

Revista de Literatura, História e
Memória



Dossiê: Literatura e interartes, desdobramentos estéticos e culturais: entrelaçamentos e reverberações da memória, da história, da sociedade e as identidades

ISSN 1983-1498

VOL. 16 - Nº 28 - 2020

UNIOESTE / CASCAVEL - p. 94-107

**METAFICÇÃO HISTORIOGRÁFICA E PARÓDIA
GÓTICA EM *ALIAS GRACE*, DE MARGARET
ATWOOD**

**Historiographic metafiction and gothic parody in
Margaret Atwood's *Alias grace***

Jaqueline Bohn Donada¹
Carolina de Mello Guimarães²

RESUMO: Este estudo tem como objetivo investigar como o romance *Alias Grace* (1996), de Margaret Atwood, usa a metaficção para se conectar com, construir a partir de e desafiar as convenções do gênero literário Gótico. Para tal, usamos os conceitos de metaficção historiográfica e paródia como definidos por Hutcheon (1988). A partir desse referencial teórico, *Alias Grace* é analisado como uma paródia Gótica.

Conclui-se que o romance apresenta uma perspectiva fragmentada e descentralizadora, desafiando interpretações absolutas dos registros históricos assim como do passado literário. Similarmente, ele também desafia convenções estabelecidas ao decorrer da história da literatura, incorporando diversas referências irônicas às narrativas Góticas. Além disso, o texto incorpora ambos Gótico Masculino e Gótico Feminino, com cada tradição criticamente espelhando a outra.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Margaret Atwood; Literatura Gótica; Metaficção.

ABSTRACT: The present study aims at investigating how Margaret Atwood's 1996 novel *Alias Grace* uses metafiction in order to connect to, build upon and challenge Gothic literature genre conventions. In order to do that, we use Hutcheon's (1988) concepts of historiographic metafiction and parody to support our reading of the novel. Based on this theoretical framework, *Alias Grace* is analyzed as a Gothic parody. We conclude that the novel presents a fragmented and decentralizing perspective, challenging absolute interpretations of historical records as well as of the literary past. Similarly, it also challenges conventions established throughout the history of literature, incorporating many ironic references to Gothic narratives. Moreover, it encompasses both Male and Female Gothic, with each tradition critically mirroring the other one.

KEYWORDS: Margaret Atwood; Gothic Literature; Metafiction.

Margaret Atwood has been active as an author for more than fifty years and has an extensive bibliography that includes novels, poetry, short story collections and essays. Among that body of work, a frequently observed characteristic is the focus on intertextuality and metafiction. For example, the poetry collection *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* (1970) is based on the writings of the XIX century Canadian author; the novel *Lady Oracle* (1976)

¹ Doutora em Letras pela Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul e professora adjunta da Universidade Tecnológica Federal do Paraná. Aatua nas áreas de Literaturas de Língua Inglesa e estudos da tradução e dedica-se à pesquisa da teoria, do ensino e da tradução do romance de língua inglesa entre o romantismo e a contemporaneidade.

² mestranda em Estudos da Tradução pela Universidade de São Paulo (USP), licenciada em Letras Português- Inglês pela Universidade Tecnológica Federal do Paraná (UTFPR) e professora de Língua Inglesa.

directly references popular Gothic romances; and *The Penelopiad* (2005) and *Hag-Seed* (2016) are reimaginings of Homer's *Odyssey* and Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, respectively.

In *Alias Grace* (1996), Atwood's characteristic use of metafiction takes a turn to the historical. The novel is based on a real murder case, and draws from a variety of historical and literary sources, without much differentiation between the two. It also references many times, directly and indirectly, Gothic literature, the literary trend in XIX century Victorian Canada, where the plot takes place. This study aims to explore how *Alias Grace* ironically uses metafiction to connect to, build upon and challenge Gothic literature. In order to explore those aspects, we use Hutcheon's (1988) concepts of historiographic metafiction and parody. Our hypothesis is that *Alias Grace* is a parody of the Gothic genre, not in the comical sense but in Hutcheon's definition of "ironic difference [...] set at the very heart of similarity" and an "authorized transgression" of convention (HUTCHEON, 1988, p. 66).

HISTORIOGRAPHIC METAFICTION AND PARODY

In *A Poetics of Postmodernism: history, theory, fiction* (1988), Linda Hutcheon explores concepts and characteristics of postmodernity in contemporary literature. Hutcheon defines postmodern art as an art form that "works within the very system it attempts to subvert" (HUTCHEON, 1988, p. 2). Postmodern art problematizes the master narratives of the past, and in doing so it often engages in a form of meta-narrative that, at the same time, acknowledges and denies hegemonic or totalizing ideals (HUTCHEON, 1988).

Among the attributes of postmodern fiction discussed by Hutcheon, two are key to the present study: historiographic metafiction and parody. Historiographic metafiction refers to how some postmodern fiction, especially novels, uses metafiction to problematize our conception of history and our relation with historical records. Parody refers to how postmodern art constantly includes and dialogues with past material in its own text, not in a nostalgic way but critically and even ironically. Historiographic metafiction and parody are often found together, as the first uses the latter in order to refer to past texts and build upon them. *Alias Grace* fits both concepts, as it challenges our knowledge about the historical case of Grace Marks and establishes a parodic relationship with various past texts, including Gothic literature.

Although it was not always like this, after the rise of scientific history, following Ranke's doctrine, literature and history became separated, being considered two very different disciplines. Historiographic metafiction challenges that conception in two ways. First, by

pointing out the similarities between those fields: both can be seen as acquiring their strength from verisimilitude, being linguistic constructs, having certain conventions in the way they portray a narrative, being hermetic in terms of language or structure, and being highly intertextual, building upon the texts of the past. Second, by denying the possibility of absolute historical knowledge, and so weakening the difference between truthful history and untruthful fiction. In that way, as is characteristic of postmodern literature and art in general, historiographic metafiction favors a state of unresolved contradiction rather than absolute knowledge (HUTCHEON, 1988).

According to Hutcheon's definition, historiographic metafiction consists of constantly playing with the distinction between facts and fiction, establishing and then crossing the boundaries between literature and historiography, and challenging the veracity of the historical record. Often, historiographic metafiction incorporates "fictitious" or "mendacious" stories/histories, showing the plural and dispersed nature of truth. These narratives self-consciously emphasize the enunciative process, suggesting that rewriting the past averts it becoming conclusive or totalizing, while rejecting labels such as authentic representation or inauthentic copy. In historiographic metafiction, the protagonist tends not to be a proper type, but a marginalised or eccentric figure, proposing a reading that was forgotten by hegemonic history and denying the possibility of a cultural universality. Both literature and history depend upon previous texts to build knowledge, and historiographic metafiction acknowledges the impossibility of gauging the reality of the past, as we only have access to its textualised version. Because of that, it is constantly citing and challenging past texts (HUTCHEON, 1988).

Alias Grace can be understood as a historiographic metafiction in the sense that it draws from past textual depictions of the historic case of Grace Marks, from sources considered "factual" and "literary" with no distinction — newspaper stories, the trial portraits, trial confession and conviction, Susanna Moodie's story, the popular ballad. These texts are used to build a web of narratives, challenging established conceptions of history as well as our ability to gauge the "truth".

The contemporary reader can only comprehend the real case of Grace Marks through textual discourses. Many things have been said about the real Grace — a cold-blooded assassin, according to the popular knowledge; a "celebrated murderess" and object of curiosity to Susanna Moodie; a dim-witted young girl according to her lawyer's speech; and many other versions of Grace that have been circulating since 1843, be it in newspapers, popular culture, word of mouth or literature. In the novel, when confronted with all the things

that have been written about her, Grace wonders: “how can I be all of these different things at once?” (ATWOOD, 1997, p. 23). Similarly to the quilt theme present throughout the novel, hinting at the fragmentary nature of narratives, with *Alias Grace*, Margaret Atwood has added one more patch to this big discursive quilt. This patch, unlike some of the other ones, is one that metafictionally emphasizes the many discourses about the real and the fictional Grace and how it is only possible to write her history by accepting its fragmentary and contradictory nature, and not by totalising, humanist objective “truths”. Even so, it is still just one patch, or one possible way of looking at the whole.

By foregrounding a fragmented construction of reality as well as stressing the contexts in which fiction is being produced by both writers and readers, historiographic metafiction newly problematizes historical reference (HUTCHEON, 1988, p. 40) and makes us aware of discourse and discursive implications (HUTCHEON, 1988, p. 184). In that way, it is a challenge to society’s “semiotic codes of behavior, value and discourse” (HUTCHEON, 1988, p. 40)

Hutcheon states that, just as Derrida considered historiography a reconfiguration of our experiences that forces a meaning on the past, the same can be said of fiction (HUTCHEON, 1988, p. 97, p. 100). Historiographic metafiction challenges that imposition of meaning in a self-conscious and contradictory manner. It is itself part of the fictive system that imposes meaning, but it also foregrounds this process as a way to problematize it and expose its biases and contradictions.

By this totalizing process of narrativization of past events, Grace Marks has been denied a voice because of her marginalized position in society’s hegemonic discursive systems. The narratives that survive her are those of the newspapers, of the courts and of the doctors, and those are the versions of her story that are assigned the value of “truth” by historiography. What Atwood’s novel does is to display other narrativizations of the historical happenings, which allows the readers to question why the other ones hold more weight. In that way, the novel questions history itself, and all the centralizing forces that erase the margins in historiography.

Hutcheon states that, in order to write history in a responsible and thoughtful way, it is necessary to analyze not only ideologies and institutions, but also the act of writing itself (HUTCHEON, 1988, p. 91). Accordingly, historiographic metafiction is also interested in analyzing the writing process. In fiction, this focus on the act of writing often takes shape by a self-aware emphasis on the process of its own constructing, ordering and selecting, as well as on enunciation and “on the subject’s use of language and the multiple contexts in which

that use situates itself” (HUTCHEON, 1988, p. 92, p. 168).

Grace Marks is, in many ways, a storyteller. When she tells her story to Dr. Jordan, she is selecting the information in a certain way in order to create a narrative. It can be inferred that the same process happened, albeit in different ways, when she told her story to others, such as her lawyer, the journalists or other doctors. Furthermore, even when she is alone in her own thoughts, she is also selecting and narrativizing in order to make sense of everything, telling herself a story.

In relation to that, Dr. Jordan thinks that “anyone in her position would select and rearrange, to give a positive impression” (ATWOOD, 1997, p. 322). In fact, when Grace is in her cell at night, we can see her “selecting and rearranging”, preparing to speak to Dr. Jordan the following day. She is preparing her story, a story that is in many ways very coherent, detailed and realistic.

All of those metafictional elements challenge the representation of not only history in general, but also the history of literature. Of course every piece of literature is part of an infinite web of intertextuality that includes other literary works, but *Alias Grace* foregrounds that intertextuality, transforming it into a major theme and a plot-relevant mechanism that even the protagonist herself sometimes seems to be aware of. Among the many literary references throughout the novel, Gothic fiction references are prominent. In order to explore this relationship, we will use the concept of parody as defined by Hutcheon.

To Hutcheon, parody does not necessarily include a comical element, but is an ironic and self-conscious use of intertexts of history and fiction that signals two contradictions characteristic of postmodernist art: difference inside similarity and transgression inside convention. This doubleness is at the heart of parody. The goal is not to destroy the past but to, at the same time, acknowledge and question it — or, to mark a difference from the past and at the same time connect with it. In parody there is an “implied ideological critique” of nineteenth-century humanist concepts of author and text as authorities or notions of single origin and author originality (HUTCHEON, 1988, p. 129).

By critically referencing past texts, the parodic text is in a position in which it can “speak to a discourse from *within* it, but without being totally recuperated by it” (HUTCHEON, 1988, p. 35). Because of this condition, parody has proved to be fertile ground for marginalised groups, as it allows them to insert themselves in the dominant discourse while at the same time criticising it, creating a relation of both identification and distance. Hutcheon states that women and other marginalised authors (marginalised ethnicities, sexual orientations, cultures) have majorly used parody to “both use and abuse, set up and then

challenge male traditions in art” (HUTCHEON, 1988, p. 134), that is, to challenge the dominant discourse that is mostly white, heterosexual and male. The marginalized are in an ambiguous position in the sense that they relate to and even long for the centre, but are withheld from it (HUTCHEON, 1988, p. 60), and this position is the foundation for the critical use of parody in postmodern literature.

Alias Grace, by not only referencing diverse literary genres but also and especially by creating an overall parodic relationship with Gothic genres, at the same time establishes a relationship and signals a contrast with those past texts. Atwood’s novel uses and challenges Gothic elements such as entrapment, power abuse, marginalisation, and Male and Female Gothic tropes. The following section will delve into these, using Hutcheon’s concepts and theory on Gothic literature to analyze *Alias Grace*.

ALIAS GRACE AS GOTHIC PARODY

Alias Grace is a historiographic metafiction, on Hutcheon’s terms, and as such employs parody as a way to ironically establish and challenge relationships with the past, including the literary past. Using Gothic literary theory as our foundation, we will argue that those parodic relationships are, for the most part, connected to past Gothic literature. We will then explore how *Alias Grace* approximates or separates itself from those literary traditions.

Throughout the novel, Gothic literature works are directly and indirectly referenced many times. First, there are the epigraphs at the beginning of each chapter of the book, which often refer to literary texts from the XIX century, most of which can be considered either Gothic literature or somehow related to it. Out of all the texts cited, some notable ones are Susanna Moodie’s 1853 chronicles on life in Canada, *Life in the Clearings*, and several texts by Emily Dickinson, Lord Tennyson and Robert Browning, all of which are used more than once. Second, the characters themselves often mention such literary texts. For example, Reverend Verringer compares Susanna Moodie’s poem *The Maniac* to Walter Scott’s poetry or Moodie’s chronicles in *Life in the Clearings* to Charles Dickens’s *Oliver Twist* (ATWOOD, 1997, p. 190-191). Walter Scott’s *The Lady of the Lake* is also prominently featured. Additionally, Dr. Jordan also mentions Edward Bulwer-Lytton and William Harrison Ainsworth, as well as unnamed “obscene novels” featuring Sultans and slave-girls and the like.

Besides actually mentioning specific texts, the novel also emulates certain Gothic characteristics. To begin with, there are general Gothic themes present either on the plot or

imagery elements, such as the imprisoned heroine, the domestic setting as a prison, the representation of the human mind as a house, the repressed and psychologically fragmented heroine, or hauntings and apparitions.

One of the central elements of Gothic novels is the Gothic castle in which the heroine is trapped. According to Williams (1995, p. 39-40), “specific decor is not so important as the setting’s power to evoke certain responses [...]: claustrophobia, loneliness, a sense of antiquity, recognition that this is a place of secrets”. The author also considers the Gothic “imposing house with a terrible secret” one of the genre’s fundamental characteristics (WILLIAMS, 1995, p. 39), and that the castle also “represents man’s culture, the arrangement of spaces in which this ‘Gothic’ action unfolds and the distribution of power that generates the plot” (WILLIAMS, 1995, p. 44).

Applying Williams’s (1995) concept of the Gothic castle as imposing and concealing a secret, Mr. Kinnear’s house is more the latter than the first. Williams (1995, p. 38) also describes the conventional Gothic castle as a “grand, mysterious dwelling concealing the violent, implicitly sexual secrets” of the male hero/villain. In that way, Mr. Kinnear’s house holds the key to his secret transgressions and abuses of power. It also represents Mr. Kinnear’s power over his servants, and although none of them are literally imprisoned there, the class structure makes it hard for them to have other alternatives. One way that the house subverts Gothic traditions is that it is not particularly imposing, and is actually described as simple and normal looking, although rich and comfortable. Judging it is a safe place because of its lack of grandeur or apparent decay would be a mistake, though. Unlike the rest of the house, the cellar is the disquieting place that makes us question the seeming normality of the other rooms. It is there that Grace imagines she is trapped forever, with the exit blocked by a man. Thus, in *Alias Grace* Kinnear’s house stands for the more traditional Gothic castle, maintaining its menacing power structure and hidden transgressions, but changing other aspects, suggesting the horror hidden inside what seems ordinary.

Besides those general Gothic characteristics, as a Gothic parody *Alias Grace* sets up more specific, critical and ironic relationships between the novel and Gothic literature. Parody is a highly ironic form of establishing critical relationships between texts, as conceptualized by Hutcheon. As such, sometimes it uses comedic elements as a manner of irony. For example, Mrs. Humphrey often works as a comic relief in the novel, although her predicaments are very serious and tragic. In a different novel, she might very well have been a Gothic heroine, as she seems to desire. But her attempts at doing so are read as ridiculous and fake, a product of her interest in so-called “third-rate shocker[s]” (ATWOOD, 1996, p. 202).

She is an imprisoned, oppressed, fragile woman, which sets up expectations on the reader based on the stereotype of the Gothic heroine established by the previous literary tradition, but those are comically subverted. A similar thing also happens to James McDermott. At first, he might seem like a typical Gothic antihero, but he fails miserably in living up to those expectations: he is not very smart, Grace does not seem to be interested in him, and his transgressive behaviour gets him killed.

Furthermore, *Alias Grace* compares and contrasts two opposing Gothic strands: Male Gothic and Female Gothic. According to Punter and Byron (2004), many authors have attempted to categorize Male and Female Gothic and its representations of gender, especially concerning the relationship of the protagonist and the portrayed dominant Gothic space. Simply put, Punter and Byron define the Male Gothic's main driving force as the male protagonist "attempt[s] to penetrate some encompassing interior", whereas Female Gothic usually depicts a female protagonist's "attempts to escape from a confining interior".

The authors also list other plot pattern and narrative differences. Male Gothic is more often connected to questions of identity, transgression of social taboos, confrontation with social institutions, objectified and victimised female characters, female body as a Gothic edifice -- a barrier between inside and outside to be trespassed by the transgressive male. Besides, Male Gothic tends to indulge openly and with grotesque or fleshly detail in scenes of violence in general, and many times of sexual violence. On the other hand, in the Female Gothic that same transgressive male becomes the main threat to the female protagonist. Whereas the Male Gothic antihero seeks to get in and to transgress, the Female Gothic heroine longs to get out and escape her imprisonment (PUNTER AND BYRON, 2004).

Based on that characterization of Male Gothic and Female Gothic, it is noticeable how Grace's first person point of view chapters resemble Female Gothic narratives, whereas the chapters with Dr. Jordan's close third person point of view are similar to Male Gothic narratives.

Firstly, Grace is directly compared to a literary heroine. Dr. Jordan describes her newspaper portrait like this:

At the front is an engraved portrait of Grace, which could easily pass for the heroine of a sentimental novel; she'd been just sixteen at the time, but the woman pictured looks a good five years older. Her shoulders are swathed in a tippet; the brim of a bonnet encircles her head like a dark aureole. The nose is straight, the mouth dainty, the expression conventionally soulful -- the vapid pensiveness of a Magdalene, with the large eyes gazing at nothing. (ATWOOD, 1997, p. 58).

When Dr. Jordan meets her for the first time in her prison cell, the scene is not behind any XIX century Gothic heroine. Moreover, just like Gothic literature, she is compared to medieval times:

The morning light fell slantingly in through the small window high up on the wall, illuminating the corner where she stood. It was an image almost mediaeval in its plain lines, its angular clarity: a nun in a cloister, a maiden in a towered dungeon, awaiting the next day's burning at the stake, or else the last-minute champion come to rescue her. (ATWOOD, 1997, p. 59).

She is also constantly fainting, and says she is afflicted with “palpitations of heart” (ATWOOD, 1997, p. 422). Those characteristics are also shared with previous Gothic heroines, hinting at their physical frailty and nervous sensibilities. The fainting heroine has even become the object of jokes concerning the Gothic genre, considering that in certain books the protagonist faints a ridiculously high number of times (for example, in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) Emily faints nothing less than ten times throughout the novel).

Nevertheless, Grace oftentimes subverts those similarities, and even critically ridicularizes those who see her as a heroine. In prison, Annie Little asks Grace about her “young doctor”. She wants to know if he is handsome, if he will get her out of prison, and if she is in love with him. Grace dismisses all of that: “Don’t be silly, [...] talking such rubbish, I’ve never been in love with any man and I don’t plan to start now” (ATWOOD, 1997, p. 380). After Grace is pardoned, Janet becomes emotional because she was to have a happy ending, “just like a book”. Grace ridicules that notion, and “wonder[s] what books she’d been reading” (ATWOOD, 1997, p. 446).

If Grace is a Gothic heroine, she is more akin to the Female Gothic tradition. Since her childhood, she has been imprisoned in various oppressive situations. She has dreams about being trapped, and longs for an escape. She is powerless, but cunning and courageous. She also fulfils the trope of a heroine searching for the absent mother and pursued by a patriarchal figure. Besides, she has many “suitors”, such as McDermott, Jeremiah, Dr. Jordan or Reverend Verringer, but they all are ineffective in freeing her from her predicaments.

On a superficial level, she looks the part. She is young, beautiful and alluring. Unlike traditional Gothic heroines, she seems to be aware of this fact, and could possibly be playing along by showcasing a demure personality. She, at least when talking to Dr. Jordan or to people on the Penitentiary, speaks modestly and “knows her place”. But she does have an angrier and more sexual side, represented by Mary Whitney. In that way, there is a division between her own thoughts and feelings and how she performs them publicly.

On the other hand, Dr. Jordan resembles a typical Male Gothic antihero. He has a deep wish to transgress society's codes, and his dreams and thoughts are full of imagery depicting him trying to "get inside" and find the chore within. This desire to "get inside" materializes in relation to women, both sexually and psychologically.

In his sexual affair with Mrs. Humphrey, he expresses his wish to go "further" by making an "incision in her [...] so he can taste her blood". He then asks himself how far will he go, "how far in" (ATWOOD, 1997, p. 366). He also admits his disgust with her when outside the house, but that he knows this will change "as soon as he steps over the threshold" (ATWOOD, 1997, p. 408). The threshold may be understood as that of the conscious mind; his unconscious desire is the one responsible for his transgressions.

With regards to his profession as a doctor, Dr. Jordan seems to consider doctors as the holders of a "forbidden knowledge" with transgressive power (ATWOOD, 1997, p. 82). He thinks that it is "the duty of those in his profession to probe life's uttermost depths", and then that he has "at least made a beginning" in that sense by frequenting European brothels (ATWOOD, 1997, p. 76). He also thinks that women are fascinated by him because, as a doctor, he has transgressed the boundaries of the female body:

He has been where [women] could never go, seen what they could never see; he has opened up women's bodies, and peered inside. In his hand, which has just raised their own hands towards his lips, he may once have held a beating female heart.

Thus he is one of the dark trio -- the doctor, the judge, the executioner, -- and shares with them the powers of life and death. To be rendered unconscious; to lie exposed, without shame, at the mercy of others; to be touched, incised, plundered, remade -- this is what they are thinking of when they look at him, with their widening eyes and slightly parted lips. (ATWOOD, 1997, p. 82).

His approach to the female mind is not very different. He always seeks to get in and find what is hidden inside. He says that he approaches Grace's mind "as if it is a locked box, to which I must find the right key" (ATWOOD, 1997, p. 132), that he tries to "open her up like an oyster" (ATWOOD, 1997, p. 133), or that she will either "crack open, revealing her hoarded treasures" or "shut herself up like a clam" (ATWOOD, 1997, p. 307).

After Grace tells him about the day of the murders, Dr. Jordan dreams that he is in a hospital to perform a surgery. He dreams that "he must lift off the sheet, then lift off her skin, whoever she is, or was, layer by layer. Strip back her rubbery flesh, peel her open, gut her like a haddock" (ATWOOD, 1997, p. 352). He is ultimately unable to find this woman under all the sheets, curtains, veils, petticoats, hinting at his inability to find the "hoarded treasures" he

expected to find by opening up Grace's mind.

When Dr. Jordan actually acts transgressively, his actions have devastating consequences for the women around him. His behaviour towards the housemaids when he was young is especially interesting because it is an inverse parallel to Grace, Mary Whitney and Nancy's situation. When he was younger, his household had many maids, and he associates the memory of them to "happier days" with "clean sheets and joyful holidays, and cheerful young servants" (ATWOOD, 1997, p. 185). They used to live in the attic, and he used to go up there furtively to do such things as to fondle their shifts. Once, he was caught by a maid whose name he cannot remember. She was very angry but could not express it for fear of being fired, so she started to cry and he hugged her and then kissed her, "to console her", he thinks (ATWOOD, 1997, p. 187).

He also often dreams about the maids' room in the attic, and experiences a sense of transgression by secretly looking into their private lives. At first, these memories are happy ones for him. But, when Grace tells him the story of Mary Whitney, he seems to, at least temporarily and at some level in the conscious-unconscious spectrum, increase his awareness of the consequences of his acts. This glimpse on the maids point of view causes him psychological trouble. When he leaves the sewing room after hearing of Mary's death, he is surprised that the lives of the maids, which he thought fondly of, turned to such an unexpected, "dire surprise". He is distressed, and thinks "he would like to wash his hands". He also remembers a lesson from one of his surgery instructors, saying that a good surgeon needs the ability to detach himself from "the business at hand", but Dr. Jordan cannot do that after hearing the story, because "he can't get Mary Whitney out of his mind" (ATWOOD, 1997, p. 185-186). He also starts to have bad dreams, and is constantly anxious. Nevertheless, he never actually consciously admits to himself that he has abused the maids, or that those acts possibly had terrible consequences. He also never regrets it or changes his behaviour, continuing to act in a similar fashion towards other women.

For example, the way Grace and Dr. Jordan think of prostitutes reveals a huge difference in perspective. Grace thinks about the possibility of becoming a prostitute, because "if worst came to worst and if starving, I would still have something to sell" (ATWOOD, 1997, p. 152). In contrast, Dr. Jordan likes to play a so-called "private mental game" in which he imagines what the women he meets would be like as prostitutes (ATWOOD, 1997, p. 57). That is, whereas to Grace the exercise of imagining women as prostitutes comes from her poverty and unstable social class, the same act to Dr. Jordan is a result of his dehumanizing sexual fantasies.

Moreover, he reveals his potential antagonism to Grace by comparing himself to Mr. Kinneer. He thinks it would be very pleasant, a “lazy” and “indulgent life”, to live in Mr. Kinneer’s house “with Grace as his housekeeper”. Then he adds: “not only his housekeeper: his locked and secret mistress. He’d keep her hidden, under a different name” (ATWOOD, 1997, p. 388). Thus, he is revealing that, in a traditional Gothic narrative, he might not assume the position of Grace’s saviour, as he sometimes believes, but that of Grace’s captor and violator.

Unlike previous Gothic texts, here both Male and Female Gothic are present in the same work and can interact with each other, affecting both characters world view and also making this contrast more evident to the reader. Dr. Jordan’s distress when listening to Grace’s story points to the clash between Male and Female Gothic traditions symbolized by the two characters respectively. Whereas the Female Gothic heroine wants to escape, the Male Gothic antihero wants to get in: the archetypal Gothic antihero is exactly the same transgressive male the archetypal Gothic heroine is threatened by, it is only a matter of narrative selection.

Similarly, Grace and Dr. Jordan also reflect such an inverse parallel. She has suffered from the absence of her mother; he has an overwhelmingly present mother whose influence he wishes to escape. She, as a housemaid, has been sexually threatened many times, and has been treated as an object; he is the one to objectify, sexualize and abuse his household maids. She is locked inside; he has freedom to travel all over the world. Moreover, the pairings female/male, lowborn/highborn, housemaid/doctor and Irish immigrant/American make them, in a way, opposite.

Dr. Jordan thinks with regards to Grace’s mind that “a prison does not only lock its inmates inside, it keeps all others out. Her strongest prison is of her own construction” (ATWOOD, 1997, p. 365). In that sentence, the complementary relation between Female and Male Gothic is summed up. Grace, representing the Female Gothic, is trapped inside a prison that is her own mind. But, to the Male Gothic perspective represented by Dr. Jordan, that same prison is another threshold that the protagonist desires to transgress and get into. Although Dr. Jordan is not a direct antagonist to Grace, he stands for all the male antagonists that have threatened her safety, and his behaviour, feelings and thoughts are not that different from those other men.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Alias Grace uses the past, both historical and literary, to signal its continuity and effects on the present and, at the same time, to question it and point out the differences between now and then. It is a fictional reconstruction of historical events, but written in a way that constantly questions the authority of historical records and destabilizes any certainties, making space for voices that otherwise would not have been heard in such discourses. The result is a fragmented text that challenges the possibility of arriving at absolute truths, and that challenge in itself becomes a major theme in the novel. Because of that, it can be considered a historiographic metafiction in the terms proposed by Hutcheon (1988).

In a similar fashion to how the novel references historical events, it also references the history of literature. By referencing Gothic literature traditions and ironically criticizing them, subverting expectations and building from them, *Alias Grace* reexamines what has already been said and contextualizes it in terms of current sociocultural perspectives. Through Grace's and Dr. Jordan's perspectives, it comments upon Male and Female Gothic traditions. In *Alias Grace*, these two traditions are both present in the same book, unlike other Gothic novels. Their intercalation allows for a critical emphasis on their oppositional natures, revealing how they are often composed of different perspectives on similar events. It questions what seemed certain in past Gothic narratives (for example, Male and Female Gothic tropes) and unveils new issues to be dealt with and explored (for example, the multiplicity of points of view). In this way, based on Hutcheon's (1988) concept of parody, it can be considered a Gothic parody.

Similarly to *Alias Grace*, it is also possible to notice in other works of art how the Gothic is still very much present today. These references are made in a variety of ways, but postmodern literature (and historiographic metafiction and parody) allows for critical, contextualized and ironic referencing with its own particular set of literary tools. How the postmodern and the Gothic interact seems to be a fertile topic that could be further explored, as they both have similarities that are sometimes used in tandem in contemporary literature. As this paper has discussed, the most important characteristic that Gothic and postmodern art have in common is that both emphasize the presentness of the past. In *Alias Grace*, as in so many Gothic narratives, the protagonist is haunted by ghosts — but hers are not only ghosts of the dead but also ghosts and shadows of all the discourses that try to force meaning into her life.

REFERENCES

ATWOOD, Margaret (1970). **The Journals of Susanna Moodie**. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997.

_____. (1976). **Lady Oracle**. New York: Anchor, 1998.

_____. **Alias Grace**. New York: Anchor Books, 1996.

_____. **The Penelopiad**. London: Vintage, 2005.

_____. **Hag-Seed**. London: Vintage, 2016.

HUTCHEON, Linda. **A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction**. London: Routledge, 1988.

MOODIE, Susanna. **Life in the clearings versus the bush**. London: Richard Bentley, 1853. Retrieved from: <<http://www.canadiana.org/ECO/mtq?doc=43989>>. Access in: July 4, 2019.

PUNTER, David; BYRON, Glennis. **The Gothic**. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004.

RADCLIFFE, Ann (1794). **The Mysteries of Udolpho**. Urbana: Project Gutenberg, 2009. Retrieved from: <<https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/3268>>. Access in: July 9, 2019.

TORONTO. *The Trials of James McDermott, and Grace Marks, at Toronto, Upper Canada, November 3rd and 4th, 1843, 1843*. Retrieved from: <<https://static.torontopubliclibrary.ca/da/pdfs/37131055310551d.pdf>>. Access in: July 4, 2019.

WILLIAMS, Anne. **Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic**. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995.

Recebido: 13/04/2020
Aprovado: 25/08/2020