the lectures we learned to dread in high school. Moreover, we write historical fiction, and read it, not to learn about history so much as to *live* it. It is the closest we can get to *experiencing* the past without having been there" (Dalton 2006, n.d., emphasis added). It is

possible to claim that neo-Victorian fiction requires from authors further work at the level of characterisation because it is precisely the character which elicits the reader's engagement. Furthermore, while Markwell contends that all fiction – regardless of whether it is "commercial" or "great literature" (Markwell 2015: 3) – elicits pleasure in the reader, one may go as far as to argue that such sensational effect is greater in the genre of sensation, and particularly neo-Victorian sensation in the scope of our corpus, precisely because of its material dimension and its emphasis on the female character's bodily experience.

Levinson defines emotion as a bodily response which involves varying levels of cognition to a stimulus wherein the response contains a particular psychological, phenomenological, and expressive characteristic that directs one's attention (Levinson 2006: 40). Levinson's definition has resonance with Merleau-Ponty's affirmation that "[a]nger, shame, hate, and love are not psychic facts hidden at the bottom of another's consciousness: they are types of behaviors or styles of conduct which are visible from the outside. They exist *on* this face or *in* those gestures, not hidden behind them" (Merleau-Ponty 1964 : 52, emphasis in original). In fact, an emotion caused by reading a novel then will be some type of bodily response to the characters or situations in the novel. This occurs mostly in a novel which has a particular psychological or phenomenological content that guides one's attention towards the character or situations as presented in the fictional text, or perhaps as they might be echoed in one's actual experience.

In her reading of *Fingersmith*, Rosario Arias claims that Waters's interest in the sensorial displays "the growing interest in the senses in neo-Victorianism and in the contemporary cultural scene" (Arias 2015: 30). Similarly, both David Howes and Constance Classen are concerned with this current fascination with sensorial experience, including the so-called 'sensory marketing', and go on to argue that the appeal to the senses is to counterpoise "an increasing feeling of alienation from our bodies in a computerized world", and thus "the senses can be used to bypass reason and appeal directly to the emotions" (Howes and Classen 2014: 145/146). In other terms, senses are responsible for reconnecting the body with the world, and so, the self with the world, for the sensory experience gives meaning to the world/social life. Merleau-Ponty suggests:

> We shall need to reawaken our experience of the world as it appears to us in so far as we are in the world through our body, and in so far as we perceive the world with our body. But by thus remaking contact with the body and with the world, we shall also rediscover our self, since, perceiving as we do with

> our body, the body is a natural self and, as it were, the subject of perception. (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 239)

Such bodily perception of the world entails a bodily reaction to both fictional text and character binging together body, reading and writing. Sylvie Bauer suggests:

> Dans cette perspective, on peut alors considérer l'acte d'écriture et l'acte de lecture comme un corps à corps, dans un rapport réciproque de tension et de désir. La question de l'écriture, indissociable de celle de la lecture, serait alors à comprendre comme l'émergence du désir, le moment où, dit Barthes, " le texte que vous écrivez doit me donner la preuve qu'il me désire " (Barthes 13). Il ajoute, " Cette preuve existe : c'est l'écriture. L'écriture est ceci : la science des jouissances du langage, son kamasutra (de cette science il n'y a qu'un traité : l'écriture elle-même) " (Barthes 14). Dans cette perspective, la lecture peut être envisagée comme plaisir de ce qui excède le texte, touche aux sens, dans un rapport qui reste à élucider et dont les articles rassemblés ici développent un certain nombre d'aspects. (Bauer 2012: 5)[50]

Bauer's argument emphasizes the physical and even carnal association involved in the acts of reading and writing, concurring with Karin Littau's suggestion that the relation a reader has to a book is one between "two bodies: one made of paper and ink, the other flesh and blood" (Littau2006: 2). Thus, one may claim that reading neo-Victorian fiction becomes a form of voyeuristic pleasure, precisely because of its investment in bodily experience. The reader's enjoyment can be derived from watching, or in this case reading fictional accounts of (sexual) pleasure, or suffering at times.

Waters's works in general, and *Fingersmith* in particular, may be read "as the contemporary attempt and desire to demystify hidden patterns of class, gender and sexual violence in Victorian England" (Zhang 2017: 117), precisely because of their focus on marginal

[50] Sylvie Bauer argues: "From this perspective, we can then consider the act of writing and the act of reading as a body to body, in a reciprocal relationship of tension and desire. The question of writing, inseparable from that of reading, would then be understood as the emergence of desire, the moment when, says Barthes, "the text you write must give me the proof that it desires me" (Barthes 13). He adds, "This proof exists: it is the writing. Writing is this: the science of the pleasures of language, its kamasutra (of this science there is only one treatise: writing itself)" (Barthes 14). In this perspective, reading can be seen as the pleasure of what exceeds the text, touches the senses, in a relationship that remains to be elucidated and of which the articles gathered here develop a certain number of aspects" (Bauer 2012: 5; my own translation).

social groups as thieves, lesbians, and female pornographers for example. Indeed, Zhang believes that "Waters's bawdy description of queer sexuality (…) provide[s] contemporary readers with startling, 'juicy', spooky, passionate, and arguably 'shameless' accounts of alternative historiographies of nineteenth-century lesbianism" and "[involve] contemporary readers in the construction and consumption of queer subjectivity in the re-imagined nineteenth century" (Zhang 2017: 117).

Faber's text may be the most voyeuristic of the three novels under study because of its emphasis on materiality not only in terms of character-construction, but also at the level of the narrative, particularly in its address to the reader. In an early section of this thesis, I have studied the narratorial address in Faber's text which invites the reader into the text. I would like to point out now that the narrator announces the prurient aspect of the novel. As early as the first pages, the narrator reminds readers of being here, in the fictional text, to "show [them] a good time" (Faber 2002: 3). The novel plays with this kind of participatory desire by invoking a multisensory, or what Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss call a "synaesthetic" experience of the vividly re-imagined Victorian world (Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss 2011: 5). Faber's narratorial voice addresses the reader as follows:

> When I first caught your eye and you decided to come with me, you were probably thinking you would simply arrive and make yourself at home. Now that you're actually here, the air is bitterly cold, and you find yourself being led along in complete darkness, stumbling on uneven ground, recognising nothing. Looking left and right, blinking against an icy wind, you realise you have entered an unknown street of unlit houses full of unknown people. (Faber 2002: 2)

Giving the illusion of a real world, this narratorial address foregrounds the fictional world as one which may be materially perceptible by the reader through a complete sensorial experience of smell, touch and sight. By means of the expression 'you're actually here' and the subsequent description of the seemingly-factual setting, the reader is transported into this artificial world of spectacle which seems no longer artificial. Thus, the text may be read as a specially-prepared or arranged display of both a private and public nature. Though it is destined to all readers, the individual reader may have the impression to be the only addressee, thus foregrounding this intimate bond. In positioning the reader as a voyeur, the text suggests that the former is supposed to react to the text by means of their senses.

Interestingly, the neo-Victorian text's appeal to the nerves of the reader echoes some of the interpretations of the genre of Victorian sensation. For example, Pamela K. Gilbert's definition of "[t]he new genre [which] was distinctively transgressive in that it was thought to appeal directly to the "nerves", eliciting a *physical sensation* with its surprises, plot twists, and startling revelations" (Gilbert 2011: 2, emphasis added) can be applied to our reading of Faber's neo-Victorian text. Like the sensational novel, "[t]he second person narrative voice, the addressee of the sensation novel, contributes to the intensification of the feelings the plot events elicit in the reader" (Arias 2015: 15).

In a similar manner, Waters utilizes the same technique as she invites the reader's sensorial curiosity and facilitates their vicarious consumption of a theatrical space, insofar that she brings together storytelling, mystery, symbolism and intrigue, illustrated for example by Gentleman's synthesis of how the plot of fraud must be performed:

> 'The story is this.' He took out a card, and laid it, faceup, on the table. It was the King of Diamonds. 'Imagine a man,' he said, as he did it. 'An old man—a wise man, in his own way—a gentleman scholar, in fact; but with curious habits. He lives in a certain out-of-the-way sort of house, near a certain out-of-the-way kind of village, some miles from London—never mind quite where, just now. (…) He places a notice in a newspaper: he needs the services of—here he put down another card, next to the first: Jack of Spades—a smart young man, to help him mount the collection; (…) The crib in the country is a damnable place: two hundred years old, and dark, and draughty, and mortgaged to the roof— which is leaky, by the by. Not a rug or a vase or piece of plate worth forcing so much as a fart for, I'm afraid. The gent eats his supper off china, just like us.' (Waters 2002: 23)

Not only does Gentleman's narrative arouse the reader's intrigue as it utilizes references to Gothic stories, by means of the tyrant, the villain and the haunted castle, which are inherently synonymous with mystery and sensoriality, it also serves as an invitation to another world which becomes visible and perceptible by the reader, a Victorian world of detection. Arias claims that "[s]ensate and detection come necessarily together" (Arias 2015: 26) insofar as "[d]etection embraces the practices of discovering, uncovering, noticing, investigating" (Johnston 2009: 39). Engaged in the same process of Victorian sensate detection, readers of Gentleman's text thus find themselves in "a space of flows and encounters, as a sensorial

contact zone" (Hamilakis 2013: 125) between reality and fictionality, between the Victorian and contemporary worlds.

Such reading of the novel has resonance with Zhang's claim that "[w]ith a focus on the perceptible and sensory qualities of the theatre, this account presents a multisensory aesthetic experience of the theatrical space" (Zhang 2017: 123). In other terms, *Fingersmith* foregrounds what Arnold Berleant calls "the perceptual dimensions through which we experience an environment directly – what we hear, see, and feel with our bodies as we move through it" (Berleant 1997: 42). As Berleant suggests, "these sensory qualities combine with our knowledge and beliefs to create a unified experiential situation" (Berleant 1997: 42).

This study is mainly interested in studying all forms of bodily reading experiences, positive or negative. Though we may be tempted to associate reading with pleasure, both fictional text and character may also lead to un-pleasure. In fact, sensation entails both pleasure and disgust, attraction and repulsion. Thus, it is important to point out that readers cannot control what kind of world they would be confronted to. They could be invited into a pleasant spectacle or trapped inside a repulsive one. Thus, their reading experience may vary from pleasure to unpleasure, for the latter can both trigger and be triggered by a feeling of disgust. Though Faber's focus on scatological content by means of imagery of urine and excrement for example may shock the reader into repulsion, it nonetheless elicits a bodily reaction. Hence, it is possible to read Faber's text as it tests Suzanne Keen's hypothesis that readers are more ready to respond empathetically to "negative feeling states" (Keen 2007: 72). From this perspective, one may claim that explicit content may be one of the many ways devised by Faber by which neo-Victorian fiction evokes and plays with the reader's desire to empathise with characters.

Interestingly however, though both Faber's and Waters's narratorial addresses to the reader foreground affect as an expected impact, they both hint at the necessity of reflection and engagement on the part of the reader. In fact, by clearly inducing the reader's curiosity and rendering their reading of the text an exceptional journey with the promise of some remarkable discovery, "the text positions readers as the privileged voyeurs of a hermeneutic puzzle" (Zhang 2017: 57). Furthermore, keeping in mind Kohlke's theorization of sexsation in neo-Victorian fiction, one might claim that the emphasis on the representation of the materiality of the female character and the recurrent focus on bodily (neo-)Victorian otherness through the intermediary of the figures of the fallen woman, the mad woman, the prostitute, the lesbian, etc. enable readers' imaginative reconstruction of the life of the historically-excluded other as a "literary voyeuristic excursion" into the past (Kohlke 2008: 345).

Yet, such position risks the latter's identification with characters as objects, and no longer as subjects, for a voyeur detains all power. Neo-Victorian characters are objectified and fetishized in the reader's perspective, which runs counter to neo-Victorianism's political engagement in rewriting historical narratives of exclusion and subordination. Zhang goes as far as to argue that novels like Waters's "evoke, cater to, and – to a certain extent – reprimand the contemporary reader's prurient desire for more knowledge about lesbian sexuality in the Victorian underworld" (Zhang 2017: 117). Though such texts utilize female materiality as a means to explore issues of sexuality, they can be criticized for their obscenity according to Zhang. Nonetheless, keeping in mind neo-Victorian engagement, one may wonder what alternatives the neo-Victorian text offers to our interpretation of the character-reader bond, a redefinition of this relationship which may help materialize Kohlke's consideration of the success of neo-Victorian revisitations.

2.2 Ethics of Reading: Narrative Empathy

2.2.1 A Theorization of Narrative Empathy

Our reading of the body of the neo-Victorian female character as a site for re-memory serves to open up the debate of character-reader bond onto considering the political and ethical issues involved in our access to and engagement with the past. Both Kohlke and Gutleben signal some reservations about the ethical concerns since "the Victorians function as our threatening doubles and distorted freak-show/funhouse mirror images" (Kohlke and Gutleben 2012: 4). Nonetheless, Helen Davies stresses the significance of neo-Victorian literature in opening up "possibilities for understanding and empathy" (Davies 2015: 15). In fact, the reading experience is not simply sensorial, for perception is also cognitive. Jerold Levinson takes a step further in his theorization of emotion as he points out the difference between the sort of initial reaction to the text, which is mainly bodily, sensorial and thus purely affective, and another ulterior "experienced" emotion, which is more cognitive, as he posits that:

> an experienced emotion can be said to have as its core a bodily reaction—comprising physiological sensations, feelings of comfort and discomfort, and orientings [*sic*.] of attention—which reaction is often caused or modified by, and is sometimes necessarily bound up with, cognitions of various sorts and strengths, depending on the type of emotion involved. (Levinson 2006: 40).

From Levinson's perspective, an emotion towards a character in a work of fiction will have not only a bodily sensational reaction, but equally a highly cognitive characteristic due to the nature of reading which involves imagination and interpretation.

Vincent Jouve argues that defining characters in terms of their mode of construction or the role they perform in the narrative is not enough, for the character's effect in and on the text is equally essential[51]. Though the notion of the extradiegetic narratee to whom the narrative is addressed and who serves as a link between author, text and reader, is evoked by Genette from a structuralist point of view, it is perhaps not quite sufficient to account for the affect that is generated between reader and text or reader and character. In fact, Levinson's theorization of emotion offers an alternative reading of the reader-character bond which is no longer to be identified in strictly cognitive terms, but by combining both cognitive and sensorial experience.

One may concur with Lynne Pearce's claim that although the discussions of theorists such as Wolfgang Iser, Stanley Fish, Jonathan Culler and Roland Barthes have displayed "considerably more interest in the role and significance of the reader", their theories tend to privilege the cognitive aspects of reading and are largely conducted "in the context of interpretation and meaning-production" (Pearce 1997: 5). Hence, recent works on narrative empathy like Keen's tend to accentuate the link between cognition and affect involved in the reading act.

Empathy, as an expanding inter- and cross-disciplinary field of study, has been broadly studied in several academic disciplines in recent years, first in neuroscience and social psychology, and later in philosophy and literary studies. Keen's exploration of the theory of narrative empathy has proved central to the evolution of this recent research field. She lays its cornerstones in an attempt to clarify the various links between reader and text, novel-reading and self, reader-response theory and social sciences, which has proved a challenging task considering the plurality of sciences and thus perspectives involved. As Amy Coplan observes: "The number of competing conceptualizations circulating the literature has created a serious problem with the study of empathy by making it difficult to keep track of which process or mental state the term is being used to refer to in any given discussion" (Coplan 2011: 4). Thus, Keen's work on the relationship between novel reading and empathy, more importantly her concept of 'empathetic narrative' may help elucidate our exploration of the bond between reader and neo-Victorian text, or even between reader and neo-Victorian female character.

[51] The danger of such focus is the multiplicity of subjective readings and relative interpretations.

The author first defines empathy from the perspective of neuroscience as a cognitive process wherein the human brain and neurones are at play, almost as an unconscious mechanism on the part of the individual:

> It need not be a conscious response: the neonates who cry at the sound of other babies' cries are almost certainly unaware of their primitive empathy. Equipped with mirror neurons, the human brain appears to possess a system for automatically sharing feelings, what neuroscientists call a 'shared manifold for intersubjectivity'. (Keen 2007: 4)

But Keen does not stop at neuroscience and takes a step further in defining empathy insofar as she highlights the interpersonal dimension involved in the process, suggesting that empathy is "a vicarious, spontaneous sharing of affect", a process which can be "provoked by witnessing another's emotional state, by hearing about another's condition, or even by reading" (Keen 2006: 208). She later revised this definition so as to include the cognitive dimension in the act of empathy which may be read as "the sharing of feeling and perspective-taking induced by reading, viewing, hearing, or imagining narratives of another's situation and condition" (Keen 2013: para. 1).

Keen signals that even though both empathy and sympathy have played a consequential role in the evolution of Western critical theory, empathy itself is still under constant negotiation and interrogation. Thus, as a first step, she highlights the difference between empathy and sympathy positing that even though "empathy is thought to be a precursor to its semantic close relative, sympathy" (Keen 2006: 208), these two differ from each other in contemporary philosophical and psychological debates: empathy is "a spontaneous, responsive sharing of an appropriate feeling", while sympathy is a more complex and "differentiated feeling for another" (Keen 2007: 5). There is an axial difference between both feelings with regard to their immediacy and orientation: while empathy is instantaneous and self-oriented, sympathy is more elaborate and other-oriented. "[E]mpathetic reading experiences start a chain reaction leading to mature sympathy and altruistic behavior, as advocates of the empathy-altruism hypothesis believe" (Keen 2006: 214). In this sense, sympathy may be seen as one possible outcome of empathetic reading. Keen provides the following example to further illustrate the difference: "Empathy: I feel what you feel. *I feel your pain*. I feel a supportive emotion about your feelings. *I feel pity for your pain*" (Keen 2007: 209, italics in original).

J. Brooks Bouson considers the empathic reader as "a participant-observer", who, in the acts of reading and interpreting, is both subject to "the disruptive and disturbing responses" the characters and texts engender and "aware of the negotiated roles he or she is invited to play when responding to fictional texts" (Bouson 1989: 27). Interestingly, Lynne Pearce points out that Bouson's 'psycho-critical' model of reading which focuses on the affective engagement between the text and the reader serves as a useful 'corrective' to the development of reader-response theory in the twentieth century, which is marked by a "lack of interest in the affective aspects of the reading process" (Pearce 1997: 4). This argument brings us back to the sensational novel, not in regard to its provocation of the reader's senses, but to its investment in its characters' and more importantly, readers' bodily senses. Thus, the underlying question is the following: how do neo-Victorian texts trigger readers' experience of empathy with and towards fictional characters?

2.2.2 Narrative Empathy in Neo-Victorian Fiction

Narrative empathy is often seen as a process which requires one's identification with a victim's suffering, or a vicarious experiencing of corporeal or psychological pain. Thus, when victimized characters go through extremely distressing events and experiences, for example loss of family or torture, such thematic interest is likely to bias the reader towards reactions such as empathy or sympathy. Neo-Victorian female characters are often represented as members of, to quote Maria J. Lopez, "the marginal [and vulnerable] communities of immigrants, servants, and mad people" (Lopez 2012: 157). The neo-Victorian text may be seen as the ground for a key issue in empathy studies: in which ways do people empathise with or express an emotional obligation toward individuals that they would consider as marginal figures?

A reader may be inclined first to empathize spontaneously and later even to identify with Sarah's character because of East Lyme's unfair judgement of her as corrupt and fallen. In an illustration of other-oriented sympathy, Charles "had felt much more sympathy for her behavior than he had shown" and "could imagine the slow, tantalizing agonies of her life as a governess; how easily she might have fallen into the clutches of such a plausible villain as Varguennes" (Faber 1969: 75). As a reader of Sarah inside the text, Charles may also represent the external reader. In a similar manner, a reader is unconsciously pushed to sympathize with Faber's female characters because of the authorial and narratorial sympathetic depiction of numerous instances of suffering. For example, the passages which depict Agnes's rape or

Sugar's defencelessness against male intrusion on her innocent body are extremely emotive to a reader who may be considered a first-hand witness of such scenes. As the narrator deliberately stops at Sugar's young age when she was forced into prostitution, the use of the adjective "disturbing" (Faber 2002: 27) may be intentional to appeal to the reader's sympathy. Besides, the former emphasizes the adversities Caroline was forced to face in order to save her ailing child. The long and detailed passages of the different hardships, the description of the boy's degrading health situation and the focus on the helpless mother's despair combined produce a melodramatic effect.

> (…) she had no choice but to engage his help. "You must be my big brave man," she told him, (…) No proposal she would ever make in later years could be more shameful than this one. (…) But the work fell further and further behind and her drowsy boy fell forwards more and more often, so that in order to prevent him burning himself (or the material) with the pressing iron she had to pin the back of his shirt to her dress. (…) it was obvious the boy was more than merely tired: he was dying. (…) Then one night at the end of winter he began coughing and wheezing like a demented terrier pup. It was a night very like the one we are in now: bitter and mucky. (Faber 2002: 12)

The sombre and dreary tone, the gloomy atmosphere conveyed in the passage and mounting tension foreshadow the boy's eventual death. Faber's story-telling approach results in a dramatic *mise-en-scène* which not only appeals to readers' empathy, but aims to nurture a feeling of sympathy. Furthermore, the narrative focuses on other less dramatic instances of female suffering such as Emmeline's sickly body or Sophie's injured body. One might claim then that suffering in Faber's text becomes both a thematic and narrative means to elicit the reader's sympathy. The result is that James Kincaid from the *New York Times Book Review* confesses: "The astonishing thing is that we not only sympathize with Sugar's ironic journey" but we are confronted to an "inescapable sympathy. This sympathy is neither sentimental nor observed; it is seeded and nurtured. Gradually, (…) we are allowed to make our own way, to find feelings and states of being we didn't know we possessed" (Kincaid 2002: n.d.). Kincaid's review is highly significant since it capitalizes on the gradual process of growing feelings of sympathy. What makes the effet of Faber's female characters long-lasting is precisely the author's insistence not to stop at the level of instantaneous feelings, but rather to target more complex ones. Similarly, in Waters's novel, female trauma is a recurrent trope, for both Maud

and Sue go through multiple stages of traumatic experiences, be it in childhood or later in their adulthood. Maud's childhood memories in the lunatic asylum, or Sue's imprisonment in the mad house are both extremely dreadful to read because of their disturbing depiction of suffering. Reading Sue's appeal to the doctor as she cries "Only hear me out, I beg you! Only let me tell you or the terrible plot I was made to be part of", we are given the impression to be the only ones who can actually hear her voice, "high, like the yelp of a dog" (Waters 2002: 416). Read in this light, the neo-Victorian text brings together suffering as a thematic means and emotive language as a stylistic tool in order to stimulate and provoke sympathy in an engaged reader.

At the same time, the neo-Victorian novel refuses to confine the female body to this debilitating position, insofar as the text points out its female characters' untiring quests for new forms of subjectivity and highlights the female body's potential to re-inscribe new meanings and alternative definitions. If we consider the novel a genre which is responsible for creating identifiable, ordinary characters that make it possible to foster an empathetic bond between reader and the character and his/her struggles, then one may ask: what engagement is possible when the novel centres upon a pained and abused other? The stakes of such question are particularly high in the case of neo-Victorianism which is arguably a genre for marginal voices. Sarah for example overtly refuses other characters' sympathy as she claims: "I do not need kindness" (Faber 1969: 59). Thus, this refusal, though limited to the fictional text, subsequently asks the reader to rethink how narrative empathy works if the body in pain is removed as the primary vehicle for reader-character identification. In other words, how can we identify, how are we expected to empathize?

The neo-Victorian text offers a rather challenging treatment of empathy in order to redefine the relationship between the suffering (female) body and the reader. In fact, female bodies in this neo-Victorian corpus are not characterized only through pain, torture, and violation, but control and power as well. Sarah's female body in Fowles's text displays numerous manifestations of composure, confidence and self-possession. "She was staring back over her shoulder at him, as if body disapproved of face and turned its back on such shamelessness (…) Her eyes were anguished ... and anguishing; an outrage in them, a weakness abominably raped" (Fowles 1969: 59). Sarah's gaze is equated to an act of rape. As violent as an act of rape is, it nonetheless reflects agency and domination. Similarly, in Faber's text, though "Miss Sugar looks like she's been dragged through a hedge backwards" (Faber 2002: 589) following the miscarriage incident, she finds an innate force within her in order to get back on her feet and take care of Sophie. Even though the text stops at her body's suffering, it soon

emphasizes its capacity to overcome its limitations. In Waters's novel, Maud physically suffers from the consequences of escaping from Mrs Sucksby's house shoeless. Mr Hawtrey is shocked at "[her] gaudy dress and gloves— which are filthy; [her] hair—which [she] think[s] is tangled; [her] face—which must be dusty, lustreless, white. (…) [Her] feet are bleeding" (Waters 2002: 379). Yet, the text foregrounds the resilience of this same body: "I put my hand before my face, and go on faster. (…) The soles of my slippers I think are beginning to tear. *Don't mind it, Maud. If you start to mind it, you will weep.* (…) The bridge, at last!—that makes me walk quicker" (Waters 2002: 370; emphasis in original). Maud proves to be tenacious as her injured body shows solidity and endurance. In reconfiguring the relationship between the female body and suffering, the novel critiques narrative voyeurism by exposing the dangerous pitfalls of empathy grounded upon the objectification of the victim. Besides, the novels disconnect the material body from its potential to generate empathy through suffering, by enabling the reader/viewer to vicariously experience atrocity from afar and then to rethink definitions of this same body. One might claim that the neo-Victorian texts appeal to the reader because of their celebration of female power instead of pain, liberation instead of suffering, and empathy is triggered by recognition and even admiration instead of being an act of charity. Besides, sympathy is no longer a feeling of "pity for [the character's] pain" in Keen's words, but rather one of affinity because of concord and harmony.

Another means to stimulate the reader's empathy with the neo-Victorian character is the use of first-person narration which helps the "projection of oneself into another in order to better understand the other or 'the projection of one's own personality into an object, with the attribution of the object of one's own emotions'" (Hartman 1997: 19). As a narrative technique, first-person narration is often considered to facilitate the cognitive and affective engagement between the narrator and the reader and the character and the reader. In my analysis of the characterial voice of the female protagonist in section one of chapter four, I have not only signalled the narratorial position female protagonists take on in the texts, but also highlighted the female voice's capacity of ambivalence and multiplicity, both by means of spoken voice and interior monologue. One may take a step further in signalling this same voice's potential to appeal to the reader through directness, straightforwardness and honesty[52]. Empathy tends to happen when information about characters' situation and internal states is available. In fact, characters' stories allow access to their situation and mental states, emotions, thoughts, beliefs, intentions, goals, and values. This access is independent of whether the account is actual or

[52] though honesty can be questioned since first-person narration also gives the speaker absolute power to select, propose and orient content

hypothetical, explicit or implicit, given through internal or external focalisation by the characters themselves or via the sympathetic authorial narrator's perspective as illustrated in the same section. For example, Sarah's long plea in which she voices her torment about her situation as governess is memorable because it conveys authenticity. As readers, we get the impression that she is completely stripped naked as she discloses her deepest agonies and sorrowfully confesses "It came to seem to me as if I were allowed to live in paradise, but forbidden to enjoy it" (Fowles 1969: 72). Similarly, as Sugar reminisces on her past of prostitution "Thirteen, she thinks. I was thirteen" (Faber 2002: 214), her stream of consciousness reveals not only her inability to forgive her mother, but pushes the reader to both indict the mother and vindicate the girl. As Waters's narrative nears its ending, Sue's inner monologue following her visit to Mrs Sucksby in prison is doubly revealing. It pushes the reader not only to empathize with Sue since she has been tricked by most of the characters around her and is still oblivious to Mrs Sucksby's true nature, but also to sympathize with her for being a girl who is about to lose the only mother-figure she has ever had.

> I thought of Mrs Sucksby, in her bright cell. I thought of her, in all the ways I had seen her, not there, but here, in her own kitchen: dosing babies, sipping tea, lifting up her face so I might kiss it. I thought of her carving meat, wiping her mouth, and yawning… The clock ticked on—quicker, and louder, it seemed to me, than it had ever ticked before. I put my head upon the table, upon my arms. How tired I was! I closed my eyes. I could not help it. I meant to keep awake; but I closed my eyes, and slept. (Waters 2002: 525)

At this stage of the narrative, unlike Sue, the reader is aware of the gap between Mrs Sucksby's reality and Sue's naïve thoughts about her. This instance of stream of consciousness incorporates a recollection of incoherent ideas and sensory impressions as it captures the natural flow of Sue's retrospection of Mrs Sucksby's familiar past actions. Reading this authentic chain of thought, a reader is unconsciously invited to project themselves in order to understand Sue's suffering.

Access to a character's interiority is one that may be deemed necessary for the reader's experiencing of empathy and sympathy. Yet, the deployment of first-person narration and other narrative techniques that seem to foster an empathetic engagement between the reader and the textual other highlights the problematic relationship between empathy and sympathy on the one hand, and judgment and reasoning on the other, for such relation can be misleading and

deceptive. In fact, the novel implicitly asks readers to focus on where, and under what circumstances, characters' interior stories emerge. These internal narratives, which are inherently equated with psychological disturbances and imbalances, usually occur during periods of extreme bodily or ideological violence, and so incentively encourage the reader to witness first-hand and consequently empathize with the character's pain. It is not surprising then that Faber's focus on interior monologue is considered as one of the strengths of the novel by the *New York Times Book Review*. The novel is described as "[c]aptivating (…) astonishing (…) We find ourselves inside the heroine's head, led there by a rhetoric so skilled and daring that we hardly know it's operating" (Kincaid 2002: n.d.). As complimentary as such review may sound, it nonetheless points out the reader's unconscious reaction to the text. In fact, an extradiegetic narrator may push readers to think in a certain way. This may be best illustrated through Fowles's narratorial intervention as he asks the reader for example to think upon the epistemological dimension of fiction, the role of the author and the relationship between author and reader:

> Fiction usually pretends to conform to the reality: the writer puts the conflicting wants in the ring and then describes the fight—but in fact fixes the fight, letting that want he himself favors win. And we judge writers of fiction both by the skill they show in fixing the fights (in other words, in persuading us that they were not fixed) and by the kind of fighter they fix in favor of: the good one, the tragic one, the evil one, the funny one, and so on. But the chief argument for fight-fixing is to show one's readers what one thinks of the world around one—whether one is a pessimist, an optimist, what you will. (Faber 1969: 173)

Such narratorial/ authorial address is suggestive of the fact that the reader is guided and even controlled like a pawn by a more experienced and more lucid narrator/ author whose skill is to 'show' the reader what needs to be shown. The absence of an active mode attributed to the reader emphasizes this lack of agency on their part, a submission contrasted with narratorial/ authorial direction. In other terms, empathy, one may posit, is no longer an instinctively-felt emotion, it is somewhat provoked and initiated by a skilled operator.

Besides, Keen insists that "caution should be taken not to oversimplify predictions about the effects of particular narrative techniques" (Keen 2013: para. 8). As she convincingly argues, "the commentary on narrative form often asserts (or assumes) that a specific technique

inevitably results in particular effects (…) in readers. These views (…) should be subjected to careful empirical testing before any aspect of narrative technique earns the label of "empathetic"" (Keen 2006: 225).

2.3 Towards a Less Sentimental Empathy

The essential risk with the concept of empathy is that its definition can easily be reduced to an intimate identification between reader and character which is centred on sentimentality. In its place, one may claim that neo-Victorian fiction reveals a new critical apparatus, essential for a mobilization of empathy centred on reason, understanding and often, a critical distance between reader and character, especially the victimized objectified one. By putting to the fore alternative potentials for the female character, other than a position of suffering and subservience, the neo-Victorian text pushes the reader to think back on the Victorian past, think critically about the female journey and think forward to another possible future.

Interestingly, as character development becomes materially inflected, readers tend to bring personal images and subjective representations to bear on the characters fleshed out in narratives, establishing links with personal memories of actual people or other literary characters. Hence, character becomes an "*image-personnage*" to borrow Vincent Jouve's term (Jouve 1998: 40). While Formalists warn that characters cannot have autonomous lives of their own and that comparing them to persons is a naïve illusion, Jouve contends that the success of characterisation depends on both author and reader. In fact, he highlights the role of the reader in giving meaning to characters. It is the reader who adds value to the fictional creation which would remain theoretical, immaterial if not actualized through reading. Such statement finds echoes in Wolfgang Iser's theory. His rhetoric emphasizes the creative role of the reader, suggesting that "a text can only come to life when it is read, and if it is to be examined, it must therefore be studied through the eyes of the reader" (Iser 1971: 4). It follows that reading involves a hermeneutic process insofar as "meanings in literary texts are mainly generated in the act of reading; they are the product of a rather difficult interaction between text and reader and not qualities hidden in the text" (Iser 1971: 5).

Merleau-Ponty's aesthetic theory is one of expression and intersubjectivity insofar as a work of art is not simply a representation, but rather an expression, both on the part of the artist and the viewer. In fact, the artist creates a painting that will always reference the creator as one living perspective on the world alongside the viewer's. When we view a painting, we are not just seeing the colours, shapes, shade and lines on the canvas, but are being invited into how

the artist who commands these tools views the world from a perspective different from our own. Though Merleau-Ponty makes this supposition first in his writings on painting and the visual arts, one may contend that this is true of all forms of art, and particularly fiction in our study, insofar as all art can be expressive in this manner. Thus, Merleau-Ponty's concept of expression connects his aesthetic and ontological writings and ultimately, in my opinion, gestures towards an ethical framework in his thought, a framework which is somaesthetic *par excellence*.

The neo-Victorian novel is an explicitly material text which brings to light the female body and its sensorial experience. One may claim that through its focus on the material representation of the female character, the neo-Victorian text helps the reader produce not merely "*une image mentale*", but more importantly "*une image visuelle, une image optique*"[53]. Since it gives concrete details about the character, such image facilitates the reader's identification with the fictional character. In contrast, the mental image is, according to Jouve, "dépourvue de présence matérielle [et] évidemment beaucoup moins déterminée que l'image visuelle. A la lecture d'un roman, notre représentation de telle ou telle figure demeure nécessairement très générale et approximative"[54] (Jouve 1998: 40). Intellectually involved in the process of reading and creating, the reader can eventually see the character which is no longer fictional, but embodied. In fact, sensorial and bodily experience leads to proximity, tangibility, materiality, not only in the fictional text, one may argue, but an immediacy which expands onto the real world, the world of the reader, making the neo-Victorian character all the more interesting despite the distance between Victorian/ neo-Victorian fiction, Victorian/ neo-Victorian reader. Furthermore, for some readers, this image is even transformed into an affective image, for the reader connects with the character. Jouve's theorization is inspired by Iser's notion of "*le lecteur implicite*" (Jouve 1992: 108). This concept "situe le récepteur par rapport au texte, signale la part prise par le lecteur dans l'acte de production de l'œuvre, dans la mesure où précisément l'horizon de sens est obtenu par un travail de création qui consiste à transformer la structure textuelle grâce à un processus imaginatif qui se déclenche chez le lecteur"[55] (Gilli 1983 : para. 5). It is the role of the reader to take in the different textual perspectives of narration, characters, and points of view, and to create meaning.

[53] Jouve theorizes the notion of "a visual optical image" (Jouve 1998: 40, my own translation).

[54] According to Jouve, a mental image "lacks a material presence [and] is evidently much less specific than a visual image. When one reads a novel, our representation of this or that character remains necessarily very general and approximate" (Jouve 1998: 40, my own translation).

[55] The concept "situates the receiver in relation to the text, indicates the part taken by the reader in the act of producing the work, insofar as meaning is precisely the result of a work of creation which consists in transforming the textual structure through an imaginative process that is triggered in the reader" (Gilli 1983: para. 5, my own translation).

Jouve defines "*effet personnage*" as the set of relations between the reader and the actants of the narrative in order to illustrate how this process of relationality occurs on three distinct levels which he calls "*perception*", "*réception*", and "*implication*". Perception focuses on how character is the result of a process of cooperation between text and reader, in order to identify its extra-textual dimension by relying on the mental image. In other terms, it revolves around how a particular character recalls other characters from outside the text within the framework of intertextuality. This seems to be at the heart of the neo-Victorian character which is, as it has become clear by now, indistinguishably associated with its Victorian predecessor. While perception stops at the level of the mental image, reception foregrounds how the reader consciously and/or unconsciously receives the characters. This reception takes place either with critical distance from, an affective attachment to, or an impulsive engagement with the character. The last two interfaces of relationality signal the sensual dimension in the relationship between reader and character. Jouve goes on to argue that readers in these instances believe themselves to be active participants in the text, and even share some of the characters' experiences, thus shedding light on the reader's – (active) involvement in the construction of the (fictional) world and more specifically the (fictional) character. "[L]e *lisant*" considère le personnage "comme une personne évoluant dans un monde dont lui-même participe le temps de la lecture ; et le *lu* comme un prétexte lui permettant de vivre par procuration un certain nombre de situations fantasmatiques"[56] (Jouve 1992: 110, emphasis in original). The sensorial experience created by the neo-Victorian text makes protagonists more material, more visceral, and thus more relatable to the contemporary reader who is immersed in the fictional/ material world. Finally, the concrete implications of such involvement are what Jouve simply calls the *effet-personnage*. Whether the reader is persuaded, seduced, and/or tempted depends on the text, character and reader, an utterly subjective process. Whether it is positive or negative process is also a question of debate and this is where the risk of such engaged reading process lies. My contention here is that readers' emotional response to characters and situations of fiction is triggered by the fact that these characters provide an existent expression of a different lived perspective. One may also suggest that the logical presupposition of ontological existence is too great a burden to place on the object of an emotion, since emotions are not necessarily a rational response to stimuli. Much of our lived experience happens outside the realm of rationality and as Merleau-Ponty says, "[a]ll life is undeniably ambiguous, and there is never

[56] According to Jouve, the devoted reader considers the fictional character as "a person evolving in a world in which they themselves participate during the time of reading; zealous reading is "a pretext allowing them to live by proxy a certain number of fantasies" (Jouve 1992: 10, my own translation).

any way to know the true meaning of what we do. Indeed, perhaps our actions have no single true meaning" (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 34). An emotional response to a character or situation in a novel should be considered a real emotion because readers respond to an expression of another lived perspective on/ in the intersubjective world, that of the author's. In other terms, readers no longer react to abstract creations, but rather to actual human beings' expressions.

What comes out of this exploration of the affective/ cognitive intersubjective connection between reader and text, and reader and character is the conclusion that the neo-Victorian female character is not to be regarded as merely a textual and semantic construct, but a material embodied being which elicits first a bodily reaction, a sensation in the reader and a cognitive/visual image. Indeed, in focusing on the text-reader relationship in neo-Victorian literature, the role of empathy stands out as one important constituent of that engagement.

This study supports the idea that narrative empathy is a highly flexible and context-dependent phenomenon. Nonetheless, the theory of narrative empathy would benefit from a more nuanced, tentative approach to the question of textual effects on readers. Accordingly, more contextual sensitivity is needed in narrative empathy research, given the complex interaction between textual and reader factors. In fact, what was ignored in the exploration of characters' capacity to trigger empathy in readers are the factors related to these particular readers. In other terms, besides textual factors centred around the construction of characters in suffering and pain, as well as the recourse to first-person narration and internal monologue, one may wonder what extra-textual factors enter into play to initiate the process of empathy.

In fact, even though some claims in literature-orientated reader-response theory are only concerned with the role of textual factors in determining certain reader responses, it seems crucial to broaden the scope to include non-textual reader factors. Despite the absence of empirical research on neo-Victorian reader reception, the self-reflexive position underpinning this study establishes that the contemporary reader's reactions to the text are the result of the dynamic interaction between textual information and the reader's prior knowledge of Victorian literature and experiences, be it similar to or different from the characters'. In neo-Victorian fiction, one may argue, neither the textual nor the reader dimension works in isolation, for both are equally relevant to character engagement in general and experiences of empathy in particular. One might even suggest that a psycho-critical study, though outside the scope of this project, would probably further nuance the impact of the aforementioned textual elements by including some reader-factors which in some contexts, can override the empathy potential of textual devices. Thus, extra-textual reader factors alone might account for differences in reader responses, "[a]s empirical research in discourse processing reveals, individual readers respond

variously to narrative texts, depending on their identities, situations, experiences, and temperaments" (Keen 2013: para. 7).

Furthermore, the idea that reading develops our ability to shift perspectives, and that it helps our understanding of unknown others, is often heard in academia as well as beyond. For example, Martha Nussbaum believes that the empathy induced by reading literature can have an influence on a person's moral development and even prompt altruistic behaviour in the real world, a contention she shares with many other philosophers and with (developmental) psychologists (cited in Keen 2014: 21). Yet, as posited by Nussbaum, literature creates an understanding of the Other as it simultaneously creates an Other, or the Other's Other, towards whom less favourable feelings may be directed, a paradox which complicates the supposed ethical effects of literature. Anna Lindhé aptly poses the question: "can we credibly argue that reading literature produces ethical effects if empathetic responses to one character occur at the expense of another character in the story world?" (Lindhé 2016: 20). The presumed empathy that the reader feels towards a literary character may initiate or even depend on the same reader's antipathy or indifference towards another character in the story. "The fact that empathy in literature may be intimately bound up with its opposite, that empathy may presuppose and/or trigger negative feelings towards other literary figures, raises important reservations about the ethical consequences of literature" (Lindhé 2016: 20). Interestingly, although Keen stresses empathy's essential role in reading, she questions "the contemporary truism that novel reading cultivates empathy that produces good citizens for the world" (Keen 2007: xv). According to Keen, there is very little empirical evidence that suggests a clear causal relationship between novel-reading and altruism. She shows that readers empathize in unforeseen ways and that altruistic behaviour after reading is quite unusual. In the light of Keen's theorization, the role of empathy in prosocial behaviour and altruism may be greatly debated.

The neo-Victorian narrative utilises a sensory, materialist discourse which puts to the fore the female character and goes beyond the limitations of a fictional character as a being of paper. By shedding light on an individual subjective realism, aided by theoretical advances of materialisation, phenomenology and sensoriality, neo-Victorianism establishes its own particular ethos of realism and rests upon new conventions of characterisation. In fact, it turns out that reality for the neo-Victorian character is ever-changing, progressive and infinite. While the outside world in realism existed objectively, independently of the ways we think about it or describe it, the neo-Victorian world is the product of thoughts, claims, doubts and choices. Meaning is constantly interpreted, dismissed and re-established, hence characters' incessant interior questionings. Consequently, in her quest for her subjective self, authenticity and

wholeness, the neo-Victorian female character is dynamic and ever-fluctuating rather than fixed, multiple and fragmented rather than whole, and the quest is from the outside/inside and vice-versa rather than external. One may posit then, that neo-Victorian fiction offers a contemporary form of neo-realism[57]. I use the term neo-realism here, with the addition of the hyphen, to discuss the resurrection of nineteenth-century-realism. It re-emerges in a new form which no longer stops at giving a faithful representation of the world but focuses rather on the world *of* and *around* the character, its interior like its exterior.

Before exploring my contention of the resurrection of neo-realism, I would like to start first by enumerating numerous common grounds between Italian *Neorealismo* and neo-Victorianism which legitimize such analogy. First, both emphasize the experiences of marginal groups: while Italian neorealism focused on the poor to alert to the dangerous outcomes of the War, neo-Victorianism celebrates marginal groups such as prostitutes, lesbians, thieves, mad women. Besides, both focus on a realistic depiction of how particular events led to contemporary findings. While Italian Neorealismo unveils the results of the repression caused by the Fascist regime, the neo-Victorian character exposes the impact of Victorian patriarchal repression. Like Italian neorealist writers who felt the compulsion to communicate life as it was then or as it had been, the neo-Victorians are engaged in the same political agenda of portraying how contemporary life both resembles and differs from the Victorians'. Besides, neorealism flourished in the film industry which targets mainly a documentary-like objectivity, actors either were or looked like ordinary people involved in commonplace situations. Similarly, the neo-Victorian characters are represented like ordinary people in common situations. The investment in materialist studies with focus on the female character's sensorial and phenomenological experience of space is meant to reflect a sort of material image, usually more easily perceptible in film than in text. Thus, one might claim that neo-Victorianism takes of both worlds to produce a human-like character which portrays reality. Furthermore, like the trend of Italian films which turned from realism toward fantasy, symbolism, and literary themes after 1950, we can also observe neo-Victorianism's reliance on the exterior to explore the interior. In other words, the narrative does not simply critique the social perils of the outside world, but rather focuses on the outcomes of such phenomena on human, notably female, psyche. All three novels by Fowles, Waters and Faber portray how patriarchal attitudes towards

[57] For the sake of clarity, it is essential that I highlight the fact that Neorealism, Italian *Neorealismo*, as an Italian literary and cinematic movement, flourishing especially after World War II, sought to deal realistically with the events leading up to the War and with the social problems that were engendered during the period and afterwards, especially due to the Fascist regime.

female sexuality, lesbianism, prostitution and individuality have undeniable consequences on woman's subjectivity.

As in every art form, audience reception is highly important, much more so in contemporary forms of materialist discourse like in neo-Victorian fiction, especially with the growing interest in reader-response theories over the past decades. The neo-Victorian character pushes the contemporary reader to react to and interact with it, whether by appreciation or depreciation. Sensorial representations stress the importance of not only the material experience for the character, but equally for the reader, hence the sensational aspect of neo-Victorian fiction. Rita Felski turns to the question of identification and draws out its diverse strands, as well as its persistence in academic criticism. She confirms that "characters do share qualities with people, while interactions with others often draw on insights gleaned from novels or films. We translate between fiction and life without blinking" (Felski 2020: 85). In other words, not finding oneself in a relation of emulation, rejection or comprehension with the fictional character becomes rather impossible. Felski notes that "fictional characters *are* real; they have effects in the world; they inspire emulation and adaptation, irritation and dislike; their existence makes a difference" (Felski 2002: 85, emphasis in original).

Accordingly, reader-response theory sheds equal light on another aspect which links the neo-Victorian character to realism, that of familiarity. In fact, the neo-Victorian female character is recognizable. In contrast with her Victorian predecessor that may seem, for one of many reasons like temporal or spatial distance and/or a drastic difference in the socio-economic setting, a bit distant from the contemporary reader, the neo-Victorian character is more of *our* world, which ensures proximity with the reader and facilitates reader-response. Thus, the notion of narrative empathy as the sharing of feeling and perspective-taking induced by reading, viewing, hearing, or imagining narratives of another's situation and condition, comes into play in our discussion of the neo-Victorian female character. Narrative empathy plays a role in the aesthetics of production when authors experience it, in mental simulation during reading, in the aesthetics of reception when readers experience it, and in the narrative poetics of texts when formal strategies invite it. Narrative empathy should not be exclusively equated with character identification. In fact, character identification can lead to empathy, just like spontaneous empathy can occur before identification. As readers of literature's complex social games, Blakey Vermuele contends that we ascribe both empathy and identification to the "theory of mind" school, according to which we imagine other people's "states of mind by referring to our built-in sense of human psychology" (Vermeule 2010: 35). We also use "simulation theory" which holds that we create the mental states of others by imagining ourselves in their place or

taking on their perspective (Vermeule 2010: 39). As traditional moral literary criticism might have put it, we read and animate literary characters by employing a combination of sympathy and empathy.

In studies of literary realism, critics analysing reader response consider the role of free indirect discourse and the use of narrative voice in general to foster an emotional response in characters. The overlap between nineteenth-century realism and what I consider neo-realism is not surprising given that both are concerned with the representation of fictional characters as real people, even though they approach the issue from different directions. Indeed, Vermeule claims that Jane Austen uses free indirect discourse "to weave a tapestry of biases and then to show us how and under what conditions such biases can be unmasked" like in the tradition of nineteenth-century Victorian fiction (Vermeule 2010: 163). In contrast, the work of Howard Sklar is relevant to this project as the use of a nonstandard first-person narrative voice in the novels I studied is crucial to the reader's response to the character/ narrator. Sklar suggests that a first-person narrative effects greater closeness between reader and protagonist and argues that focalisation, free indirect discourse and homodiegetic narration close the distance between reader and character (Sklar 2013: 48/49). If the fictional world is represented from the point of view of a particular character, readers are more likely to adopt the same perspective. Thus, the use of the I in neo-Victorian fiction further consolidates the link between realism as a nineteenth-century movement which relies heavily on third-person omniscient narrator to expose the inner workings of character and reader-response as a contemporary theory which investigates the different ways to create this relation of sympathy and empathy.

Works of Phelan, Sklar and Gavins[58], as different as their approaches to narrativity may be, among many reader-response studies demonstrate that readers' response to fiction is a key aspect of literary realism. It is because we apply our knowledge and experience of people in the actual world to our interpretation of characters and endow those characters with the qualities of sentient beings that we respond emotionally to fictional narratives. Keeping in mind the postmodernist dimension of the neo-Victorian character, this allows me to conclude that the female protagonist transcends all the narratological boundaries of realism, modernism and postmodernism and extends its meaning onto the reader for she ceases to be a narrative element in a story, but becomes an actant, both Victorian and contemporary, fictional and real, fictive

[58] Joanna Gavins studies whether a third-person narrative can create just as close a bond as a first-person and contends that empirical evidence shows that readers are just as able and likely to identify with the protagonist of a third-person focalised narrative. Joanna Gavins, *Text World Theory: An Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p.64.

and material. Thus, the neo-Victorian female character helps establish a new poetics of fictional characterisation at the crossroads of realist and postmodernist aesthetics.

Conclusion

This study began with the examination of character as a narrative and narratological construct in the fictional text and concluded with the sensorial and affective relation between the neo-Victorian female character and its contemporary reader. Its objective was to investigate the different processes of female characterisation in the neo-Victorian text which render the female character more material, more visceral, more tangible, and thus result in a bodily relation with the reader. My project was three-fold. First, the interest was centred on the representation of the fictional character at the crossroads of sensation fiction and gender studies from a narratological perspective because of multiple similarities with the genre of Victorian sensation. The objective was to draw various parallels between the neo-Victorian protagonist on the one hand, the sensational Victorian heroine and the figure of the New Woman on the other hand in order to show that the neo-Victorian novel and the neo-Victorian female character should not be seen as mere contemporary replicas of nineteenth-century characters, but rather as attempts to reconsider the enduring impact of Victorian literature and socio-historical and political distinctions on 20th- and 21st-centuries representations. Then, because of neo-Victorian fiction's desire to re-write the historical narrative of the Victorian period by representing marginalised voices and new histories of sexuality, this study addressed the political re-orientations of the neo-Victorian character and the importance of female voice and authorship as well as feminist heritage. The novels under study celebrate marginal voices and allow them diversity and plurality. This multifariousness is meant not only for the characters to construct alternative identities which break with patriarchal stereotypes, but also to highlight their creative literary capacity. Third, I focused on the material representation of the female character and body. Marie-Luise Kohlke's concept of sexsation reveals neo-Victorian fiction's interest in the construction of women's (sexual) identities. Reconciling sexual political commitment and literary creativity, the female protagonists of these novels recall the figure of the New Woman. Furthermore, through a phenomenological and somaesthetic approach, this study also examined the subsequent effect of female materiality on the contemporary reader.

The first step of this project has been to evaluate the purpose for which contemporary authors recover Victorian literature and culture. Through a comparative reading of the three neo-Victorian novels and a number of key Victorian works such as those by Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Wilkie Collins, Charles Dickens and Mrs Henry Wood, I have concluded that neo-Victorians are essentially engaged in a project of revision as they revisit the Victorians. It is not simply a nostalgic tendency to recuperate a long-gone past often equated with glory and grandeur, but rather a thorough exploration of the links still inextricably binding the two epochs, especially in regard to the position of woman. When I began this study, I wondered to what

extent such revision entailed imitation in the context of intertextuality. Through the different parallels I have established between the neo-Victorian protagonist on the one hand, the Victorian sensation heroine and the New Woman figure on the other hand, I have concluded that neo-Victorians' first step in re-reading the Victorians is imitation indeed. Yet, their skill lies in avoiding to fall in the traps of repetition, reiteration, and ultimately duplication. In fact, the neo-Victorian novel and neo-Victorian female character are not to be thought of as simple contemporary replicas, but rather attempts to reconsider the enduring impacts of the Victorian literature and socio-historical and political distinctions on twentieth- and twenty-first centuries representations. Neo-Victorianism brings a fresh contemporary perspective it to Victorian fiction.

Neo-Victorian fiction, as a politically engaged subgenre, celebrates marginal female characters. At the centre of this neo-Victorian corpus are fallen women, mad women, prostitutes, thieves and lesbians. They are contemporary variations of Victorian sensational heroines and resurrections of New Woman characteristics. Thus, neo-sensation bridges the gap not only between the Victorian and contemporary ages, but also between Victorian and contemporary female characters, through its narrative structure as well as its socio-historical and political contexts. Indeed, the neo-Victorian novels I studied imitate sensation by reproducing the Victorian setting, adapt its narrative mode as they look afresh at the Victorian age from a contemporary perspective, integrate multiple modernist and postmodernist techniques at the level of the narrative, and even revise the Victorian sensational discourse as they innovate at the level of the female character which becomes politically engaged in the acts of re-reading and re-writing.

This innovation also takes place at the level of the character which is no longer purely realist from a nineteenth-century perspective, but rather a combination of nineteenth- and twenty-first-century aesthetics. The use of a female first-person-narrative voice stands out as the narrative strategy which posits the framework for a debate around female agentivity in the narrative. Indeed, the neo-Victorian novelists opt for female-narrated narratives which foreground the notion of narratorial voice in relation to female identity. In fact, both Faber's and Waters' texts expose the genderization process which takes place since childhood in order to dictate what and how female should be, and dramatize the protagonists' struggle to break free from the shackles of such gendered mould. Both Sugar and Maud rebel against the narrow frames in which patriarchy limited them. Both prostitution and pornography turn out to be two ideology apparatuses which define women. Yet, by capitalizing on the possibility of liberation

for Sugar and revision for Maud, neo-Victorianism celebrates woman's capacity to deconstruct gendered identities and proclaims multiplicity and plurality.

Furthermore, as the female character experiences geography in a different light transforming places into social spaces that both impact and are impacted by the self, the neo-Victorian character renegotiates her spatialised gendered roles and reconsiders alternative possibilities for social mobility. The Victorian private/public dichotomy no longer holds, for the heroine transgresses all boundaries and redefines her social role as she creates liminal spaces. Sarah's freedom is illustrated through her association with open spaces. In contrast, the hotel room is completely changed insofar as it becomes emblematic of the eruption of female passion and desire. Sugar, Maud and Sue manage to transform both private and public Victorian spaces which are typically associated with female imprisonment like the household or the lunatic asylum into loci of liberation. The library as a typically male place symbolizes Maud's literary creativity. Through the lens of feminist geography, I have concluded that Fowles, Faber and Waters respond to the call that space affects how gender is experienced, constructed and interpreted insofar as woman's consciousness of her role, identity and meaning are geographically and spatially embodied.

Though neo-Victorian characters are successors of numerous fictional foremothers, they manage to deviate from typological representations. Faber revises the figure of the prostitute which is no longer seen as a display of discrepancy and aberrance, but rendered more human by exposing the duality of choice/ obligation. In fact, prostitution is not regarded from a moral, but rather from a socio-historical perspective as a phenomenon which impacts identity formation. Faber even proposes an alternative trajectory for his protagonist: instead of a fall, he opts for ascension. The angel in the house is no longer an idealised model of Victorian perfection for Faber exposes the psychological turmoil woman continually faces when she is forced to this gender role. Though Agnes often becomes a victim of her own quest for excellence, she resists this mould and rebels against masculine representants of patriarchy. Furthermore, while the position of female villain is usually an indictment by men, Sarah deliberately marks herself as such by adopting moral looseness, thus triumphantly displaying both the power of choice and the capacity for (self-)creation. Interestingly, by means of role-playing, her character vacillates between villainy and goodness. Sarah's character is innovative insofar as she is initially more of an angel than a villain but who opts for performing the demonic instead of assuming the angelic in order to achieve her ultimate object of freedom.

Another form of deviating from Victorian moulds is revising heteropatriarchal notions of female antagonism. Both Faber and Waters insist on amending traditional perceptions of

female feuds by putting to the fore solidarity and complicity in the achievement of one's self. Both authors use different approaches to female relationships. While Faber opts for sisterhood in his reconception of Sugar's and Agnes's relationship, Waters chooses romantic love as a means for self- and mutual exploration. Furthermore, both Fowles and Faber propose an alternative reading of motherhood and its potential in self-achievement, in their focus on communion and wholeness through the intermediary of Sarah and her daughter Lalage and Sugar and her surrogate-daughter Sophie. In brief, the metaphor of matrilineal heritage has allowed me to study both the relation between the neo-Victorian character and its Victorian foremothers, but also the relation between the female characters in the neo-Victorian text. I have concluded that the neo-Victorian novel utilises complex genealogies and their impact on individual identity, focusing notably on the matrilineal heritage, in order to dramatize the long and challenging quest for a female voice.

Indeed, the neo-Victorian novel celebrates its female protagonist's voice, be it narratorial and/ or authorial, despite being a liminal character on the margins of society (and often literature). Sarah as an artistic muse, Sugar as an author of novels, Agnes as a writer of existential literature and erotica in Maud's case, the neo-Victorian protagonist closely resembles the New Woman icon who embodied literary and artistic engagement of the *fin-de-siècle*. By means of fiction within fiction, neo-Victorianism not only revives New Woman fiction, but also resurrects female *Bildungsroman* and *Künstlerroman*, as it tracks its female protagonists' journey of self-achievement and maturity and their artistic development simultaneously.

One could claim that the motivations behind the resurrection of Victorianism is an exhausted query which has been sufficiently debated and has run its course in neo-Victorian studies. Nonetheless, when taken in its conjunction with the characterisation of the female character, this question surpasses the association of neo-Victorianism with an imitation of Victorian sensation. In fact, despite the increasing interest in neo-Victorian studies over the recent decades, there is a substantial gap regarding the characterisation of the female protagonist especially with focus on its heritage. Though critics and scholars often stop at early-Victorian predecessors particularly from Victorian sensation, one of the aims of this study has been to weave more concrete links with the New Woman figure of the *fin-de-siècle*. In his characterisation of Sarah, Fowles draws a portrait of a woman who breaks all temporal constraints insofar as she surpasses the Victorian times and becomes representative of a new modern age through values of freedom, liberation, and independence. Her eventual association with the Pre-Raphaelite movement puts to the fore her artistic capacity aligning her with

nineteenth-century New Women. This same tendency can be equally seen in Faber's text through both his female protagonists Sugar and Agnes. While Sugar is a novelist in her own right who amazes with her intellect, Agnes is associated with artistic creation, diary-writing and philosophical and metaphysical productions. In Waters's novel, Maud is the embodiment of the New Woman figure who conciliates sexual political engagement and literary creativity insofar as she emerges as a lesbian writer of pornography.

This work's aim has also been to explore the neo-Victorian authors' equivocal relationship with feminism especially in the light of the evolution of the field thanks to the development of theories such as gender studies, materialist studies, corporeality and phenomenology. Even though the Victorians did ponder issues related to gender inequality and women's specific exploration of identity and subjectivity by means of their fictional representations of their reality, the neo-Victorians provide an alternative vantage point. In fact, the neo-Victorian novel builds on the early waves of feminism in their various definitions of femaleness and femininity, but goes a step further in unveiling the multiple facets of womanhood thanks to a highly explicit discourse of sexsation and materialisation. Its blunt articulation of female materiality is meant to speak the body, to give it (back) its significance and to expose its potential in foregrounding a subjective identity. While early-Victorian ethics and moral values circumscribed men and women of letters' ability to speak explicitly of the female body and questions of sexuality pushing them either to absent female materiality from narrative or to devise new ways to camouflage and hide the body in the text, the neo-Victorians exhibit more freedom to emphasize this sexuality.

The present thesis has permitted to shed light on the difference between Fowles on the one hand, and Faber and Waters on the other, in their exploration of female sexuality and sexual identity. In fact, Fowles's text published in 1969 preceded the material turn, which may be one of the factors explaining a sort of reticence in materializing the female body. Both Faber and Waters on the other hand seem to have taken advantage of the boom of materialist studies in order to conceive of extremely explicit and highly sexualized texts. Their protagonists' sexuality is put to the fore so as to explore different potentials of womanhood. Like the New Woman novel which was shockingly explicit about female sexuality as a reaction to early-Victorian fiction which either absented completely, camouflaged wisely or disembodied utterly the female body, the neo-Victorian novel celebrates this openness by putting the body at the heart of the narrative. In its discussion of the significance of the female body on female subjectivity, neo-Victorian authors resort to (over-)sexsation, both praised and condemned. First, they liberate the body from Victorian standards of heteronormativity by re-exploring its

representation and highlighting its materiality in the narrative. Then, they endow it with new meanings of harmony and wholeness bringing together body and mind, thus going counter prejudiced stereotypical representations of male embodiment and female disembodiment. Furthermore, they invest in the body's sexual aspect in order to discuss its significance on female subjectivity. The body becomes a site of control and a space to find new meanings: Sarah's desiring body illustrates her sexual agency, Sugar's prostitute body uncovers alternative possibilities as that of a sister's and/or mother's, while Sue's and Maud's bodies allow them to discover their lesbian identities.

What I would like to do now is stop at the contributions which neo-Victorian fiction and particularly the novels I studied, bring to contemporary literature by offering a new reading of its feminist poetics. The three novels give rise to the figure of the New Woman of the *fin-de-siècle* which was manifestly a source of confusion and mystery to her peers as well as her readers in a new and more material form, giving her the advantage of a twenty-first-century fresh contemporary perspective and a hindsight on the Victorian era and the evolution of feminism. Rita Kranidis notes:

> (…) for the feminists, this new type of heroines is more a literary and political attempt than an actualized, accomplished fact or an established type. The New Woman one encounters in feminist novels remains an unknown in many ways, because she has not yet materialized socially. For the feminists, then the New Woman serves as a theoretical concept and as a dynamic social projection, and as such is continually revised and refigured. Nonetheless, feminists use her as a model of political and social independence, and contrast less liberated women to her, in formulating their critique of patriarchy. (Kranidis 1995: xiv)

The New Woman is a fictional and cultural construct and many like Patricia Marks have regarded the New Woman as a myth to add to the list of representations of female (Marks 1990: 104). Yet, by means of its engagement with materialist studies, the neo-Victorian novel foregrounds a more tangible portrayal of the New Woman who shares with her contemporary readers similar interests and/ or convictions with regard to her identity as a contemporary woman and position within society. Like nineteenth-century New Woman novelists who had to display their courage to create displeasure by means of their social critique which set them apart from authors of romance whose objective was to appeal to the reader (Saudo-Welby 2019: 75),

neo-Victorian novelists –by means of their use of sexsation to varying degrees and in various forms, sexual liberty, pornography, lesbianism, prostitution – equally dwell on woman's sexual identity taking the risk of creating dissent among their readers.

The sexsation of New Woman fiction was meant for the objective of social critique. In the 1880s and 1890s, emerged a didactic tendency in the British novel, insofar as the engaged novel offered new social critique and political and philosophical reflection and encouraged an intellectual debate. Yet, the New Woman novel was severely critiqued when it was labelled as novel with a purpose the aim of which is to preach, give sermons and educate. Walter Besant's defence of fiction, I argue, is applicable to New Woman fiction[59]:

> The modern novel converts abstract ideas into living models; it gives ideas, it strengthens faith, it preaches a higher morality than is seen in the actual world; it commands the emotions of pity, admiration and terror; it creates and keeps alive the sense of sympathy; it is the universal teacher; it is the only book which the great mass of mankind ever do read; it is the only way in which people can learn what other men and women are like; it redeems their lives from dullness, puts thoughts, desire, knowledge, and even ambitions into their hearts; it teaches them to talk, and enriches their speech with epigrams, anecdotes and illustrations. (Besant 1884: 10)

The neo-Victorian novel can be considered as an extension of the nineteenth-century engaged novel, for it not only informs about the hidden and silenced Victorian past, but also allows room for plurality and multiplicity in a debate enriched by the successive feminist waves from the time reaching the #MeToo movement, all the while keeping in mind that the neo-Victorian novel is not a sermon on ethics and morals, but rather an exploitation of a lived experience and its transformation into a topic for debate and a form of political engagement.

The neo-Victorian novel proves to be both material and symbolic, tangible and figurative, for it uses the female character as a medium to expose reality, and reality to demystify the female character. Indeed, the dichotomy exterior/ interior marks one of the theoretical frameworks of neo-Victorianism's political engagement. This poses the ground for the realism of the neo-Victorian novel: a realism of both plot and character, outside and inside,

[59] Besant's *The Revolt of Man* (1882) reads like an anti-suffragette novel and a satire of New Woman ideology. Though he comically reverses gender roles as he imagines a society controlled by women reflecting his preoccupation with female dominance, he eventually re-instils traditional Victorian male order.

group and individual. Reading the neo-Victorian novel, we, as contemporary readers, may be invited to witness a return to or rather a revisionist resurrection of realism, a new type of realism: more subjective than objective, more individual than collective. In other words, unlike nineteenth-century realism which portrayed the outside world as it was with characters in it, neo-Victorian realism manages to draw the fictional world of the character as well as its role in the world around it.

Reading twenty-first century neo-Victorian fiction through the lens of Henry James's nineteenth-century realism, we find some echoes in his description of realist characters:

> They are suggestive, they are even inspiring, but they are not exact, though they are doubtless as much so as the case admits of; which is a proof of that liberty of interpretation for which I just contended. For the value of these different injunctions--so beautiful and so vague--is wholly in the meaning one attaches to them. The characters, the situation, which strike one as real will be those that touch and interest one most, but the measure of reality is very difficult to fix" (James 1884: para. 6)

Undeniably, the neo-Victorian character is not simply realist, but rather portrayed in a realist manner with the use of more contemporary techniques. For example, instead of having a third-person omniscient narrator, we have neo-Victorian characters that speak for themselves, uncover their thoughts and unveil their emotions, all the while giving a glimpse of their reality.

The third part of this study dwells on the inextricable link between the body and self, for the female body turns out to be the ground for a meaningful sensorial experience. A phenomenological reading has allowed me to re-evaluate the role of the neo-Victorian character's sensorial experience in linking sense and affect, body and emotion, self and others, and transcending the bounds of the fictional text to reach the reader. In fact, the sensorial not only reconnects the neo-Victorian text with its predecessor Victorian sensation, but also proposes new definitions of the fictional character. It is no longer merely a being of paper, but a material embodied subjectivity with a tangible impact in the real world, making the reader react to and interact with the neo-Victorian protagonist. Furthermore, the process of reading the female body as a historical archive entails engagement and commitment on the part of readers, for they actively participate in reading and subsequently creating this character. Consequently, by means of identification and/or narrative empathy, the contemporary reader establishes both a cognitive and affective bond with the neo-Victorian character.

Bringing together nineteenth-century realism, materialist studies, and phenomenology, a somaesthetic approach to the neo-Victorian novel has allowed me to conclude that the latter can be read as a form of neo-realism. In this study, I have explored the neo-Victorian female character in three neo-Victorian novels, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), *The Crimson Petal and the White* (2002) and *Fingersmith* (2002) first as a narrative component of the fictional text. The neo-Victorian character is also an essential link in complex chains of matrilineal lineages by which the neo-Victorian novelists posit the female character's deviation from Victorian typological frames and foreground new female relationships in which sisterhood and motherhood prove to be tools for individuation It is also conceived as a representative of female voice both in the literal (literary) and metaphorical (political) dimensions in order to discuss and revisit gender(ed) roles. Finally, it is a corporeal materialist subjectivity in which both expression and experience of body and its senses are paramount in finding the female self. The outcome of this comprehensive study is that character persists in the neo-Victorian novel. It is no longer possible to talk of death of the character, with regard to the efforts made by neo-Victorian novelists to put the female character at the centre of the narrative and ponder her axial role in reality, as well as the reader who contributes to the subsistence of this character.

My main concern in this study has been to examine the processes of characterisation of the female protagonist in neo-Victorian fiction and to examine how Victorian patriarchal heteronormativity, (authorial) voice, spatialization, sexuality and gender converge in the formation of female selfhood in the neo-Victorian novels of this corpus. Thanks to relatively recent fields of literary thought, neo-Victorianism puts in place multiple theoretical frameworks to revisit the question of woman. My study of these novels has allowed me to conclude that both male and female authors are interested in probing different ways to empower their female protagonist, thus exhibiting their engagement in a feminist project the aim of which is to renegotiate an inferior position which limited woman and her potential. Yet, what could be of interest is to investigate further female-authored resources. In the tradition of early-waves feminists who strived to make their works of art as distinct and gendered as possible, is there such thing as gendered language in neo-Victorian fiction, a language that is specific to female authorship?

Besides, though I ensured to select novels from different periods of time, notably the early beginnings of neo-Victorianism and more recent ones in early twenty-first century, I wonder what neo-Victorian novels of the 1980s and 1990s like Emma Tennant's *Tess* (1993), Valerie Martin's *Mary Reilly* (1990) or Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) to name a few would uncover especially in terms of the materiality of the female character. Keeping in mind

that materialist studies boomed around this period, would female sexuality be at the centre of a novel like those of Waters and Faber, or would it be made less explicit and more covert and symbolic like that of Fowles?

Furthermore, as I explained in the introduction to this thesis, the choice of the corpus was partly motivated by common thematic concerns for I noted multiple parallels in the plots constructed by Fowles, Faber and Waters who were mainly interested in the decades between the 1860s and 1880s marked by the emergence of the New Woman fiction of the *fin-de-siècle*. I wonder what a neo-Victorian novel which revisits the late years and early decade of the twentieth-century would unveil as to the characterisation of the female protagonist, especially with regard to different themes notably centred on notions of colonialism and the imminent risk on the British Empire, axial interests in the Edwardian era. What new vantage points would such novels put forward through the intermediary of the female character? Furthermore, what would really widen the horizon of such study is to include neo-Victorian titles written by non-British or Anglophone novelists so as to explore different perspectives to the female protagonist such as Audrey Niffenegger's *Her Fearful Symmetry* (2009) or Tracy Chevalier's *Falling Angels* (2001) for example.

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Summary

Vers la seconde moitié du XXe siècle, émerge une tradition littéraire et artistique basée sur le renouvellement de tout ce qui est victorien. Un consensus général soutient que les productions de cette pratique néo-victorienne naissante ressemblent, revitalisent et rappellent la culture victorienne entre les années 1860 et le début du XIXe siècle, d'où le préfixe néo-. Retraçant l'origine du néo-victorianisme, Christian Gutleben rejoint Matthew Sweet (xvii), Sarah Edwards et Heilmann et Llewellyn (8) et soutient que "neo-Victorianism is then already (or also) a modernist practice, which has been pursued, developed and perfected by postmodernism" (Gutleben 2015 : 224). Il va précisément jusqu'à louer la "persistence or permanence of the movement", car "neo-Victorian impulse has survived into the twenty-first century" (Gutleben 2015 : 224). La fiction néo-victorienne manifeste alors une longue tradition de la littérature britannique des XXe et XXIe siècles qui revisite le XIXe siècle.

Afin de revisiter, réinterpréter et reconstruire le passé, un certain nombre d'auteurs ont recréé le passé victorien dans leur fiction en utilisant la narrativité en reproduisant des décors similaires, ainsi que l'historicité à travers la description de faits réels de l'époque comme le choléra, la guerre de Crimée, l'invention de la photographie, la découverte et l'étude des fossiles, la mort de la Reine parmi tant d'autres. Si, par leur longueur, leurs thèmes et leur succès populaire, les romans néo-victoriens tissent des liens évidents avec leurs homologues victoriens, ils s'en distinguent aussi subtilement afin de mobiliser le prisme victorien pour repenser le monde post-moderne. Ainsi, le genre néo-victorien s'intéresse principalement à informer le passé par le biais de son retour à l'ère victorienne en empruntant son cadre, son contexte et ses aspects culturels, inspirés des aspects stylistiques et esthétiques victoriens de la fiction victorienne. Ainsi, il découle de cette insistance sur la dimension factuelle que le néo-victorianisme est souvent assimilé au genre de la fiction historique, et très souvent défini comme un sous-genre de la métafiction historiographique, une association qui établit davantage le lien entre les deux genres en termes de leur relation avec le passé.

Graham Huggan explore les raisons de la persistance et de la popularité de la fiction historiographique et confirme que "At its best such [historiographic] fiction allows for a spirited re-engagement with the past that is both ethically responsible and aesthetically satisfying" (Huggan 2007 : 61). Autrement dit, la fiction néo-victorienne ne se contente pas de revisiter la période victorienne pour raconter l'histoire vécue de l'époque, mais plutôt de pousser le lecteur à réfléchir sur cette histoire. Dans le même ordre d'idées, Linda Hutcheon et Peter Widdowson conviennent que tout type de fiction qui raconte le passé fait partie de la métafiction historiographique. Ainsi, on peut soutenir que la fiction néo-victorienne peut être définie comme un sous-genre de cette métafiction historiographique qui invite le lecteur à

s'interroger sur le lien entre la fiction et une période précise de l'histoire, un récit de l'histoire qui est aussi une enquête sur le passé. Par exemple, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969) de Fowles s'intéresse beaucoup à la géologie, une science qui traite intrinsèquement de la structure physique et de la substance de la terre, de leur histoire et des processus qui agissent sur elles, notamment par le biais du protagoniste masculin qui est constamment vu préoccupé par la recherche de fossiles tout au long du récit. Cet intérêt pour la géologie peut être une métaphore de l'un des enjeux emblématiques du roman néo-victorien : sa récupération et sa réflexion sur le passé.

La période victorienne est recréée dans les romans de ce corpus d'abord au niveau narratif à l'aide d'éléments tels que les contextes spatiaux et temporels qui visent à reproduire un décor victorien reconnaissable et de nombreuses références à des événements qui sont liés à la période par le biais d'importants textes législatifs adoptés par le Parlement britannique ainsi que des avancées technologiques clés par exemple, et ensuite au niveau idéologique à travers des débats culturels et politiques particuliers de l'époque comme les discussions sur les sciences et la foi, et la position de la femme dans la société.

Le narrateur de Fowles, dans les premières lignes du premier chapitre, affirme que le roman se déroule "in the late March of 1867" à Lyme Bay ; une zone au large de la côte sud de l'Angleterre (Fowles 1969 : 2). La date peut être pertinente en référence à l'éventuelle motion de John Stuart Mill visant à donner aux femmes le droit de vote le 18 mai de la même année, qui serait plus tard rejetée de manière décisive par une Chambre des communes entièrement masculine. L'année donc marque le mouvement social florissant en faveur des femmes ainsi que les réformes électorales qui ont émancipé pour la première fois une partie de la classe ouvrière masculine urbaine en Angleterre et au Pays de Galles. Par conséquent, aucune autre date ne pourrait être plus appropriée pour la protagoniste Sarah qui montre des signes constants de liberté d'expression et de féminité libérée.

Michel Faber opte pour une technique moins explicite puisqu'il inclut différentes dates à divers moments du récit : la publication d'un livre spécifique "the Winter 1874 catalogue of Rackham manufactures" (Faber 2002 : 176), référence au Noël d'un année "To my valued Friend Henry Rackham, Christmas 1874" (Faber 2002 : 237) et l'âge de Sophie par exemple. Le roman se déroule alors à la fin de 1874 ; une date qui est présentée à un stade avancé du récit sans plus de détails sur le mois ou le jour. La décennie entre 1870 et 1880 signale néanmoins l'avancée rapide d'une grande partie de la législation en faveur des femmes. Par exemple, les lois sur la propriété des femmes, en particulier la loi sur la propriété des femmes mariées, et les différentes lois sur la prostitution, à savoir les lois sur les maladies contagieuses, sont

emblématiques de la lutte pour les droits des femmes. La description minutieuse de Faber de nombreux endroits tels que Church Lane, Greek Street et Regent Street se veut une critique ouverte de certaines lois de 1875 telles que la Factory Act et la Public Health Act adoptées par le Parlement britannique. Ainsi, en mettant l'accent sur les conditions sociales de ses personnages, le roman pourrait bien être un clin d'œil littéraire aux œuvres d'Henry Mayhew, Charles Booth et Gustave Doré car il émule la tradition de documenter la réalité sociale.

Comme Faber, Waters présente le cadre temporel du roman à travers des références indirectes. Elle inclut des dates assez vagues, en particulier des années qui font référence à des événements distincts basés sur les souvenirs d'enfance de Sue, par exemple sa mère "[coming] to Lant Street on a certain night in 1844" (Waters 2002 : 10). Il est possible de soutenir que cette ambiguïté sert à intensifier le mystère autour du passé et de l'héritage matrilinéaire de Sue, deux axes principaux du processus de construction de son personnage. En conséquence, il n'est pas surprenant que les seules dates précises incluses dans le récit concernent le dénouement de l'histoire. En fait, la lettre/testament écrite par Marianne Lilly dans laquelle elle raconte les événements de l'échange des filles indique que l'aventure de Sue commence "on this day 18th of September 1844", and the secret must be revealed "on the day of her eighteenth birthday, 3rd August 1862" (Waters 2002 : 534). Le lecteur est alors laissé deviner le cadre temporel du roman jusqu'à ses dernières pages. À l'inverse, le récit présente les repères spatiaux dès le début : Sue habite "at Lant Street, in the Borough, near to the Thames" (Waters 2002 : 2). Bien que l'emplacement de Briar ne soit pas spécifié, le récit suit Sue sur son chemin vers le manoir s'arrêtant dans la ville de Marlow. Combiné avec des références ultérieures à la Tamise et à la fuite éventuelle des personnages par la rivière, le récit fait allusion à la factualité du lieu puisque Marlow est en effet situé près de la Tamise. De plus, lorsque Maud se promène dans Londres, Gentleman mentionne le terminus de Paddington, le Regent's Park et la Tamise.

En réunissant à la fois historicisme et fiction, réalité et imaginaire, on peut soutenir que ce corpus néo-victorien participe à l'établissement d'une tradition de fiction néo-historique.

En définissant le néo-victorianisme, Letissier évoque des principes d'"adaptation", "appropriation", "revival" and "translation" qui lient le mouvement littéraire à son prédécesseur, le victorianisme (Letissier 2016 : 2). Il croit que ces principes sont cruciaux pour le processus contemporain de relecture victorienne, qui vise la création et l'innovation. Mark Llewellyn souligne le "desire to re-write the historical narrative of that period by representing marginalised voices, new histories of sexuality, post-colonial viewpoints and other generally 'different' versions of the Victorian" (Llewellyn 2008 : 165). Il souligne la nécessité de réétudier ce qui est Victorien de manière critique, une étude qui fera remonter à la surface des

interprétations multidimensionnelles qui s'opposent à "the stability of a presumed hegemonic historical narrative" (Llewellyn 2008 : 165). Par exemple, dans une interview avec Lucy Armitt, Sarah Waters avoue avoir choisi le lesbianisme comme moyen de réintégrer le monde victorien avec une perspective différente. Elle affirme que "[f]or [her], entering the past via telling queer stories is a great way of finding a slightly new way of talking about familiar periods like the Victorian era or wartime" (Waters 2006 : 121). En d'autres termes, les études néo-victoriennes permettent la pluralité et la diversité dans le déchiffrement des Victoriens, contrairement aux interprétations hégémoniques qui en sont faites.

En étudiant les raisons du retour du néo-victorianisme au XIXe siècle, Nadine Boehm-Schnitker et Susanne Gruss soulignent qu'il s'agit "an ongoing cultural and academic venture to analyse the manifold overlaps and intersections, the continuities and the breaches between 'us' and 'them'" (Boehm-Schnitker et Gruss 2014 : 1). En ce sens, il est possible d'affirmer que "neo-Victorian texts as cultural *doppelgängers* of the Victorian age both mimic and challenge the discourses of the nineteenth century" (Boehm-Schnitker et Gruss 2014 : 2). Du fait de son retour dans le passé, le texte néo-victorien recrée en partie le texte victorien, notamment sur le plan thématique. Par conséquent, l'imitation est certainement inévitable dans le processus de relecture intertextuelle. Comme l'affirme Thomas Hardy, "in fiction there can be no intrinsically new thing at this stage of the world's history" (Hardy 1888 : 78).

L'approche contemporaine de la culture victorienne provoque un questionnement et par conséquent, un défi au texte victorien. La « re-vision » est au cœur de la fiction néo-victorienne. Ce terme a été inventé par Adrienne Rich pour désigner "the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction" (Rich 1972 : 18). Heilmann et Llewellyn établissent tous deux un parallèle entre les deux époques : le XIXe siècle représente tout ce qui est "the comfort of inclusiveness with a common purpose", tandis que le XXIe siècle est "an age of fragmentation and disintegration" (Heilmann et Llewellyn cité dans Letissier 2010 : 3). Le risque d'une telle conception est cependant de tomber dans le piège de "[construing] the Victorian as a homogenized identity, a single monological signifier, through what would amount to cultural iconization" (Letissier 2010 : 3). Les deux critiques considèrent le néo-victorien comme "more than historical fiction set in the nineteenth century". Il est "self-consciously engaged with the act of (re)interpretation, (re)discovery and (re)vision concerning the Victorians" (Heilmann et Llewellyn 2010 : 4). En ce sens, la réflexion sur la fiction du XIXe siècle suppose un processus de métafictionnalisation du genre.

Peter Widdowson affirme que la tendance générale de la fiction révisionniste est plutôt sélective dans son choix de textes canoniques, car seule la littérature canonique mérite d'être

étudiée, réfléchie et remise en question. Dans le même ordre d'idées, les auteurs de ce corpus avouent également réviser des titres victoriens renommés. Fowles reconnaît les parallèles avec Hardy (Fowles 1990 : 146). Faber imite la "Dickensian richness" (Hale 2002 : n.d.). Waters s'intéresse à l'"underworld that Dickens writes a bit about" (Waters 2021 : n.d.). Cependant, Letissier affirme que le néo-victorianisme vient "[blur] the gap between high and low culture" (Letissier 2010 : 2). Autrement dit, il s'agit d'un processus de contemporisation et de "commoditization" du victorien, quel que soit l'hypotexte du marché littéraire contemporain (Letissier 2010 : 2). Alors que le marché victorien du début du siècle était vraisemblablement réservé à l'élite sociale et au lectorat bien éduqué de la classe supérieure, la culture contemporaine est plus complète et le marché est rendu populaire et plus accessible. En effet, cela a conduit à une réception dichotomique car la littérature néo-victorienne est souvent soit hautement louée, soit sévèrement critiquée en raison de sa dimension «populiste».

Le silence imposé aux personnages féminins et le refoulement de leurs voix dans les hypotextes victoriens pourraient bien être une autre raison de justifier le choix de l'intertexte des contemporains. En effet, les textes victoriens peuvent être muets, notamment par rapport à la représentation des rôles des femmes au XIXe siècle. Il convient de noter que le silence peut avoir été un instrument de censure exigé par les éditeurs victoriens ou une manifestation de pruderie de la part des auteurs victoriens. Alors qu'il a souvent été examiné comme un manque, ces mêmes romans muets compliquent cette idée car Rich admet que "[i]n a world where language and naming are power, silence is violence" (Rich 1995 : 204). En effet, cette perspective a généralement été celle des universitaires qui se sont concentrés sur l'exclusion des femmes de ces textes. Ainsi, Fowles expose le dilemme de la femme déchue et sa position intermédiaire au sein de la société. Faber parle de la lutte constante de la prostituée contre une domination masculiniste. Waters dévoile le combat d'une femme, d'une lesbienne et d'un auteur pour la reconnaissance de soi et de l'altero. Kohlke soutient que la fiction néo-victorienne aborde la répression "through acts of uncovering", "[u]ncovering secrets, scandals, or the nakedness beneath crinolines" (Kohlke 2011 : 86/87). Waters découvre à juste titre les mains de ses protagonistes féminines, car Sue et Maud se débarrassent finalement des gants que leur a imposés le patriarche M. Lilly. Faber découvre souvent les organes génitaux féminins dans la mesure où ses personnages féminins affichent délibérément et consciemment leurs organes génitaux. Les lacunes et les silences dans la tradition littéraire victorienne représentent un point de départ axial pour les néo-victoriens qui travaillent à mettre en place des interprétations alternatives des techniques victoriennes des silences (délibérés).

Sally Shuttleworth soutient que le néo-victorianisme, comme le roman victorien, est né du besoin et du désir de "give voice to women, or the racially oppressed that have been denied voice in history" (Shuttleworth 1998 : 256). Ainsi, il est politiquement engagé dans le projet de dire ce qui était à la fois non-dit et indicible, et de donner la parole à ceux qui ont été marginalisés et réduits au silence dans le discours patriarcal, notamment la femme. S'appuyant sur l'affirmation de Shuttleworth, Widdowson postule que "at the very least, what the contemporary text does is 'speak' the unspeakable of the pre-text by very exactly evoking the original and hinting at its silences and fabrications" (Widdowson 2006 : 506). Les protagonistes de ce corpus font partie de catégories sociales qui n'ont pas eu le droit de parler et d'être entendues : la femme déchue simplement châtiée ou ignorée, la prostituée exploitée et jamais reconnue, la folle mise en cage et oubliée, la lesbienne considérée comme inexistante sauf pour le plaisir sexuel, et enfin la femme auteur transgressive sévèrement critiquée et même punie. De telles figures occupaient un espace narratif limité à l'intérieur du texte victorien. Le roman néo-victorien est politiquement engagé lorsqu'il discute de la position de « l'autre » car il redonne aux personnages marginalisés leur voix et tente de vaincre le stéréotype binaire du soi et de « l'autre », le « subalterne » du discours colonial. Toutes les protagonistes féminines de ce corpus peuvent être considérées comme autres, si on les compare aux normes idéales de la société victorienne. Ainsi, en faisant d'elles des personnages centraux, les auteurs néo-victoriens tentent de réparer les torts des textes originaux dans le but de donner à ces personnages marginalisés l'espace littéraire pour raconter leur lutte et compenser l'injustice dont ils ont été victimes dans le discours patriarcal répressif. De plus, la fiction néo-victorienne a le pouvoir de sensibiliser les lecteurs qui deviennent non seulement conscients des injustices commises contre les minorités dans le passé, mais aussi attentifs aux dangers possibles pour tenter d'empêcher qu'elles ne se reproduisent à l'avenir. Rich affirme : "We need to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition, but to break its hold over us" (Rich 1980 : 35). Quelles connaissances le roman néo-victorien offre-t-il aux lecteurs contemporains pour qu'ils remettent en cause le discours patriarcal ?

Le projet néo-victorien est souvent impliqué dans le traitement de questions morales qui étaient soit ignorées soit implicitement discutées dans la fiction victorienne, par différents moyens d'excès, d'ellipses, d'incohérences, d'absurdités et d'autres formes de dissimulation dans les textes. Il promeut la voix des catégories marginalisées, majoritairement féminines, notamment et pas exclusivement par rapport aux questions de genre et de sexualité. Ainsi, on trouve souvent des récits néo-victoriens avec des chapitres voyeuristes sur des sujets sexuels. Les trois romans de ce corpus – bien qu'à des degrés divers du moins au plus explicite,

comparant Fowles à Faber et à Waters – ont en commun cette caractéristique thématique et stylistique. Charles de Fowles fantasme sur la sexualité attrayante et dominante de Sarah. La voyant à la fois forte et passive, sexuelle et innocente, dominatrice et fragile, cette dualité est si intense qu'elle finit par mener à leur union sexuelle. Bien que Charles n'utilise pas d'images ouvertement sexuelles dans sa description de Sarah, ses pensées sont souvent charnelles lorsqu'il est en sa compagnie. De plus, le choix des prostituées comme groupe social ciblé dans le roman de Faber et l'accent mis sur leur vie quotidienne et leurs pratiques avec le client font tourner le récit autour de la sexualité comme thème dominant, allant de simples références à des scènes de rapports sexuels explicites et minutieusement décrites. Les protagonistes lesbiennes de Waters ouvrent la porte à des passages très suggestifs d'actions et de sentiments détaillés, un voyage au terme duquel elles reconnaissent leurs sexualités. En conséquence, Cora Kaplan désigne Sarah Waters comme l'une des néo-victoriennes les plus en vue "[contributing] to this explicit exhibition of taboo sex through her modern depiction of same-sex relationships" (Kaplan citée dans Letissier 2010 : 4). Le roman de Waters est peut-être le plus explicite de ce corpus en raison de son accent sur le lesbianisme et de son examen franc des identités lesbiennes (sexuelles), défiant ainsi la société victorienne imaginée moralement et éthiquement guidée et conservatrice. En fait, Heilmann et Llewellyn soutiennent que "Victorian sexuality and the way we re-imagine it, its contradictions, excesses, dissimilarities from or correspondences with our diversity of experience holds an irresistible appeal for the neo-Victorian imagination" (Heilmann et Llewellyn 2010 : 107). Si cette fascination pour la sexualité victorienne est l'une des raisons de la réception contradictoire du genre néo-victorien, à la fois apprécié et déprécié, cet investissement explicite en matière de sexe rattache la fiction néo-victorienne à la fiction de New Woman de fin-de-siècle qui manifeste également de la transgression, notamment en matière de sexe dans la mesure où elle suscite un débat controversé sur la question du sexe et finalement une réception critique tout aussi contradictoire. Sally Ledger affirme que l'ouverture sexuelle dans la fiction de New Woman a conduit à la consternation de nombreux critiques qui se sont opposés à de telles représentations et les ont qualifiées de "sickening" pour reprendre le terme de James Ashcroft Noble (Noble 1895 : 494). D'un point de vue féministe, le néo-victorianisme sert à réécrire le passé des femmes d'une manière responsabilisante afin de leur donner la chance d'avoir une subjectivité qui leur était refusée dans la fiction victorienne. Je soutiens que le roman néo-victorien combine manifestement toutes les phases du féminisme : il est impliqué dans la réévaluation de la position de la femme, la remise en cause d'une littérature patriarcale exclusive, la revalorisation d'un mode de discours féminin dans le but d'établir une position subjective et une identité féminine plus forte. Par ses protagonistes

marginales, ses thèmes abordés et sa perspective contemporaine, ce corpus néo-victorien peut être considéré comme la continuation du combat féministe pour la cause de la femme. Ainsi, on peut se demander en quoi le roman néo-victorien emprunte et réutilise la politique féministe victorienne.

Si certaines penseuses comme Imelda Whelehan et Anglea McRobbie s'interrogent sur la pertinence du néo-victorianisme au XXIe siècle et critiquent le caractère désuet de certaines des questions posées par ce projet politique, à savoir l'intérêt pour le statut des femmes des minorités, notamment femmes déchues et folles, ces figures marginales relient précisément la fiction néo-victorienne à la sensation victorienne, également critiquée pour ses protagonistes féminines transgressives et rebelles. En effet, Kelly Marsh a discuté de l'apparition d'une vague de "néo-sensation" à la fin des années 1980 et 1990 en mettant l'accent sur les similitudes et les caractéristiques de l'intrigue qui peuvent être retrouvées dans le texte contemporain. Son étude définit le cadre théorique pour explorer comment la fiction néo-victorienne affiche de multiples points communs avec la sensation victorienne à la fois thématiquement et stylistiquement.

La vague actuelle de fiction néo-victorienne s'inspire des romanciers victoriens à sensation. Dans une interview avec Lucy Armitt, Waters déclare : "I was hooked on the "sensation novels" of writers such as Wilkie Collins, Sheridan LeFanu and Mary Elizabeth Braddon: novels whose preoccupation with sex, crime and family scandals had once made them runaway bestsellers" (Waters 2006, n.d.). Comme les victoriens, les romanciers néo-victoriens sont conscients de l'importance de l'intrigue pour séduire leur lectorat. En fait, Pykett note que les romans à sensation étaient souvent qualifiés de «romans rapides», de «romans policiers», de «romans sur la bigamie» ou de «romans sur l'adultère». Ainsi, les trois romans néo-victoriens de ce corpus partagent les quatre mêmes aspects narratifs que Thomas Hardy jugeait essentiels au roman à sensation : « mystère, enchevêtrement, surprise et obliquité morale » (Hardy cité dans Pykett 1994 : 4). Au centre de *The Woman in White* (1859) de Collins, se trouve une femme – ou plus – avec un secret caché. *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) de Braddon porte bien son titre. Isabelle Vane dans *East Lynne* (1861) est également tourmentée par son passé caché. Comme ces protagonistes victoriens, la Sarah de Fowles est associée à un passé mystérieux avec le lieutenant français. Sugar tente constamment de cacher sa vocation littéraire à la fois à sa mère et à Rackham, ainsi que son identité de prostituée dans la rue victorienne et les cercles publics. Maud et Sue partagent toutes deux un passé secret de mères échangées et de fausses histoires, ainsi que de faux cadeaux dans lesquels chacune se fait passer pour un autre personnage. Ainsi, la notion d'identité secrète est centrale dans les romans de ce corpus : toutes les protagonistes féminines luttent pour (dé)-couvrir et découvrir leur véritable identité au milieu d'intrigues

centrées sur le mystère et la confusion. Le processus de découverte est rendu long et intrigant pour satisfaire les attentes du lectorat. Les intrigues néo-victoriennes reportent le dénouement aux dernières pages pour renforcer le mystère et la perplexité.

Les romans de ce corpus font allusion à des œuvres sensationnelles particulières au moyen de symboles et de tropes. Par exemple, *The Woman in White* (1859) de Collins, ainsi que les représentations de cette même femme par John Whistler, notamment dans Symphony in *White, No. 1 : The White Girl of 1862* peuvent être considérées comme des figures archétypales pour les protagonistes néo-victoriens, avec leurs cheveux auburn, leur attitude solitaire et leur centralité dans l'œuvre d'art. Tout comme la pauvre et folle Anne Catherick dans Collins et Joanna Hiffernan, muse, modèle et maîtresse de longue date de James Whistler, on retrouve Sarah dans le roman de Fowles, Agnes et Sugar dans Faber, ainsi que Maud dans Waters. Outre l'apparence physique flagrante mise en avant par la pâleur de la peau et la rougeur des cheveux, ces protagonistes ont en commun des traits tels que la solitude et la mélancolie, ainsi qu'une créativité artistique souvent associée à la passion, l'hystérie et la folie.

La représentation du personnage féminin est un élément majeur qui fait que la sensation victorienne est sévèrement critiquée. Au centre de l'intrigue sensationnelle, la femme était représentée soit sous l'image du passif et de l'angélique, soit sous la forme de la femme fatale, incarnant ainsi soit l'héroïne, soit la méchante. On retrouve ce trope revisité dans les romans de Fowles, Faber et Waters dans la mesure où leurs protagonistes féminines sont peu orthodoxes, non conventionnelles et rebelles. La protagoniste féminine qui montre des signes d'affirmation et de franc-parler a suscité beaucoup de controverse à l'époque car sa démonstration de passion représentait une menace importante pour la moralité féminine telle qu'envisagée par le patriarcat et donc pour la respectabilité de la société anglaise. Cette nouvelle protagoniste semble inextricablement liée aux femmes des années 1860 qui deviennent plus politiquement conscientes dans leur lutte pour le suffrage.

Suite à ces points communs, on peut se demander comment le corpus néo-victorien revisite le genre victorien de la sensation, soit par émulation, adaptation ou révision.

Les romanciers néo-victoriens font ressembler leurs textes à la sensation victorienne à travers des références intertextuelles, l'utilisation de structures narratives particulières, à savoir l'intrigue et le décor et des dispositifs stylistiques comme la tradition gothique, le réalisme et la romance. Les romans de ce corpus incluent des références historiques aux romanciers à sensation en imitant le style d'épigraphes de George Eliot, en insérant Thomas Hardy et Wilkie Collins comme personnages dans le récit ou en empruntant certaines de leurs intrigues. Comme la sensation victorienne qui est un "generic hybrid" mêlant "realism and melodrama, the

journalistic and the fantastic, the domestic and the romantic or exotic" (Pykett, 1994 : 4), la sensation néo-victorienne utilise différents types de discours généralement associés à le XIXe siècle, à savoir le romantisme, la tradition gothique et le réalisme. Dans leur focalisation sur l'individu, les romans néo-sensationnels affichent des influences romantiques. L'influence romantique la plus explicite dans le texte de Fowles pourrait bien être sa célébration de la nature. Inspirés du gothique du XIXe siècle, les romanciers néo-victoriens de ce corpus s'appuient souvent sur le motif des maladies mentales et de l'instabilité psychologique. Le texte de Faber rend ce lien explicite à travers le personnage d'Agnès qui finit par être associée aux esprits et aux anges. La troisième influence stylistique est le réalisme du XIXe siècle qui s'est frayé un chemin dans la sensation néo-victorienne. Parce qu'il se déroule dans un contexte domestique familier, le roman à sensation émule la réalité et donne l'illusion de la factualité. De plus, les trois romanciers néo-victoriens s'intéressent, à des degrés divers, à dépeindre la réalité sociale dans leurs textes. Comme ils se concentrent sur des thèmes tels que le déclin de l'institution du mariage, la définition de la maternité et de la féminité, et la mobilité sociale entre les classes de la société anglaise, les textes présentent certaines caractéristiques journalistiques du mode réaliste.

Lorsqu'ils réécrivent la sensation, les romanciers néo-victoriens alternent entre intertextualité et distance. D'une part, au moyen de références constantes à la littérature victorienne, "Waters remembers – and re-members – this novelistic tradition *and* the extra-textual reality with which we associate it" (Mitchell 2010 : 121/122, italics in original). D'autre part, les romanciers néo-victoriens ont plutôt tendance à créer leur propre vision du victorien. Lorsque les recherches s'avèrent insuffisantes, Fowles doit adapter le roman à sensation victorien afin de créer sa version néo-victorienne de la tradition victorienne. Faber s'appuie sur l'argument de Fowles: "In the end, though, the Victorian London in my story is a *vision* from my imagination, in the same way that the Scottish-highlands in my earlier novel, *Under The Skin*, were a personal vision. Every writer uses the "real" world as raw material for *creating his or her own universe*" (Hale 2002 : n.d., italics added).

Les romanciers néo-victoriens adaptent la sensation victorienne en introduisant les traditions postmodernes des XXe et XXIe siècles au niveau du style littéraire et de la culture. Autrement dit, la sensation ressurgit à l'époque contemporaine sous une nouvelle forme postmoderne(iste). Beth Palmer établit un parallèle entre la fiction postmoderne qui s'attache à revisiter les conditions idéologiques et culturelles du passé et la fiction néo-victorienne qui réinterprète le passé dans une perspective postmoderne. La fiction néo-victorienne change les codes stylistiques de la fiction en rappelant le passé victorien tout en y introduisant des

techniques modernes. Parmi les techniques narratives du XXe siècle utilisées par Fowles figure l'interruption de la séquence des événements. Il perturbe souvent la progression du récit pour créer plus de suspense et faire appel aux sensations du lecteur. Par ailleurs, le narrateur du XXe siècle est physiquement présent dans le texte du XIXe siècle. Il s'agit d'un jeu stylistique de la part de Fowles pour brouiller les frontières entre réalité et fiction, réalité et imagination. Thomas Docherty, dans son exploration du roman de Fowles, affirme qu'il existe un processus de manipulation des points de vue narratifs. Le texte de Fowles est une multiplicité de textes : il y a souvent la présence de plus d'un "surrogate author" fournissant leur propre texte, il y a de nombreux textes présents dans le texte soit par citation soit par allusion, et les personnages sont souvent présentés comme "free", des personnages qui créent leurs propres textes. Fowles, en tant qu'auteur-Dieu, est un partisan de "the freedom that allows other freedoms to exist" (Fowles, 1969 : 86). De plus, il intègre le texte comme personnage physique. Le texte de Fowles est un remaniement palimpsestique de multiples sources victoriennes. Ainsi, le roman est une combinaison de techniques narratives victoriennes et (post-)modernes, ce qui le transforme en une œuvre d'art contemporaine reflétant le roman dans le passé et acquérant ainsi une dimension métafictionnelle historiographique. Bien qu'accusé d'imiter les traditions littéraires victoriennes, Fowles les réinvestit pour produire un roman qui n'est pas une copie, mais plutôt une "exploitation of the form" selon Thomas Foster. Il affirme que Fowles "returned to an early form of fiction as a way of constructing his novel" (Foster 1994 : 67).

Comme si elle contrôlait à la fois la narration et le texte, la voix narrative est presque matérialisée et sa présence se fait sentir dans son monologue adressé au lecteur. Il s'agit d'un jeu narratif de la part du narrateur/auteur. Faber est un auteur-Dieu parce qu'il a le pouvoir de faire entrer et sortir le lecteur du texte comme il le souhaite. Cependant, il admet qu'il ne contrôle pas plus ses personnages qu'il ne contrôle les lecteurs, maintenant ainsi une interaction constante entre les caractéristiques du XIXe siècle et du XXIe siècle de la voix narrative dans le texte. Letissier décrit la voix narrative en ces termes : "the double temporal perspective, with the twenty-first century looking back on the nineteenth century, with the benefit of hindsight, as it were, leads to what could be called hyperomniscience" (Letissier 2005 : 6/7).

Une telle relégation narrative se retrouve également dans le roman de Waters. Bien qu'il traite du Londres victorien, le roman est composé dans une tradition postmoderne, le récit est une combinaison de trois parties clés racontées par différents narrateurs. Waters expérimente la structure narrative et les références intertextuelles, ce qui aligne son travail sur la métafiction historiographique postmoderne. Le récit est multicouche dans le sens où différentes intrigues

se déroulent en même temps. L'attention du lecteur est toujours attirée par l'intrigue serrée, la caractérisation complexe et le rythme rapide.

Les romanciers néo-victoriens révisent également la sensation victorienne au niveau de sa fin. Alors que les textes réalistes offrent linéarité et cohésion et que leurs fins sont sur la clarté et la fermeture, les textes néo-victoriens sont souvent sur des fermetures abruptes, ambiguës et même incomplètes. Fowles propose trois fins possibles à son récit. Faber opte pour le flou, "[a]n abrupt parting" selon l'expression de son narrateur (Faber 2002 : 628). La fin du roman de Waters suscite des opinions opposées quant à savoir si Maud finit par se conformer à l'hétéropatriarcat ou à créer son propre discours pornographique moral. Néanmoins, cela montre dans les deux cas qu'une telle fin postmoderne est ouverte à différentes interprétations. Waters rompt alors l'hégémonie narrative, pour reprendre l'expression de Jane J. Lee utilisée dans le titre de son article (Lee 2018).

En néo-sensation, la tradition gothique se transforme, se banalise et s'inscrit dans le quotidien, comme les premiers signes de la contemporisation du gothique. Le gothique dans le roman néo-victorien est adapté aux attentes du lectorat contemporain. Rohan McWilliam soutient que le gothique dans le texte de Waters est ravivé par "a complex plot, a foregrounding of female characters and desires, its dark landscapes and underworlds, and its shocks and hysterical emotions" (McWilliam 2009 : 109). Le roman de Waters illustre de nombreux espaces gothiques tels que l'ancien manoir de Briar et la maison de fous, ainsi que des personnages incarnés par les méchants et les antagonistes : Mr Lilly, Gentleman et Mrs Sucksby comme les plus influents. Néanmoins, Waters révolutionne le gothique par un jeu constant entre présence et absence selon Boglárka Kiss. Cette dernière soutient que la maison de fous dans le texte de Waters ne surmonte pas les attentes puisqu'elle s'avère être l'espace où Maud se sent en sécurité parmi des personnes en qui elle a confiance et considère des figures maternelles, elle a été élevée à l'asile comme si c'était sa maison (Baiser 2013 : 236). Contradictoirement, Sue exprime sa peur de l'asile de fous qui semble ressembler à une maison ordinaire mais provoque en elle une horreur insoutenable. Les romans adaptent également la figure du monstre victorien assimilé à Jack l'Éventreur. Les monstres néo-victoriens sont plus courants dans la mesure où ils sont apparemment normaux et donc moins choquants. Faber introduit une culture de monstres du XXIe siècle en libérant la monstruosité qui est inévitablement naturellement ancrée dans tous les êtres humains. Sugar devient monstrueuse lorsque sa mère la force à se prostituer. Maud, aussi, se transforme en sadique suite au conditionnement de son oncle. *Fingersmith* présente un autre modèle de monstre contemporain, celui en quête constante de richesses dans une société de plus en plus matérialiste, représenté à la fois par les personnages

de Mrs Sucksby et de Gentleman. Selon Judith Halberstam, dans le gothique contemporain, le monstre n'est plus totalisant : "The monstrous body that once represented everything is now represented as potentially meaning anything – it may be the outcast, the outlaw, the parasite, the pervert, the embodiment of the uncontrollable sexual and violent urges, the foreigner, the misfit. The monster is all of these" (Halberstam 1995: 27) [.]

La fiction néo-victorienne suppose un engagement dans le projet de révision de la fiction victorienne, de remise en question de ses codes et de réécriture d'un discours souvent assimilé au patriarcat masculiniste. Ainsi, l'acte de révision implique un processus de repenser, de regarder quelque chose - ici les œuvres victoriennes précédentes - à partir d'une nouvelle perspective critique et d'introduire des changements dans un souci d'amélioration et d'amélioration. Si les actes d'adaptation et de révision ont en commun le principe d'introduire un nouveau regard sur le(s) intertexte(s), on peut suggérer que la révision prône les notions de contestation et de subversion. L'acte de révision dans la néo-sensation est à la fois stylistique et thématique. L'auteur, le lecteur et le personnage sont tous engagés dans ce processus de révision.

Sarah est une lectrice du reste des personnages, ce qui lui permet d'écrire son présent en tant que femme déchue, et de réécrire son avenir d'une manière qui ne l'emprisonne pas dans les codes sociaux victoriens qui la marginalisent, un avenir de liberté. Sugar a l'intention de réécrire son histoire et celle de ses collègues prostituées moralement humiliées et physiquement maltraitées par des clients masculins. Elle s'engage dans un acte d'écriture d'une fiction où elle tente de réécrire la figure de la prostituée comme une femme forte, active et efficace qui refuse l'avilissement et lutte pour son droit à la dignité. Ainsi, Sugar révise le discours masculiniste monolithique traditionnel qui considère la femme comme inférieure et la prostituée comme encore pire en raison de son défi moral et éthique. Bien qu'absorbée – à la fois par obligation et par choix – dans un genre fictionnel différent, la pornographie, Maud s'engage dans le même projet que Sugar de dire le non-dit. Alors qu'elle émerge comme écrivain à part entière, elle révise l'histoire masculiniste et occupe la position d'agence. Son combat prend une dimension encore plus rebelle, si l'on considère son lesbianisme.

L'acte de révision dans la fiction néo-victorienne se concentre principalement sur la représentation de la femme en insistant sur les actes de (re-)lecture et de (ré-)écriture lors du récit de leurs histoires. Ainsi, toutes les héroïnes néo-victoriennes de ce corpus sont inextricablement liées aux notions de type, de voix et d'auteur, et canalisent d'importantes figures littéraires telles que la Nouvelle Femme de la fin de siècle.

Les théories contemporaines, notamment dans la tradition postmoderniste, annoncent la mort du personnage. Concentrant son attention sur le théâtre, Elinor Fuchs note : "the 'death of character' idea started out of a spark of insight ignited in alternative theaters and fanned by the various poststructuralists 'deaths' announced in the late 1970s and 1980s (of Man, the Author, the Subject, the Work, the Book)" (Fuchs 1996: 9). Cette expression est devenue largement utilisée par de nombreux spécialistes d'autres formes de littérature dont les travaux explorent cette mort, comme Baruch Hochman et Roger C. Schlobin. Ce dernier soutient que "[a]nyone who has even dabbled in contemporary narrative theory is aware that there has been a blood bath. The author is dead; plot is dead. Amid this carnage, perhaps the most painful is the assassination of character" (Schlobin 2003: 257). Néanmoins, le personnage est en fait central dans le roman à sensation néo-victorien, notamment dans le corpus que je propose.

Le roman néo-victorien est centré sur la revisitation de personnages féminins. Letissier fait remonter l'émergence du genre à *Wide Sargasso Sea* de Jean Rhys à travers son personnage d'Antoinette inspiré de Bertha Mason, et à *The French Lieutenant's Woman* de John's Fowles à travers son personnage de Sarah inspiré de Christina Rossetti et de Jane Burden Morris construit dans un esprit préraphaélite. En effet, l'esquivement constant de Sarah, "a free spirit who passed for a Victorian spinster" (Letissier 2015 : 2), rappelle le modèle préraphaélite de la femme évasive : les peintures préraphaélites mettent souvent en scène la mystique de la féminité ; Bernard Shaw pensait que les portraits de Jane Morris incarnaient la façon dont sa personnalité restait à jamais insaisissable. À travers ces exemples, Letissier distingue deux modes de néo-caractérisation féminine : le "model", c'est-à-dire le prédécesseur, l'"hypo-character" et le personnage qui incarne le nouvel esprit artistique du néo-victorianisme, la version revisitée.

Letissier soutient que la formation des personnages implique une relation dialogique qui inclut la créativité de l'écrivain et celle du lecteur. Le décryptage des personnages est un processus complexe et subjectif qui varie d'un lecteur à l'autre, car il ne s'agit pas d'une création stable de la part de l'auteur. En fait, il est "predicated upon an experience of reading, or textual reception" (Letissier 2015: 3). En d'autres termes, un lecteur bien informé sur les processus de caractérisation dans le roman néo-victorien est très susceptible de construire un jugement différent et de tendre vers une interprétation plus profonde des " néo-personnages " par rapport à un lecteur moins expérimenté. Dans une certaine mesure, on pourrait parler d'un personnage au carré, d'un personnage qui est doublement un personnage, une forme de caractérisation qui, dans le roman néo-victorien, est multipliée par elle-même, et donc doublement cruciale pour la poétique de ce genre.

Une autre forme de migration des personnages qui revêt une grande importance pour cette étude est celle qui consiste à créer des personnages néo-victoriens qui sont des reproductions complexes de caractéristiques historiques victoriennes. Kate Mitchell les qualifie de personnages " faux-victoriens " car leur caractérisation est le résultat d'un processus de simulation et d'imitation afin d'effacer la différence avec l'antécédent victorien, et qualifie ce processus d'imitation de "authenticating strategy" (Mitchell 2010 : 118). Letissier prend l'exemple de Sugar et situe ses différents précurseurs dans la tradition victorienne. Sugar est donc une combinaison d'éléments victoriens empruntés de Charles Dickens et Augusta Davies Webster, qui s'assemblent pour produire un personnage très victorien. De même, Maud dans *Fingersmith* rappelle Laura Fairlie dans *The Woman in White* (1859) de Collins, ainsi que Dorothea dans *Middlemarch* (1872) de George Eliot. Le personnage de Sue emprunte certains de ses attributs à *Oliver Twist* (1839) de Dickens.

Letissier se concentre sur la centralité des "personnages ronds" dans le roman néo-victorien par rapport aux personnages plats, en empruntant la distinction de E. M. Forster. En fait, selon Letissier, le roman néo-victorien célèbre la profondeur psychologique de ses personnages et leur conscience stratifiée. Dans le roman de Fowles, le narrateur détecte la détresse de Sarah face à sa position intermédiaire de gouvernante ; comme la gouvernante victorienne, elle n'est ni complètement dépendante ni complètement indépendante, elle n'a ni rang social ni prospérité économique et est donc reléguée au bas de l'échelle de la classe moyenne. En outre, elle est déchirée entre son devoir de figure maternelle et son désir personnel de maternité. Elle répète à Charles : "you are not a woman. (…) you were not born a woman (…) And you were not ever a governess" (Fowles 1969 : 72). Se concentrer sur la dimension psychologique du personnage permet non seulement de dramatiser le récit, mais aussi d'y ajouter de la profondeur et du sens. En ce sens, Letissier soutient que la néo-caractérisation implique nécessairement une telle complexité qui est significative du genre et met en évidence le personnage féminin comme l'une de ses pierres angulaires.

La narratologie structuraliste se concentre sur le texte en tant que champ d'étude. Dans le cadre de ces intérêts, la théorie narratologique de Genette se concentre sur l'impact du point de vue sur la construction des personnages et évalue si les personnages sont décrits de l'extérieur par un narrateur à la troisième personne, de l'intérieur par un narrateur omniscient ou d'un point de vue partiellement omniscient. Manfred Pfister propose une investigation du processus de représentation du personnage à l'aide d'un diagramme arborescent et en basant son analyse sur trois paramètres 'narratorial vs. figural, explicit vs. implicit and auto- or altero-narratorial characterisation'. Je soutiens ici que le roman néo-victorien combine les techniques

de construction dramatique du personnage susmentionnées afin de permettre au lecteur de visualiser le personnage féminin. En fait, les trois romans néo-victoriens étudiés combinent différentes techniques de construction narrative du personnage afin de dresser un portrait complexe et multicouche de la protagoniste féminine. Ce processus complexe aboutit à un personnage composite qui ne doit plus être considéré comme virtuel ou implicite. Le personnage féminin néo-victorien est plutôt une subjectivité multiple et à multiples facettes dans le récit. Non seulement cette diversité aboutit à une description approfondie et étendue de ce même personnage, mais elle met en évidence la multiplicité des perspectives dans le regard porté sur elle, et pousse ainsi le lecteur à se représenter une subjectivité et le confronte à un personnage matériel.

Il est intéressant de noter que la narratologie structuraliste s'est révélée déficiente car elle ne tient pas compte du genre comme vecteur d'analyse des personnages. Le roman néo-victorien est un texte inextricablement lié au contexte socioculturel et idéologique de l'époque victorienne car il réexamine comment et quels rôles sociaux sont assumés par les femmes. Ainsi, il est intéressant d'étudier dans quelle mesure la construction du personnage féminin est impactée par la réalité victorienne, une réalité qui est étroitement affectée par la division des rôles. En effet, l'étude de la caractérisation féminine dans ce corpus néo-victorien peut être éclairée par la narratologie féministe, une branche récente de la théorie narrative qui cherche précisément à rapprocher théorie féministe et narratologie et à révéler les angles morts et les pièges des analyses prétendument neutres en termes de genre de la narratologie structuraliste et formaliste.

Du point de vue de la narratologie féministe, on peut soutenir que l'intrigue néo-victorienne célèbre l'activité de la femme, "a power, a possibility that may be inconsistent with what women have experienced both historically and textually, and perhaps inconsistent with women's desires" (Lanser 1986: 357). L'issue de l'intrigue dans chacun des romans incarne cette activité, ce mouvement, cet effort féminins. L'agentivité de Sarah en tant qu'auteur de l'action et sujet d'un verbe actif est mise en avant dans le texte de Fowles. Son rejet de la demande en mariage de Charles et sa décision de quitter l'Angleterre pour le Nouveau Monde peuvent être lus comme l'expression ultime de l'activité. Par ailleurs, on peut suggérer que Sarah embrasse son " rôle thématique " pour reprendre le terme de Vincent Jouve par lequel il désigne l'acteur porteur de sens, notamment au niveau figuratif. Il renvoie donc à des catégories, tant psychologiques que sociales, permettant d'identifier le personnage en termes de contenu. Jouve affirme : "si le rôle actantiel assure le fonctionnement du récit, le rôle thématique lui permet de véhiculer du sens et des valeurs. De fait, la signification d'un texte

tient en grande partie aux combinaisons entre rôles actantiels et rôles thématiques" (Jouve 1997 : 53). Ainsi, la transgression des rôles normatifs genrés d'épouse et de mère par Sarah ne la rend pas seulement capable de reconstruire son identité de femme indépendante libérée dans le récit, mais défie et subvertit symboliquement les normes associées au rôle de la femme. De même, dans le roman de Faber, Sugar est souvent assimilée à des verbes d'action qui impliquent la détermination. "Emboldened, she decides to take a much bigger risk" (Faber 2002 : 343) pourrait bien être une expression qui résume son attitude générale. Cette disposition rend possible la mobilité sociale, car elle passe d'un rôle social à l'autre : prostituée, maîtresse accompagnante, gouvernante et enfin figure maternelle. Dans le roman de Waters, après s'être échappée de Briar, Maud se décrit comme un agent du libre arbitre : "I have been bold and determined. I have bitten down rage, insanity, desire, love, for the sake of freedom" (Waters 2002: 343). Dans la fin du récit, la reconnaissance ultime par Sue et Maud de leurs sentiments romantiques mutuels ainsi que de leur identité lesbienne symbolise leur transgression des normes victoriennes d'hétérosexualité.

Les romans néo-victoriens de ce corpus ne prennent pas en compte l'hystérie de Freud dans la mesure où les protagonistes néo-victoriennes se montrent femmes féminines. En ce qui concerne Sarah, le récit met en avant la façon dont son indépendance et son mystère hypnotisent le regard masculiniste de Charles, et pas seulement son beau visage. Quant à Sugar, c'est son intelligence pratique et son intelligence qui attirent William. Bien qu'elle soit une prostituée avec laquelle les clients masculins partagent généralement un lien physique, elle captive l'attention de William grâce à ses traits non physiques. La caractérisation de Maud et Sue est un peu différente car elles ne sont jamais impliquées dans un schéma hétérosexuel, même si Gentleman initie une fausse intrigue de cour. Au sein de l'intrigue d'usurpation, le récit met l'accent sur leur empressement mutuel à apprendre les actions de l'autre, ce qui finit par les rapprocher l'une de l'autre et d'elles-mêmes. Il semble donc que l'approche des romanciers néo-victoriens soit plutôt globale que divisée, car leurs personnages féminins peuvent incarner la féminité sans avoir à sacrifier leur agentivité. En conséquence, ce qui fait l'unicité des protagonistes néo-victoriens de ce corpus est l'amalgame d'attributs moraux et cognitifs, typiquement dissociés de la féminité. La narratologie féministe contribue alors à déconstruire l'association naturelle entre la femme et la féminité en mettant en lumière l'impact permanent de l'opposition binaire entre masculin et féminin sur les rôles (sociaux). Ce faisant, le texte néo-victorien vise à élucider la confusion entre sexe et genre. Ces intérêts se retrouvent dans les études de genre, qui s'avèrent tout aussi pertinentes pour explorer la façon dont le genre est construit dans le texte néo-victorien et comment l'identité est interprétée.

Les études néo-victoriennes se penchent sur la littérature et culture victoriennes et soulignent la persistance des discours patriarcaux sur les relations entre les sexes, étant donné que nous partons toujours d'une position binaire genrée afin de critiquer et, espérons-le, de déconstruire précisément ce binaire homme/femme. En effet, les romans de ce corpus néo-victorien mettent en scène les parcours de leurs personnages féminins dans la mesure où les textes suivent le processus d'acquisition de l'identité à travers une variété de personnages féminins, enfants et adultes, hétérosexuels et lesbiennes, des classes supérieures, moyennes et ouvrières, éduquées et illettrées.

À mesure que nous suivons de plus près l'éducation sexuée de Sophie, le récit de Faber propose des perceptions opposées de la performativité du genre à partir de différents points de vue : celui de la bonne et celui de Sugar. Selon la première, élever un enfant est un projet qui doit suivre un ensemble de règles appropriées. Sinon, il est voué à l'échec. Les travaux de Judith Butler sur la performativité du genre permettent d'éclairer ce processus de 'genrisation'. Dans son étude de la construction de l'identité sexuée, elle établit un lien étroit entre les actes de discours - actes de parole qui illustrent les relations entre les sujets parlants - et la théorie phénoménologique des actes qui vise à expliquer comment "social agents constitute social reality through language, gesture, and all manner of symbolic signs" (Butler 1988 : 519). En d'autres termes, elle considère que la "constitution" d'un sujet repose sur l'association et la coexistence du langage et des actes qui illustrent ce même langage. La femme de chambre dans le texte de Faber sert alors d'exécutrice de cet ensemble de règles ; elle veille à ce que les directives soient appliquées.

En raison de cette position intimidante, Sugar se sent à la fois coupable et effrayée de ne pas avoir les compétences requises pour être la gouvernante de Sophie. Elle se dit : "In a few hours, she'll be solely responsible for Sophie Rackham--What on earth is she going to do with her? She's an imposter, a fraud so outrageously transparent that... that even a child could see through it! *Axioms*, *dictums* and *golden rules* are what's wanted in a teacher, but when Sugar racks her brains for some, what does she find?" (Waters 2002: 373, italics added). La notion de performativité du genre de Butler permet d'élucider la préoccupation de Sugar quant à la manière dont Sophie doit être élevée. En fait, Butler concentre ses recherches sur la constitution du genre de la femme. Prenant comme point de départ l'affirmation de Beauvoir selon laquelle "one is not born, but, rather, *becomes* a woman", elle soutient que le genre est une identité sociale et pas seulement biologique et que le processus de sa construction se produit au fil du temps au moyen d'une "a stylized repetition of acts" (Butler 1988 : 519). Plus simplement, le soi féminin est le résultat de la stylisation du corps à travers des gestes corporels, des

mouvements et des mises en scène de différents types, d'où la dimension performative de la construction sociale de l'identité. Les dictats sociaux - les choses à faire et à ne pas faire - sont un facteur important qui détermine la manière dont le processus de formulation de l'identité de genre se déroule.

Nous lisons des manifestations similaires mais plus dramatiques de ce même processus de genrisation dans les souvenirs d'enfance de Sugar. Dès son plus jeune âge, sa mère Mme Castaway - qui est aussi sa maquerelle - la contraint à se prostituer pour vivre de son corps, la privant ainsi de son enfance et de son innocence. Vers la fin du récit, nous observons la rébellion de Sugar contre le rôle de la prostituée et sa transformation progressive en un individu plus indépendant, conscient de sa valeur en dehors du domaine de la prostitution. Elle opte pour le statut de figure maternelle qui lui apporte un sentiment de paix.

Dans le roman de Waters, le processus de genrisation est plus problématique puisque Maud est soumise dès son plus jeune âge à un conditionnement masculin patriarcal par les infirmières d'abord - considérées comme complices du patriarcat en raison de leur intériorisation des hiérarchies et des exigences des relations entre les sexes - puis par son oncle, lui-même un patriarche autoritaire. Dans l'asile, Maud "learn[s] the rudiments of discipline and order; and incidentally apprehend[s] the attitudes of insanity" (Waters 2002: 176). Cette première étape de son éducation préfigure les tourments psychologiques qu'elle devra endurer dans la maison de son oncle. Lorsqu'elle s'installe à Briar, M. Lilly cherche à faire de l'enfant sa secrétaire qui travaille sur une bibliographie de la pornographie. Ce processus de conditionnement est non seulement débilitant sur le plan individuel, puisque Maud apprend à être silencieuse, soumise et effacée, et moralement et éthiquement inapproprié en raison du contenu sur lequel elle est forcée de travailler, mais également dominateur sur le plan physique, puisque Lilly lui impose des comportements spécifiques. Ce qui rend le processus de genrisation de Maud problématique, c'est la position qu'elle prend dans ce monde d'hommes. Lilly lui ordonne d'accomplir de nombreux actes tels que rester immobile, parler doucement et écrire d'une certaine manière jusqu'à ce qu'elle les apprenne par cœur, niant ainsi sa subjectivité et même son humanité. Elle est également utilisée comme un objet sexuel pour attirer l'attention des hommes et renforcer l'effet du matériel pornographique. D'autre part, elle est associée à des capacités intellectuelles masculines et on lui apprend à devenir insensible, ce qui met en évidence sa masculinisation. A l'inverse, Maud acquiert progressivement une identité sexuée hybridée, alternant entre attributs féminins et masculins.

Le processus de formation identitaire de Maud met en évidence les limites de l'approche de Lanser qui repose sur un "binary model of gender that emphasize[s] difference" et tend "to

construct the category 'women' as if it were a universal group" (Page 2006 : 46/7). Au travers de cette enquête centrée sur quelques protagonistes, on peut suggérer que la fiction néo-victorienne célèbre la multiplicité des femmes en mettant en avant des modèles de protagonistes variés et souvent très différents. Dans ces romans, les protagonistes féminines défient et même (tentent de) renverser leurs processus de genrisation.

La représentation des rôles de genre dans le récit témoigne du fort impact du contexte socio-économique et idéologique victorien qui délimitait les responsabilités masculines et féminines au sein et en dehors du foyer. En fait, la consolidation de la dichotomie privé/public a indéniablement contextualisé les discussions sur les rôles de genre. Cela suggère en outre que la construction de l'identité féminine peut être affectée par les espaces victoriens, dans la mesure où le XIXe siècle se présente comme un paysage physique extrêmement complexe. Dans son enquête sur la protagoniste féminine, le roman néo-victorien revisite cette dichotomie afin de brouiller les frontières entre le privé et le public, et de proposer de nouvelles lectures de l'identité féminine.

Les textes néo-victoriens étudiés suivent les déplacements des protagonistes féminines entre les espaces de la sphère privée et de la sphère publique, mettant en lumière la dimension personnelle de ces espaces dans la mesure où les récits se concentrent sur la manière dont les protagonistes néo-victoriennes vivent les espaces (néo-)victoriens. Le point culminant de la dichotomie public/privé se situe à l'époque victorienne, lorsque la société de plus en plus urbanisée, industrialisée et moderne prend forme et façonne l'organisation sociale des familles. Ces affirmations ont eu pour conséquence de genriser l'espace en attribuant des rôles particuliers aux hommes et aux femmes. La sphère privée était associée aux femmes chastes, plus précisément aux épouses et aux mères. La sphère publique était à la fois un espace masculin de liberté et d'action, et un espace d'activité érotique et d'amoralité. L'exploration d'une possible expérience féminine dans cet espace-temps est d'une importance immédiate pour cette enquête, car une spatialité féminine fait référence au chronotope où le féminin est central dans l'articulation du thème spatial dans le récit. Dans l'introduction de *Bodyspace : Destabilizing Geographies of Gender and Sexuality* (1996), Nancy Duncan explore "the idea of knowledge as embodied, engendered and embedded in the material context of place and space" by means of "a reconsideration and repoliticization of such geographical concepts as space, place (…) sites of resistance, (…) the transgression of boundaries and the public/ private division of space" (Duncan 1996 : 1).

Faber revisite l'idéologie du XIXe siècle qui considérait la prostituée comme une figure problématique puisqu'elle n'est ni une femme apte à occuper la sphère privée ni un homme

dans la sphère publique. Il souligne la controverse de savoir où la placer si les deux espaces ne l'accueillent pas, en mettant en scène la mobilité de sa protagoniste principale dans et entre les sphères privée et publique. La subversion spatiale de Faber fait également écho à de nombreuses études sur cette dichotomie spatiale dans la réalité et la littérature du XIXe siècle, comme Martha Vicinus, Judith Walkowitz ou Deborah Epstein Nord. On pourrait suggérer que, par le biais de sa protagoniste féminine, Faber illustre la façon dont les essentialisations précédentes sur les rôles de genre et les espaces genrés ne sont plus valables d'un point de vue contemporain, et affirme que le public/privé n'est en fait pas aussi fixe qu'on le pensait.

De même, Maud cherche une opportunité professionnelle dans la boutique de livres érotiques de M. Hawtrey. Associée aux livres pornographiques, le statut social de Maud est dégradé et elle est assimilée à une prostituée. Dans *Walking the Victorian Streets : Women, Representation, and the City* (1995), Deborah Epstein Nord se concentre sur le groupe social des femmes qui marchaient dans les rues victoriennes, afin de critiquer la position du flâneur. Elle souligne que la promeneuse n'est pas simplement une version féminine de la figure masculine, une flâneuse, car quelle que soit son activité, qu'il s'agisse de flâner, de faire du shopping ou de faire du travail social, elle était susceptible d'être objectifiée et marquée sexuellement. Mais surtout, le fait de demander un emploi pour gagner de l'argent et se financer est un clin d'œil littéraire aux nouvelles femmes qui cherchaient du travail dans divers domaines, une tendance qui s'est imposée vers la fin du siècle. Les journalistes, les téléphonistes, les enseignantes ne sont que quelques exemples des emplois occupés par les nouvelles femmes éduquées dans la classe moyenne. Ces "promeneuses des rues", lorsqu'elles représentent leurs expériences urbaines, comme le soutient Nord dans son étude qui remet en question la vision standard (masculine) de la ville victorienne divisée entre public et privé, sont animées par "a consciousness of transgression and trespassing, [by] the vexed sexuality [their] position implies, and [by their] struggle[s] to escape the status of spectacle and become a spectator" (Nord 1995 : 12).

Fowles donne une dimension épistémologique à la chambre d'hôtel d'Exeter et à la maison préraphaélite dans la mesure où elles deviennent l'incarnation de la libération sexuelle de Sarah. Le texte de Fowles fait écho à la façon dont les années 1880 ont été une période où les femmes ont commencé à gagner plus de liberté, non seulement en se déplaçant dans les espaces publics de la ville, mais surtout en s'exprimant à la fois sur le désir sexuel et contre leur propre sexualisation et objectivation dans la sphère publique, spécifiquement urbaine. En fait, un nouvel air de liberté sexuelle a émergé à la fin du siècle. Il est également possible de

prétendre que la position ultime de Sarah en tant que Nouvelle Femme matérialise la vision que Charles a d'elle comme moyen d'émancipation.

Les romanciers néo-victoriens revisitent les espaces victoriens non pas simplement pour illustrer la porosité de la dichotomie public/privé, mais surtout pour capitaliser sur la capacité de leurs protagonistes à transcender les limites en estompant les frontières entre ces sphères séparées, ainsi qu'en créant des espaces liminaires dans lesquels elles peuvent assumer des rôles différents. Les textes néo-victoriens font écho aux préoccupations de la géographie féministe qui soutient que la conscience que la femme a de son rôle, de son identité et de sa signification est incarnée géographiquement et spatialement. Les romanciers néo-victoriens répondent à l'appel selon lequel l'espace affecte la manière dont le genre est vécu, construit et interprété. On peut suggérer qu'à l'instar des géographes féministes, les romanciers néo-victoriens s'intéressent particulièrement à la manière dont les contraintes spatiales affectent l'appartenance à un genre et aux façons dont celle-ci se manifeste ou est remise en question. Par le biais de leur réutilisation et de leur subversion des espaces victoriens, ils mettent en lumière les possibilités et les limites de la mobilité spatiale des femmes au-delà de l'ordre spatial patriarcal. En outre, la capacité des personnages féminins à transcender la division binaire de l'espace met en évidence non seulement leur insistance à (ne pas) appartenir à des lieux particuliers, mais aussi le lien indissociable entre l'espace et le lieu, le soi et la géographie.

En étudiant les interfaces des (dis-)continuités entre la sensation victorienne et la néo-sensation, j'ai établi de nombreux parallèles entre les protagonistes néo-victoriennes de ce corpus et plusieurs protagonistes victoriennes dans la mesure où Sarah, Sugar, Agnes, Sue et Maud sont modelées sur des figures archétypales. Cette affirmation ne mène pas seulement à la conclusion que la relation entre les deux genres est définie par la proximité et la distance simultanées, la similarité et la différence et une tension entre le passé et le présent, mais suggère également "a paradoxical connection between imitation of and escape from the inherited maternal narrative, since the daughter can re-enact as well as alter it" (Muller 2011 : 38). Bien qu'Angela Carter utilise spécifiquement la métaphore matrilinéaire dans son étude de l'écriture pornographique du Marquis de Sade, on peut affirmer que la même métaphore peut être utilisée pour explorer la signification des prédécesseurs victoriens dans la caractérisation des protagonistes féminins dans la fiction néo-victorienne. L'objectif donc est d'évaluer dans quelle mesure les protagonistes néo-victoriennes suivent et s'écartent de leurs prédécesseurs victoriens, notamment en ce qui concerne les représentations typologiques telles que la femme déchue, l'ange de la maison et la villaine. En outre, toutes les protagonistes féminines de ce corpus néo-victorien, pourrait-on dire, sont directement ou indirectement poussées par leur

mère fictive, morte ou vivante. Carter écrit : "If the daughter is a mocking memory to the mother – then the mother is a horrid warning to her daughter. 'As I am, so you will be'" (Carter 1979 : 144). L'objectif est donc d'examiner dans quelle mesure la formation de l'identité de ces personnages néo-victoriens imite et/ou dévie de leurs mères respectives. Par conséquent, on peut se demander quel type de relations féminines sont mises en place dans les récits. Une autre variation de la métaphore matrilinéaire est centrée sur la création artistique. En effet, plusieurs protagonistes néo-victoriens développent une identité d'auteur par le biais de laquelle ils accentuent une voix féminine qui non seulement englobe l'espace narratif, mais illustre également les attributs féminins de la créativité. Ainsi, la métaphore matrilinéaire peut être utilisée pour décrire la relation entre les filles et les mères littéraires, les personnages néo-victoriens et leurs prédécesseurs victoriens, en particulier les Nouvelles Femmes de la fin du siècle. Le but ultime est donc d'étudier comment la révision de la métaphore matrilinéaire par les romanciers néo-victoriens peut être utilisée pour faire avancer la libération des protagonistes féminins des moules patriarcaux des prédécesseurs victoriens et, par conséquent, pour mettre en avant le projet féministe des romanciers néo-victoriens d'autonomiser leurs personnages féminins.

En étudiant les représentations féminines dans la littérature, notamment dans la fiction victorienne et néo-victorienne, la dichotomie de la femme déchue et de l'ange dans la maison est récurrente et les relations entre les personnages sont souvent basées sur le dialogisme ange/démon. Le trope littéraire de la femme déchue est revisité dans *The Crimson Petal and the White* par le biais du groupe social des prostituées, et plus particulièrement de Sugar. Dans sa ré-exploration du modèle victorien de la femme déchue, Faber met magistralement en scène l'élévation de Sugar non seulement dans la catégorie des prostituées stéréotypées et des femmes victoriennes, mais aussi dans l'intrigue. Il choisit également de la doter de compétences littéraires exceptionnelles, faisant d'elle un personnage non conventionnel et lui permettant d'occuper un éventuel poste de gouvernante. Sa trajectoire inverse donc le parcours typique des femmes déchues dans les fictions victoriennes du début du siècle, revisitant ainsi les motifs grecs de la *katabasis* et de l'*anabasis*. Si, étymologiquement, la katabasis en grec ancien désigne une descente, ou une manœuvre militaire impliquant une descente, dans la mythologie, elle en est venue à signaler le voyage du héros aux enfers pour faire valoir ses qualités exceptionnelles. Par opposition, l'anabasis peut être définie comme une montée, une marche vers le haut, ou une avancée militaire. Dans la mythologie, il désigne le titre particulier de l'avancée de Cyrus le Jeune en Asie, telle que racontée par Xénophon. De manière significative, le personnage de Sucre est constamment dépeint dans un mouvement ascendant : "[looking]

up" (Faber 2002: 88), "sitting up to comb her hair" (Faber 2002: 187), "[creeping] up the stairs to her room" (Faber 2002: 209), et "[lifting] herself up on her elbows" (Faber 2002: 562). Aussi insignifiantes que soient ces actions, elles n'en signalent pas moins l'attitude érigée de la protagoniste tout au long du récit, comme si elle marchait vers le haut comme Cyrus.

The Crimson Petal and the White ne s'arrête pas à Sugar qui remet en cause les représentations stéréotypées victoriennes des femmes dans le récit. Faber s'inspire du trope victorien de l'ange dans la maison pour construire le personnage d'Agnès, qui semble être l'incarnation littéraire de l'ange parfait. Le personnage d'Agnès est multidimensionnel, alternant entre un état de rationalité et de raison d'une part, et un autre d'irrationalité et de folie d'autre part. Son état de faiblesse, ses délires constants et ses hallucinations à propos du Couvent de la Santé ainsi que ses effondrements sur le sol, ses vomissements dans les rues et son comportement incontrôlé et inapproprié dans les lieux publics et dans les hautes sphères sont des indications de son instabilité mentale et de son imprévisibilité. D'un autre côté, la conscience de son mépris pour William, son état d'illumination et sa décision de se reconvertir au catholicisme, ainsi que ses réflexions et ses questions sérieuses sur la vie et les devoirs d'une parfaite hôtesse, la rapprochent davantage de la raison et du bon sens. Une caractérisation aussi ambivalente déroute le lecteur et complique le personnage d'Agnès qui reste un mystère. Bien qu'elle reste oblique, son étude apporte aux lecteurs un sentiment d'intrigue et d'excitation constant. Dans *The Crimson Petal and the White*, Faber utilise le mysticisme victorien, la spiritualité, la folie et l'hystérie, ainsi que des outils stylistiques comme le recours à l'humour et à l'ironie, afin de revisiter le trope littéraire de l'ange dans la maison. Il crée ainsi un personnage non conventionnel, précisément dans sa non-conformité à ce mythe.

Le texte de Fowles revisite un autre trope victorien puisque nous constatons une remise en cause constante de la figure de la femme méchante à travers Sarah. Le démon féminin, l'un des tropes littéraires victoriens récurrents dans la sensation victorienne, est revisité pour construire le personnage de Sarah, qui semble être l'incarnation de la méchanceté à East Lyme. Le personnage de Sarah est novateur par rapport aux protagonistes victoriennes dans la mesure où elle ne tente pas de cacher le démoniaque sous une apparence angélique, mais embrasse ouvertement sa nature sauvage et transgressive en tant que femme du lieutenant français, devenant ainsi l'incarnation du Nouveau Monde. La méchanceté de Sarah est un signe de son pouvoir car c'est elle qui choisit de construire une telle image d'elle-même et à son sujet. Elle invente l'histoire de sa perte de virginité et assume la position d'une femme déchue qui a perdu son honneur afin d'éviter d'être représentée comme telle par la société victorienne. Constamment, "[attempting] to become unstoried", elle construit son destin, elle écrit son

propre texte (Tarbox 1996 : 89). Mahinur Akşehir Uygur va jusqu'à soutenir que la méchanceté délibérée de Sarah est une manifestation de liberté, car "[r]ather than portraying the wicked women as victims of a male-dominated society, [Fowles] prefers to grant wickedness to Sarah as a power position that would grant her freedom from the conventional codes of Victorian society" (Akşehir Uygur 2014 : 177).

Dans le roman à sensation, on trouve souvent l'héroïne en lutte constante avec une antagoniste. Bien que ce dialogisme puisse être considéré comme une structure narrative constante et un schéma récurrent dans la tradition du sensationnel, ces dernières décennies cependant, avec l'avancée des théories postcritiques, certains chercheurs comme Frederick Jameson et Matthew Price ont proposé de nouvelles lectures de certaines traditions narratives, précisément "the fiction of active, heroic protagonism" (Price 2019 : 246). Au lieu des héros du XIXe siècle qui occupent une position centrale dans le récit, il faut considérer le rôle des personnages mineurs qui sapent la force du premier. Ce phénomène désigné par Jameson comme la "deterioration of protagonicity" implique que l'agence dans le récit n'est pas exclusivement associée au protagoniste, mais distribuée de manière variée (Jameson 2013 : 96). En d'autres termes, le voyage du héros n'est pas seulement défini par sa propre prise de décision, ou marqué par son propre échec ou succès. L'intrigue avance grâce à la participation d'autres personnages secondaires qui rendent l'action et l'activité possibles. Parmi ces différents acteurs, je m'intéresse principalement à l'agent du 'donor' qui est défini par Vladimir Propp dans les contes populaires russes "as the figure who provides the hero with a magical agent necessary to defeat the villain" (Propp cité dans Price 2019 : 247). Jameson et Bruce Robbins affirment que même si cette figure a un rôle secondaire par rapport au héros, elle est "the real heart of the narrative" (Robbins 2007 : 41). Ces médiateurs viennent perturber le triangle traditionnel du héros, du méchant et de l'objet du désir, le même triangle qui établit la tradition de la sensation. Ainsi, au lieu d'avoir des personnages féminins rivaux, nous sommes confrontés à de nouveaux modèles de relations féminines qui ne sont plus fondées sur la rivalité et l'antagonisme, mais plutôt sur la coopération et l'assistance. La fiction néo-victorienne vient réviser le modèle traditionnel des relations féminines en mettant en avant les notions de solidarité féminine et de sororité. La protagoniste est toujours aidée par et/ou se précipite au secours d'un autre personnage féminin. De plus, les personnages féminins qui sont traditionnellement écrits comme des antagonistes se transforment en compagnes, comme c'est le cas dans le texte de Faber. Sugar et Caroline - des prostituées travaillant dans un domaine très compétitif - partagent une relation de véritable amitié et de compagnonnage. Faber imagine une relation différente entre Sugar et Agnès, basée sur la sympathie, la compassion et

l'assistance, surtout de la part de Sugar. Si nous explorons la notion de solidarité en tant que concept sociologique, la définition d'Alain Supiot peut nous aider à élucider notre enquête sur la relation entre Sugar et Agnès. Bien qu'il énumère cinq formes diverses mais complémentaires de solidarité, ce qui est particulièrement intéressant pour notre étude est sa définition de "la solidarité familiale" : "Les solidarités familiales ont une dimension affective et coopérative et s'expriment par les secours et les soins prodigués directement aux proches. Fondée sur des liens personnels, la solidarité est source d'une interdépendance qui peut recéler le meilleur ou le pire" (Supiot 2015 : 33). À la lumière de l'insistance de Supiot sur la dimension affective de la relation, ainsi que sur son potentiel à créer une sorte de dépendance mutuelle et de coopération, la relation entre Sugar et Agnès peut être vue comme manifestant une forme de solidarité familiale qui permet à Agnès de parvenir à l'individuation grâce au soutien de Sugar. En empruntant la notion d'individuation de Marx, l'individuation peut être définie comme la socialisation ou la collectivité, car "Marx's concept of individuation distinctively [emphasizes] (…) the social and historical context of individuality" (Miller 1979 : 6).

Dans le texte de Waters également, Sue et Maud - deux personnages dessinés à l'origine par Mrs Sucksby pour être le prédateur et la proie dans son intrigue - se transforment en amants conscients des manques et des déficiences de l'autre et désireux de se soutenir mutuellement après de multiples rebondissements et révélations. Alors qu'Agnès et Sugar deviennent des sœurs dans le roman de Faber, Sue et Maud deviennent amoureuses dans celui de Waters. Bien que les deux auteurs utilisent des approches différentes des relations féminines dans la mesure où le premier révise la relation épouse/maîtresse et investit dans la sororité féminine, tandis que le second opte pour l'amour lesbien, tous deux semblent vouloir réviser les perceptions traditionnelles de l'antagonisme féminin en mettant en avant la solidarité et la complicité. Il est intéressant de noter que ce n'est que par le biais de ces relations pacifiques que les héroïnes parviennent à trouver une résolution au sein de l'intrigue. Ainsi, Faber et Waters réimaginent les relations féminines traditionnelles, souvent fondées sur la querelle et la compétition, en investissant dans les notions de fraternité et de solidarité féminines. Ce nouveau modèle de relations féminines n'apparaît cependant pas dans le roman de Fowles. Cela peut s'expliquer par le fait que Sarah est censée être une femme indépendante du Nouveau Monde, déterminée à tracer son propre chemin vers la liberté.

Par ailleurs, ce qui est également remarquable dans ces nouvelles relations féminines, c'est le poids de l'institution de la maternité sur la formation de l'identité des protagonistes. En effet, Sugar, Maud et Sue sont influencées par leur héritage matrilinéaire, le poids du passé et des décisions de leurs mères est omniprésent dans leurs parcours d'exploration de soi. En outre,

à la fin des récits, Sugar dans le texte de Faber et Sarah dans celui de Fowles sont associées à leur rôle de mère, un rôle généralement attribué dans l'époque victorienne à une sphère privée aux possibilités limitées. Ainsi, les trois auteurs reconsidèrent le sens de la maternité dans la mesure où ils explorent son potentiel comme moyen d'individuation et de bonheur. Les romans de ce corpus mettent en avant des généalogies complexes et leur impact sur l'identité individuelle, en se concentrant notamment sur l'histoire matrilinéaire. L'identité féminine est à la fois déterminée et déformée par les histoires matrilinéaires. Les récits mettent en scène le long et difficile processus de libération vers une subjectivité individualisée, loin de son passé. Si le maternalisme peut être inhibant et confinant pour certaines héroïnes, comme c'est le cas pour Agnès, il peut aussi être le moyen de s'individuer, précisément en se détachant de son poids, comme c'est le cas pour Sugar, Sue et Maud, qui parviennent à trouver de nouvelles définitions d'elles-mêmes et de la maternité en dehors des limites de leurs mères respectives. Il est toutefois intéressant de noter que les romans soulignent également que la fille n'est jamais libérée de sa mère, car l'histoire matrilinéaire la hante et la guide constamment. Néanmoins, le résultat de ce processus de libération est une identité individualisée et une voix subjective par laquelle chaque protagoniste insiste sur la nécessité de s'éloigner de son passé matrilinéaire.

L'un des mérites du néo-victorianisme réside dans son exploration de la représentation des femmes des minorités, grâce à sa discussion des questions d'ethnicité d'une part, et de celles de la sexualité d'autre part. Plus précisément, dans leur étude du néo-victorianisme, Heilmann et Llewellyn insistent sur le statut axial de la voix. En fait, le retour du genre au passé victorien a d'abord été associé à une tentative de "recover and heal" d'un passé colonial traumatisant (Letissier 2010 : 3). Llewellyn signale le "desire to re-write the historical narrative of that period by representing marginalised voices, post-colonial viewpoints, new histories of sexuality, and other generally 'different' versions of the Victorian" (Llewellyn 2008 : 165). De même, Sally Shuttleworth affirme que le néo-victorianisme est né du désir de "give voice to women, or the racially oppressed who have been denied voice in history" (Shuttleworth 1997 : 256). Dans les romans de ce corpus, les protagonistes féminines appartiennent à différents groupes marginalisés, tels que la prostituée, la criminelle, la folle et la lesbienne, catégories qui étaient dégradées dans la société victorienne. Les textes illustrent comment ces héroïnes ont récupéré leur voix de diverses manières, voix qui résonnent dans les récits et expriment la subjectivité et l'agentivité de ces femmes. Les romans mettent en lumière la voix affirmée de Sarah, la voix rebelle de Sugar, la voix de l'insécurité privée d'Agnès et la voix politique de Maud. Mais Sugar adopte également une voix didactique et critique, notamment en ce qui concerne les codes d'éducation des jeunes filles de l'époque victorienne. La voix d'Agnès devient plus

philosophique dans son interrogation sur les phénomènes existentiels. Maud adopte une voix d'auteur encore plus affirmée dans sa réécriture des fictions qui l'entourent, tandis que la voix de Sue, par le biais de sa relation (romantique) en constante évolution, représente non seulement les personnes libérées sexuellement mais aussi celles qui traversent un processus de découverte et de création de soi. Toutes ces voix émergentes combinées servent à façonner une idéologie féministe, à réécrire une tradition patriarcale qui a longtemps contenu la voix féminine dans l'étroite sphère privée en la limitant à un certain nombre de critères de respectabilité et de bienséance, voire au silence le plus souvent. Dans mon étude de la voix, je fais la distinction entre la voix verbale, qui comprend les énoncés parlés et le monologue intérieur, et la voix non verbale qui englobe tous les modes de langage silencieux, notamment dans le format écrit au moyen de lettres, de journaux intimes ou de toute autre forme de fiction, afin d'explorer les métaphores que ces voix représentent.

La voix de la protagoniste féminine dans le roman de Fowles est mise en valeur par une voix narratrice sympathique. La multiplicité de la voix de Sarah lui permet de jouer divers rôles. Elle apparaît d'abord comme religieuse faisant d'elle un prédicateur moral. Puis, elle est collective marquant sa transformation en observatrice sociale. Elle est également sincère lorsqu'elle assume le rôle de confesseur. Dans toutes ses variations, sa voix est non seulement efficace, mais également convaincante, car Charles finit par lui dire : "I already know, to my cost, what an accomplished actress you can be when it suits your purpose" (Fowles 1969 : 194). En outre, la voix audacieuse de Sarah manifeste ses convictions anticonformistes dans une société qui condamne les femmes pour un prétendu manque de chasteté. Son insistance à dévoiler ses secrets afin de garder le contrôle de sa vie et d'empêcher la société d'East Lyme de raconter son histoire, met ainsi en avant son agencement et sa voix. En outre, il est également possible d'affirmer que par l'intermédiaire du point de vue critique de Sarah, le texte de Fowles sert à expliquer et à nuancer la pruderie victorienne : "The vast majority of witnesses and reporters, in every age, belong to the educated class; and this has produced, throughout history, a kind of minority distortion of reality. The prudish puritanity we lend to the Victorians, and rather lazily apply to all classes of Victorian society, is in fact a middle-class view of the middle-class ethos" (Fowles 1969 : 115).

Il est intéressant de noter que Sarah n'intervient dans le récit qu'au moyen de la parole, d'énoncés verbaux et de formes d'expression non verbales. Bien que l'œuvre soit ancrée dans les techniques modernes et postmodernes, on ne trouve pas un seul exemple de monologue intérieur dans le récit en ce qui concerne Sarah. Cette absence est très significative. Un certain nombre de critiques comme Magali Michael, Margaret Goscilo et Brooke Lenz ont fait valoir

que Sarah est décrite de l'extérieur d'un point de vue masculin revendiqué par trois voix (celle de Charles, du narrateur et de Fowles lui-même) et qu'elle manque par conséquent d'autorité puisque la voix qui prédomine dans le récit est essentiellement masculine. Néanmoins, ce choix délibéré peut s'expliquer par l'insistance de Fowles à faire de Sarah un mystère irrésolu pour tous, obligeant les personnages et les lecteurs à la lire de l'extérieur et interdisant l'accès à son intérieur. En outre, il est possible d'affirmer que si les voix masculines sont narratives, la sienne est créative. À travers la tentative constante de Sarah d'écrire son récit, elle assume une voix créative en construisant sa propre histoire, car "power resides in the hands of those who tell the best – that is, most intelligible, most satisfying – stories" (Tarbox 1996 : 90).

L'un des mérites de *The Crimson Petal and the White* réside non seulement dans l'attention qu'il porte aux voix féminines marginales de l'épouse folle et de la prostituée, deux catégories souvent négligées et même réduites au silence, mais aussi dans sa représentation de la complexité de ces voix. En effet, la voix d'Agnès est représentée comme ambivalente et évolutive puisqu'elle assume différentes positions tout au long du récit. La voix de Sugar est plus contrôlée grâce à sa capacité à la réguler et à la transformer. Ainsi, grâce à l'habileté des protagonistes à jouer des personnages différents, les deux voix féminines sont théâtralisées. La voix d'Agnès dans le texte de Faber est plurielle et multiple car elle alterne entre douceur et dureté, oralité et silence, puisqu'elle est à la fois parlée et écrite. De plus, elle passe d'une voix enchanteresse et musicale à une voix de sermons religieux et de conférences scientifiques. Il est intéressant de noter que bien qu'Agnès ne semble pas à sa place dans le récit car les autres personnages ne tiennent pas compte de sa voix ou l'ignorent, elle parvient néanmoins à être entendue et comprise, en particulier par Sugar. Cette dernière a recours au jeu de rôle. Elle ne se contente pas d'interpréter plusieurs personnages, mais, plus important encore, elle commande plusieurs voix. Elle a la capacité de moduler son timbre et son ton pour des objectifs particuliers. Bien que la voix de Sugar soit initialement celle d'un personnage marginal comme la prostituée, elle apparaît dès les premières pages du récit comme résonnante et puissante. Grâce à sa capacité à jouer différents rôles comme la séductrice, la partenaire réconfortante, la gouvernante apaisante et la sauveteuse, et à sa maîtrise du camouflage dans la mesure où elle parvient à cacher ses véritables intentions lorsqu'elle parle en variant son timbre en fonction de ses objectifs, sa voix a un impact décisif sur les personnages et l'intrigue. Enfin, Sugar assume une identité littéraire et est donc dotée d'une voix d'auteur.

Le roman de Waters est co-narré par deux personnages féminins : Sue, la forgeronne de bas étage et Maud, la secrétaire pornographique de haut rang. À travers ces deux personnages singuliers, Waters donne la parole à des sujets queer. Dans le présent document, le terme "queer"

a deux significations. Selon l'Oxford English Dictionary, l'adjectif désigne d'abord quelqu'un qui est "strange, odd, peculiar, eccentric" et "of questionable character; suspicious, dubious"Le second sens est utilisé de manière familière pour "[denote] or [relate] to a sexual or gender identity that does not correspond to established ideas of sexuality and gender, especially heterosexual norms". Le point de départ de cette analyse est l'affirmation d'Annamarie Jagose selon laquelle le queer est toujours une identité en construction, un site en devenir permanent au sein des discours dominants de la société dans laquelle il/elle vit (Jagose 1996). Dans le roman de Waters, Sue et Maud sont des protagonistes qui deviennent queer, construisant leurs identités à travers de multiples discours, notamment les fictions fabriquées pour elles et par elles, mais aussi le récit lui-même. Grâce à sa narration à double voix, le texte crée un espace de polyphonie, car les protagonistes féminines non conventionnelles et transgressives contrôlent la narration. Bien qu'elle soit une criminelle, la voix narrative de Sue domine le texte au lieu d'être marginalisée. Sa narration est principalement interne. Le monologue intérieur permet au lecteur d'accéder aux pensées et aux sentiments de Sue. Ces techniques mettent l'accent sur la vie psychologique de la protagoniste. Elle est présentée comme un personnage ambivalent multidimensionnel qui alterne entre force et vulnérabilité, raison et passion, et dont le rôle oscille entre agent de son propre destin et victime de la machination des autres. Dans les deux cas, son personnage est au centre de l'intrigue. De la même manière, les discours intérieurs de Maud dévoilent ses sentiments d'emprisonnement, de souffrance et son désir constant de libération. En effet, les énoncés vocaux et les dialogues dans le texte de Waters sont si limités que le roman peut être qualifié de psychologique dans la mesure où ces techniques exposent littéralement le sujet féminin et dévoilent son intériorité. Les deux personnages féminins adoptent des voix hautement sexuelles lorsqu'elles expriment leurs désirs charnels l'une pour l'autre, faisant du texte de Waters un récit élaboré pour une exploration de l'identité lesbienne.

Trois personnages féminins de ce corpus se distinguent non seulement par leur complexité mais aussi par leur créativité littéraire puisqu'on leur attribue une identité d'auteur, à des degrés divers. En effet, Sugar dans le texte de Faber et Maud dans celui de Waters sont des personnages engagés dans la tâche de l'écriture littéraire : la première écrit un roman policier pour se venger des hommes qui ont abusé d'elle et de ses sœurs, et la seconde devient écrivaine de pornographie pour gagner sa vie. Dans le texte de Fowles, Sarah est associée à des cercles artistiques créatifs, car elle devient la muse de Dante Gabriel Rossetti et de ses disciples. Cette créativité littéraire les rapproche de la figure de la nouvelle femme de la fin du siècle.

Dans le roman de Faber, on suit Sugar dans son voyage de créativité littéraire : un voyage initié par elle et dirigé vers elle-même où l'héroïne existe par procuration. Sa pensée

critique et ses commentaires sur la littérature de l'époque la rapprochent de la nouvelle femme de la fin du siècle, à la fois créative et subversive. De plus, sa détermination à prendre la parole et à faire entendre sa voix ainsi que celle de ses sœurs prostituées souligne sa croyance en la sororité féminine, une notion fortement défendue par les Femmes Nouvelles. Son roman peut également être lu comme un renversement de l'histoire de Jack l'Éventreur, dont les crimes impliquaient généralement des prostituées qui vivaient et travaillaient dans les bidonvilles de l'East End de Londres et qui étaient égorgées. Il est intéressant de noter que dans le roman de Sugar, les rôles sont inversés puisque l'héroïne devient le meurtrier, une version féminine de l'Éventreur avec les mêmes compétences en matière de brutalité. Par le biais du même acte d'écriture qui lui procure le pouvoir de créer et donc de dicter le destin de ses créations fictives, elle insiste pour refuser aux personnages masculins toute forme d'agence et de contrôle.

En tant que dissidente sexuelle et héroïne d'un Künstlerroman néo-victorien, Maud s'apparente également à la Nouvelle Femme de la fin du siècle. Son émancipation sexuelle lui permet de prendre conscience de son statut de femme écrivain et d'acquérir une indépendance financière. Comme les romancières de la Nouvelle Femme des années 1890 qui s'assuraient une position exceptionnellement importante sur le marché littéraire et obtenaient un succès commercial, un attrait populaire et (parfois) une reconnaissance critique, Maud est finalement capable de gagner sa vie en tant qu'écrivain professionnel et en tant que femme écrivant sur les femmes du point de vue des femmes. Ann Heilmann et Lyn Pykett soutiennent toutes deux que la femme artiste dans les romans de la Nouvelle Femme fonctionne comme "a figure of authorial self-reflexivity" puisqu'elle englobe plusieurs féminités : la féministe qui s'immisce dans la sphère masculine ainsi que la femme à la féminité intérieure conflictuelle qui explore les contradictions entre la définition dominante de la féminité de la classe moyenne et la sexualité féminine (Heilmann 2004 : 5). En usurpant l'identité d'auteur de son oncle et en devenant une femme auteur, Maud s'immisce dans la sphère masculine représentée par M. Lilly et ses amis.

Le texte de Fowles accorde d'abord à Sarah le statut de créatrice car elle assume une position d'auteur quant à la création de son histoire. En fabriquant l'intrigue autour du lieutenant français, elle conçoit une fiction qui lui est propre. Plus intriguant encore, la fin corrobore son identité d'artiste entourée de nombreux objets d'art, d'esquisses et de "many paintings, so many the place seemed more an art gallery" (Fowles 1969 : 188). Charles la compare à Miss Christina Rossetti avec laquelle elle partage "a certain incomprehensible mysticism[.] A passionate obscurity, the sense of a mind too inward and femininely involute" (Fowles 1969 : 195). Une telle comparaison met en lumière la capacité créative de Sarah,

puisque Christina Rossetti est elle-même une artiste et une poète. Ainsi, Sarah participe à la création et à la production de l'art préraphaélite.

La tension qui entoure la question du statut de la femme auteure remonte à l'anxiété des femmes d'entrer dans le domaine de la création littéraire, de s'approprier un espace initialement exclusif aux auteurs masculins et de rivaliser avec les canons masculins. En effet, Sean Burke suggère que certaines des principales difficultés auxquelles les femmes ont dû faire face au cours des siècles ont été d'acquérir une légitimité en tant qu'auteurs : "It would scarcely be an exaggeration to say that the struggles of feminism have been primarily a struggle for authorship – understood in the widest sense as the arena in which culture attempts to define itself" (Burke 1995 : 45). Il n'est donc que légitime que nous trouvions l'écriture comme l'un des thèmes les plus récurrents de la fiction néo-victorienne, principalement construite autour d'une héroïne/artiste féminine en quête d'identité en tant que femme et créatrice, comme le montrent Sugar, Maud et Sarah.

Ainsi, Sugar peut être considérée comme une résurrection de l'héroïne du Künstlerroman, la femme artiste en quête de libération et d'épanouissement. *The Crimson Petal and the White* s'inspire des Künstlerromane et des Bildungsromane des XIXe et XXe siècles, ce qui fait du texte une version adaptée qui suit le parcours de Sugar dans sa croissance en tant que femme et artiste. Il signale les difficultés et les obstacles que la femme artiste doit affronter dans la quête de son moi. De même, on peut considérer *Fingersmith* comme une néo-fiction de Nouvelle Femme par le biais de Maud, le personnage-auteur qui fait revivre la figure de la Nouvelle Femme. Alors que le roman de Waters présente les éléments "sexués" typiques que Kohlke considère comme caractéristiques du néo-victorianisme, il élargit et aiguise la réflexion en soulignant l'importance de la créativité féminine dans la formation de l'identité (sexuelle). Il en résulte la construction d'un type spécifique d'héroïne néo-victorienne, la protagoniste subversive de néo-Nouvelle Femme qui s'inspire des écrivains britanniques de Nouvelle Femme ainsi que des représentations fictives de Nouvelle Femme des années 1890. Il est intéressant de noter que, comme ses prédécesseurs de la fin de l'ère victorienne, le roman de Waters a été critiqué pour son personnage trop commercial. Pourtant, dans son exploration du désir et de la créativité lesbiens et dans sa révision des représentations pornographiques, *Fingersmith* opère une puissante déconstruction du discours patriarcal sur la sexualité féminine, de l'écriture masculine et des figures d'auteurs masculins. Kaplan le lit même à la lumière du "Feminism [which] began an analysis taken up by gay, lesbian and queer critics, historians and theorists that, at its boldest put the heteronormativity of the Victorian period into question" (Kaplan 2011 : 47). En effet, *Fingersmith*, plus important encore, offre une alternative érotique

féminine convaincante, articulée par ses protagonistes féminines et surtout par Maud, une figure prométhéenne qui vole le feu créatif de son oncle afin d'écrire sa propre t/sexualité et instaurer sa propre écriture féminine cixousienne. L'analogie entre les protagonistes néo-victoriennes et les auteures Nouvelles Femmes de la fin du siècle conduit à considérer les représentations (sexuelles) du personnage féminin dans le roman néo-victorien.

La représentation du corps féminin dans la littérature a toujours été au centre des préoccupations. Dans *Le Deuxième Sexe*, Simone De Beauvoir reprend certains des arguments exposés par Mary Wollstonecraft et s'oppose au moule imposé aux femmes en montrant comment les auteurs masculins ont construit la femme comme l'Autre. Toutes deux ont souligné que les écrivains masculins ont utilisé leur plume pour créer un monde de dualité. Dans un tel monde, les hommes occupent un espace transcendantal tandis que les femmes sont limitées au domaine physique. Beauvoir affirme : "He is the transcendent, he soars in the sky of heroes; woman crouches on earth beneath his feet" (Beauvoir 1982 : 676). Cette dichotomie conventionnelle est peut-être le résultat de la conceptualisation de la scission entre l'esprit et le corps dans la pensée de Descartes par exemple. Elizabeth Grosz écrit : "Descartes instituted a dualism which three centuries of philosophical thought have attempted to overcome or reconcile" (Grosz 1994 : 6). Ce dualisme a finalement conduit à des distinctions entre homme et femme, associant le rationnel à l'homme et le matériel à la femme.

Laurence Talairach-Vielmas va jusqu'à affirmer que les genres victoriens de contes de fées et de sensation qui ont proliféré grâce à l'essor de la publicité et des cultures de consommation de l'époque ont pu participer à présenter le corps féminin comme un objet de féminité : "[f]eminine representation, caught within a commodity culture saturated with advertisements and dominated by representation, transforms feminine identity into a literary exhibit where the woman's body is only figured in sets of similes" (Talairach-Vielmas 2007 : introduction). Par conséquent, le corps féminin était souvent considéré comme une marchandise à travers des idéaux tels que l'ange de la maison ou la femme de l'autre côté du "miroir", qui mettaient l'accent sur le processus de transformation et de remodelage à la perfection. Le corps masculin, quant à lui, était principalement caractérisé par la puissance, la force et la virilité masculines et "often normalised as the epitome of Victorian values", de la masculinité victorienne et de sa physicalité incarnée (Parsons et Heholt 2019 : introduction).

On pourrait suggérer que le genre néo-victorien, puisqu'il ne se contente pas de confronter le lecteur à une multiplicité de protagonistes féminins, mais qu'il explore également l'utilisation qu'elles font de leur corps à des fins de subversion, pourrait être engagé dans le même projet que le roman à sensation victorien du réexamen des définitions du corps féminin,

des définitions qui visent la fusion entre l'esprit et le corps au lieu de la fragmentation et de la désincarnation. Au cours des dernières décennies, différentes théories centrées sur le corporel ont émergé pour (re)-positionner le corps féminin à la fois dans la vie et dans la littérature en examinant ses représentations et en proposant des images positives des femmes. Alors que la pensée réactionnaire de Simone de Beauvoir se concentre sur la biologie afin de remettre en question la même définition patriarcale réductrice du corps féminin et de signaler sa différence et ses particularités biologiques, le féminisme corporel d'Elizabeth Grosz offre une approche plus globale du corps combinant le matériel et le spirituel, "bodies and minds are not two distinct substances or two kinds or attributes of a single substance, but . . . through twisting . . one side becomes another" (Grosz 1994 : xii). Judith Butler met en évidence le processus constructif de la subjectivité féminine qui englobe de nombreux facteurs influençant le développement individuel. Ainsi, la critique plus récente de Butler accorde une attention particulière au rôle du corps dans la formation de l'identité. En outre, ce qui rend la représentation du corps féminin encore plus problématique dans la fiction victorienne, c'est son lien inextricable avec la sexualité, car les héroïnes à sensation sont souvent empêtrées dans des intrigues de stimulation visuelle et sont parfois implicitement ou ouvertement marquées du sceau du péché.

Ainsi, lorsqu'on étudie un personnage féminin néo-victorien, il est nécessaire de s'attarder sur sa dimension corporelle pour explorer son rôle dans la construction identitaire. Les contemporains néo-victoriens qui prônent un agenda plus rebelle afin de mettre en avant une esthétique féminine qui permet à la fois au récit et à la protagoniste féminine de parler et d'écrire la sexualité féminine ont spécifiquement accentué la matérialisation du corps féminin dans le texte littéraire par l'intermédiaire du concept de sexsation de Marie-Luise Kohlke. En effet, cette idée marque le retour en force des questions de sexe et de genre et met en lumière le potentiel du corps féminin à créer une subjectivité individuée. Comment les textes néo-victoriens représentent-ils la matérialité du corps féminin ? Dans quelle mesure le néo-victorianisme remet-il en question et subvertit-il les perceptions traditionnelles du corps féminin ainsi que le regard du (corps) masculin sur le corps féminin ? Comment le corps féminin ouvertement sexualisé laisse-t-il place à une expérience subjective individuée ? Et enfin, est-il possible aujourd'hui de parler du corps comme d'un site de construction identitaire sans tomber dans le piège de la réitération des définitions patriarcales limitatives ?

D'autre part, les théories phénoménologiques ont soutenu l'individuation du corps féminin par le biais de son expérience vécue : sensorielle, spatiale et temporelle, pour ne citer que quelques aspects. Le corps matériel est essentiel pour comprendre l'existence humaine,

surtout dans le cas des sujets féminins, non seulement en raison de facteurs biologiques, mais aussi des contextes socioculturels qui ont un impact direct sur cette expérience matérielle. Ainsi, lorsque nous étudions l'expérience corporelle féminine, nous sommes constamment confrontés à l'affect, car chaque espace ne marque pas seulement l'existence subjective du personnage féminin, mais est également marqué par une dimension émotionnelle féminine. En effet, le roman néo-victorien s'appuie sur la sensorialité pour mettre en évidence le lien entre le corps féminin et l'espace, le corps et l'émotion, l'émotion et l'espace. Dans leur représentation de la corporéité et de l'affectivité, comment les textes, par le biais des sens, contribuent-ils à produire une expérience narrative somesthésique pour le personnage féminin ? En tant que champ d'investigation interdisciplinaire visant à promouvoir et à intégrer les disciplines théoriques, empiriques et pratiques liées à la perception, à la performance et à la présentation corporelles, la somesthésique définit le cadre théorique de l'étude de la relation entre les sens et la subjectivité, le corps et l'identité, le personnage et le lecteur. En fait, le sensoriel relie finalement le roman néo-victorien à la sensation victorienne, car n'est-ce pas le sensationnel qui représente les points communs entre les deux genres ? En gardant à l'esprit que la sensation victorienne visait l'affect du lecteur, serait-il légitime d'envisager les moyens par lesquels le sensoriel peut rapprocher le personnage féminin néo-victorien et le lecteur contemporain ? Une approche phénoménologique/ somesthésique peut servir d'outil critique pour éclairer notre investigation de la relation affective et cognitive entre le personnage néo-victorien et son lecteur contemporain.

Hannah Aspinall écrit : "the female body has been idealised, objectified and fetishized and this can be seen particularly in Victorian culture" (Aspinall 2012 : n.d.). En effet, l'ère victorienne a vu l'émergence de toute une étiquette sur l'apparence du corps féminin et la façon dont il doit être habillé. Ainsi, couvrir le corps à la fois littéralement avec des vêtements et métaphoriquement dans le texte de fiction en ignorant toute discussion sur sa matérialité est devenu une obligation morale et culturelle. Alors que le corps de la femme victorienne est censé rester couvert, les cheveux apparaissent comme la seule partie du corps qui est exposée. Bien que la description des cheveux soit un trope récurrent dans la culture orale et la littérature écrite occidentales, les représentations des cheveux dans la culture du milieu et de la fin de l'époque victorienne sont particulièrement répandues et symboliques, car les romanciers accordent une grande attention aux propriétés physiques des cheveux des femmes : leur longueur, leur texture, leur couleur, leur style, leur frisure.

La fiction néo-victorienne réutilise le motif de la chevelure dans la construction de ses protagonistes féminines car cette dernière devient un symbole de la formation de l'identité. Les

cheveux roux célébrés dans les peintures préraphaélites comme *Lady Lilith* (1868-1868) de Dante Gabriel Rossetti par exemple sont devenus strictement associés à la femme déchue dont la corruption morale est incarnée par sa chevelure déréglée. Fowles opte pour une exposition graduelle jusqu'à ce que les cheveux de Sarah soient découverts et sexualisés par le regard de Charles. Le récit suit consciemment la formation identitaire de Sarah par le biais de ses cheveux. Plus elle assume son identité de femme libre, plus ses cheveux sont exposés. Il n'est donc pas surprenant que lorsqu'elle est complètement transformée en la Nouvelle Femme du Nouveau Monde vivant avec les Préraphaélites, "her hair was bound loosely back by a red ribbon" (Fowles 1969 : 189). Le portrait de Sarah en tant que femme déchue dont les cheveux roux lâches incarnent sa liberté rappelle directement la Lady Lilith de Rossetti. En tant que tentatrice, elle assume pleinement sa sexualité et résiste à la domination des hommes. Cette sexualisation conduit certains critiques, comme James Acheson, à aller jusqu'à affirmer que le texte présente un intérêt particulier en raison de son contenu sexuel (Acheson 1998 : 1). Deborah Byrd voit dans la description sexuelle de Sarah un signe d'autonomisation et de liberté, dans la mesure où Sarah ne reproduit pas le modèle patriarcal, mais laisse plutôt la place aux femmes pour libérer leur sexualité et leur passion (Byrd 1984). En effet, le texte de Fowles soutient que, tout comme les hommes, les femmes sont des êtres sexuels, que la sensualité féminine existe et qu'il semble plutôt illogique et contre nature de refuser aux femmes de tels sentiments ou le plaisir qui en découle. En se concentrant sur l'agentivité sexuelle de Sarah dans sa relation avec Charles, le récit souligne le rôle actif des femmes. Elles ne sont plus simplement des objets du désir sexuel des hommes, mais deviennent des sujets sexuels. Brooke Lenz admet que le personnage de Sarah est quelque peu fragmenté parce qu'il est présenté à partir des analyses partielles des personnages masculins, mais il représente néanmoins "a prototype for the New Woman whose unconventional attitudes and actions expose the oppressive machinations of both social and narrative authority" (Lenz 2008 : 102). Elle conclut finalement que "Fowles validates a feminist standpoint approach by presenting a woman character who pursues and enacts a politically engaged and practically grounded standpoint" (Lenz 2008 : 102).

La chevelure, seul élément remarquable de l'extérieur, est réemployée dans sa symbolisation d'un mouvement féministe qui a commencé avec les victoriens et qui semble se retrouver dans le texte de Faber. Christine Sutphin affirme que

Male poets often represented female desire filtered through a male persona. Augusta Webster's "Circe" and "Medea in Athens" contribute to the discourse on women's sexuality by voicing the desire of the women personae and their critique of heterosexuality. Circe and Medea's status as mythological women, which apparently distances them from constructions of

Victorian womanhood, serves both to undermine and affirm their versions of the complexities of female desire within heterosexual politics. (Sutphin 2006: 1)

Décrites à l'aide de l'imagerie capillaire qui peut rappeler le mythe grec de Circé, Caroline et Sugar dans le texte de Faber semblent représenter la sexualité des femmes en exprimant le désir féminin et en critiquant le rôle subordonné accordé aux femmes dans la politique hétérosexuelle.

La chevelure dans le texte de Waters n'est pas sexualisée dans la mesure où les deux filles ont des cheveux ordinaires, foncés à des degrés divers. Elle n'est ni luxuriante ni somptueuse ; des associations avec de la graisse et une odeur aigre ne mettent pas en avant l'attrait des cheveux. Cela peut s'expliquer par le fait que les deux protagonistes sont des non-conformistes. Maud n'appartient pas à la classe des dames au sens traditionnel du terme : elle n'apparaît pas dans les occasions publiques et ne reçoit pas de visiteurs pour le thé ou le dîner. Sue, au contraire, appartient à la classe ouvrière. Il est toutefois intéressant de noter qu'à la fin du récit, lorsque Maud adopte un nouveau style de vie en devenant écrivain et en retournant vivre à Briar, ses cheveux font écho à sa décision d'être ordinaire et de se libérer des règles de son oncle. "Now it was smooth, unpinned, she had put it back and tied it with a simple ribbon" (Waters 2002 : 547). Ainsi, les cheveux dans le roman néo-victorien sont considérés comme un indicateur à la fois du caractère et de l'appartenance sociale, dans une société victorienne qui exige que les règles soient respectées par les femmes. Dès lors, tout signe de non-conformité devient un symbole de transgression et/ou de libération. Le texte néo-victorien, par ses diverses représentations de la chevelure des protagonistes féminines, réfute la linéarité et célèbre la multiplicité et la pluralité.

Le texte néo-victorien réutilise divers articles vestimentaires de l'époque victorienne, tels que le corset, la crinoline et les gants, qui sont devenus des métaphores de la vertu et de la sensibilité dans la mesure où ils représentent la retenue et la restriction. Le texte de Faber, par exemple, expose la double signification du corset en tant que vêtement aux mœurs défavorables. Il créait la silhouette à la mode qui désignait la femme qui le portait comme délicate et féminine, tout en rendant sa forme corporelle plus définie et plus attrayante pour les regards adorateurs, devenant ainsi un outil de séduction. En outre, Fowles et Faber réutilisent la crinoline victorienne uniquement pour saper les conventions vestimentaires de l'époque et pour mettre en avant l'évasion de leurs personnages féminins des règles et des limitations imposées aux femmes. Fowles fait référence à "another wind [which] was blowing in 1867: the beginning of a revolt against the crinoline and the large bonnet" (Fowles 1969 : 2). Le narrateur décrit Sarah

en ces termes : “[s]he too was a stranger to the crinoline; but it was equally plain that that was out of oblivion, not knowledge of the latest London taste” (Fowles 1969 : 5).

Les romanciers néo-victoriens revisitent le symbolisme victorien de la chevelure ainsi que des articles vestimentaires afin de réécrire graphiquement le corps féminin. Une telle explicitation fait que Maria Teresa Chialant va jusqu’à soutenir que “works like Faber’s *The Crimson Petal and the White* expose details that Dickens and his fellow authors knew but couldn’t or wouldn’t write about” (Chialant 2011 : 48). Cette réécriture donne aux motifs victoriens de nouvelles connotations afin de mettre en avant les attitudes féministes des personnages féminins des néo-victorianistes et d’imiter le Rational Dress Movement de la fin du siècle. Ce mouvement des années 1890 non seulement remettait directement en cause les caprices de la mode victorienne, car “Rational designs allowed women to move more freely, unencumbered by trailing skirts and tight corsets” (Simpson 2001 : 55), mais symbolisait la question plus large du progrès social pour les femmes. En outre, la redéfinition de ces codes victoriens vise largement à remettre en question les représentations traditionnelles de la féminité et de la masculinité.

À l’approche de la fin du XIXe siècle, les discussions sur la position de la femme et son rôle dans la société sont devenues plus explicites, notamment avec la "question féminine" au centre des débats. Plus particulièrement, les écrivains, hommes et femmes, ont commencé à s’interroger sur les essentialisations archaïques du corps féminin. Elizabeth Gaskell, les sœurs Brontë et Mary Elizabeth Braddon ont créé des héroïnes incontrôlables et non-conformistes dans leur discours, leur apparence et leur comportement, remettant ainsi en question le comportement féminin décent. Des protagonistes passionnées telles que Jane Eyre et Lady Audley ont amplifié les tensions entre les dichotomies corps/passion essentiellement associées à la féminité et esprit/raison, à la masculinité.

La fiction néo-victorienne ne remet en question ces binarités que pour en ébranler la stabilité et en dévoiler les carences par le biais de ses personnages masculins et féminins. À travers un prisme proto-féministe, les personnages néo-victoriens peuvent être lus comme des réécritures de la dichotomie masculinité/féminité. On peut suggérer que lorsque les romanciers néo-victoriens présentent des formes ambivalentes de masculinité et de féminité, ils ne se contentent pas d’exposer les doubles standards des Victoriens vis-à-vis de l’identité de genre, mais remettent également en question la fiabilité de ces dichotomies. Par conséquent, ils laissent l’espace narratif à leurs personnages pour qu’ils interprètent des identités non descriptives équivoques.

Fowles et Faber optent tous deux pour l'ambivalence lorsqu'ils dépeignent la sexualité de leurs personnages masculins, alternant entre la retenue et la perte de contrôle d'une part, et l'action et la soumission d'autre part. En fait, alors que Charles, dans le texte de Fowles, tente constamment de contrôler son désir sexuel pour Sarah et d'autres prostituées, William, dans le texte de Faber, s'abandonne sans cesse à ses désirs charnels. Les deux récits mettent en avant une alternance de contrôle et de soumission, d'échec et de succès, remettant ainsi en question la vision du ministre Hugh Stowell Brown selon laquelle la virilité est synonyme de contrôle. Comme il l'explique dans l'une de ses conférences de 1858, ce qui constitue la véritable virilité, c'est la maîtrise par les hommes de leur corps et de leurs émotions. S'ils n'étaient pas contrôlés, leur virilité serait mise en péril :

I, virtue, I am manliness. I alone am manliness; without me you may be a fool, you may be a brute, you may be a demon, but you cannot be a man. I must be enthroned in your heart; I must have the absolute government of your physical, intellectual, moral being; I must regulate your life; I must direct you in your going out and your coming in; I must have the control of your thoughts, feelings, words and deeds; on such conditions only is it possible for you to be manly! (Brown 1858: 34)

Grâce à une alternance continuelle entre les traits virils et non virils attribués au corps masculin dans le texte néo-victorien, constamment déchiré entre la complaisance et le contrôle de soi, la permissivité et la retenue, Faber et Fowles subvertissent tous deux l'idéal de virilité tel que proposé dans l'argument de Brown. En effet, le roman néo-victorien remet en question la perception binaire du corps humain en tant que mâle rationnel et femelle passionnée. Cela met en évidence l'ambivalence de la construction de l'identité masculine dans la mesure où certains adjectifs peu virils comme débauché et épicurien du point de vue de Brown s'avèrent applicables à la masculinité. En outre, les deux auteurs suggèrent que la féminité ne doit pas être considérée en termes contradictoires avec la masculinité. Ainsi, ils conçoivent une forme alternative de féminité pour leurs personnages féminins, précisément en subvertissant subtilement les binarités victoriennes.

Si le corps féminin n'est pas consciemment absent, moralement couvert ou immoralement exposé, il est dépeint comme malade ou désincarné. À travers la récurrence du motif de la femme malade dans la fiction victorienne, le corps féminin devient un site de maladie, de vulnérabilité et de fragilité. Ce qui rend le motif de la maladie particulièrement important dans cette étude est le fait que la consomption est associée à deux personnages

féminins dans *The Crimson Petal and the White* de Faber. Dès les premières pages du récit, Sugar est décrite comme “flat-chested and bony like a consumptive young man” (Faber 2002 : 20). Plus tard dans le récit, on diagnostique une consomption chez Mme Emmeline Fox. Si l’invalidité doit être lue comme intrinsèquement associée aux femmes, ce motif est redéfini et relu dans le texte de Faber. Bien que Faber emprunte le même motif victorien de l’invalidité féminine, en particulier en ce qui concerne la couleur féminine désirée, par le biais de la référence aux fards rose, rouge et cramoisi, il le subvertit de manière à réfuter son association avec la perception romantique victorienne de la féminité.

S’il n’est pas malade, le corps féminin est dépeint comme désincarné et fragmenté. Dans son étude du discours phallogocentrique, Rosi Braidotti critique la théorie freudienne qui suppose qu’il y a “an identification between human subjectivity and rational consciousness”, ignorant ainsi totalement le corps physique (Braidotti 1994 : 18). De même, Elizabeth Grosz soutient que les représentations phallocentriques divisent souvent l’esprit et le corps et revendiquent une sorte de désincarnation pour les femmes (Grosz 1994 : 188).

En réécrivant le corps féminin et en mettant en avant son potentiel afin de trouver un état d’incarnation, les textes néo-victoriens remettent simultanément en question les définitions de la féminité corporelle. Parmi ces définitions, l’hospitalité est une “performed activity directed at particular individuals” où “[b]oth the guest and host live a corporeal existence [insofar as] acts of hospitality are intimately linked to attending to the body” (Hamington 2010 : 32). Ce qui rend l’étude du concept d’hospitalité centrale dans cette enquête est son association avec la féminité dans la théorie occidentale. En effet, Jacques Derrida et Emmanuel Levinas affirment tous deux que l’hospitalité est essentiellement féminine. Pourtant, l’état féminin de désincarnation complique cette association. Un sujet féminin désincarné peut-il manifester l’hospitalité ? En d’autres termes, si le corps féminin est d’une part associé à la désincarnation et d’autre part à l’hospitalité, où se situe le sujet féminin entre ces deux notions opposées ? Quelle réalité le sujet féminin a-t-il en termes de construction identitaire à la lumière de cette querelle entre le corps et l’esprit ? Par ailleurs, si l’on s’intéresse à l’hospitalité sexuelle, quelle identité sexuelle le personnage féminin est-il autorisé à avoir ?

La notion d’(in)hospitalité pose le fondement théorique de l’étude du lien indissociable entre le corps féminin d’une part et la sexualité, la subjectivité et la propriété d’autre part. Cette interrelation rend la discussion de l’identité féminine plus problématique, car le corps en tant que champ de bataille entre l’hôte féminin et l’invité masculin pourrait bien être le même endroit où la femme se bat pour une subjectivité indépendante. Le féminin est à la fois changeant et irréductible. Malabou conclut : “The question is that the feminine or the feminine

being (one can say either now), by remaining one of the inescapable terms of ontological change, themselves become animated, metabolic places of the identity that make one see, like others, the words inscribed at the heart of gender" (Malabou 2012 : 244). On peut se demander quelle(s) identité(s) subjective(s) le corps permet au personnage néo-victorien de se construire. Dans quelle mesure le maternalisme et l'homosexualité peuvent-ils être deux redéfinitions possibles du corps féminin ?

Bien que le texte de Faber soit parfois critiqué pour sa sexualisation excessive du corps féminin, qui peut être considéré comme une marchandise, en particulier dans la négociation du corps de Sugar, ce même corps est finalement doté d'un pouvoir maternel qui le purifie en quelque sorte d'un passé horrible d'exploitation et libère Sugar de sa position d'objet sexuel. Nadine Muller écrit que la représentation par Faber de la prostitution de la fin du XIXe siècle "exemplifies the objectification of female sexuality in the sex industry and in the marketplace as much as it explores the oppressive as well as the liberatory potentials of prostitution" (Muller 2012 : 41). Par conséquent, on peut suggérer que la sexualisation du corps féminin dans la fiction néo-victorienne peut être considérée comme une continuité de l'héritage des premières vagues du féminisme, tel qu'illustré dans la fiction New Woman de la fin de l'époque victorienne. Si le récit sexué de Faber éclaire la perception traditionnelle du corps de la prostituée, il s'emploie en même temps à redéfinir ce même corps et à souligner sa capacité de réévaluation et d'émancipation ultérieure.

Dans le roman de Waters, le sexe victorien est politisé. Bien que le fantasme sexuel soit associé à l'affirmation du pouvoir sur la femme exploitée soumise et à l'expression d'un tel désir dans une intrigue de criminalité et de fraude, renforçant ainsi les stéréotypes qui assimilent le lesbianisme à la déviance, Waters utilise le motif sexuel au profit de son projet politique/textuel de déconstruction de l'hétéronormativité en s'appropriant le domaine de la pornographie dominé par les hommes. Mitchell affirme que le projet lesbien de Waters "silently inserts her depiction of nineteenth century female homosexuality into our cultural memory of Victorian fiction" (Mitchell 2010 : 118). Sa littérature moderne est l'espace où les voix gays qui ont été réduites au silence dans le passé et les intérêts gays qui ont été supprimés sont autorisés à être entendus et parlés explicitement. Les protagonistes de Waters ne sont pas des personnages conçus à l'époque moderne puis simplement réinsérés dans l'ère victorienne. Ce sont des constructions complexes dotées d'identités homosexuelles qui servent non seulement à réécrire l'histoire victorienne, mais aussi à l'interroger et à faire la lumière sur ses lacunes et ses silences en matière de caractérisation sexuelle féminine. Lee affirme que "[t]he work of the

neo-Victorian novel, then, is to reveal and then subvert the narrative hegemony that moderates women and their desires in Victorian literature" (Lee 2018 : n.d.).

Le dix-neuvième siècle s'offre comme un paysage psychologique dans lequel la conscience féminine de la sexualité est apparue, car il fournit un cadre queer pour ces discussions sur la sexualité lesbienne. Il propose également le terrain pour une étude phénoménologique du personnage féminin dont le corps est matérialisé par le biais de son expérience sensorielle.

Au cours des dernières décennies, le corps dans sa relation avec les sens et l'identité a reçu une attention critique croissante. Au cœur de ce débat se trouve la théorie phénoménologique de Maurice Merleau-Ponty, qui suscite un intérêt renouvelé depuis les années 1970. La phénoménologie de Merleau-Ponty est initialement centrée sur la perception du monde réel. Selon sa théorie, "there is a need to rediscover the perceived world (in the philosopher's terms, the real world) through the senses which organise experience and situate the subject as another object in the world of objects, with the indispensable help of modern art and philosophy" (Baldwin cited in Arias 2017: 43). Néanmoins, on peut établir une analogie entre les mondes réels et fictifs réunis par les sens. Plus particulièrement, dans le cadre de la fiction néo-victorienne, on peut explorer le phénomène du corps (féminin) comme conscience, comme corps qui embrasse et constitue le monde (fictif). Il s'agit alors d'étudier dans quelle mesure l'expérience du monde des protagonistes féminines se construit à travers la représentation de leurs vécus corporels. L'objectif ultérieur est d'étudier l'impact d'une telle expérience corporelle sur la perception de soi. En d'autres termes, dans quelle mesure l'incarnation reflète-t-elle la subjectivité féminine dans le texte néo-victorien ?

Au centre des récits phénoménologiques de l'incarnation se trouve l'expérience vécue du corps. Elle ne concerne pas simplement la description de l'expérience, mais plutôt la façon dont le corps/la personne répond à cette expérience. Pour les phénoménologues féministes des années 1970 comme Sandra Bartky et Iris Marion Young, l'incarnation est notre "mode of being-in-the-world" (Young 2005: 9). Pour parler d'expérience féminine, il faut se concentrer sur l'analyse du mouvement du corps au sein de cet espace phénoménal plutôt qu'objectif. En outre, on peut affirmer que ce n'est pas seulement le mouvement du corps, mais plutôt son implication sensorielle dans et avec l'espace aussi qui produit finalement une expérience vécue féminine et médiatise le sens de l'identité féminine en tant que femme. Ainsi, on peut se demander comment le texte néo-victorien illustre l'expérience de l'espace par les sens du corps féminin. La théorie de Merleau-Ponty suggère que les sens peuvent fonctionner comme des intermédiaires entre le monde réel et le texte de fiction, et entre le lecteur et le

personnage et leurs corps respectifs. Cette réception corporelle peut être davantage élucidée par une approche somesthésique. Comme en phénoménologie, le corps est primordial en somesthésique. En tant que domaine d'étude qui rassemble la connaissance et la perception sensorielle, le but de la somesthésique est alors d'explorer dans quelle mesure la réception du personnage féminin néo-victorien peut être centrée sur une expérience corporelle/cognitive.

Un espace particulier qui se distingue dans les romans de ce corpus comme rare est les toilettes des employés dans la savonnerie dans le texte de Faber. C'est un espace typiquement néo-victorien puisqu'il succède les années 1872 et 1873, le cadre temporel du texte. Les toilettes sont un lieu particulièrement intéressant surtout en raison de son importance pour Sugar, son sens de soi et le sens du corps.

Suddenly she must – absolutely must – sit down. Her stomach is skewered with agony, and every inch of her skin prickles with cold sweat; the flesh of her buttocks, bared in desperate haste as she claws handfuls of her dress onto her bent back and yanks down her pantalettes, is wet and slippery as a peeled pear. She lets herself drop heavily onto the seat, and with a stifled cry of anguish she slumps forward, her bonnet falling to the tiled floor, her hair unravelling after it. Blood and other hot, slick material erupts and slithers between her thighs. "Oh God!" she cries. "God help me ...!" and a flush of dizziness seems to flip her upside down before she loses consciousness altogether. (Faber 2002: 588)

Dans ce passage, le sujet féminin expérimente l'espace par l'intermédiaire de son corps, conduisant ainsi à une symbiose entre la corporalité et la sensorialité. En gardant à l'esprit la théorie performative de Butler, le soi féminin est le résultat de la stylisation du corps à travers des gestes corporels, des mouvements et diverses mises en pratique de différents types. C'est dans cet espace particulier que réside l'importance d'aborder le genre d'un point de vue phénoménologique. Le corps féminin de Sugar est le résultat de son engagement sensoriel dans l'espace géographique. Ainsi, les toilettes inscrivent sur son corps une expérience politiquement sexiste, celle de la fausse couche. Fait intéressant, contrairement à la description détaillée et minuscule des latrines comme nouvel espace rare, le récit n'explicite pas la fausse couche de Sugar. Le narrateur s'arrête simplement à la souffrance corporelle de Sugar et le texte se termine brusquement avec Sophie prenant les mains de sa maîtresse, ne donnant pas plus de détails sur ce qui se passe ensuite. Vu sous cet angle, une lecture phénoménologique privilégie une focalisation sur l'expression sensorielle du corps plutôt que sur la description externe explicite

du texte. En d'autres termes, l'intérêt n'est plus dans l'espace comme simplement géographique, il est plutôt orienté vers l'expérience sensorielle du corps féminin de ce lieu.

L'expérience sensorielle des personnages néo-victoriens met en évidence le lien inextricable entre le sens et l'affect, le corps et l'émotion, l'individu et l'autre. Inspirée par la refonte de la phénoménologie de Merleau-Ponty par Sara Ahmed, Arias soutient que "our embodied subjectivity is oriented towards others, as objects, and their place in sexual desire, and their perspectival orientation in turn affects other bodies and spaces" (Arias 2017: 44). Grâce au sens du toucher, précisément quand elles parviennent à enlever leurs gants, Maud et Sue parviennent à découvrir leurs subjectivités lesbiennes incarnées. Cette reconnaissance n'est possible que lorsque les deux personnages orientent leur existence l'une vers l'autre, "by attending to how the bodily direction "toward" such objects affects how bodies inhabit spaces and how spaces inhabit bodies" (Ahmed 2006: 23). Finalement, non seulement elles se découvrent les unes les autres, mais elles se redécouvrent elles-mêmes tout en transformant et en se transformant par Briar.

Comme le toucher, le sens de l'odorat est d'une importance primordiale dans l'expérience de Sugar de l'espace et d'elle-même dans le texte de Faber. Le parfum de la lavande est un déclencheur de l'activisme social et de l'engagement littéraire de Sugar. Lorsque Sugar visite les champs de lavande de Rackham, voir les pauvres agriculteurs au travail est un signal d'alarme dans la mesure où elle prend immédiatement conscience des conditions misérables et des difficultés que la classe ouvrière doit endurer. Ainsi, dans son roman, elle assume le rôle d'une critique sociale qui dénonce le statu quo, écrit son mécontentement face à l'une des conséquences négatives de la révolution industrielle sur les classes sociales inférieures et devient même un représentant de cette pauvre classe ouvrière.

En plus d'être textualisés, les parfums victoriens étaient aussi fortement sexualisés, car le parfum victorien - savons, bouquets, bouquets - était assigné au genre. Ainsi, il n'est pas étonnant que l'industrie de la parfumerie de la lavande de Rackham soit centrée sur la plantation, l'industrialisation et la commercialisation de la lavande, car elle faisait partie des parfums les plus populaires destinés aux dames de la haute classe victorienne. Si la lavande est un parfum victorien féminin selon Rackham Senior et Junior, on peut se demander si Sugar en tant que personnage néo-victorien se conforme à cette idéologie esthétique. Alors qu'elle explore son nouveau logement, Sugar est irritée par les parfums omniprésents des fleurs. Les différents parfums de ce passage sont accablants, étouffants et oppressants. Elle aspire à jeter toutes les roses qu'elle associe à ordures. Ainsi, l'expérience olfactive est à la fois personnelle et subjective, car si quelqu'un qui aspire à l'odeur l'admire, d'autres comme Sugar et les

ouvriers des champs de lavande qui y sont submergés au quotidien sont plutôt étouffés par elle. Bien que Sugar déménage dans un appartement privé où elle s'attend à profiter de la liberté et de la libération, elle se retrouve constamment entourée par l'ombre parfumée de Rackham dominateur. Chaque produit signé Rackham marque en outre son état d'emprisonnement. Afin de se libérer de cette atmosphère étouffante, Sugar recherche de l'air frais, un air qui sent naturel et non industrialisé.

Cette lecture phénoménologique du personnage féminin, par son accent sur les sens du corps, permet d'explorer la tendance néo-victorienne à investir dans la matérialité du corps féminin pour matérialiser davantage une expérience féminine subjective. Pourtant, bien que la phénoménologie ait été la principale tradition académique de la conscience corporelle philosophique, on peut se tourner vers la somesthésique, un concept beaucoup plus tardif qui a été stimulé par l'objectif d'amener la théorie et les pratiques corporelles dans un dialogue. Donc, notre étude du corps féminin ne s'arrête pas à une expérience corporelle phénoménologique, mais explore davantage la dimension épistémologique de ce même corps.

Le corps en tant que réalité matérielle au moyen de son expérience sensorielle n'exclut pas de le lire comme un trope / métaphore. La lecture du corps en tant que métaphore suggère au lecteur que tout marqueur spécifique de ce corps, qu'il s'agisse de la peau ou de l'odeur explorée, a une incidence sur un plan universel et invite le lecteur à voir la généralité des questions qu'il soulève à travers l'individu. Avec un accent particulier sur le corps de fiction féminin, mon affirmation ici est qu'il n'est pas "a passive record" comme postulé par Derrida (Derrida cited in Currie 2007: 12), mais plutôt une archive active. Dans le cadre de notre étude du personnage féminin néo-victorien, le corps féminin peut alors être lu comme multiple. Le corps maternel a le double pouvoir de (pro)création en tant que mère et artiste. Le corps lesbien sert de dépôt historique pour un discours transgressif de / sur la sexualité. Par conséquent, le corps féminin fonctionne comme un site de re-mémoire dans son autoréflexivité. Ces lectures métaphoriques rassemblent à la fois la matérialité et l'immatérialité du corps et mettent finalement en avant l'unification du corps et de l'esprit. Le corps féminin sert de récipient aux récits historiquement approuvés, mais aussi d'espace pour questionner et réécrire ces récits. Ainsi, l'objectif ultime de cette étude est d'amener la phénoménologie et la somesthésique dans un dialogue centré sur le corps féminin du personnage fictif néo-victorien puisque tous deux ont un intérêt pour les sentiments, les perceptions et la présence du corps dans le monde.

Par l'intermédiaire du corps maternel/créatif de Sugar, on peut suggérer que Faber contribue à sa manière au renouvellement des formes romancières, ce qui aboutit au développement d'une nouvelle éthique. En effet, le trope littéraire de la métaphore maternelle

est revisité dans le texte de Faber afin d'ouvrir un nouvel espace textuel au corps et par conséquent de questionner les récits historiques autour de la maternité. Raconter de nouvelles histoires à l'aide du corps permet donc d'influencer le cours de l'histoire littéraire. En insérant un héritage de lesbianisme, Waters met également en avant l'interrelation entre le corps féminin, la fiction et l'histoire. Bien que le corps féminin dans le roman néo-victorien peut être considéré comme "a marketing tool which plays to the sexual immaturities of our age", il peut néanmoins "in more sophisticated textual constructions, serve to address contemporary identity politics by 'mainstreaming' gay coming-out-stories (as Waters's novels do)" (Heilmann and Llewellyn 2010: 107).

Dans les premières pages de cette thèse, j'ai présenté le néo-victorianisme comme un genre qui signifie réactiver la mémoire des lecteurs du passé, non pas comme ils revisitent l'ère victorienne avec nostalgie, mais plutôt comme ils s'engagent de manière critique avec elle et questionnent ses significations d'un point de vue contemporain. On peut maintenant aller plus loin en prétendant que le corps féminin du personnage néo-victorien fonctionne comme la manifestation corporelle de la mémoire collective ainsi que du récit historique. En fait, le roman néo-victorien semble répondre à l'appel de Grosz en faveur d'une vision alternative de la prise en compte du passé, selon laquelle "a completely different set of perspectives – this time based on women's specificities, experiences, positions, rather than on those of men, who hide themselves and their specificities under the banner of some universal humanity – is possible and needs to be explored" (Grosz 1994: xi). Par l'accent mis sur le corps féminin, que ce soit dans sa matérialité ou dans sa dimension métaphorique, l'expérience du corps constitue un élément fondamental de la construction, ou plutôt de la reconstruction de la continuité du récit historique. Dans cette formulation, le corps devient le lieu dans lequel le passé, le présent et le futur convergent. En outre, le corps devient, alors, non seulement le lieu de souvenirs ancestraux, mais aussi un outil de résistance contre le récit historique hégémonique et une arène pour proposer des récits féminins alternatifs. Il devient même 'a sentient archive'. En établissant des associations entre le corps, la mémoire et l'histoire, il devient légitime de lire le corps féminin comme un site de connaissance, de souvenir et d'exécution qui sert à générer et à stocker des informations pour le rappel, la récupération ou la reconstitution. Par l'intermédiaire du personnage féminin, le texte rassemble la mémoire et la corporalité, car le corps se sent, et nous lisons des traces physiques de sensation sur son corps. "The memory of that sweet man fetches her a sly blow in the pit of her stomach, for she's had no warning, and memories can be cruel when they give you no warning. She flinches, claps one hand protectively to her breast" (Faber 2002: 623).

À travers le corps lesbien par lequel l'histoire est mise en question et contestée, on peut suggérer que le projet de Waters consiste à encourager le lecteur à s'engager dans un processus de "reparative reading", une notion que Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick a développée dans le cadre de la critique queer. Lire de manière réparatrice signifie lire sans "proscribed object choice, aim, site or identification", lire pour "important news about herself, without knowing what form that news will take", lire avec "only the patchiest familiarity with its codes; without, even, more than hungrily hypothesizing to what questions this news may proffer an answer" (Sedgwick 1997: 2/3). Ce processus de lecture réparatrice implique un engagement et un engagement de la part des lecteurs, car ils doivent être des participants actifs dans les processus de lecture - et de création ultérieure. Ainsi, l'exploration du lien établi entre le personnage et le lecteur semble essentielle dans la portée de cette lecture phénoménologique / somesthésique du personnage féminin néo-victorien.

La théorie phénoménologique de Wolfgang Iser présente un modèle de lecture communicatif. Pour Iser, "a literary text contains intersubjectively verifiable instructions for meaning-production" (Iser 1978: 25). Son modèle de lecture met l'accent non pas sur un message extrait d'un texte, mais sur un sens assemblé et vécu par un lecteur. La théorie d'Iser sera prise ici comme point de départ dans la mesure où ce projet examine les façons dont l'acte de lecture de la littérature néo-victorienne implique une interaction dynamique entre le cognitif et l'affectif.

Communément appelé le « paradoxe de la fiction », Jerrold Levinson se pose cette question "[h]ow can we coherently have emotions for fictional persons or situations, given that we do not believe in their existence?" (Levinson 2006: 38). Pour y répondre, David Markwell souligne que tous les personnages de fiction ont la capacité de déclencher un tel effet émotionnel chez leurs lecteurs. En outre, Sylvie Bauer insiste sur l'association physique, voire charnelle, des actes de lecture et d'écriture, en accord avec la suggestion de Karin Littau selon laquelle la relation d'un lecteur avec un livre est une relation entre "two bodies: one made of paper and ink, the other flesh and blood" (Littau2006: 2). Ainsi, on peut affirmer que la lecture de fiction néo-victorienne devient une forme de plaisir voyeuriste, précisément en raison de son investissement dans l'expérience corporelle. Le plaisir du lecteur peut être dérivé de regarder, ou dans ce cas de lire des récits fictifs de plaisir (sexuel), ou de souffrance parfois.

Il est intéressant de noter que, bien que les discours narratifs de Faber et de Waters mettent en avant l'affect comme un impact attendu, ils insinuent tous deux la nécessité de la réflexion et de l'engagement de la part du lecteur. En effet, en induisant clairement la curiosité du lecteur et en faisant de sa lecture du texte un voyage exceptionnel avec la promesse d'une

découverte remarquable, “the text positions readers as the privileged voyeurs of a hermeneutic puzzle” (Zhang 2017: 57). En outre, en gardant à l’esprit la théorisation de Kohlke de la sexsation dans la fiction néo-victorienne, on pourrait affirmer que l’accent mis sur la représentation de la matérialité du personnage féminin et l’accent récurrent mis sur l’altérité corporelle (néo-)victorienne par l’intermédiaire des figures de la femme déchue, de la femme folle, de la prostituée, de la lesbienne, etc., permettent aux lecteurs de reconstituer avec imagination la vie de l’autre historiquement exclu comme une “literary voyeuristic excursion” dans le passé (Kohlke 2008: 345).

Notre lecture du corps du personnage féminin néo-victorien comme lieu de mémoire sert à ouvrir le débat du lien personnage-lecteur sur la prise en compte des questions politiques et éthiques impliquées dans notre accès et notre engagement avec le passé. J. Brooks Bouson considère le lecteur empathique comme « un participant-observateur », qui, dans les actes de lecture et d’interprétation, est à la fois soumis à “the disruptive and disturbing responses” que les personnages et les textes engendrent et conscient des “negotiated roles he or she is invited to play when responding to fictional texts” (Bouson 1989: 27). L’empathie narrative est souvent perçue comme un processus qui exige que l’on s’identifie à la souffrance de la victime ou à une expérience indirecte de douleur corporelle ou psychologique. Ainsi, lorsque des personnages victimes traversent des événements et des expériences extrêmement pénibles, par exemple la perte de leur famille ou la torture, un tel intérêt thématique est susceptible de biaiser le lecteur vers des réactions telles que l’empathie ou la sympathie. Les personnages féminins néo-victoriens sont souvent représentés en tant que membres de, pour citer Maria J. Lopez, “the marginal [and vulnerable] communities of immigrants, servants, and mad people” (Lopez 2012: 157). L’accès à l’intériorité d’un personnage peut être jugé nécessaire pour que le lecteur puisse éprouver de l’empathie et de la sympathie. Pourtant, le déploiement de la narration à la première personne et d’autres techniques narratives qui semblent favoriser un engagement empathique entre le lecteur et l’autre textuel met en évidence la relation problématique entre l’empathie et la sympathie d’une part, et le jugement et le raisonnement d’autre part, car une telle relation peut être trompeuse.

Le risque essentiel avec le concept d’empathie est que sa définition peut facilement être réduite à une identification intime entre le lecteur et le personnage qui est centré sur la sentimentalité. À sa place, on peut affirmer que la fiction néo-victorienne révèle un nouvel appareil critique, essentiel pour une mobilisation de l’empathie centrée sur la raison, la compréhension et souvent, une distance critique entre le lecteur et le personnage, en particulier la victime objectifiée. En mettant en avant des potentiels alternatifs pour le personnage féminin,

autres qu'une position de souffrance et d'asservissement, le texte néo-victorien pousse le lecteur à repenser au passé victorien, à penser de manière critique au voyage féminin et à penser en avant à un autre avenir possible. Fait intéressant, à mesure que le développement des personnages s'infléchit matériellement, les lecteurs ont tendance à apporter des images personnelles et des représentations subjectives sur les personnages étoffés dans les récits, établissant des liens avec des souvenirs personnels de personnes réelles ou d'autres personnages littéraires. Ainsi, le personnage devient une « image-personnage » pour reprendre le terme de Vincent Jouve (Jouve 1998: 40).

Ce qui ressort de cette exploration de la connexion intersubjective affective/cognitive entre lecteur et texte, et lecteur et personnage est la conclusion que le personnage féminin néo-victorien ne doit pas être considéré comme une simple construction textuelle et sémantique, mais un être matériel incarné qui suscite d'abord une réaction corporelle, une sensation dans le lecteur et une image cognitive/visuelle. En effet, en se concentrant sur la relation texte-lecteur dans la littérature néo-victorienne, le rôle de l'empathie se distingue comme l'un des constituants importants de cet engagement.

Le récit néo-victorien utilise un discours sensoriel et matérialiste qui met en avant le personnage féminin et va au-delà des limites d'un personnage fictif comme être de papier. En jetant la lumière sur un réalisme subjectif individuel, aidé par des avancées théoriques de la matérialisation, de la phénoménologie et de la sensorialité, le néo-victorianisme établit sa propre éthique particulière du réalisme et repose sur de nouvelles conventions de caractérisation. En fait, il s'avère que la réalité pour le personnage néo-victorien est en constante évolution, progressive et infinie. Alors que le monde extérieur dans le réalisme existait objectivement, indépendamment de la façon dont nous pensons ou le décrivons, le monde néo-victorien est le produit de pensées, de revendications, de doutes et de choix. Le sens est constamment interprété, rejeté et rétabli, d'où les interrogations incessantes des personnages à l'intérieur. Par conséquent, dans sa quête de soi subjectif, d'authenticité et d'intégrité, le personnage féminin néo-victorien est dynamique et toujours fluctuant plutôt que fixe, multiple et fragmenté plutôt qu'entier, et la quête se fait de l'extérieur/intérieur et vice-versa plutôt que de l'extérieur. On peut donc affirmer que la fiction néo-victorienne offre une forme contemporaine de néo-réalisme. J'utilise ici le terme néo-réalisme, avec l'ajout du trait d'union, pour parler de la résurrection du réalisme du XIXe siècle. Il réapparaît sous une forme nouvelle qui ne se limite plus à donner une représentation fidèle du monde mais se concentre plutôt sur le monde du personnage et autour de lui, son intérieur comme son extérieur.

Cette étude a commencé par l'examen du personnage en tant que construction narrative et narratologique dans le texte de fiction et s'est terminée par la relation sensorielle et affective entre le personnage féminin néo-victorien et son lecteur contemporain. Son objectif était d'étudier les différents processus de caractérisation féminine dans le texte néo-victorien qui rendent le personnage féminin plus matériel, plus viscéral, plus tangible, et aboutissent ainsi à une relation corporelle avec le lecteur.

On pourrait prétendre que les motivations derrière la résurrection du victorianisme est une question épuisée qui a été suffisamment débattue et a suivi son cours dans les études néo-victoriennes. Néanmoins, lorsqu'elle est prise en conjonction avec la caractérisation du personnage féminin, cette question dépasse l'association du néo-victorianisme avec une simple imitation de la sensation victorienne. En fait, malgré l'intérêt croissant pour les études néo-victoriennes au cours des dernières décennies, il y a un écart important en ce qui concerne la caractérisation de la protagoniste féminine, en particulier en ce qui concerne son héritage. Bien que les critiques et les chercheurs s'arrêtent souvent aux prédécesseurs du début de l'ère victorienne, en particulier à cause de la sensation victorienne, l'un des objectifs de cette étude a été de tisser des liens plus concrets avec la figure de la nouvelle femme de la fin du siècle.

Ce travail a également eu pour but d'explorer la relation équivoque des auteurs néo-victoriens avec le féminisme, notamment à la lumière de l'évolution du domaine grâce au développement de théories telles que les études de genre, les études matérialistes, la corporalité et la phénoménologie. Même si les Victoriens ont réfléchi aux questions liées à l'inégalité entre les sexes et à l'exploration spécifique de l'identité et de la subjectivité des femmes au moyen de leurs représentations fictives de leur réalité, les néo-Victoriens offrent un autre point de vue. En fait, le roman néo-victorien s'appuie sur les premières vagues du féminisme dans leurs différentes définitions de la féminité, mais va plus loin en dévoilant les multiples facettes de la féminité grâce à un discours très explicite de la sexsation et de la matérialisation. Son articulation franche de la matérialité féminine est destinée à parler le corps, à lui redonner sa signification et à exposer son potentiel en mettant au premier plan une identité subjective. Alors que l'éthique et les valeurs morales des premiers temps de l'ère victorienne limitaient la capacité des hommes et des femmes à parler explicitement du corps féminin et des questions de sexualité, les poussant soit à l'absence de matérialité féminine dans le récit, soit à concevoir de nouvelles façons de camoufler et de cacher le corps dans le texte, les néo-victoriens montrent plus de liberté pour mettre l'accent sur cette sexualité.

La présente thèse a permis de mettre en lumière la différence entre Fowles d'une part, et Faber et Waters d'autre part, dans leur exploration de la sexualité féminine et de l'identité

sexuelle. En fait, le texte de Fowles publié en 1969 a précédé le tournant matériel, qui peut être l'un des facteurs expliquant une sorte de réticence à matérialiser le corps féminin. Faber et Waters, d'autre part, semblent avoir profité du boom des études matérialistes pour concevoir des textes extrêmement explicites et très sexualisés. La sexualité de leurs protagonistes est mise en avant afin d'explorer les différents potentiels de la féminité. Comme le roman New Woman qui était choquant pour son explicité sur la sexualité féminine en réaction à la fiction victorienne qui soit s'absentait complètement, se camouflait sagement ou désincarnait complètement le corps féminin, le roman néo-victorien célèbre cette ouverture en mettant le corps au cœur du récit. Dans l'analyse de l'importance du corps féminin sur la subjectivité féminine, les auteurs néo-victoriens recourent à la (sur-)sexsation, à la fois louée et condamnée.

En offrant une nouvelle lecture de la poétique féministe dans la littérature contemporaine, les trois romans de ce corpus donnent naissance à la figure de la Nouvelle Femme de la fin du siècle qui fut manifestement une source de confusion et de mystère pour ses pairs ainsi que pour ses lecteurs sous une forme nouvelle et plus matérielle, lui donnant l'avantage d'une perspective contemporaine fraîche du XXIe siècle et un recul sur l'ère victorienne et l'évolution du féminisme.