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Circular Patterns of Change in the Feminine Quest for Self-Identity in the novels of Margaret Atwood and Alice Munro

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ABSTRACT

Circular Patterns of Change
in the Feminine Quest for Self-Identity
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Mary Lewochko

This thesis explores and compares the feminine quest for self-identity in the fiction of Margaret Atwood and Alice Munro. The early writings of these authors depict a repressive and hypocritical society which discourages women from developing their own potential.

Chapter Two shows how the heroines of Atwood and Munro rebel against the norms of their society by seeking learning which eventually leads to economic and sexual freedom. These women reject marriage and motherhood in their quest for self-identity, believing that marriage will destroy their self-identity.

Chapter Three portrays a new development in the feminine quest for self-identity. Women learn that they have distorted reality in believing that self-fulfillment lies in assuming the masculine role in society, at the expense of losing their identification with nature through procreation. Although the protagonists are successful in achieving equality with the men in their culture, they fail to find self-fulfillment.

My fourth chapter demonstrates how the feminine quest for self-identity ends in circularity when women reach a higher level of understanding of reality, discovering that self-identity can be achieved within the bonds of society. Women return to the traditional norms of society in their attempt to integrate with society in seeking marriage and motherhood.

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INTRODUCTION

In Alice Munro's Lives of Girls and Women, Addie predicts:

> "There is a change coming I think in the lives of girls and women. Yes. But it is up to us to make it come. All women have had up till now has been their connection with men. All we have had. No more lives of our own, really, than domestic animals. He shall hold thee, when his passion shall have spent its novel force, a little closer than his dog, a little dearer than his horse. Tennyson wrote that. It's true. Was true. You will want to have children, though."[1]

Addie foresees that women of her daughter's generation will want greater freedom to pursue their own self-identity. She suggests that this change is needed, but cautions that women must not seek freedom at the expense of losing their traditional identification with nature and society when she tells her daughter that she "will want to have children". The feminine quest for self-identity is a recurring theme throughout the novels of both Margaret Atwood and Alice Munro.

It is the aim of this thesis to compare the patterns of change effected by the women in the novels of Margaret Atwood and Alice Munro in their feminine quest for self-identity. I will draw parallels between the worlds of these two writers, showing how the women in these novels abandon the norms of their society, in rejecting marriage and childbearing, and go in search of greater freedom and independence.

The women in the novels of both Atwood and Munro are all proud, independent, intelligent and ambitious. It is these very traits that lead them to question the roles that society has imposed upon them and to

seek their own self-identity.

Nature and society will be seen as inter-related in the society which these women reject, as it is both a natural biological function of women to bear children and a role sanctioned by society.[2] This traditional identification of women with nature will be construed as a woman's uniqueness in nature and a source of power, which these women neglect in their feminine quest for self-identity. Margaret Atwood recognizes this uniqueness when she states in an interview with Graeme Gibson that a baby allows a woman to keep a close connection with her body, staying in touch with the physical elements of life, in a way that is not available to men.[3]

I will compare the various stages of rejection of the imposed norms of society by the women in the fiction of both writers. The similarities in character of the protagonists of both Atwood and Munro will be delineated, showing how they are directed towards reaching their goals. I will show that the more the heroine deviates from the imposed norms of her society, the greater will be the degree of isolation, alienation and psychological suffering that she will experience, and the harder it will be for her to reintegrate with society. I will centre upon the condition of the "emancipated" woman, with her own set of values which are foreign to those of the society which she rejects. The degree of loneliness, isolation, alienation and emotional suffering which the women of both writers experience will be compared.

I will show that the feminine quest for self-identity assumes a spiral-like form when these women finally reach a higher level of understanding, discovering that they have distorted reality. There is a gradual awareness

on the part of the women of both authors that, in seeking greater equality, they have denied their own femininity and no longer fit into society. In assuming a more masculine role, these women are rejected by the men in their culture. In their quest for self-identity, the protagonists of both Atwood and Munro gradually come to realize that it is not enough to have sexual equality and economic independence. They discover that the "emancipation" which they once sought does not bring them happiness and self-fulfillment when they find themselves alienated from the rest of society, and they suffer psychologically.

Although the feminine quest for self-identity is a recurring theme in the writings of both Atwood and Munro, and circularity in the quest can be compared and traced in the individual novels of both writers, Margaret Atwood's novels are more extensive than those of Alice Munro. The initial phase of the feminine quest for self-identity is similar in the fiction of both writers in that the feminine quest for self-identity ends in circularity. However, Margaret Atwood provides a broader scope for this investigation, further demonstrating the circular movement of this quest, which was observed in her earlier fiction, as well as in that of Alice Munro.

I will attempt to show that the feminine quest for self-identity ends in circularity in the protagonists' attempts to reintegrate with society, culminating in their realization that women's uniqueness lies in nature through procreation, which sets them apart from the men in their culture. The protagonists now understand that they have gained freedom and equality at the expense of losing their traditional identification with nature and society. They now also realize that self-identity may be secured

within the bounds of society, in a creative and productive manner. With this progression comes the need to reintegrate with society on multiple levels and to once again internalize the traditional norms of society. These women have discovered that total freedom which excludes being responsible to society, is an impossibility, for it ends in alienation and becomes a form of captivity.

Finally, I will show that the quest for self-identity comes full circle in The Handmaid's Tale, where women lose all freedom and self-identity as a result of rejecting their identification with nature through procreation and carrying their fight for freedom to excess.

I have chosen this topic of discussion because no one has compared the progression of the feminine quest for self-identity in the novels of both Margaret Atwood and Alice Munro, and shown that it ends in circularity. Another reason for having chosen this topic is that it is timely, as women of today's society are faced with combining career with motherhood. Also, the feminine quest for self-identity is still in flux; women in our culture are trying to cope with their newly acquired freedom and its effect upon the men in our patriarchal society.

This topic is also of special interest to me because I feel that it is important for women, in their quest for self-identity, to realize that they cannot live apart from the male segment of society. Women should not lose track of the fact that they must also learn to relate to the men in their culture. This, I feel, is reflected in the writings of both Atwood and Munro.

The body of writing of both authors exposes the lack of love between individuals whose main goal is to fulfill their prescribed social roles in an inhuman and materialistic culture. Atwood and Munro create a similar society in order to expose the imposed superficial standards of behaviour which are destructive to its members. These writers stress that harmony between the sexes will not be brought about by imposing domination upon either the male or female. Neither do they advocate sexual encounters that lack depth and feeling. Rather, the aim is to arrive at a middle ground in which the individual has the strength to assert herself/himself against the stereotyped standards set by society and yet is human and tender enough to take into consideration the feelings of the other individual. The ideal is here stressed, where love does not destroy individuality but encourages the growth and personal development of the loved one.

ENDNOTES

INTRODUCTION

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[1]Alice Munro, Lives of Girls and Women (Scarborough, Ontario, 1974), pp. 146-147.

Page 2

[2]Carol P. Christ, "Margaret Atwood: The Surfacing of Women's Spiritual Quest and Vision," Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, II, 2 (Winter 1976), p. 326.

[3]Graeme Gibson, Interview with Margaret Atwood in Eleven Canadian Novelists (Toronto, 1973), p. 28.

CHAPTER I

Background and Traditional Role of Women in a Patriarchal Society

The world which Margaret Atwood and Alice Munro create in their early fiction is a society in which women drop out of school early and leave the intellectual pursuits to men. A woman's main goal in this culture is to find a husband, have children and look after the domestic needs of her family. Women assume a passive role and stifle any intellectual tendencies which appear unfeminine to men and win them the scorn and ridicule of the other women in their society. Men, on the other hand, seek higher education to prepare themselves for the role of provider. It is the men who seek fame and fortune in the world which Atwood and Munro create, and who compete with other men for top place in society.

The women's social position is determined by the man they marry. Spinsters derive their identity and position in society from the household of the male member of their family, where they live and serve. Women who are born into poverty have no way of escaping from it; they end up marrying men who come from similarly poor and uneducated backgrounds, and continue to live in the cycle of poverty into which they were born, or end up marrying for money at the expense of missing out on an education.

The society which Atwood and Munro present is puritanical, stifling and hypocritical. Women are expected to remain pure and chaste until

marriage; society is unsympathetic to women who fall prey to men's sexual advances and who are exploited by them. Women who are proud, intelligent and ambitious, and who try to compete with men both sexually and intellectually, are rejected by the male members of their society. Such women are viewed as unfeminine, poor candidates for marriage, and become outcasts in their own society.

Alice Munro shows how women contend with these repressive social conditions in Lives of Girls and Women. The story is set against the background of the drab and poverty-stricken town of Jubilee, Ontario, typical of the difficult times of the 1940's. The dismal and depraved town of Portersfield, inhabited by criminals, prostitutes and untrustworthy characters, lies next door. Surrounding them is Wawanash County, where people barely survive and where the only evening diversion is listening to Boston Blackie and Police Patrol on the radio.[1]

This Canadian setting "in the sticks" is typical of any small town, where women continue to live in poverty from one generation to another.[2] Like their mothers before them, they leave school at an early age, marry into poverty, and bring children into the world who cannot escape their environment. This is a world where women feel isolated, where their dreams remain unfulfilled, where girls who are abused go insane and drown themselves, and where pregnant girls are trapped into unfortunate marriages.[3]

Addie is born into this eternal cycle of poverty. Her own mother goes insane and turns to religion because she cannot successfully reconcile her independence and intelligence with love and sex and the demands of marriage under hard conditions.[4] Addie follows in her mother's footsteps when she marries a poor fox farmer. Like her mother, Addie

cannot successfully integrate her independence and intellectual craving with love and sex. Addie married Del's father because he never made any sexual advances towards her before marriage. When Del asks her mother why she fell in love, Addie replies, "'Your father was always a gentleman.'"[5]

In the society which Alice Munro presents, women are expected to subdue such qualities as pride, intelligence and ambition. Women who favour knowledge over domesticity are in the minority in this culture and are viewed as eccentrics by the other women in their society. Addie finds herself in this position when she neglects her household chores and embarks upon her crusade for knowledge by travelling door-to-door selling encyclopedias. She is severely criticized and antagonized by Aunt Elspeth and Auntie Grace, who are typical of the women in her culture.

The aunts grow elderly, sly and sulky, and are quick to take offence when they are in Addie's home. Behind her back they would say to Del, "'Is that the hair-brush you use on your hair? Oh, we thought it was for the dog!' Or, 'Is that what you dry your dishes with?'"[6] They would bend over Addie's kitchen sink, scouring the pots and pans until they had removed all the black that had accumulated since their last visit. They tolerate Addie's statements with stunned smiles and are taken aback by her directness and outrageousness, rapidly batting their lashes and trying to look helpless. When Addie offers to teach Aunt Elspeth to play the piano, she "refused, with a delicate, unnatural laugh, as if somebody had offered to teach her to play pool."[7]

The aunts never dreamt of penetrating the male world, feeling content with looking after a man's needs. They cooked, baked, cleaned,

mended, sewed, gardened and made preserves, leaving intellectual pursuits to men. They stuck to what they considered to be a woman's role, secretly feeling superior to women who dared to transgress these boundaries:

> And they would never, never meddle with it;
> between men's work and women's work was the
> clearest line drawn, and any stepping over
> this line, any suggestion of stepping over
> it, they would meet with such light, amazed,
> regretfully superior, laughter.[8]

The author reveals that the aunts had no wish to compete in the masculine world, preferring stagnation to the risk of failure. They lacked the ambition to better themselves and resisted change. The aunts believed that their brother Craig was the most popular and intelligent man in Wawanash County, and could have been elected to the legislature, but were proud of the fact that he never ran. For the aunts, "choosing not to do things showed, in the end, more wisdom and self-respect than choosing to do them. They liked people turning down things that were offered, marriage, positions, opportunities, money."[9]

Aunt Elspeth and Auntie Grace poke fun at Addie by telling Del that judging from her unironed blouse, her mother no longer has any time for ironing now that she is out on the road selling encyclopedias. Del learns through her aunts that her mother's love of knowledge is not valued by the rest of society:

> "Your mother knows such a lot of things, my,"
> said Aunt Elspeth and Auntie Grace lightly,
> unenviously, and I saw that to some people,
> maybe to most people, knowledge was just oddity;
> it stuck out like warts.[10]

Spinsters, like Aunt Elspeth and Auntie Grace, who live under the roof of a male member of their family, have no lives of their own. They derive their identity from the man they serve and are lost when they no

longer have one to fawn over. They do not develop mentally and remain much like children throughout their lives. Such was the case with Aunt Elspeth and Auntie Grace when Craig died:

> They told their same stories, they played their same jokes, which now seemed dried out, brittle with use; . . . . the older they got the more frail and admirable and inhuman this construction appeared. This was what became of them when they no longer had a man with them, to nourish and admire, and when they were removed from the place where their artificiality bloomed naturally.[11]

The narrator shows that the aunts' "artificial" way of life, of refusing to develop their own potential and remaining content in the service of their brother's home, no longer held any purpose for them when he died. In having lived in the shadow of their brother, the aunts had not developed intellectually and were no longer able to function effectively on their own when they ceased to live in their brother's home.

Women who marry share much the same fate as spinsters. Although they marry lawyers and bankers, they derive their identity from the man they marry and remain uneducated. For instance, when Addie gives her first party in her new city home, she invites Mrs. Coutts, "sometimes called Mrs. Lawyer Coutts."[12] Addie is disappointed to discover that the city women are no different from the farm women, from whom she escaped; they lead equally empty and shallow lives, and do not share Addie's love of knowledge, quickly tiring of the educational games she played.

In the society which Alice Munro creates, young women are taught to look feminine and beautiful, and to remain as children intellectually. The successful young woman, according to social standards, attracts and marries a man who looks after her every need and indulges her much as he would a child. In return these women give blind obedience and leave

the decision making to their husbands. Young women who are independent and intelligent are shown to be out of place in this society, finding it difficult to combine these qualities with being beautiful and passive, according to the dictates of society.

We learn that Del admires beauty and femininity but that she will never conform to the feminine role which society has imposed upon women like her Aunt Nile. When Del first meets her aunt, she knows that she will never be beautiful. Nile is barely twenty-three, exquisitely beautiful, but does not have the intelligence to know that the fox coat she is wearing came from a real animal; for all she knew, it could have been synthetic. In spite of her shortcomings, Del's wealthy and aging Uncle Bill treats Nile like a china doll. Although Del does not respect Nile's mind, she cannot help but admire her:

> I thought she was an idiot, and yet I frantically admired her, was grateful for every little colorless pebble of a word she dropped. She reached some extreme of feminine decorativeness, perfect artificiality, that I had not even known existed; seeing her, I understood that I would never be beautiful.[13]

Alice Munro shows that although Del longs to be as "artificially" beautiful and feminine looking as her Aunt Nile, she realizes that she is not prepared to sacrifice her intellectual development and independence for beauty, as had her aunt. Del knows that she can never be content with merely concentrating upon her physical beauty while remaining an "idiot" intellectually, but that she will seek inner beauty through the pursuit of knowledge and will be self-reliant.

Del, who has a mind of her own, is confused; although she does not want to be viewed by society as outspoken, innocent and virginal like

her mother, she still wants to seek equality with men. When Del reads an article written by a New York psychiatrist, she learns that, in the eyes of society, her interests are viewed as more masculine than feminine. Del discovers that when women gaze at the moon, they think of washing their hair, whereas men think about the mystery of the universe and its vastness; she wants both worlds.

Alice Munro shows that the only way an intelligent and ambitious woman can survive in this society is by hiding her intelligence and allowing the men with whom she competes to feel that they are more intelligent, while secretly feeling superior to them; only in this way can a woman be desirable to men and at the same time seek equality.

Del gets straight A's in school, and cannot get enough of them. She competes with Jerry Storey, who has the highest I.Q. in her school, but does not reveal what she thinks of him:

> The gymnastics of his mind I did not admire, for people only admire abilities similar to, though greater than, their own. His mind to me was like a circus tent full of dim apparatus on which, when I was not there, he performed stunts which were spectacular and boring. I was careful not to let him see I thought this. He was truthful in telling me what he thought about me, apparently; I had no intention of being so with him. Why not? Because I felt in him what women feel in men, something so tender, swollen, tyrannical, absurd; I would never take the consequences of interfering with it: I had an indifference, a contempt almost, that I concealed from him. I thought that I was tactful, even kind; I never thought that I was proud.[14]

Del does not share and admire Jerry's abilities of abstract thought and reasoning powers, which he feels are needed in the intellectually competitive outside world. She believes that her intuitive powers and gift of language, which he believes to be secondary, are superior and secretly feels that she is the more intelligent. Del is careful to avoid

hurting what she believes to be Jerry's inflated male pride by concealing her own feelings of superiority. What she does not realize is that she is equally proud in believing that she does not need Jerry to acknowledge her superiority.

Women do not alter noticeably from one generation to the next. Although Del loves the library walls of printed matter, she realizes that she is an exception in Jubilee. Young women still shun knowledge, as had their mothers before them, believing that it is detrimental to their chances of marriage. Reading "persisted mostly in unmarried ladies, . . ."[15]

Young women of marriageable age continue to drop out of school early, find mediocre jobs, and concentrate their efforts upon looking feminine and beautiful, with a view to luring a man into marriage. They assume the passive role which society has prescribed for them, as do Naomi and the young women in the creamery office where she works. They go to showers, collect china, silverware, pots and pans, and attend dances at the Gay-la Dance Hall, where they hope to meet eligible young men. They get drunk and are driven home along the back roads by men they try to fight off. In attempting to understand men and getting used to them "a girl was putting herself on the road to marriage."[16] Women who grow old and are unsuccessful at catching a man, "whether they were perfect old maids or discreet adventuresses," like Addie's boarder Fern Dogherty, were ridiculed by the younger women of marriageable age.[17]

The author shows that women are taught to believe that a woman's mark of success in this patriarchal society is marriage. The single woman has no status in this society, and a woman's reputation is judged by her standing in society, as opposed to her morality. Younger women

of marriageable age judge older women according to these social standards, and view the unmarried woman as a failure in society.

Del informs her friend Naomi that her mother has heard from Fern, who has gone to work in Windsor. She tells Naomi that Fern appears happy and cheerful in her new life, for she is having a good time singing at the Opera Society and going to races and a night club in Detroit. Naomi replies dogmatically that Fern is a joke because she never married, a view shared by the young women at the creamery office with regard to unmarried women in general.[18]

Women who get pregnant in this puritanical and hypocritical society are pushed into undesirable marriages, seeing no other way out. When Naomi is unsuccessful in her efforts to abort her baby, she tells Del, "'. . . I've collected all this stuff, I might as well get married.'" [19] The author shows that this male-oriented society does not protect young women who are sexually abused, nor is it sympathetic to their plight. Such women as Marion Sherriff and Del's Drama teacher Miss Farris, who was found "floating face down, unprotesting," after her affair with a married Music teacher, end up in the Wawanash River.[20]

Although women continue to follow the dictates of this patriarchal society and are pushed into undesirable marriages or suicide, a new breed of women, like Del, is emerging who will not be limited by the dictates of society.

In Alice Munro's Who Do You Think You Are?, published seven years after Lives of Girls and Women, Munro continues to explore this new breed of woman. Rose rebels against the dictates of her society by asserting her independence; the heroine openly flaunts her pride, intelligence and love of knowledge even though she is well aware that society

does not value such traits in women.

The story is set against a background of poverty in a small town called Hanratty, in Ontario. West Hanratty, where the heroine lives, is inhabited by foundry workers, bootleggers and prostitutes. Rose is the daughter of a defeated father who takes out his inadequacies on Rose because she shows promise of having the ambition he lacks. Rose knows very little about her own mother, who died when she was born, but fancies that she must have been far superior and more refined than either her father or stepmother.

Rose's stepmother Flo is a compassionate but ineffective mother, who constantly threatens her with beatings which Rose knows her father will carry out with sadistic pleasure. There is a constant struggle between Flo and Rose. Flo is resentful of Rose's rebellious nature and of her feeling of superiority and ambition, traits which are viewed as unfeminine in this traditional society. Flo seeks gratitude from Rose for having brought her up after her mother's death, but Rose's pride and independence will not allow her to bow down to anyone. Instead of showing gratitude, as Flo wishes, Rose is resentful of her and answers her back saying, "'I never asked you to do anything. I wished you never had. I would have been a lot better off.'"[21]

Unlike Flo, Rose does not accept her fate of being born into poverty. She dreams of freeing herself from poverty and ugliness while still at school. Rose hopes to transcend her environment, as had Addie and Del, when she gazes admiringly at the pictures of beautifully coloured birds which hang over the blackboard, looking so out of place in the shabby and rundown schoolroom:

> Here they were bright and eloquent, so much at variance with everything else that what they seemed to represent was not the birds themselves, not those skies and snows, but some other world of hardy innocence, bounteous information, privileged light-heartedness. No stealing from lunchpails there; no slashing coats; no pulling down pants and probing with painful sticks; no fucking; no Franny.[22]

Rose is ashamed of her family and feels sorry for herself. Instead of sympathizing with Katherine Mansfield, the heroine of Garden Party, who was herself as poor as Rose, she feels anger. Rose reasons that Katherine's parents did not speak with an accent, nor did she have to look at her father's stained underwear. "Rose was getting to be a prig about poverty, and would stay that way for a long time."[23]

Rose feels superior to her parents. Like Addie and Del, she shows a strong liking for knowledge in spite of the disapproving looks she gets from Flo, who thinks reading is a waste of time, and the mixed feelings of her father who is secretly proud of her. Although Rose never answers her father back and is never disrespectful, her attitude towards him displays secretiveness and circumspection. She could not hide from him "her need for flaunting, her high hopes of herself, her gaudy ambitions, . . ."[24] Rose feels that she has in some way disgraced her father but would continue to do so throughout her life. She is aware of her own pride and stubbornness but does not plan to change.

Munro shows that women with intellectual pursuits are out of place in this patriarchal society. That men are secretly resentful of them is demonstrated when we learn that Rose does not measure up to her father's expectations because she lacks the womanly qualities that he admires:

> A woman ought to be energetic, practical, clever at making and saving; she ought to be shrewd, good at bargaining and bossing and seeing through people's pretentions. At the same time she should be naive

> intellectually, childlike, contemptuous of maps and long words and anything in books, full of charming jumbled notions, superstitions, traditional beliefs.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> The real problem was that she combined and carried on what he must have thought of as the worst qualities in himself. All the things he had beaten down, successfully submerged, in himself, had surfaced again in her, and she was showing no will to combat them. She mooned and daydreamed, she was vain and eager to show off; her whole life was in her head.[25]

Alice Munro reveals that men have unrealistic expectations of women in believing that they should be wise in the affairs of the world, while remaining unskilled by being denied an education. The author further shows that Rose possesses all the artistic powers of intuitive thought and the gift of language which Rose's father did not fully develop but failed to suppress. He is reminded of his own failure to achieve material success, wrongly believing that his failure is due to his being unable to curb his daydreaming and love of literature.

Despite what Rose's parents think, her love of learning leads her to graduate into university. Her ambition and top grades attract the attention of Dr. Henshawe, an educated and well-to-do spinster. She offers Rose a place in her own home, as she had done for other female students before her who showed promise.

When Rose meets Patrick Blanchford in college, and he falls in love with her, she has mixed feelings. Rose hides her vanity, discontent and ambitious nature because she does not want to lose his love and offer of marriage, which will lead to social acceptance, but at the same time knows that marriage means the loss of her self-identity. Rose experiences conflict when she is unable to make a choice. Eating becomes a form of escape when she is unable to find a solution to her problem:

> In the middle of the night Rose woke up and ate chocolate bars. She craved sweets. Often in class or in the middle of a movie she started thinking about fudge cupcakes, brownies, some kind of cake Dr. Henshawe bought at the European Bakery; it was filled with dollops of rich bitter chocolate, that ran out on the plate. Whenever she tried to think about herself and Patrick, whenever she made up her mind to decide what she really felt, these cravings intervened.[26]

Although Dr. Henshawe is impressed with Patrick's wealth, she warns Rose that marriage will mean the end of her ambitions and her college degree. However, Rose enjoys the attention she receives because of her engagement to a man of wealthy background, as well as being socially accepted. Rose is gradually lured into marriage and eventually succumbs to the role which other young women in her culture adopt and, like many of them, marries for the wrong reasons because she feels pressured by society:

> Girls she hardly knew stopped and asked to see her ring, admired it, wished her happiness. When she went back to Hanratty for a weekend, . . . she met the dentist's wife on the main street.
>
> "Oh, Rose, isn't it wonderful! When are you coming back again? We're going to give a tea for you, the ladies in town all want to give a tea for you!"
>
> This woman had never spoken to Rose, never given any sign before of knowing who she was. Paths were opening now, barriers were softening. And Rose--oh, this was the worst, this was the shame of it--Rose, instead of cutting the dentist's wife, was blushing and skittishly flashing her diamond and saying yes, that would be a lovely idea.[27]

The author points out that young women are sometimes trapped into marriage because they feel helpless, confused and frightened by social pressures. Women like Rose, who live in poverty and are unskilled because of a lack of education, succumb to marriage because they are financially unable to support themselves. Those who long to maintain

their self-identity are confused over their role in society and eventually marry in order to find security and social acceptance. This is revealed when Rose later confesses her reasons for marrying Patrick:

> She said she had run to him and clung to him and overcome his suspicions and kissed and cried and reinstated herself simply because she did not know how to do without his love and his promise to look after her; she was frightened of the world and she had not been able to think up any other plan for herself. When she was seeing life in economic terms, or was with people who did, she said that only middle-class people had choices anyway, that if she had had the price of a train ticket to Toronto her life would have been different.[28]

The society which Margaret Atwood portrays in The Edible Woman is similar to the one found in Alice Munro's novel, Lives of Girls and Women, a culture in which young women are pressured to conform to the dictates of society by being pushed into marriage and having children for the wrong reasons. They are encouraged to be passive and to hide their intellectual interests, which are viewed as unfeminine and a threat to their chances of marriage. Women who are independent, ambitious and who seek equality with men economically, intellectually or sexually are rejected by society, becoming social outcasts.

In this hypocritical middle-class society, women must guard their reputations from being sullied by such spying middle-class hypocrites as the landlady in The Edible Woman who rents the upper rooms of her rooming house to Marian, the heroine of the story, and her unconventional roommate Ainsley. George Jonas suggests that the society which Margaret Atwood portrays in The Edible Woman is "post-Raymond Souster but still not quite the sixties' mood of Rochdale, Yorkville, St. James Town and Nathan Phillips Square." He goes on to say that the novel deals

with the mores and manners of a particular society which is still undergoing change and transition.[29] Anne Montagnes also believes that Margaret Atwood is alluding to middle-class Torontonians when she describes the middle-class rooming house decorated with velvet curtains and run by a landlady who wears pearls.[30] Whether or not Atwood is really speaking of a small-town species of Torontonians, which represents a segment of our Canadian national identity, she clearly embodies in the prudish and hypocritical landlady a force of social manipulation. The narrator, who has witnessed the destructive and consuming effects of transgression upon those who dare to break out of the mold, has learned to fear and distrust such people as the landlady. The landlady does not merely represent a small segment of society but society as a whole, because prudish and hypocritical people like her permeate all of the society which Margaret Atwood creates in The Edible Woman.

Margaret Atwood's constant disparagement of this hypocritical segment of society is further supported in her short story, "The War in the Bathroom," in Dancing Girls, where the landlady embodies a negative force in society similar to that in The Edible Woman. The protagonist of this short story is an old lady who is pleased with herself when she moves three blocks away from her old place of residence into a new one. We are told that she always disliked the German landlady who, she suspects, has been snooping around in her room.

Atwood here denounces the hypocritical women of society who lead respectable lives on the surface, while violating the private rights of such helpless individuals as the old lady in "The War in the Bathroom."

Not only does the landlady snoop around the old woman's room but also goes through her mail:

> . . . the envelopes had greasy thumb-
> prints, and it is still too cold for the
> postmen to go without their gloves.
> The new place has a landlord instead of a
> landlady; I think, on the whole, I prefer
> them.[31]

Margaret Atwood's short poem, "The Landlady," in The Animals in That Country, is also reminiscent of the landlady in The Edible Woman, as revealed in the opening lines of her poem:

> This is the lair of the landlady.
>
> She is
> a raw voice
> loose in the rooms beneath me,
>
> the continuous henyard
> squabble going on below
> thought in this house like
> the bicker of blood through the head.
>
> She is everywhere, intrusive as the smells
> that bulge in under my doorsill;
> she presides over my
> meagre eating, generates
> the light for eyestrain.[32]

The landlady, in her rooming house, embodies the destructive forces of society; she is compared to an animal running free in its lair and is equally dangerous. The landlady is a "raw" or uncouth individual, who is bent on drawing "blood" or inflicting pain on those around her through her continuous bickering. She is ever watchful of her tenant, as are the self-righteous hypocrites of society, knowing every move she makes and what is on her table. She is as oppressive as a strong smell in her invasion of privacy and presides over the very pattern of the tenant's life, barely providing her with the necessities of life.

Margaret Atwood shows that the landlady in The Edible Woman is snobby, prudish and pretentious. This is demonstrated when Ainsley and Marian first approach her about renting the upstairs rooms of her home:

> The lady down below shook her head again. "If it weren't for the child," she said, "I would sell the house. But I want the child to grow up in a good district."
>
> I said I understood, and she said that of course the district wasn't as good as it used to be: some of the larger houses were too expensive to keep up and the owners had been forced to sell them to immigrants (the corners of her mouth turned gently down) who had divided them up into rooming houses. "But that hasn't reached our street yet," she said. "And I tell the child exactly which streets she can walk on and which she can't."[33]

The author alerts us to the fact that not all is as normal as appears on the surface, despite the landlady's show of propriety. Her daughter, who is attending a private girls' school, does not look as innocent and feminine as we would expect. Such words as "hulking", "creature" and "cretinous" suggest to the reader that there is something unwholesome below the surface. We are told that:

> She is a hulking creature of fifteen or so who is being sent to an exclusive private girls' school, . . . I'm sure she's really quite normal, but there's something cretinous about the hair-ribbon perched up on top of her gigantic body.[34]

The landlady is wearing "spotless white gloves" and is carrying a garden trowel when she confronts Marian. "Spotless, white gloves," which may suggest a spotless character, are here juxtaposed with a

"garden trowel" to create an association with burying something. The author makes this strange juxtaposition to show that the landlady is symbolic of death or is a destructive element to those around her. Ainsley recognizes this when she says, "She was wearing a pair of spotless gardening gloves and carrying a trowel. I wondered who she'd been burying in the garden."[35] The author further shows that the landlady is sly and hypocritical, when Ainsley reveals to Marian her suspicions:

> ". . . I'll bet she wasn't at a meeting at all; she was hiding behind that damn velvet curtain, wanting us to think she was at a meeting so we'd <u>really</u> do something. What she wants is an orgy."
>
> "Now Ainsley," I said, "you're being paranoid." Ainsley is convinced that the lady down below comes upstairs when we aren't there and looks round our apartment and is silently horrified, and even suspects her of ruminating over our mail, . . . It's a fact that she sometimes answers the front door for our visitors before they ring the bell.[36]

We learn of the young women's backgrounds and how society has played a part in shaping their characters through the author's use of colour. We are told in the very beginning of the novel that Ainsley and Marian are very different in character. Ainsley is shown to be wearing "neon pink", while Marian is wearing a dress of a colour which conceals her appearance. The author uses the colour "pink" to denote Ainsley's femininity and the word "neon" to suggest that she is outgoing and uninhibited.

Ainsley is not afraid of society, nor does she have the need to hide her actions. Marian, on the other hand, is shown to be shy and

self-conscious about the outside world, hiding under protective colouring. We learn that the landlady always confronts Marian with her complaints:

> ". . . I'm afraid it upsets the child." She holds Ainsley alone responsible for the smoke, and seems to think she sends it out of her nostrils like a dragon. But she never stops Ainsley in the hall to talk about it: only me. . . . It's probably the way we dress: Ainsley says I choose clothes as though they're a camouflage or a protective colouration. [sic] though I can't see anything wrong with that. She herself goes in for neon pink.[37]

Ainsley's show of flashiness suggests that she does not care about what other people think of her; she is not, therefore, easily approached, whereas Marian's outward appearance of shyness and respectability leaves her wide open to the attacks of such people as the malicious and gossipy landlady, who feels that her comments will produce the most results when directed at her.

Marian is especially susceptible to the dictates of society, being a product of a small-town mentality. She is emotionally vulnerable due to her intelligence, sensitivity and honest nature, in spite of her outward show of strength and practicality. As the title of the novel implies, Marian is the edible woman. She is capable of being consumed or swallowed up by society, for she has observed its destructive effects upon other women who have dared to overstep the boundaries of socially-accepted behaviour, and has learned to fear it.

Marian feels trapped by society on multiple levels. We first learn of Marian's entrapment when she fears meeting the landlady on her way to work, because she knows that the woman will confront her with complaints about the smoke in their apartment. Marian, who has been conditioned by a small-town puritanic society, is juxtaposed with Ainsley, who has no feelings of entrapment because she is not susceptible to the dictates of society:

> "The old bitch," said Ainsley. "Why can't she mind her own business?" Ainsley doesn't come from a small town as I do, so she's not as used to people being snoopy; on the other hand she's not as afraid of it either. She has no idea about the consequences.[38]

The landlady is representative of a society which is hypocritical and destructive to creative human growth, burying or destroying those who dare to overstep its prescribed norms of prudish moral behaviour. Atwood is here criticizing people like the landlady, and suggests that Ainsley's independence is credible. It is the sensitive and vulnerable women like Marian who are in danger of being swallowed up emotionally by such a prudish and hypocritical society, preventing them from developing their creative powers and their individuality.

We learn that Marian is also trapped in her job, which is good paying, interesting and in keeping with her education, but which offers little advancement:

> I couldn't become one of the men upstairs; I couldn't become a machine person or one of the questionnaire-marking ladies, as that would be a step down. I might conceivably turn into Mrs. Bogue or her assistant, but as far as I could see that would take a long time, and I wasn't sure I would like it anyway.[39]

Marian envies Ainsley because her job offers change and adventure. Although Marian knows that she is free to change her position, she does not feel secure enough to do so:

> As I hurried towards my office building, I found myself envying Ainsley her job. Though mine was better-paying and more interesting, hers was more temporary: she had an idea of what she wanted to do next. She could work in a shiny new air-conditioned office-building, whereas mine was dingy brick with small windows. Also, her job was unusual.[40]

"Small windows" here denote the windows of Marian's mind; her outlook on life is limited because she fears overstepping the prescribed norms of society. Ainsley, on the other hand, does not fear society; she knows what she wants out of life and does not hesitate to go after it.

Atwood again juxtaposes Marian and Ainsley when we learn that Marian is hesitant about signing the pension plan because she fears being trapped in her job until retirement, as are the old ladies wearing hearing aids who work with her. Marian, who is not emotionally free to leave her job at will, hesitates to talk her problem over with Ainsley, feeling that she would not understand and would tell her that she was free to leave whenever she wanted to.[41]

Marian is also more susceptible to the dictates of a society which advocates that women's happiness lies in marriage and childbearing. Her relationship with Peter, a socially acceptable young lawyer, grows more serious than she cares to admit. Although Ainsley warns her that Peter is taking advantage of her and that she should be seeing other

men, Marian, who has been conditioned by society, thinks it is improper to be involved with more than one man at a time. She is more concerned over what society will think of her than of her own well-being.

Marian appears to be a logical progression of what we have seen to be Del's character in Lives of Girls and Women; she is well educated, intelligent and ambitious. Marian is as self-supporting as Del hopes to be by becoming a writer. She temporarily succumbs to the dictates of society as she floats along with plans of marriage to Peter, who is slowly turning her into a plaything. Similarly, Del leads Garnet French on into believing that she wants marriage and children, but is shocked into realizing that marriage to Garnet would mean the end of her ambitions of fame and fortune. Marian and Del are also similar in that they both have the need to preserve their self-identity which they fear losing through marriage.

The young women in the creamery office in Lives of Girls and Women, who prepare themselves for marriage, are similar to the office virgins, in The Edible Woman, who wear false eyelashes, elaborate hair styles and flashy clothes, and who are compared to fish lures in their pursuit of men, whom they hope to trap into marriage.

Margaret Atwood shows that the office virgins are both physically and emotionally entrapped by their false values. While they speak of travelling before marriage, all they can think about is getting married and protecting their virginity, while sitting around on their own doorsteps:

> They are all interested in travelling: Millie has lived in England, Lucy has been twice to New York, and Emmy wants to go to Florida. After they have travelled enough they would like to get married and settle down.[42]

The author ironically suggests that the office virgins are already settled and bogged down both physically and mentally, even though they are not yet married.

We are told by the narrator that the only thing the office virgins have in common is that they are all "artificial" blonds. Their fair colouring is not, however, associated with beauty. On the contrary, the effect is very unfeminine looking, for they are described as being "artificial" and "brassy":

> They aren't really very much alike, except that they are all artificial blondes--Emmy, the typist, whisk-tinted and straggly; Lucy, who has a kind of public-relations job, platinum and elegantly coiffured, and Millie, Mrs. Bogue's Australian assistant, brassy from the sun and cropped--and, as they have confessed at various times over coffee-grounds and gnawed crusts of toasted Danishes, all virgins-- . . . .[43]

The author reveals, through her description of the office virgins, the superficial values of such women, as well as their unattractive and narrow way of thinking.

Margaret Atwood shows that while marriage is a socially-accepted role for women, society often traps women into getting married and having children for the wrong reasons. Marian's college friend Clara has stars in her eyes when she drops out of university and gets married. Clara does not plan on having a family when she marries. It is only after the children come along that she realizes that marriage also means being a mother. Her first child is greeted with dismay, while the second one leaves her astonished. She looks forward to the third one with grim fatalism. "Her metaphors for her children included barnacles encrusting a ship and limpets clinging to a rock."[44]

That Clara feels trapped by marriage is evident from the author's use of imagery. When Ainsley and Marian are on their way to visit Clara in her suburban neighbourhood, the author reveals, through her narrator, a picture of sterility and aridity to portray Clara's entrapment by marriage and that of the majority of housewives:

> . . . I thought Clara was lucky, especially in her condition, to be living so far away from the heat and noise of downtown. Though she herself thought of it as a kind of exile: . . . . The street itself was old but not as attractive as our street: the houses were duplexes, long and narrow, with wooden porches and thin back gardens.[45]

The author suggests, through the description of Clara's home, that unmarried women lead a more satisfying life than the married ones. The married woman's "street" or way of life is not as attractive as that of the single woman. For Clara, marriage is really an exile from life. The narrowness of the houses and "thin back gardens" denote the married women's narrow way of life, which spells spiritual impoverishment and aridity. As Ainsley and Marian approach Clara's home, it is described in terms of death images, to portray death in life. The lawn is shown to be neglected and of very small dimension, while the children's play-things, strewn around the lawn, are symbolic of death. A doll is "decapitated" and the teddy bear's stomach is hanging out:

> The grass on the door-mat-sized lawn had not been cut for some time. On the steps lay a nearly-decapitated doll and inside the baby-carriage was a large teddy-bear [sic] with the stuffing coming out.[46]

The author again uses death images to show that married women are emotionally dead when they assume a passive role in society. Marriage destroys a woman's inner core or personality, which is gradually taken over by the husband when he assumes the decision making.

When the girls first see Clara sitting in the round wicker chair, we are told that Clara resembles a boa constrictor in her pregnant state. The image of motherhood, which is usually associated with life, is here associated with a death-inflicting serpent:

> Clara's body is so thin that her pregnancies are always bulgingly obvious, and now in her seventh month she looked like a boa-contrictor [sic] that has swallowed a watermelon. Her head, with its aureole of pale hair, was made to seem smaller and even more fragile by the contrast.[47]

Atwood describes Clara's pregnancy in death terms to show that child-bearing is for Clara physical and mental imprisonment. Her head is described as being "smaller" and more "fragile" than her body, in order to show that in her pregnant condition, Clara no longer functions as an intelligent, thinking human being.

Atwood shows that Clara feels trapped by marriage into having children she did not plan on having when she hands her baby over to Ainsley. Pregnancy for Clara is shown to be a life of vegetation and pain; she is compared to a "vegetable growth" with a cicada in the background singing a song which vibrates "like a hot needle of sunlight between the ears":

> Clara pried the baby away from her body and transferred it to Ainsley, saying "Come on, you little leech. I sometimes think she's all covered with suckers, like an octopus." She lay back in her chair and closed her eyes, looking like a strange vegetable growth, a bulbous tuber that had sent out four thin white roots and a tiny pale-yellow flower. A cicada was singing in a tree nearby, its monotonous vibration like a hot needle of sunlight between the ears.[48]

After the baby wets on Ainsley's dress and she hands it back to its mother, Clara confesses that she does not enjoy motherhood:

> ". . . But we didn't want to put rubber pants on you in all this heat, did we, you stinking little geyser? Never believe what they tell you about maternal instinct," she added grimly to us. "I don't see how anyone can love their children till they start to be human beings."[49]

Margaret Atwood's message is similar to that of Alice Munro in Lives of Girls and Women, suggesting that motherhood is best left to those who plan on having children and who truly love and desire them. Clara is trapped into having children through marriage, while Naomi is trapped into an unwanted marriage by getting pregnant with a child she never planned on having.

Ainsley, who decides to have a baby out of wedlock to fulfill her deepest feminine instincts, is contrasted with Clara, who never planned to have children. When Marian shows her disapproval of Ainsley after she announces her plan and tells Marian that she is searching for a suitable man to father her child, the author's voice can be heard loudly and clearly when Ainsley tells Marian that she is a prude, like the rest of society:

> "So what it boils down to," I said, finishing my water, "is that you've decided to have an illegitimate child in cold blood and bring it up yourself."
> "Oh, it's such a bore to explain. Why use that horrible bourgeois word? Birth is legitimate, isn't it? You're a prude, Marian, and that's what's wrong with this whole society."[50]

Unlike Clara, Ainsley has a strong inner core which she is careful to conceal. She knows what she wants and how to get it. Ainsley hides her intelligence and plays the passive role that society demands of her when she pursues Len. Her look of fragility and femininity is depicted through the author's use of colour. Ainsley's feigned innocence and naivety is compared to Clara's baby, through the use of "pink" and

"blue" colours, usually associated with babies. Marian notices this resemblance, when Ainsley is holding Clara's baby: "I thought how closely the two faces resembled each other. The baby stared back up with eyes as round and blue as Ainsley's own; the pink mouth was drooling slightly."[51] The author again uses "pink" and "blue" colours when Ainsley disguises herself to look young and innocent and goes to the Park Plaza bar to meet Marian uninvited, in the hope of being introduced to Len, whom she has decided will father her child. Marian confesses that she has never seen anyone look more feminine and vulnerable:

> She had dug out from somewhere a cotton summer creation I'd never seen before, a pink and light-blue gingham check on white with a ruffle around the neck. Her hair was tied behind her head with a pink bow . . . . Her make-up was understated, her eyes carefully but not noticeably shadowed to make them twice as large and round and blue, and she had sacrificed her long oval fingernails, biting them nearly to the quick so that they had a jagged schoolgirlish quality. I could see she was determined.[52]

Ainsley is well aware of her role in society when she hides her cold-hearted determination and scheming mind and pretends to be sweet, naive and innocent.

While Ainsley makes plans for seducing Len, Marian, like Clara, is beginning to lose her inner core. She is gradually being reduced to a passive unthinking individual, while Peter is slowly taking over her mind, much in the same way as Joe had robbed Clara of her individuality. Marian is gradually falling into the very pattern Joe had spoken of when he had confided in the girls that he was worried over Clara's passivity. Joe had explained that once married, women must cease to be thinking individuals and must assume the role of passivity which marriage required of them. This, he had warned, was more difficult for the college girl

who had learned that she had a mind and was capable of intelligent thought:

> ". . . She gets the idea she has a mind, her professors pay attention to what she has to say, they treat her like a thinking human being; when she gets married, her core gets invaded. . . ."
>
> "Her what?" Marian asked.
>
> "Her core. The centre of her personality, the thing she's built up; her image of herself, if you like."
>
> "Oh, yes," said Marian.
>
> "Her feminine role and her core are really in opposition, her feminine role demands passivity from her. . . ."
>
> . . . . . .
>
> "So she allows her core to get taken over by the husband. And when the kids come, she wakes up one morning and discovers she doesn't have anything left inside, she's hollow, she doesn't know who she is any more; her core has been destroyed."
>
> . . . "I can see it happening with my own female students. But it would be futile to warn them."[53]

Atwood reveals that women who were once intelligent and self-assertive leave the decision making to men after marriage, adhering to the passive role that society prescribes.

We learn of the relief Marian's family experiences when she announces to them at Christmas dinner that she will be marrying a young and promising lawyer who is a real catch by social standards. Although her parents had never voiced their fears, they were secretly worried that Marian's university education would render her undesirable to men and would lead to spinsterhood and a failure in society:

> Their reaction . . . was less elated glee than a quiet, rather smug satisfaction, as though their fears about the effects of her university education, never stated but always apparent, had been calmed at last. They had probably been worried she would turn into a high-school teacher or a maiden aunt or a dope addict or a female executive, or that she would undergo some shocking physical transformation, like developing muscles and a deep voice or growing moss. She could picture the anxious consultations over cups of tea. But now,

> their approving eyes said, she was turning out all right after all. They had not met Peter, but for them he seemed to be merely the necessary X-factor.[54]

The author again shows that educated women are unfeminine in the eyes of society. Marian first meets Duncan as she passes questionnaires door-to-door, asking men what they think of her company's new beer slogan. She starts seeing Duncan on a regular basis to temporarily evade Peter and her marriage plans. When Marian realizes that she and Duncan are incompatible and suggests to him that he should start dating English Graduate students, Duncan replies, "'they don't have enough breasts. Or,' he qualified after a pause, 'some of them have too many.'"[55]

Margaret Atwood emphasizes that society negates education for women in The Edible Woman, much in the same way as does Alice Munro in Lives of Girls and Women. The author shows that Addie is an oddity in her culture because of her crusade for knowledge, as is Del who tries to hide her intelligence and love of knowledge because she fears being rejected by the men in her culture.

Joan Foster, the protagonist in Margaret Atwood's Lady Oracle, is also born into a culture where women must hide their intelligence and competitive nature if they are to maintain their self-identity and also have the love and acceptance of men in their society. Her own mother embodies all the qualities which a traditional society prescribes for women. She leads a passive role by adhering to the domesticity of her home, while her husband provides for the family through his medical profession. Joan's mother is passive, feminine and as artificially beautiful looking as is Nile in Lives of Girls and Women. She appears to be a model of success in conforming to the traditional role of wife

and mother. Joan's mother is, in reality, cold, hypocritical and unhappy in her role as housewife. She is a social climber, who gets pregnant and is trapped into marriage to a man she does not love. Joan overhears conversations between her parents in which her mother confesses her unhappiness and bitterness:

> . . . "It's not as though I wanted to have her. It's not as though I wanted to marry you. I had to make the best of a bad job if you ask me."
> My father: "I'm sorry it hasn't worked out for you."
> And once, when she was very angry: "You're a doctor, don't tell me you couldn't have done something."[36]

Joan's mother reveals her lack of love and cruelty when she responds to her daughter's admiration and attempts of emulating her by punishing her. Watching her mother putting on her make-up was a treat for Joan, as was going through her mother's cosmetics, when she was a child. Joan removes the covers of her mother's creams, powders, lipsticks and perfumes, and is careful to replace them exactly as she found them, knowing that her mother will punish her if she finds out.

So severely is Joan traumatized by her mother's extreme cruelty to her when she is a child, that she has nightmares which are much like Joan's daytime experiences of watching her mother putting on her make-up. Joan dreams that she is watching her mother sitting in front of her three-way mirror dressing table, and notices that her mother has three heads. She is frightened because she has always known this. She dreams that a man is outside who is trying to push the door open; Joan is frightened because if he succeeds, he will discover her secret. As Joan grows older, she has the same dream but now hopes that the man will succeed in pushing the door open and that he will discover

the secret which only she knows - that her mother is a monster.[57]

Margaret Atwood shows that women like Joan's mother are trapped into roles they do not desire and marry men they do not love because they are pushed into marriage by social pressures. Once married, these women continue to be influenced by society in keeping up with their neighbours and creating the right impression.

Joan's mother enters her daughter in dance school because it is the socially-accepted thing to do and because she wants Joan to lose weight; she is ashamed of having an overweight daughter who is out of place in her elegant surroundings. Joan cannot wait for the day of the school recital when she will don her filmy dancing skirt and fragile butterfly wings. She is finally happy, thinking that she will look as feminine and beautiful as all the other slender girls in her dance class. On the appointed day of the recital Joan's mother tells her dance teacher that Joan will spoil the performance because she is overweight and will look out of place alongside the other girls who are dressed as butterflies. Joan's mother paints a large sign which reads "Moth Ball" and hangs it around her daughter's neck. Joan is told by her dance teacher that she cannot wear her wings; she is given a teddy bear costume instead and told that she will be playing the part of a moth ball.

Joan's mother is oblivious to the hurt and disillusionment that her daughter suffers. Her only concern is the impression that she will be making on society. Joan's mother cannot bear to see her overweight daughter compared to the other girls, fearing that she will spoil the perfect image she is trying to create in society. Although Joan tear-

fully performs her moth ball dance and is a huge success with the audience, this incident marks her for the rest of her life.

Wilfred Cude remarks that it is this early incident, at the tender age of ten, that leads Joan, in later years, to believe that the world is sordid and devoid of mystery and pleasure. He goes on to say that it is for this reason that Joan creates a fantasy world, both in her private life and in her fiction. Joan wants to forget the past, part of which is the humiliation she suffered at the hands of Miss Flegg. So ·ıtranced was Joan by Miss Flegg's skillful avoidance of the ugliness in life that she did not notice how her teacher used cruelty and deceit in the interests of what she believed to be creativity, which was itself cheap and gaudy, for there is no beauty in hurting a child. As a result of this painful experience, Joan grows up to be a liar, trying to cover up her unhappy past because she cannot bear to contemplate it. Joan avoids the truth, "cheapening the present in a vain effort to remake the past."[58]

Joan's mother again neglects her daughter's feelings and well-being in order to keep up with society. She makes Joan join the Brownies in a district which is more socially prominent than her own, and because the other neighbours are sending their daughters there for the same reason. She does not worry over Joan's safety, knowing that she must cross a densely covered ravine which cuts across the city. Joan's mother frightens her when she warns her not to speak to the bad men who supposedly hide in the bushes which cover the ravine. She never

tells Joan what these men look like or what they will do to her, but suggests to her that if they hurt her, it will be because she asked for it.[59]

Joan's safety is endangered when she is blindfolded and tied to the bridge by one of the older Brownies, and left there until after dark to be molested by the daffodil man who exposed himself in front of Joan the week before. After Joan is untied and rescued by presumably the same man, her mother punishes her instead of being concerned over her safety. Joan's mother is again more concerned over the impression she is creating than with her daughter's safety. She turns sweet and gracious when the man explains to her what has happened. Her mother shakes his hand and drags Joan off by the hand.[60]

Joan's mother is shown to be out of place in the role society has trapped her into. She lacks the love and patience that is needed to raise children. She criticizes Joan when her daughter tries to help her with the household chores, as she was taught to do at Brownies. When Joan has mishaps or does not measure up to her mother's standards, her mother tells her that she would prefer that she did not help her.[61]

Ironically, Joan gets the love and emotional support, which her own mother fails to provide, from a woman who is an oddity by social standards. She is neither domesticated nor passive. Louisa K. Delacourt became self-supporting as Head of Public Relations for a company that manufactures sanitary napkins, after her husband abandoned her. The author shows that Aunt Lou, who gives Joan love and affection, is better suited to raise children than her mother, even though she does not conform

to the socially-accepted role for women. Joan wishes that Aunt Lou was her true mother instead of her natural mother, who is cold, unloving and superficial. She cannot remember how her mother felt but could always remember what she looked like, with her long delicate fingers, perfectly polished red nails and tight immaculate curls.

Joan's own mother never held her hand and seldom touched her; she held her by the arm or the collar. It is Aunt Lou who takes her to the movies, the exhibition and the circus. Aunt Lou buys Joan popcorn and cotton candy, and offers her all the motherly love and affection that her mother has neglected to give her. She holds Joan's hand and makes her feel wanted and cared for. Joan describes the warmth and love that her aunt radiates:

> Aunt Lou however was soft, billowy, woolly, befurred; even her face, powdered and rouged, was covered with tiny hairs, like a bee. Wisps escaped from her head, threads from her hems, sweetish odors from the space between her collar and her neck, where I would rest my forehead, listening to the stories of her talking fox. In the summers, when I was small and we wandered the grounds of the Canadian National Exhibition, she would hold me by the hand. My mother didn't hold me by the hand, there were her gloves to think of. She held me by the arm or the back of the collar. And she would never take me to the Ex, which she said was not worthwhile. Aunt Lou and I thought it was worthwhile, we loved it, the shouting barkers and the pipe bands and the wads of pink cotton candy and greasy popcorn we would stuff into ourselves while rambling from one pavilion to another.[62]

The author shows how hypocritical society actually is when mothers pretend to lead happy and useful lives, while beneath the guise is a loveless home, where children are unloved and neglected by mothers who are busy social climbing and thriving on artificiality.

Atwood further demonstrates that Joan's mother lacks the loving and nurturing qualities which are associated with motherhood. She is contrasted with Aunt Lou who shows true concern over Joan's future; Aunt Lou leaves her two thousand dollars in her will, on the condition that Joan lose a hundred pounds. When Joan finally goes on a diet to qualify for the money that her aunt has left her, she feels that her mother will at last be pleased with her. Joan is bewildered when her mother tries to discourage her from staying on a diet:

> "You're ruining your health," . . . "You should eat something more than that, you'll starve to death." She went on baking sprees and left pies and cookies around the kitchen where they would tempt me, and it struck me that in a lesser way she had always done this. While I grew thinner, she herself became distraught and uncertain.[63]

Joan finally concludes that since her mother had finished moving into progressively larger homes as her husband's income rose, she now had nothing more to do. Instead of showing true concern over Joan's weight problem, she had counted on her staying fat forever. Now that Joan was finally getting slim, her mother's life work was over.

When Joan finally leaves home, with the help of the money her aunt left her, she meets a Polish Count. He seduces her and later apologizes, telling her that she should have told him that she had never slept with a man before:

> He felt he'd injured my chances for a good marriage. He wanted to make it up to me and couldn't understand why I wasn't more upset.[64]

The author reveals that such narrow-minded men as the Count are typical of the men in this patriarchal society who exploit women and only value those who preserve their chastity until marriage. The author shows that good marriages are not based upon a woman's innocence but upon mutual love and understanding, as is evident from the heroine's lack of concern over the loss of her virginity.

The Polish Count, who is representative of the men in Joan's culture, believes that women cannot understand the philosophy of life, war, courage and the need for a man to distinguish himself in battle. He tells Joan, "'Women do not understand these things,' . . . 'They believe that life is babies and sewing.'"[65] The author reveals the false reasoning of men in this patriarchal society, whose belief is that women are incapable of rational thought and are ignorant of the world around them. She further shows that while women are biologically destined to bear children, this should not preclude them from developing their minds in the same manner as men.

Margaret Atwood's short story, "The Man from Mars," in Dancing Girls, further explores the restrictions of traditional society and their effect on women. Christine, the heroine of "The Man from Mars," has much in common with Joan, in Lady Oracle. She is viewed as a failure in society because she is overweight and, therefore, a poor candidate for marriage, as is Joan. Christine's father provides the family with a comfortable home from his earnings as a civil servant, while her mother attends to the domesticity of the home. Christine's mother is uneducated and leads a shallow and meaningless existence, similar to that of Joan's mother.

Christine's mother shows superficial interest in Christine when she inquires about her Political Science and Economics exams. Christine is resentful towards her mother because she knows that she has only a foggy idea of what an exam really is. Christine's mother, who is elegant and beautiful, spends her time arranging flowers in vases and entertaining. Her maid, who was brought back from the West Indies when the family vacationed there at Christmas, does all the rest of the housework. Christine's mother wears protective gloves when she arranges the flowers:

> As far as Christine could tell her housework consisted of arranging flowers in vases: daffodils and tulips and hyacinths through gladioli, . . . Sometimes she cooked, elegantly and with chafing-dishes, but she thought of it as a hobby. The girl did everything else. . . . She was so delicate, so preserved-looking, a harsh breath would scratch the finish.[66]

Christine's mother's main preoccupation is to see that her daughters succeed in society through marriage to socially prominent young men. Christine has two sisters who are both as beautiful and elegant looking as their mother. One is already well married, and it is clear that the other one will have no difficulty. Christine, however, is a worry to her mother because she fears that Christine will be a failure in society. Even their pregnant servant girl feels superior to Christine because she has managed to get herself pregnant: ". . . she knew, her position in the girl's eyes had suffered because no one had yet attempted to get her pregnant."[67]

Christine's mother encourages Christine to have interests and hopes that she will one day find a job in the government because she knows that even if she slims down, she will never be beautiful. Her mother views this as a definite handicap with regard to her chances of marriage. Christine's

mother never encourages her two other daughters to engage in activities. Christine's mother's friends also sympathize over her plight; they try to console her mother by saying, "She's not fat, she's just big-boned, it's the father's side."[68] Although Christine is popular with the boys in her school, they treat her like a buddy and only meet her after meetings and at the coffee shop.

Margaret Atwood shows how mothers who are trapped into the domestic role, according to the dictates of society, perpetuate this cycle by encouraging their own daughters to marry the first eligible man who comes along. So intent is Christine's mother on marrying her off that she invites a foreign student to tea, without telling Christine, when he telephones to inquire about her, shortly after he and Christine meet:

> Her mother was being bell-voiced and gracious
> in the hall; then there was a tap at the door.
> "It's that nice young French student, Christine,"
> her mother said.[69]

When Christine goes to the phone and tries to get rid of the foreign student, she notices her mother anxiously waiting. ". . . she was aware of her mother poised figurine-like in her bedroom doorway."[70] Christine tries to be polite to him for her mother's sake and learns from him that her mother has invited him to tea: "'I come to tea,' he said. . . . 'Your pleasant mother ask me. I come Thursday, four o'clock.'"[71]

Christine's mother is pleased with herself and orders cakes for the occasion from The Patisserie, in the interests of trapping this young man, whom she has never met, into marrying her daughter. Christine suspects that her mother will find an excuse to go out, as she had done on other occasions, in order to leave Christine alone with the young man. She knows that her mother will first size up the foreign student and will

then conveniently slip out; her excuse this time is the Symphony Committee:

> Sure enough, her mother carefully mislaid her gloves and located them with a faked murmur of joy when the doorbell rang. Christine relished for weeks afterwards the image of her mother's dropped jaw and flawless recovery when he was introduced: he wasn't quite the foreign potentate her optimistic, veil-fragile mind had concocted.[72]

Christine comes to realize that her mother does not really love her, as does Joan in Lady Oracle. The author shows that Christine's mother is not concerned over her daughter's happiness but is only interested in making a good impression on society; she is ready to marry her off to the first man that will have her. Christine feels that, in her mother's eyes, she is no better than their servant girl: "Her mother's attitude towards each of them was similar; they were not altogether satisfactory but they would have to do."[73]

This traditional distinction between men and women is further explored in Surfacing. The heroine of this novel is a product of a new society, where women have at last gained equality with men on every level. Finding no meaning in her own society, she explores the traditional world of her parents. In this society logic and reason are male attributes which the heroine's father embodies, while emotion and being close to nature through procreation are female characteristics, which her mother possesses.

The unnamed narrator of Surfacing is the product of a humble existence in the backwoods of northern Quebec. Her parents spent part of their time in the city, where her father worked as a botanist, and part of their time in a deserted cabin home on a secluded lake. Her parents believed in the traditional values of society, which embodied marriage

and family, accompanied by love and fidelity.

The narrator's father espoused logic and admired the thinking of the eighteenth-century rationalists, whose golden mean was the balance of reason. He believed that these men had avoided the corruption of the Industrial Revolution and were in favour of organic farming.[74] The narrator's father did not believe in war but would have fought for science. He did not believe that Hitler was an example of "the triumph of evil but the failure of reason."[75] The narrator's mother differed from her father; he explained everything, while she never did. The narrator believes that her mother had all the answers but would never reveal them.[76] Her mother was kind and gentle. Like her husband, she was a pacifist, who did not even believe in killing insects. Contrary to her husband, she trusted her emotions. She was close to nature in weeding her garden, taking solitary walks in the woods, and in taming and feeding the bluejays with breadcrumbs and seeds. The narrator's mother also recognized her own uniqueness in nature by giving birth to two children. The narrator feels that it would be impossible to emulate her mother because "it would need a time warp; she was either ten thousand years behind the rest or fifty years ahead of them."[77]

In this novel, Atwood no longer negates the traditional values which include motherhood. On the contrary, the author views childbearing as a uniqueness in the society which she portrays. The traditional values which are negated in Atwood's earlier fiction are here celebrated, and are contrasted with the false values which have evolved in the

narrator's generation:

> A little beer, a little pot, some old jokes,
> a little political chitchat, the golden mean;
> we're the new bourgeoisie, this might as well
> be a Rec Room.[78]

When we first meet the narrator, she is no longer familiar with her parents' values, but neither does she find self-fulfillment with her own. This is a society where distances pervade. People do not sustain friendships; friends do not speak with meaning and are unable to communicate with one another. Relationships are superficial, and sex is mechanical and devoid of love, as exemplified by the narrator's love affair with Joe. We learn from the narrator that their love-making is practiced and meaningless:

> . . . his hands at any rate are intelligent,
> . . . they repeat patterns he's tried before,
> they've found out what works, and my body
> responds that way too, anticipates him, educated,
> crisp as a typewriter. It's best when you don't
> know them. A phrase comes to me, a joke then but
> mournful now, someone in a parked car after a
> highschool dance who said <u>With a paper bag over their head they're all the same</u>.[79]

The author shows that sex has ceased to be an extension of love and fidelity in the traditional manner, but has become a purely physical act, preferably enjoyed with a stranger.

Similarly, married couples exploit one another; their relationships are sadistic and based on infidelity, as is typical of the marriage which Anna and David share. David humiliates his wife by forcing her to undress in front of Joe and the narrator, and asks Joe to photograph her in the nude. David tells Anna that since she is already sharing her body with other men, she need not feel that he is trying to humiliate her. When Joe tries to protect Anna, David tells him not to interfere:

> "Shut up, she's my wife," David said. His hand clamped down above her elbow. She jerked away, then I saw his arms go around her as if to kiss her and she was in the air, upside down over his shoulder, hair hanging in damp ropes. "Okay twatface," he said, "is it off or into the lake?"[80]

Anna tells the narrator that her husband would make love to other women in front of her if he could. She says, "'Instead he screws them somewhere else and tells me about it afterwards.'"[81] Anna is, in turn, unfaithful to her husband. When she sleeps with Joe, her husband knows of her infidelity and tries to get back at her by attempting to seduce the narrator.

The author portrays the meaningless relationships and sexual exploits in this new society, as the narrator contemplates David's advances towards her: "Geometric sex, he needed me for an abstract principle; it would be enough for him if our genitals could be detached like two kitchen appliances and copulate in mid-air, that would complete his equation."[82] Anna attacks the narrator when she learns that she has not given in to David's advances, feeling inferior to her because of her promiscuity, while David accuses her of hating men:

> "She hates men," David said lightly. "Either that or she wants to be one. Right?"
> A ring of eyes, tribunal; in a minute they would join hands and dance around me, and after that the rope and pyre, cure for heresy.[83]

Two worlds are presented in this novel: that of the narrator's parents and the one she now finds herself in. Her parents' culture, which represents traditional values, is contrasted with the meaningless values that the people of her own generation have chosen. Ultimately, the narrator must mediate between the two to define a new lifestyle for herself.

ENDNOTES

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CHAPTER II

Women's Flight from Traditional Society and their Quest for Self-Identity

In the novels of Margaret Atwood and Alice Munro, the initial break from society is occasioned by women who openly follow the path of knowledge. As the intellectual gap between men and women begins to narrow, women further abandon the traditional norms by seeking their own self-identity. No longer are women content with what they believe to be a secondary position in society. In their quest for self-identity, women break away from the traditional norms of their culture by seeking their own fame and fortune in a male-oriented society. They deviate even further from society when they compete with men for sexual equality. Finally, women break away from society in denying their own biological destiny, in negating childbearing and marriage in favour of the socially defined masculine role.

Addie first deviates from society by neglecting the needs of her family and travelling door-to-door selling encyclopedias in the pursuit of knowledge (Lives of Girls and Women). Addie soon discovers that she has nothing in common with the farm women, who are not interested in acquiring knowledge. She further deviates from the stereotyped role by abandoning her husband and son and renting a home in the city, in the hope of freeing herself from the poverty of Flats Road. Addie takes up life in the city with her daughter, leaving her husband and son on the farm to fend for themselves. She breaks up her family in the hope of

finding refinement and people of education in the city, seeing her husband and son only on weekends. Addie maintains her city home with the help of the earnings from her husband's fox farm and her boarder Fern Dogherty.

Although Addie is more educated than her husband, he is, nevertheless, kind, loving and considerate. He shows greater tact and intelligence in his dealings with people than does Addie. When Uncle Benny is deserted by his wife Madeleine, who is a child beater, he is crushed and frightened, refusing to speak of his wife. Addie meddles in his affairs by insisting that he should have confided in them and that Madeleine should be reported to the police and arrested for abusing her child. Addie's husband is aware of the grief that his farmhand is experiencing, as well as Addie's lack of tact and insensitivity when he cautions her by saying, "'Enough talk about it for now,' . . . 'We'll wait and see.'"[1] Addie, who is more concerned about being right than hurting Uncle Benny's feelings, defends herself by saying, "'Just the same I know I'm right.'"[2] Addie's husband puts an end to her insensitivity by telling her "'You may be right but that doesn't mean there's a thing you can do about it.'"[3]

Addie's husband consoles Uncle Benny by telling him that Madeleine had not been a good housewife and that she had not made him comfortable and secure. He is careful not to point out that Madeleine is slovenly and lacks beauty, "not forgetting he was talking about a man's wife."[4] He tries to comfort Uncle Benny by telling him that the things she had stolen from him are a small price to pay for being free of her.

Unlike Addie, who is ashamed of living on the Flats Road and does very little mingling with her neighbours, whom she feels are beneath

her, Addie's husband is close to nature, preferring the simple ways of country people to those of city folk: "He felt comfortable here, while with men from town, with any man who wore a shirt and tie to work, he could not help being wary, a little proud and apprehensive of insult, with that delicate, special readiness to scent pretension that is some country people's talent."[5]

In spite of their differences, Addie and her husband had a close relationship. Del speaks of this closeness between her parents, while they were still living together on the Flats Road: ". . . they did not look at each other. But they were connected, and this connection was plain as a fence, it was between us and Uncle Benny, us and the Flats Road, it would stay between us and anything."[6] Del recalls the safety and comfort she experienced as a child when she lulled herself to sleep to the voices of her parents while they were playing cards down below in the kitchen of their farmhouse, which sheltered them from the howling storm, like an arc:

> And upstairs seemed miles above them, dark and full of the noise of the wind. Up there you discovered what you never remembered down in the kitchen--that we were in a house as small and shut up as any boat is on the sea, in the middle of a tide of howling weather. They seemed to be talking, playing cards, a long way away in a tiny spot of light, irrelevantly; yet this thought of them, prosaic as a hiccup, familiar as breath, was what held me, what winked at me from the bottom of the well as I fell into sleep.[7]

Del remembers, with nostalgia, that when her family was assembled on the cement slab gallery of their farm home that "there was no better place in the world for watching a sunset from than at the end of the Flats Road."[8] Miriam Packer speaks of the importance of this close family relationship to Del. She says that although Del enjoyed city life, she

missed her childhood days on the Flats Road, when her family was together.[9]

Addie is finally estranged from her husband and son when they stop visiting her on weekends. Her son eventually reverts to the country ways of his father and Uncle Benny, when he stops seeing his mother. Addie breaks further away from society when she stops seeing her husband and son, and devotes herself exclusively to intellectual pursuits. In turning her back on married life and focusing her attention on promoting knowledge, making speeches and writing letters to the local newspaper, Addie takes up the socially defined masculine role in society and makes her final break from the traditional role: "Her letters about local problems or those in which she promoted education and the rights of women and opposed compulsory religious education in the school, would be published in the Jubilee Herald-Advance over her own name."[10]

Del, like her mother, shows independence at an early age and learns that "freedom is not so easily come by."[11] When pushed by her cousin Mary Agnes Oliphant to look upon her dead uncle against her will, she bit her downy arm just below the elbow "and broke the skin . . . in pure freedom thinking . . . ."[12] As Del tastes the blood of Mary Agnes, she believes that she has done the most shameful thing in the whole world but vows that no one will ever force her to look upon her uncle's body, nor will anyone ever try to force her to submit to their will.

Del also breaks away from the stereotyped role in showing a strong interest in books and learning, and proves to be different from her friend Naomi and the other young women in her society, when she reveals:

> I was happy in the library. Walls of printed pages, evidence of so many created worlds--this was a comfort

> to me. It was the opposite with Naomi; so many books weighed on her, making her feel oppressed and suspicious. She used to read --girls' mystery books--but had outgrown the habit.[13]

Del moves further away from the norms of her society in asserting her sexual freedom. She believes in being sexually active and does not consider it a punishable act, as do Naomi and the other young women in her society. Del does not believe Naomi's superstitions that were passed on to her by her mother:

> " . . . if a girl has to get married, she either dies having it, or she nearly dies, or else there is something the matter with it. Either a hare-lip or clubfoot or it isn't right in the head. My mother has seen it."[14]

When Addie cautions Del about being trapped into marriage by getting pregnant, she quickly retorts, "'There is birth control nowadays,' . . ."[15] Del sees a way out when Naomi confesses to her that she is pregnant. She advises her, "'You don't have to get married. You could go to Toronto--'"[16]

We learn that Del does not intend to marry and have children. She is amazed that her mother is saving a newspaper clipping for her future grandchildren, when she sees her cutting out a picture of Fern, which was taken by the Jubilee Herald Advance following a snow storm outside the Post Office where Fern works. Del, however, knows that she will be exiled from the rest of society in seeking her own fame and fortune:

> Her speaking of my children amazed me too, for I never meant to have any. It was glory I was after, walking the streets of Jubilee like an exile or a spy, not sure from which direction fame would strike, or when, only convinced from my bones out that it had to. In this conviction my mother had shared, she had been my ally, . . .[17]

Alice Munro uses gold and silver imagery to show that Del will seek her own fame and fortune and will follow in the path of men. As Naomi and Del wander through the town of Jubilee on a spring evening, they make their way to a children's playground, where children nearby are skipping and singing:

> On the mountain stands a lady
> Who she is I do not know.
> All she wears is gold and silver,
> All she needs is a new pair of shoes![18]

The last line of this rhyme, which usually reads, "All she wants is a nice young man," is here deliberately changed by the author to show that Del will be self-reliant and will not want a husband. She will stand alone, like the lady on the mountain, in order to find her own fame and fortune. All she will need is a new pair of shoes or to emulate the men in her society in their independence and pursuit of fame and fortune, instead of being the domestic animal that Addie speaks of.

That Del will assume the traditionally masculine role in society is foreseen by Aunt Elspeth and Auntie Grace when they entrust her with Uncle Craig's manuscript, the work which had up until now been considered by them to be a man's:

> "We used to think about giving it to Owen, because he's the boy--"
> "But you're the one has the knack for writing compositions."[19]

Del is fatally attracted to Garnet French, a Baptist convert, and must make a decision between marrying into poverty or seeking fame and fortune. We learn that Del has certain misgivings when she reveals:

> . . . the thought of being on these equal terms, social terms, with Pork Childs who was of course a Baptist, produced in me that quiet, now very familiar, sinking of the heart).[20]

Del leads Garnet on into believing that she wants marriage and children. She feels warm and at home with Garnet's poor but loving farm family, who assume that Del will be his bride. Del admits: "There is no denying I was happy in that house."[21] Del's mother warns her against the perils of falling in love with a poor farm boy, when she says:

> "I think you must have softening of the brain."
> . . . . . .
> "You've gone addled over a boy. You with your intelligence. Do you intend to live in Jubilee all your life? Do you want to be the wife of a lumberyard worker? Do you want to join the Baptist Ladies Aid?"[22]

Although Del enjoys the physical side of their relationship, intellectually Del and Garnet have nothing in common, and Del, who is as conscious of society as is her mother, has no intention of sinking to the lowest level of society.

Del makes her final break from society when she decides against marrying Garnet in favour of seeking her own fame and fortune. Garnet divines Del's true feelings when he says, "'You think you're too good for anything. Any of us.'"[23]

Del fights back when Garnet tries to submerge her head in water, symbolically trying to baptize her into the Baptist faith. Water, which symbolizes both life and death, is here used to denote death or an end to all of Del's plans and ambitions for fame and fortune. Garnet does not have the power over her that he thought he had, and she is surprised that anyone would think that they could. In expressing her amazement, she says:

> . . . it seemed to me impossible that he should not understand that all the powers I granted him were in play, that he himself was--in play, that I meant to keep him sewed up in his golden lover's skin forever, even if five minutes before I had talked about marrying him.[24]

Del really believes that Garnet is trying to drown her: " . . . it was a game that required you to be buried alive."[25] On one level Del tries to keep from drowning, but on another she is really fighting to preserve her self-identity or the plans that she has mapped out for herself, which would be destroyed if she became a Baptist and married Garnet. "I thought that I was fighting for my life."[26]

Unlike Del, Rose, in Who Do You Think You Are?, succumbs to marriage, taking up the socially-accepted role of wife and mother. She tries to adjust to her role but her marriage is fraught with arguments and discontent. Rose does not enjoy domesticity, financial security and the socially prominent position into which she has married.

Although Rose tries to admire and respect Patrick, she does not feel he has a superior mind. Even in the days before her marriage "she would ask him a question in the hope that he would show off some superior knowledge that she could admire him for, but she was usually sorry she had asked, . . ."[27] Her husband's answers usually came in scolding tones, were long and lacked superior knowledge.

Rose begins to miss her college days and intellectual discussions. This renewed intellectual craving marks the beginning of her flight from society. Although Rose gives birth to a baby girl in the North Vancouver General Hospital, she finds nothing in common with the other women in the maternity ward. Their conversations of childbearing and domesticity are boring and uneventful for Rose, who seeks intellectual stimulation.

Rose is immediately drawn to Jocelyn when she sees her reading, oblivious to the other women in the maternity ward. Jocelyn reminded her of a college student, and Rose was envious that Jocelyn still retained her intellectual interest after marriage.

> Jocelyn sat reading, and twiddling the end of a braid between her fingers, as if she was in a library, at college, as if she was researching for a paper, and this world of other women had never closed down on her at all. Rose wished she could manage as well.[28]

Once Rose befriends Jocelyn, she discovers that although they share a literary interest, they do not have very much in common. Jocelyn comes from a well-to-do family. "Her father was a psychiatrist and her mother was a pediatrician."[29] Although Jocelyn is well educated, she does not need to compete with her husband, who earns a living playing a violin in the Vancouver Symphony. Unlike Rose, who still dreams of becoming an actress, Jocelyn, who wanted to be a writer before marriage, is now content in her traditional role of wife and mother of a two year old son and her newly born infant boy. Jocelyn believed that it was her husband who was the gifted one, and felt that she would "be better off nurturing him, . . ."[30]

Rose, who had once been poor, now finds herself ashamed of her beautiful home and her department store heir husband. She now plays up the poverty into which she had been born and makes fun of her family's diction and lack of education. Rose is embarrassed over her comfortable existence in front of Jocelyn, who fixes her own leaky taps and clogged drains. In spite of her meagre existence, Jocelyn is happy and works at her marriage, expending all her energy in looking after the needs of her husband and family in the traditional manner.

Rose readily falls into the intellectual circle of Jocelyn's friends when she attends a party at her home, for the first time. Rose desperately tries to fit in and is anxious over Patrick's lack of artistic and intellectual interests:

> The people she admired were inevitably poorer than she was. It seemed a bad joke on her, after being poor all her life in a place where poverty was never anything to be proud of, that now she had to feel apologetic and embarrassed about the opposite condition--with someone like Jocelyn, for instance, who could say middle-class prosperity so viciously and despisingly.31

The turning point in Rose's life takes place at this party, where she meets and falls in love with Clifford, Jocelyn's husband. Rose breaks further away from her socially accepted role of wife and mother when she trades married life for excitement. "She wanted tricks, a glittering secret, tender celebrations of lust, a regular conflagration of adultry."[32]

Rose deceives Patrick when she goes to Vancouver to meet Clifford, where he and his fellow musicians are practicing. They risk being seen by the other musicians when they sit kissing and fondling each other in a public cafe. Rose continues to have secret meetings with Clifford, and drifts further and further away from Patrick and his lifestyle.

Jocelyn does not complain over the lack of conveniences in her home and shows little interest in clothes and personal grooming. Jocelyn tells Rose that Clifford "was attracted by the very absence of female artifice and trappings; he liked unshaved legs and hairy armpits and natural smells."[33] Rose mistakenly believes that Clifford does not love his wife and is unhappy in his unkempt home, which is heated by an oil stove "covered with spill-marks; orange peel and coffee grounds" and where "the ceiling-racks and stand-up racks were draped with damp graying sheets and diapers, hardening towels."[34] Rose believes "that his life in that house, Jocelyn's house, was all pretense, and waiting, like her own life in Patrick's house."[35]

Rose again risks her marriage and moves further away from society when she plans to meet Clifford at Powell River, where she hopes to

consummate their love. Clifford, who is giving a concert in Powell River, is fearful that he will be discovered in his infidelity. He backs out at the last minute upon Rose's arrival at the bus depot. Clifford feels guilty when he thinks of Jocelyn and his children, and tells Rose, "'What we're doing. It's not some big necessary thing. It's ordinary mischief.'"[36]

Rose's final flight from society culminates with the breakdown of her marriage and in her taking on a career of her own. Rose returns home from Powell River and tells her husband that she has had an affair with Clifford, feeling ashamed of telling him that Clifford had rejected her. Their daughter tries to keep them together by refusing to be parted from either of them. Rose takes a job at a radio station in the Kootenay Mountains and struggles to look after her daughter for a short while. Anna is eventually forced to choose between her two parents. She decides to live with her father and to remain in the school where her friends attend. Although Anna appears cheerful on the surface, we can readily understand the grief she is experiencing as a result of Rose's choice when she waves to her parents and shrieks, "'Have a happy divorce!'"[37]

Marian, in The Edible Woman, also has difficulty in choosing between marriage and the search for self-identity, in the same way as Rose. In the first part of the novel, it is Marian who is the narrator. She relates the story with clinical detachment, which leads us to distrust her trustworthiness.[38] The narrator reveals that Marian is gradually being lured into marriage to Peter because he promises to be a successful lawyer and, like Rose, wants to be accepted by society. Marian has partially fulfilled the dictates of society, as her relationship with Peter is progressing towards matrimony. Marian is not yet

consciously aware of feeling pressured by society into conforming to the traditional role of wife and mother.

On the conscious level, Marian is at ease in her relationship with Peter, because she has not yet committed herself to him. She is also aware that Peter is a confirmed bachelor, and is careful not to appear too domesticated. Marian is surprised by Peter's reaction when she serves him a meal of plastic packaged smoked meat with frozen peas instead of a home cooked meal. As Peter pushes his plate away, he says, "'Why can't you ever cook anything?' . . . ."[39] Marian refrains from telling him that she is a good cook and that he is being unfair to her. She avoids an argument because he has just come back from his best friend's wedding and is feeling depressed over the marriage. Marian feels sorry for Peter, knowing that he believes that Trigger was trapped into marriage. Marian asks Peter how the wedding went and is further assured that he has no marriage plans: "'God,' he said, 'poor Trigger. He looked terrible. How could he let himself be taken in like that?'"[40] Peter accuses the bride of being predatory, conniving and malicious, having lured Trigger into a void of domesticity. Marian is further assured that their relationship is casual when Peter tells her that he will never share Trigger's fate.

In Part Two, the story is narrated by the author, with the same kind of detachment as Marian's in Part One. By this means we begin to trust the narrator and to associate her views with that of the author.[41] We are told that Marian discovers that her relationship with Peter has reached the point where he is emotionally dependent upon her. This emotional dependence is similar to Garnet's dependence upon Del in Lives of Girls and Women. Peter had not yet expressed his desire to marry Marian

much in the same way as Garnet had not asked Del to marry him when he brought her home to meet his family. In both cases, the relationship appeared casual on the surface. When Marian subconsciously realizes that her relationship with Peter is more serious than she imagined, like Del, she panicks and feels trapped by the impending marriage.

It is at the Park Plaza Hotel bar, where Marian and Peter meet Len for a drink, that Marian is subconsciously disturbed over her relationship with Peter. Marian discovers the cruelty in Peter when he describes a hunting scene to Len:

> "So I let her off and Wham. One shot, right through the heart. The rest of them got away. I picked it up and Trigger said, 'You know how to gut them, you just slit her down the belly and give her a good hard shake and all the guts'll fall out.' So I whipped out my knife, good knife, German steel, and slit the belly and took her by the hind legs and gave her one hell of a crack, like a whip you see, and the next thing you know there was blood and guts all over the place. All over me, what a mess, rabbit guts dangling from the trees, god the trees were red for yards. . . ."[42]

Marian is pushed to the edge of madness when she begins to fear Peter's cruelty. Perry Nodelman remarks that Marian feels trapped by him and identifies with the rabbit which Peter killed. On the conscious level, Marian sees Peter as a killer, similar to any other hunter. Subconsciously, she believes that Peter is trying to destroy her self-identity. Marian notices that she has begun to cry and escapes to the washroom. Nodelman further equates Marian's experience with the rabbit in the hunting scene.[43] She passively awaits what she believes to be her end in the pink-plush washroom cubicle, clutching "The role of toilet paper . . . helpless and white and furry, . . ."[44] This is Marian's first subconscious attempt to free herself from the imposed norms of her society, when she begins to feel trapped by marriage.

Marian later rejoins Peter and her friends, and Ainsley notices that Marian has been crying. Marian pulls herself together and pretends that nothing has happened. She realizes that Peter is not ignoring her but that he is being dependent upon her when she sees that he has not even missed her, and is still preoccupied with his hunting conversation with Len:

> He was treating me as a stage-prop; silent but solid, a two-dimensional outline. He wasn't ignoring me, as perhaps I felt (did that account for the ridiculous flight?)--he was depending on me![45]

The author shows that Peter is acting like an insensitive husband in his own preoccupation with the tale of the hunt, when he does not notice that Marian is upset and leaves the table. Marian realizes that Peter's intentions are more serious than she believed when she observes that he is acting like a selfish husband, who does not include his wife in his conversations with men but merely depends upon his wife for approval.

Now that Marian knows the truth about her relationship with Peter, she again subconsciously rebels against marriage and motherhood. Marian manages to keep under control until they leave the hotel bar room and are out in the street. When Len tells them that it is still early and invites them to his apartment for a drink, Marian loses all control and runs away from them. Peter and her friends finally track her down, after much difficulty, and convince her to go with them to Len's apartment.

Marian continues to subconsciously rebel against society when she again associates with the slaughtered rabbit and feels trapped in Len's apartment. She slips herself under the sofa on the dusty floor, without being noticed:

> Though I was only two or three feet lower than the rest of them, I was thinking of the room as "up

> there". I myself was underground, I had dug myself a private burrow, I felt smug.[46]

Marian finally understands that Ainsley was right when she warned her that Peter was monopolizing her. She is now aware that she panicked and fled from Peter because she subconsciously felt that she was being trapped into marriage, a role she was not prepared to accept. Marian now knows that she must make a decision

Marian is finally rescued from her hiding place under the sofa and once again bolts out into the street, in order to escape from her impending marriage to Peter. Peter stalks her until Marian agrees to let him drive her home. He proposes to her in the car, and Marian reluctantly accepts. The author again shows that Marian subconsciously believes that Peter is trying to destroy her self-identity when Peter looks at her while they are embracing in the parked car. Marian equates Peter's eyes with murder weapons [47] when she tells us, "I could see myself, small and oval, mirrored in his eyes."[48]

Marian is no longer in control of her life after her engagement to Peter. She floats along with her marriage plans and allows Peter to make all the decisions. When Peter tells Marian to set a date for their wedding, she is tempted to answer in her usual flippant manner but submissively answers, "'I'd rather leave the big decisions up to you.'"[49] Marian becomes increasingly dependent upon Peter, to the point where she cannot even decide what she wants to eat. When confronted with a menu, she lets Peter decide for her. Peter orders a steak for Marian and, for no apparent reason, she is unable to eat it:

> In the supermarket they had it all pre-packaged in cellophane, . . . But now it was suddenly there in front of her with no intervening paper, it was flesh

> and blood, rare, and she had been devouring it. Gorging herself on it.
>
> She set down her knife and fork. . . . "This is ridiculous," she lectured herself. "Everyone eats cows, it's natural; you have to eat to stay alive, meat is good for you, it has lots of proteins and minerals." She picked up her fork, speared a piece, lifted it, and set it down again.[50]

Marian is no longer the consumer she once was in the beginning of the novel, when she was ready to devour anything that was put in front of her. Marian's subconscious mind continues to rebel against the stereotyped pattern which society has imposed on her. On the conscious level, Marian does not understand what is happening to her when she first associates with animal life and now plant life, finding that she can no longer eat anything that was once alive:

> She was watching her own hands and the peeler and the curl of crisp orange skin. She became aware of the carrot. It's a root, she thought, it grows in the ground and sends up leaves. Then they come along and dig it up, maybe it even makes a sound, a scream too low for us to hear, right now it's still alive, . . .
>
> She thought she felt it twist in her hands. She dropped it on the table. "Oh no," she said, almost crying. "Not this too!"[51]

Marian believes that she is about to go mad while she is getting ready for her engagement party. She calms herself only after she has invited some of her own friends for moral support. The first on her list is Duncan, whom she has recently befriended, hoping to temporarily escape from Peter and her plans of marriage. Marian also invites the office virgins, Clara, Joe, Ainsley and Len. Her friends all compliment her on her new image when they arrive at the engagement party, with the exception of Duncan. When he sees Marian in her new sequined red dress, lacquered hairdo, elaborate earrings and heavy make-up, he does not recognize her. "'You didn't tell me it was a masquerade,' he said at

last. 'Who the hell are you supposed to be?'"[52]

The author ironically suggests that Marian believes that Peter is trying to destroy her when she speaks of her irritation with Duncan: "He was very irritating. What did he expect her to wear, sackcloth and ashes?"[53] Marian's party is more of a wake than an engagement party; Marian believed that marriage to Peter meant the death of her self-identity, in the same way as Del, in Lives of Girls and Women, feared that marriage to Garnet meant the death of her ambitions for fame and fortune.

Nodelman correctly maintains that Marian believes that Peter is a killer and is trying to destroy her self-identity when she again associates with the slaughtered rabbit, as Peter prepares to take her picture:[54]

> He had a camera in his hand; but now she saw what it really was. There were no more doors and when she felt behind her for the doorknob, afraid to take her eyes off him, he raised the camera and aimed it at her; his mouth opened in a snarl of teeth. There was a blinding flash of light.
>
> "No!" she screamed. She covered her face with her arm.[55]

Marian makes her final break from society and her marriage to Peter when she flees from her engagement party. She decides to have an affair with Duncan instead of marrying Peter, thereby freeing herself from the imposed norms of her society. Marian's break from society culminates with her presenting Peter with a surrogate of herself in the form of a cake which she bakes for him the following morning:

> Now she had a blank white body. . . . She set about clothing it, filling the cake-decorator with bright pink icing. First she gave it a bikini, but that was too sparse. She filled in the midriff. Now it had an ordinary bathing-suit, [sic] but that still wasn't exactly

> what she wanted. She kept extending, adding to top and bottom, until she had a dress of sorts. In a burst of exuberance she added a row of ruffles around the neckline, and more ruffles at the hem of the dress. She made a smiling lush-lipped pink mouth and pink shoes to match. Finally she put five pink fingernails on each of the amorphous hands.[56]

The day following the engagement party, Marian invites Peter for tea to explain her strange behaviour at the party. When Peter arrives, Marian presents him with the cake and tells him that he has been trying to destroy her self-identity, turning her into a doll or plaything similar to the one she had baked for him. Marian consumes the cake herself when Peter leaves without a word:

> She considered the first mouthful. It seemed odd but most pleasant to be actually tasting and chewing and swallowing again. Not bad, she thought critically; needs a touch more lemon though.
>
> Already the part of her not occupied with eating was having a wave of nostalgia for Peter, as though for a style that had gone out of fashion and was beginning to turn up on the sad Salvation Army clothes racks.[57]

For Marian, marriage to Peter is indeed out of fashion, as she moves away from society by refusing to be pressured into marriage and maintains her self-identity. A new lifestyle, already predicted by Addie in Lives of Girls and Women, is also dawning, where women will no longer be an extension of their husbands.

In Part Three, we learn that the narrator of Part Two is really Marian when she says, "Now that I was thinking of myself in the first person singular again . . . ."[58] Although this shift in narrative voice might suggest that Marian now understands the predatory nature of mankind and is completely in control of her life, this is not so. Marian, who breaks up with Peter because she feels he is manipulating her, continues to be manipulated by Duncan, who seduces her by making her believe that he

is impotent. Marian continues to feel sorry for Duncan when he telephones her to tell her that he is depressed over losing Fischer who was his surrogate mother. Even though Marian is now on her own and is faced with reshaping her own life, she invites Duncan over to her apartment for tea and sympathy because he is worried about who will look after him.

Contrary to Perry Nodelman's belief that Marian has finally learned to accept her femininity, which embodies her witty intelligence which the reader has been enjoying all along, Marian has not learned to accept her own femininity at the end of the novel, nor has she gained self-knowledge. Although Marian has broken out of her chrysalis in defying society by having an affair with Duncan and is no longer a chaste Diana, she is hardly a Venus capable of both sexual and mother love.[59]

Nevertheless, Nodelman rightly observes that the author has tricked the reader "into accepting the omniscient objectivity of a voice that had no objectivity."[60] He is, however, incorrect in believing that Marian must break away from her friends in order to assert her individuality.[61] What Atwood portrays in this novel is the predatory nature of mankind in general which Marian must still learn to understand and cope with. Only then will she be able to accept her own femininity and will no longer have the need to escape from her friends.

Joan Foster, in Lady Oracle, also breaks away from her socially-defined role by secretly pursuing a career as a writer. Joan realizes that she cannot openly show her talent and compete with the men in her society if she wants to be loved and accepted by them.

Joan dreams of both career and marriage long before she is an adult. She empathizes with Moira Shearer, the protagonist in The Red Shoes, who must choose between the two, when her Aunt Lou brings her to see the movie in the days when Joan is still an overweight adolescent. So meaningful is this movie to Joan that she sees it four times. Joan must make the same decision in later years when she is slim and beautiful and has become a successful writer of romance novels. Arthur tells Joan that he wants a woman whose mind he can respect when she first meets him. Joan marries Arthur but is careful not to reveal to him her past, knowing that if he knew that she wrote The Secret of Morgrave Manor, he would not respect her mind.

Joan, unlike her mother, is not a good housekeeper. She would make a shopping list, charge out of the house without her handbag, rush back home, and then forget her keys. When she was once again on her way, she would discover that she forgot the shopping list. Joan brings home caviar, crackers and champagne instead of the staples that Arthur had suggested she buy. Joan wanted love and approval from her husband, but most of all she "always wanted to do something he would admire."[62]

The narrator reveals that Arthur is both attracted and repelled by Joan's behaviour. Although he does not drink very much, he invariably brings a bottle home and leaves it where Joan will find it, because he enjoys seeing her reaction. Joan thinks of herself as Arthur's chemistry set because he never knows how she will react. He enjoys mixing Joan up, hoping that something exciting will happen. The narrator tells us

that while Arthur disapproves of Joan's wardrobe and red sari, embroidered caftan and apricot-coloured velvet gown with ripped hem, he "had a strange relationship with" her clothes.[63] Arthur is fascinated and aroused by Joan's clothes but is also irritated because of the effect they have on him. Joan does not communicate her frustration to Arthur when she does not know what is expected of her but secretly lives her fantasy life behind closed doors. She dabs on perfume, kicks off her shoes, and imagines that she is dancing with a handsome stranger.

Joan continues to live her fantasy life through her fiction. She breaks away from society by secretly continuing her writing after marriage; she knows that she cannot preserve her marriage and continue with her writing career if her secret is discovered, for Arthur would not approve of the quality of her writing. Joan writes her Costume Gothics under the pen name of Louisa K. Delacourt, which she assumed when her Aunt Lou died. She hides her secret from Arthur by writing in his absence. At other times, she tells him that she is "writing an essay on the sociology of pottery for the university extension course" she claimed to be taking.[64]

Joan's married life is like playing house; although she leads two lives, she is not prepared to suffer like the mermaid in the Anderson fairy tale or Moira Shearer in The Red Shoes, who both tried to please their handsome prince without success. Joan believes that she is doing well in comparison, for both of them ended up dead. "Their mistake had been to go public, whereas I did my dancing behind closed doors."[65] Joan feels that neither of her lives is completely real. Her life as a writer consisted of castles, costumes and paper dolls, much

like the ones she dressed and undressed when she was a child in her mother's home. In her personal life, Joan has many deficiencies in the eyes of her ideological husband.

When Arthur gets a university teaching job, Joan is introduced to the wives of the other professors, one of whom turns out to be Marlene, Joan's tormentor, who tied her to the bridge when she was on her way home from Brownies, as a child. Luckily, Marlene does not recognize her, and Joan's secret of once being fat remains safe.

Joan moves further from her socially imposed domestic role in increasingly neglecting her husband, with whom she has nothing in common. Joan is more interested in her own secret career than in being a good housewife and in encouraging her husband in his career. Arthur approves of Marlene who, unlike Joan, plays at writing for a Canadian nationalist left-wing magazine and who praises Arthur's ideas. "Marlene became Arthur's Platonic ideal. Not only did she have a mind he could respect, she was also a tip-top cook, mostly vegetarian."[66] Although Arthur took precautions so they would not have children, he now reproaches Joan for not having any. He admires Marlene, who is the mother of two. Joan refuses to live in the shadow of her husband and to become as domesticated as Marlene. She becomes estranged from her husband when he spends more time with Sam and Marlene than with her.

Joan further risks the breakup of her marriage when she tries automatic writing and turns out a novel which is about "'Modern love and the sexual battle, dissected with a cutting edge and shocking honesty.'"[67] As Joan checks the gallery proofs, she is increasingly

apprehensive. She had told Arthur about her book but was now afraid that he would misinterpret it as being the story of their own lives together: "There were the sufferings, the hero in the mask of a villain, the villain in the mask of a hero, the flights, the looming death, the sense of being imprisoned, but there was no happy ending, no true love. The recognition of this half-likeness made me uncomfortable."[68]

Once Joan gives a copy of her novel to Arthur, he becomes increasingly distant and spends most of his time at the university. Both he and his friends believe that the hero of her novel is Arthur. Instead of telling Joan that her book was bourgeois and tasteless, as she had expected, Arthur tells her, "'When you write your next book, I'd appreciate it if you'd let me see it first.'"[69] Not only is Arthur secretly resentful of her success, but she is also resented by the male public. Joan is attacked by a male interviewer on a television show; he accuses her of being an angry and unhappily married woman, and intimates that she is in Women's Lib:

> "Welcome to Afternoon Hot Spot. Today we have with us Joan Foster, author, I guess that's authoress, of the runaway bestseller Lady Oracle. Tell me, Mrs. Foster--or do you prefer to be called Ms. Foster?"
>
> . . . "Whichever you like," I said.
>
> "Oh, then you're not in Women's Lib."
>
> "Well no," I said. "I mean I agree with some of their ideas, but. . . ."
>
> "Mrs. Foster, would you say you're a happily married woman?"
>
> "Oh yes," I said, "I've been married for years."
>
> "Well, that's strange. Because I've read your book, and to me it seemed very angry. It seemed like a very angry book. If I were your husband, I'm not sure I'd like it. What do you think about that?"[70]

As Joan's success as a writer soars, her marriage begins to disintegrate, and Joan further breaks away from society and her socially-accepted role. Joan finds a lover when Arthur begins to lose interest in her sexually. She meets the Royal Porcupine at a party given in her honour, and begins her double life.

The Royal Porcupine also resents Joan's success; he tells her that Lady Oracle is terrible but that the title is terrific. He describes her book as being typically Nineteenth-Century writing, and a cross between Rod McKuen and Khalil Gibran. The Royal Porcupine tells Joan that she is a publishing success but wants to know "'What's it like to be a successful bad writer?'"[71]

Joan's affair with the Royal Porcupine is short-lived. She realizes that he is not the romantic figure he pretended to be. When he shaves off his beard and sheds his cloak, Joan refuses his proposal of marriage, again rejecting the socially-imposed role of wife and mother:

> It was horrible. He'd thought that by transforming himself into something more like Arthur he could have Arthur's place; but by doing this he'd murdered the part of him that I loved. I scarcely knew how to console the part that remained. Without his beard, he had the chin of a junior accountant.[72]

Joan discovers that she is being blackmailed by Fraser Buchanan, an unsuccessful writer, who makes it his business to know the shady secrets of famous writers. When Joan finds out that he knows her secret life as an overweight adolescent, her false identity as a writer and her affair with the Royal Porcupine, she knows that she must make a choice

between married life and maintaining her self-identity as a writer. She plans her own suicide drowning in Lake Ontario with the help of her friends, Sam and Marlene, who think that she is running away from the authorities. She flies to Terremoto, Italy, where she assumes her new identity as Louisa K. Delacourt, and pursues her own self-identity.

The unnamed narrator of Surfacing also chooses to maintain her own self-identity. She deviates further from the norms of traditional society than any of the other heroines of both Atwood and Munro. She abandons the traditional world of her parents when she is sixteen: "They were from another age, prehistoric, when everyone got married and had a family, children growing in the yard like sunflowers; remote as Eskimoes or mastodons."[73]

As the narrator later tries to piece together the fragments of her life, she notices the similarity between her friend Anna and herself at sixteen, when she sees her lying on the beach of her parents' cabin home in the northern Quebec woods. The narrator remembers her married boyfriend and the way she looked before she left home:

> Except for the bikini and the colour of her hair she could be me at sixteen, sulking on the dock, resentful at being away from the city and the boyfriend I'd proved my normality by obtaining; I wore his ring, too big for any of my fingers, around my neck on a chain, like a crucifix or a military decoration.[74]

The crucifix, which is symbolic of Christ's suffering on the cross, is here symbolic of the suffering which the narrator undergoes as a result of her affair with this married man. The military decoration, which is granted for bravery, is her symbol of the courage the

narrator shows in surviving an abortion and attaining spiritual wholeness.

The heroine further breaks away from the traditional world of her parents when she leaves home and moves to the city, as did her friends, who are of a similar generation: "They all disowned their parents long ago, the way you are supposed to: Joe never mentions his mother and father, Anna says hers were nothing people and David calls his The Pigs."[75] The narrator moves further away from the norms of her society by rejecting the traditional role of wife and mother in favour of a career, as did Del, in Lives of Girls and Women, and Rose, in Who Do You Think You Are?. We learn that the unnamed narrator once wanted to be an artist, but abandoned her dreams because her boyfriend advised her to prepare for a career, making it clear to her that he would never support her in the traditional manner: "For a while I was going to be a real artist; he thought that was cute but misguided, he said I should study something I'd be able to use because there have never been any important woman artists."[76]

We are told that the narrator compromised and went into design because she needed the money. She was, however, unhappy with the work she produced and was forced to compromise even further to please her employer, who was only interested in profit:

> We had an argument about that: He said one of my drawings was too frightening and I said children like being frightened. "It isn't the children who buy the books," he said, "it's their parents."[77]

The heroine continues to make compromises in her quest for self-identity. She settles for a few stolen hours with her married lover,

even though she knows that he will never marry her. The wedding band he gave her was not a symbol of love and fidelity, in the traditional manner, but helped to open motel doors. Her boyfriend never planned for their relationship to come between his own wife and children.

The unnamed narrator is the most sexually liberated of all the heroines of both authors. She loves her married boyfriend absolutely, giving up her innocence, jeopardizing her chances for marriage and having an abortion; she knows that she is not really special in his life but that she is the last fling of an aging man. The unnamed narrator offers her lover everything, while he gives her nothing in return:

> For him I could have been anyone but for me he was unique, the first, that's where I learned. I worshipped him, non-child-bride, idolater, I kept the scraps of his handwriting like saints' relics. he never wrote letters, all I had was the criticisms in red pencil he paperclipped to my drawings. CS and DS, he was an idealist, he said he didn't want our relationship as he called it to influence his aesthetic judgement. He didn't want our relationship to influence anything; it was to be kept separate from life. A certificate framed on the wall, his proof that he was still young.[78]

When the narrator becomes pregnant, her lover takes no responsibility for the baby. He protects his own family by advising her to have an abortion:

> He said I should do it, he made me do it; he talked about it as though it was legal, simple, like getting a wart removed. He said it wasn't a person, only an animal; . . . ."[79]

The narrator's flight from traditional society culminates with her risking her own life by agreeing to have an abortion. She undergoes the abortion alone, while her boyfriend attends to the needs of his own

family: "He hadn't gone with me to the place where they did it; his own children, the real ones, were having a birthday party. But he came afterwards to collect me."[80] The only words of comfort and support that the narrator receives from her boyfriend when he picks her up after the abortion are "'I know it's tough,' . . . 'but it's better this way.'"[81]

Althougn the protagonists in the writings of both Atwood and Munro have been successful in their search for knowledge, leading to economic independence and sexual equality with the men in their culture, they are not yet aware of the consequences of their actions. What they fail to see is the loneliness, isolation and alienation which they will experience as a result of their break from society.

ENDNOTES

CHAPTER II

Page 56

[1]Munro, Lives of Girls and Women, p. 18.

[2]Ibid., p. 18.

[3]Ibid., p. 18.

[4]Ibid., p. 17.

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[5]Ibid., p. 7.

[6]Ibid., p. 22.

[7]Ibid., pp. 22-23.

[8]Ibid., p. 19.

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[9]Miriam Packer, "Lives of Girls and Women: A Creative Search for Completion," The Canadian Novel Here and Now, ed. John Moss (Toronto, 1978), p. 137.

[10]Munro, Lives of Girls and Women, p. 68.

[11]Ibid., p. 46.

[12]Ibid., p. 46.

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[13]Ibid., p. 99.

[14]Ibid., p. 100.

[15]Ibid., p. 147.

[16]Ibid., p. 195.

[17]Munro, Lives of Girls and Women, pp. 119-120.

Page 60

[18]Ibid., p. 132.

[19]Ibid., p. 52.

[20]Ibid., p. 180.

Page 61

[21]Ibid., p. 188.

[22]Ibid., p. 183.

[23]Ibid., p. 197.

[24]Ibid., pp. 197-198.

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[25]Ibid., p. 198.

[26]Ibid., p. 198.

[27]Munro, Who Do You Think You Are?, p. 107.

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[28]Ibid., p. 102.

[29]Ibid., p. 104.

[30]Ibid., p. 105.

Page 64

[31]Ibid., pp. 117-118.

[32]Ibid., p. 114.

[33]Ibid., p. 122.

[34]Ibid., p. 125.

[35]Munro, Who Do You Think You Are?, p. 126.

Page 65

[36]Ibid., p. 124.

[37]Ibid., p. 138.

[38]Perry Nodelman, "Trusting the Untrustworthy," Journal of Canadian Fiction, 21 (1977-1978), p. 74.

Page 66

[39]Atwood, The Edible Woman, p. 59.

[40]Ibid., p. 60.

[41]Nodelman, "Trusting the Untrustworthy," p. 74.

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[42]Atwood, The Edible Woman, p. 65.

[43]Nodelman, "Trusting the Untrustworthy," p. 76.

[44]Atwood, The Edible Woman, p. 66.

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[45]Ibid., p. 67.

Page 69

[46]Ibid., p. 73.

[47]Nodelman, "Trusting the Untrustworthy," p. 77.

[48]Atwood, The Edible Woman, p. 80.

[49]Ibid., p. 87.

Page 70

[50]Ibid., p. 154.

[51]Atwood, The Edible Woman, pp. 183-184.

Page 71

[52]Ibid., p. 250.

[53]Ibid., p. 250.

[54]Nodelman, "Trusting the Untrustworthy," p. 77.

[55]Atwood, The Edible Woman, p. 255.

Page 72

[56]Ibid., p. 282.

[57]Ibid., p. 285.

[58]Ibid., p. 290.

Page 73

[59]Margaret Atwood, Survival (Toronto, 1972), pp. 210-211.

[60]Nodelman, "Trusting the Untrustworthy," p. 74.

[61]Ibid., p. 74.

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[62]Atwood, Lady Oracle, p. 23.

Page 75

[63]Ibid., p. 18.

[64]Ibid., p. 22[illegible]

[65]Ibid., p. 218.

Page 76

[66]Ibid., p. 233.

[67]Atwood, Lady Oracle, p. 236.

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[68]Ibid., p. 234.

[69]Ibid., p. 238.

[70]Ibid., pp. 238-239.

Page 78

[71]Ibid., p. 240.

[72]Ibid., p. 273.

Page 79

[73]Atwood, Surfacing, p. 154.

[74]Ibid., pp. 55-56.

Page 80

[75]Ibid., p. 18.

[76]Ibid., p. 56.

[77]Ibid., p. 57.

Page 81

[78]Ibid., pp. 158-159.

[79]Ibid., p. 155.

Page 82

[80]Ibid., p. 154.

[81]Ibid., pp. 94-95.

CHAPTER III

The Penalty Women Pay for Freedom and the Quest for Self-Identity

The heroines in the novels of both Margaret Atwood and Alice Munro learn that there is a price to pay for deviating from society. The more they depart from the social norms, the greater the suffering which they experience. The price for freedom and the quest for self-identity ranges from loneliness and isolation to alienation from society, mental suffering and abuse.

Although Addie frees herself from the poverty of the Flats Road, she does not find the happiness she expected (Lives of Girls and Women). She becomes alienated from society, finding the city women shallow and uneducated, while they, in turn, find her eccentric in her love of knowledge. John Moss points out that although Addie tries to escape from her stereotyped role in society, she has been too strongly conditioned by society to be successful and merely ends up being an eccentric. Moss writes that "Living away from her husband, selling encyclopedias, writing letters to editors, all this sets her apart within the community rather than from it."[1] Moss goes on to say that organizing parties, joining book clubs and discussion groups only adds to Addie's isolation from society.[2]

Addie, who was once proud and relatively content with her family on the Flats Road, begins to show a loss of power after her move to the city. Del remembers that her mother resembled a priestess when they

lived on the Flats Road. She now notices that her mother has become unhappy and has lost some of her power and vitality. "She had power still, but not so much as perhaps she thought. And she was in no way content. Nor a priestess."[3]

Addie grows progressively masculine in appearance and pursuits. She alienates herself from her own daughter when Del becomes ashamed of her, noticing how different her mother is from other women:

> One day she came to the school, representing the encyclopedia company, to present a prize for the best essay on why we should buy Victory Bonds. . . . She wore a terrible mannish navy blue suit, with a single button at the waist, and a maroon-colored felt hat, her best, on which I agonizingly believed I could see a fine dust. She gave a little speech. I fixed my eyes on the sweater of the girl ahead of me--pale blue, little nubby bits of wool sticking out--as if hanging on to such indifferent straws of fact would keep me from drowning in humiliation. She was so different, that was all, so brisk and hopeful and guileless in her maroon hat, making little jokes, thinking herself a success. For two cents she would have launched into her own educational history, nine miles to town and the chamber pots. Who else had a mother like that? People gave me sly and gloating and pitying looks. Suddenly I could not bear anything about her--the tone of her voice, the reckless, hurrying way she moved, her lively absurd gestures (any minute now she might knock the ink bottle off the principal's desk), and most of all her innocence, her way of not knowing when people were laughing, of thinking she could get away with this.[4]

Addie becomes increasingly lonely and in need of companionship when Fern Dogherty moves away. As Del matures and her knowledge and sophistication increase, she buries herself in books, drawing away from her mother, who seeks the love and emotional support she no longer has from her husband:

> "You can't read there," . . . "You can't read in that light. Come down on the steps."
> So I came, but she did not want me to read at all. She wanted company.[5]

There is a noticeable change in Addie; although she has gained a degree of independence and has succeeded in educating herself and freeing herself from the poverty of Flats Road, she has suffered a loss. Addie has alienated herself from her son and husband, and has lost their love and companionship.

Del visits her family on the Flats Road in the summer months, unaccompanied by her mother for the first time. She tries to cope with the household chores which Addie has neglected since her move to the city. Del speaks of her mother's alienation from the family when she refuses to visit her husband and son and remains in Jubilee. "My mother said she was not equal to it and anyway they were happy as they were, my father and Owen and Uncle Benny."[6] Separation between Addie and her family eventually leads to estrangement, as the men increasingly rely upon one another for economic support and companionship, and are left to cope somewhat ineffectively with the domesticity of their farm home.

Estranged from society, Addie grows spiritually and physically beaten, lonely and in need of affection, which she seeks from her daughter:

> . . . she would go and lie on her bed and call me to put a quilt over her. I would always do it too carelessly; she would call me back and make me tuck it in at the knees, around the feet. Then she would say, in a petulant, put-on, childish voice, "Kiss mother." I would drop one dry, stingy kiss on her temple. Her hair was getting quite thin. The exposed white skin of the temple had an unhealthy suffering look that I disliked. I preferred to be by myself, . . .[7]

Although Del provides Addie with a degree of companionship, she has interests of her own and is not equal to the task of providing the mature love and emotional support of a husband.

Del, who has allowed herself to be influenced by her mother, is also lonely and isolated from society. She does not fit in with the other

young women in her culture who are preparing for marriage and who look forward to childbearing and domesticity. Del discovers that she has nothing in common with her closest friend Naomi, who is pregnant and about to be married.

Del rejects Garnet French's proposal of marriage because she wishes to maintain her own self-identity by seeking fame and fortune, and does not want to marry into a family that is on the poorest social scale of society. She, however, discovers that he is not content with carrying on a casual relationship with her but is intent on marriage and raising a family. Although Del looks forward to elevating her social status through a literary career, she is lonely and heartbroken when Garnet does not return, as she hoped he would. Susan Warwick points to the following passage as indicative of Del's isolation and detachment when the love affair is over:[8]

> I was crying, I noticed, whimpering in a monotonous rhythm the way children do to celebrate a hurt. I turned around, went back into the hall to look in the dim mirror at my twisted wet face. Without diminishment of pain I observed myself; I was amazed to think that the person suffering was me, for it was not me at all: I was watching. I was watching, I was suffering. I said into the mirror a line from Tennyson, from my mother's Complete Tennyson that was a present from her old teacher, Miss Rush. I said it with absolute sincerity, absolute irony. He cometh not, she said.[9]

Del tries to dissociate herself mentally from the physical pain she is experiencing when Garnet does not return to her. Although she could not conceive of losing his love, she acknowledges the physical pain and reality of the fact that she has lost him, but distances her experience of pain and loneliness by relating it to the protagonist in Tennyson's poem. Miriam Packer remarks that Del feels isolated when she has difficulty in choosing between two unsatisfying approaches to life.

Marian is torn between choosing to be as ambitious and eccentric and asexual as her mother, or as passive and dependent as her aunts.[10]

Del's choices are, however, unsatisfying only because she pursues knowledge to further her own ambitions for fame and fortune, and has no desire to marry and to have a family, thereby leaving herself open to loneliness and isolation. Unlike Del, Jocelyn in Who Do You Think You Are? does not seek knowledge for material gain but pursues knowledge for its own sake. She leaves a wealthy family background, abandons a writing career of her own, and marries a man of lesser background. Jocelyn finds a third approach which is both satisfying and fulfilling to her; she is content with being a mother and is happy in furthering the career of her own husband, recognizing the importance of having the love and emotional support of a husband and family.

Del learns that freedom is not easily come by, as she had once discovered as a child when she bit Mary Agnes Oliphant's arm. While Del's writing career appears rosy on the surface, she is faced with an uncertain future which she must forge on her own, instead of relying on the security of a husband. Miriam Packer perceives that Del's choice will bring hardship. She writes that Del feels "the loss and the gain side by side."[11] Miriam Packer is correct in saying that Del ultimately pays a price for her ambition by experiencing loneliness and isolation, as is her statement that Lives of Girls and Women tells a story of a hopeful child who becomes a lonely adolescent. Packer is also correct in pointing out that in accepting her loneliness and isolation, Del will ultimately experience a celebration of imagination and experience by becoming a writer. She, however, fails to perceive that this does not necessarily imply that Del will find self-fulfillment in her personal life.[12]

Rose also discovers that there is a penalty to pay for freedom (Who Do You Think You Are?). She learns the meaning of responsibility after her daughter Anna moves into Rose's modest apartment on the mountainside. She becomes aware of the true meaning of domesticity for the first time in her life and realizes that she is doing all the things she has always done while married to Patrick, but under much harder circumstances. It is only after Anna has gone to bed and Rose has done the necessary chores of tidying up and making lunches that she relaxes; she sits alone looking out of the window of her mountainside apartment, drinking coffee, mixed with rum, and feels appreciative for the first time:

> She would turn off the lights and sit by the high front window looking out over this mountain town she had hardly known existed a year ago, and she would think what a miracle it was that this had happened, that she had come all this way and was working, she had Anna, she was paying for Anna's life and her own. . . . For the first time in her life she understood domesticity, knew the meaning of shelter, and labored to manage it.[13]

Although Rose has come to terms with herself and is no longer ashamed of her humble background and uneducated parents, and has found independence and recognition through her career, she feels the emptiness of living alone. Rose clings to Tom, a married man with children, for emotional support: "She wasn't forgetting Tom. He wrote; she wrote. Without this connection to a man, she might have seen herself as an uncertain and pathetic person; that connection held her new life in place."[14] Rose gets lonely when Tom moves to England with his family, and her career brings her from one new place to another. She walks the streets and peers through lighted windows, envying people enjoying themselves at Saturday night parties and families having Sunday night

dinners. So lonely is Rose that "She thinks she could take on any hospitality."[15]

Rose does occasionally manage to get invited to parties, such as the one in Kingston. Rose is ashamed because of the distance she has travelled to attend this party. She competes with younger women, and drinks too much in order to fit in and to get into the swing of things: "She took another drink of her gin and knew there was a limited time coming now when she would feel light and welcome as a hummingbird, convinced that many people in the room were witty and many were kind, and some were both together."[16]

Rose grows tired and old before her time after years of hard work in order to achieve success and recognition. She now needs love and acceptance after struggling to make ends meet by taking odd jobs, such as teaching drama, when her acting career did not provide enough money to live on. Rose becomes painfully aware of the toll the years have taken on her, and now wants acceptance and compassion from these young strangers that she meets at this party:

> She wanted to state her case. The years of work, the exhaustion, the traveling, the high school auditoriums, the nerves, the boredom, the never knowing where your next pay was coming from. She wanted to plead with them, so they would forgive her and love her and take her on their side.[17]

As Rose looks at these young women, she thinks of her own daughter, who has moved back to live with her father. Rose is as alienated from her own daughter as she is from these young women. Her daughter, now seventeen, accomplished and sophisticated, "was not like these young people but she was equally remote."[18]

Rose contrasts her own life with that of her host, who is only three years younger, feeling old, unattractive and unpopular in comparison:

> He was looking very brushed and tended, thinner but softened, with his flowing hair and suit of bottle-green velvet. . . . He had shed a wife, a family, a house, a discouraging future, set himself up with new clothes and new furniture and a succession of student mistresses. Men can do it.[19]

Rose is "Tired and adrift and witless" when she meets Simon at the Kingston party.[20] So grateful is she to have found a man that she stops on her way home to buy food, hoping that he will stay for breakfast. Rose confesses to the storekeeper that she is going to a lot of bother and expense for unexpected company. The woman guesses that Rose has met a new man when she says, "'I could stand a bit of it,' . . ."[21]

Rose becomes aware of how much she misses having a man around the house when Simon suggests alterations to her home, fixes her furnace and prepares the ground for a garden. When Rose goes to work the following Monday, no longer is her career of prime importance; she spends the day thinking about Simon and cannot wait to get home to see him. So delighted is Rose when she arrives home and sees that Simon has dug up her garden that, when he asks her whether it is to her satisfaction, she answers candidly:

> . . . "Oh Simon, you idiot, you're the man for my life!" Such was the privilege, the widespread sunlight of the moment, that she did not reflect that saying this might be unwise.[22]

Rose looks forward to Simon's next visit the following weekend, buying fancy sheets for her bed, wine and other delicacies. "On Friday night she put the sheets on the bed and the cherries in a blue bowl.

The wine was chilling, the cheese was getting soft."[23] That evening Rose goes to the door with a thumping heart when she hears a knock, only to discover, to her disappointment, that it is a lonely neighbouring woman. Rose realizes how lonely and empty her life actually is when she sits up all night drinking tea, desperately hoping that Simon will return:

> People's lives were surely more desperate than they used to be, and what could be more desperate than a woman of Rose's age, sitting up all night in her dark kitchen waiting for her lover? . . .
>
> The mistake was in buying the wine, she thought, and the sheets and the cheese and the cherries. Preparations court disaster.[24]

Rose knows that age has caught up with her and that it is harder to find someone to fill her reawakened need after she visits Jocelyn and Clifford in Toronto. Clifford is now rich and successful. Jocelyn continues to support his lifestyle, as she had done when they were poor, even though she once purported to dislike wealth and new commodities. Jocelyn has no difficulty in adjusting to the luxury of her surroundings. They have a large brick house, with a built-in sauna and all the modern conveniences. Jocelyn has been on a diet and is now fashionably dressed; her hair is cut short and parted in the middle in the latest style, with white streaks curving away from her temples. She still mothers Clifford and works at keeping their marriage together, even though he is unfaithful to her and threatens to leave her.

Rose still remembers returning home from Powell River after Clifford rejected her. She recalls the pain she had endured and how her pride had wrecked her marriage to Patrick. She remembers that in those days, she did not relieve her pain by taking a drink, never went to bars and

did not know what tranquilizers were. Rose further loses control when she tries to alleviate her loneliness by making love with Clifford, with Jocelyn approvingly looking on. The following morning, Rose feels that Jocelyn and Clifford have humiliated her. She is wretched on her way home because Clifford has reawakened a need, and that she now has no one to satisfy it:

> She found she was looking at men with that speculative hunger, that cold and hurtful need, which for a while she had been free of. She began to get very angry. She was angry at Clifford and Jocelyn. She felt that they had made a fool of her, cheated her, shown her a glaring lack, that otherwise she would not have been aware of.[25]

Although Rose vows that she will never see her friends again, by the time she reaches home she reasons that she needs their friendship at her stage of life and that it was convenient to stay over at their home when her work took her away from the country to Toronto.

Marian, in The Edible Woman, also embarks on the road to loneliness and isolation when she leaves her engagement party and asserts her freedom and independence by having an affair with Duncan. She, like Ainsley, proves that she is responsible for her own actions, regardless of the views of society. Although Marian has emulated Ainsley in asserting her own independence, she is not yet fully aware of the consequences of her actions. Unlike Ainsley, she has not yet learned that part of a woman's fulfillment lies in giving life, through procreation. In having an affair with Duncan, Marian subconsciously fulfills a death wish.

When Marian first meets and interviews Duncan, the author shows, for the first time, that Duncan is symbolic of death. His "cadaverously thin" body and "nearly colourless, not white" skin stretched over his protruding ribs, resembling the "sallow tone of old linen" are reminiscent

of the mummies wnich fascinate him at the museum, where he spends a good deal of his time.[26]

The author shows that Marian is also preoccupied with death when she associates with Duncan and feels that she has known him all her life. When Marian arrives at Duncan's apartment bringing him her ironing, after he telephones her, Duncan informs Marian that he got her name and telephone number from the switchboard operator at her company, because she forgot to give him her name. She had not given him her name because "It had not occurred to Marian that she hadn't told him her name. She had taken it for granted that he knew it all along."[27]

Marian first associates Duncan with death in the ancient Egyptian section of the museum, where he and Marian later meet. Duncan reveals to Marian his fascination with mummies when she sees him admiring a shrivelled figure in one of the mummy cases: "From somewhere the thought drifted into her mind that if she were to reach out and touch him at that moment he would begin to crumble."[28]

We further learn of Duncan's preoccupation with death when he expresses his death wish:

> ". . . When I get really fed up with this place I'm going to go and dig myself in. Maybe the library would serve the purpose just as well; except this city is kind of damp. Things would rot."[29]

That Duncan is symbolic of death is again shown by the author when Marian notices his resemblance to one of the mummies, which was once preserved in the sands of the desert. The description is similar to that of Duncan when Marian first met him:

> Marian leaned further over the glass case. She found the stunted figure pathetic: with its jutting ribs and frail legs and starved shoulder-blades it looked like the

> photographs of people from nderprivileged countries or concentration camps.[30]

Marian feels sorry for this mummy, much as she had felt sorry for Duncan on their second meeting, at the laundromat. When Duncan reaches out to embrace Marian, she recoils. Duncan immediately understands that Marian associates him with death, when he says, "'Don't worry . . . 'I'm not going to return from the tomb.'"[31]

On the morning following Marian's affair with Duncan, we again learn of Duncan's preoccupation with death. When Duncan leads Marian to a ravine or cavity in the city which resembles an open grave, he again reveals to Marian his fascination with death. He tells her that he prefers the snow, where it is at "absolute zero" or nothingness, to a tropic island, teeming with life, which is "too fleshy" for him:

> . . . "I like this place. Especially now in winter, it's so close to absolute zero. It makes me feel human. By comparison. I wouldn't like tropical islands at all, they would be too fleshy, I'd always be wondering whether I was a walking vegetable or a giant amphibian. But in the snow you're as near as possible to nothing."[32]

When Marian asks Duncan what she should do with her life, he implies that she has chosen or "invented" her own death or "cul-de-sac" when she ran off with him, and must now cope with her decision on her own:

> He grinned at her. "Don't ask me, that's your problem. It does look as though you ought to do something: self-laceration in a vacuum eventually gets rather boring. But it's your own personal cul-de-sac, you invented it, you'll have to think of your own way out."[33]

At Duncan's request, Marian leaves him at the cold and empty ravine and returns home to pick up the threads of her life.

Marian is appropriately left to share the cake, that Peter refused to eat at the end of the novel, with Duncan. In choosing Duncan over

Peter, Marian has completed her own death wish by destroying her femininity. Ainsley recognizes this when she witnesses Marian eating the cake which she baked in her own image, and is alarmed. "'Marian!' she exclaimed at last, with horror. 'You're rejecting your femininity!'"[34] "Twice in the novel, Marian is solemnly accused of 'rejecting her femininity': once by the radical Ainsley and once by the conservative Peter. Their words are identical, and their meaning essentially the same."[35]

The biological destiny of women reaches its climax when Duncan's roommate, Fischer Smythe, has an archetypal vision of dark earthgods and round bellied goddesses, symbolic of warmth, vegetation and an abundance of life, as a result of his studies of womb symbols in D. H. Lawrence.[36] Ainsley acknowledges her feminine destiny when she tricks Len into impregnating her.

The author demonstrates, through Ainsley's dishonest actions, her lack of feeling and shows that her only concern is to fulfill her own biological need. Ainsley, with her lack of feeling for Len, is typical not only of cold and unfeeling women but also of the men in this patriarchal society, who still judge women according to a double standard. Ainsley is at one end of the spectrum, embodying extreme coldness and indifference to the feelings of others, while Marian, who is tender, vulnerable, intelligent and morally conscious, is at the other end. It is society with its imposed superficial standards of behaviour which is destructive to the defenceless individual which Atwood exposes. The author uses extremes to promote true human feeling and understanding between individuals. Atwood tries to arrive at a middle ground in which the

individual is strong enough to assert his own independence and yet is tender and human enough to consider the feelings of the loved one. The author stresses the ideal, where love does not destroy individuality but encourages growth and personal development.

Marian and Len, whose vision has been distorted by the predatory nature of mankind, are the victims of society. Marian's choice of death over life or procreation can be compared to Len's rejection of life when Ainsley tells him that she is pregnant with his child. Marian fears birth, as does Len when he refuses to take responsibility for the birth of his child, and finds birth repugnant:

> "Now I'm going to be all mentally tangled up in Birth, Fecundity, Gestation. Don't you realize what that will do to me? It's obscene, that horrible oozy. . . ." [37]

Fischer, on the other hand, embraces life, as does Ainsley, when he comes to her rescue at Marian's engagement party, and later marries her, becoming the father of her child.

Joan, in Lady Oracle, also rejects marriage and motherhood, choosing loneliness and isolation in Terremoto, Italy, when she abandons her husband for a career, as did Rose, in Who Do You Think You Are?. Joan misses her husband's love and affection and the special moments they shared together. She remembers the shopping lists and love letters that she wrote to Arthur, with nostalgia:

> Have gone to pick up some coffee, XXX. The thought of these abandoned shopping trips intensified my sorrow . . . no more grapefruit, cut in half for two, with a red maraschino cherry like a navel boss, which Arthur habitually rolled to the side of the plate; no more oatmeal porridge, loathed by me, extolled by Arthur, lumping and burning because I hadn't taken his advice and done it in a double boiler. . . . Years of breakfasts, inept, forsaken,

> never to be recovered. . . . Years of murdered breakfasts, why had I done it?[38]

That Joan rejects her own femininity is revealed through her act of cutting off her beautiful red hair, a symbol of femininity, and choosing a career over domestic life. Joan remembers how Arthur loved combing her long hair, and is well aware that "hair in the female was regarded as more important than either talent or the lack of it."[39] She fully understands the sacrifice she has made in rejecting her femininity for a career and begins to wonder whether the sacrifice was worthwhile.

Joan misses her husband's love-making as she looks at the lumpy mattress which they shared during their vacation the year before. She remembers the urgency with which they made love, like couples in motel rooms, Arthur's fascination with centipedes, which served as an aphrodisiac, and that he loved living out of suitcases. Joan recalls that when Arthur went out for cigarettes, she looked at him as if she would be seeing him for the last time, and that now she would truly never see him again. Joan relates to us the pain she is experiencing now that she is aware of her loss: "I burst into tears and shoved my head under the pillow."[40]

Joan's solitary life in Italy is a living death; she is bored and feels that she is living in limbo. Joan begins to question whether she is really alive:

> Maybe I really did drown, . . . The soul sticks around the body for a while after death because it's confused, or that's what the Spiritualists said. . . . My entire life didn't flash before me the way it was supposed to, but it would, I was always a late bloomer.[41]

Joan feels trapped and bogged down in Terremoto and, like people lost at sea, has the urge to send out bottled rescue messages. She is haunted by old memories of her own country and experiences terror when she fears

that if she does not keep them under control, she will go mad.

As Joan stands alone on her Terremoto balcony when she first arrives, she recalls that she has always liked balconies and believed that if she stood on the right one long enough "wearing a long white trailing gown, preferably during the first quarter of the moon, something would happen: music would sound, a shape would appear below, sinuous and dark" and would climb towards her.[42] Instead of being rescued by a dark handsome stranger, as she had hoped, Joan is trapped on her own unromantic, five foot steel balcony, and does not adjust to her new life in Terremoto with the ease she once expected:

> Where was the new life I'd intended to step into, easily as crossing a river? It hadn't materialized, and the old life went on without me, I was caged on my balcony waiting to change.[43]

Joan feels isolated and is alienated from the Italian peasant women, who look upon a woman without a man with suspicion:

> . . . I was a foreigner, and there was something beyond that, something wrong. I was passing through a corridor of hostile eyes, the old black-draped women with their sausage legs no longer returning my <u>bongiorno</u>, they didn't even nod, they stared through me or averted their eyes. One put her hand over the eyes of the little girl sitting beside her and made the sign of the cross. What had I done, what taboo had I violated?[44]

The janitor of Joan's apartment building tells her that a woman living alone is open to criticism when he says, "'. . . . It is not good for a woman to be alone. Others will talk of it.'"[45] He shows concern, asking Joan when her husband will be joining her.

Towards the end of the novel, Joan is frightened and alone in this strange country when she hears footsteps on the gravel path leading to her apartment. No longer does she await a handsome stranger who will

climb onto her balcony and fulfill her romantic dreams, but confronts the stranger by hitting him over the head with a Cinzano bottle when he comes to her door.

The unnamed narrator of Surfacing is as isolated and alienated from society as are the earlier heroines who rejected the traditional role of marriage and motherhood in the novels of both Atwood and Munro. We learn, at the beginning of the novel, that she has not made any close and lasting friendships. On her way home to search for her missing father, the narrator tells us that she is accompanied by her closest woman friend: "She's my best friend, my best woman friend; I've known her two months."[46] We also learn that she is alienated from her childhood home when she says, "Now we're on my home ground, foreign territory."[47]

The narrator tells us, "Nothing is the same, I don't know the way any more."[48] Not only is the terrain leading to her home changed, but so also is the direction of her life. The narrator wants to go back to the city without locating her father, because she is unable to face him. She has blotted out a painful memory from her mind and is unable to come to terms with it. Her pride had prevented her from seeking her parents' help, believing that they would not accept her way of life in the city, which was so different from their own.

Not only does the narrator suffer because she is isolated and alienated from her own society and no longer fits into her parents' world, but she has lost the ability to experience emotion. That the narrator experiences pain because of this loss is demonstrated when she substitutes one form of pain for another as she approaches her parents' home:

> I bite down into the cone and I can't feel anything
> for a minute but the knife-hard pain up the side of

> my face. Anaesthesia, that's one technique; if it hurts invent a different pain.[49]

Subconsciously, the narrator feels that she must first experience suffering to atone for her past sins, before she will again be accepted into her parents' world. As she approaches the lake and gets closer to her parents' home, she does not feel prepared to cope with her past and does not feel that she has atoned for her sins:

> But they're cheated, we're here too soon and I feel deprived of something, as though I can't really get here unless I've suffered; as though the first view of the lake, which we can see now, blue and cool as redemption, should be through tears and a haze of vomit.[50]

As the narrator approaches her parents' home, she notices that the terrain is changed in a way that suggests to her violation or rape. The author portrays rape or violation on two levels. On the one hand, nature is being raped or violated by the Canadians who have emulated the American way of life. On the other hand, it is the narrator who has been violated by a married man, while she was still a teenager. Society has also robbed the narrator of her unborn child through abortion. This rape motif runs throughout the novel to reveal the destruction of nature by industrialized man and the narrator's own violation of nature by agreeing to have an abortion.

The narrator alludes to this destruction of nature, which has changed the physical direction of the road, as well as to her own altered way of life, as a result of being forced by her lover to destroy nature by having an abortion, when she writes, "I'm starting to shake, why is the road different, he shouldn't have allowed them to do it, . . ."[51]

The narrator's life is altered by psychological suffering, which has led her to believe that she has been married and divorced, and that she has lost her baby to her husband, a lie which is easier for her mind to accept than her affair with a married man, which ended in an abortion. While the narrator has managed to wipe out the suffering by subconsciously repressing her true actions, she knows that she is not mentally sound, because of her inability to experience emotion.

The unnamed narrator panicks while she and her lover are out berry picking when he proposes to her. All she can think of is whether she has enough money to move out and how quickly she can find another place. The narrator was content to live with Joe, accepting the physical side of their relationship, but now that he wants to marry her, she is unable to make a commitment:

> I didn't feel awful; I realized I didn't feel much of anything, I hadn't for a long time. . . . At some point my neck must have closed over, pond freezing or a wound, shutting me into my head; since then everything had been glancing off me, it was like being in a vase, or the village where I could see them but not hear them because I couldn't understand what was being said.[52]

The narrator envies Joe because he still has the ability to love when she sees that his face is contorted because she does not return his love and refuses to marry him. She is suddenly no longer concerned with her father's death but with her own when she leaves Joe sitting on the beach and returns to the cabin to look for clues to her illness. So severe is the narrator's pain and mental suffering when she confronts her abnormality, that she fears that she may be dead:

> Pleasure and pain are side by side they said but most of the brain is neutral; nerveless, like fat. I rehearsed emotions, naming them: joy, peace, guilt, release, love and hate, react, relate; what to feel was like what to wear, you watched the others and memorized it. But the only thing there was the fear that I wasn't alive: . . . .[53]

In addition to feeling alone and alienated from society, the narrator is faced with recovering her sanity and coming to terms with the fact that she is as guilty of violating nature as is the society which she condemns, because she agreed to have an abortion.

Life Before Man depicts an alienated society, where men and women experience loneliness and isolation, in a cold and competitive world. Adele Wiseman notes that Elizabeth, a married woman with two children, aptly expresses her own isolation and alienation from society in the opening lines of the novel, which set the theme of the novel:[54]

> I don't know how I should live. I don't know how anyone should live. All I know is how I do live. I live like a peeled snail. And that's no way to make money.
>
> I want that shell back, it took me long enough to make.[55]

Judith Timson comes to the same conclusion in stating that Margaret Atwood exposes reality in a modern society, where men and women are emotionally alienated, experiencing separation, divorce and sexual confusion.[56]

Elizabeth has never made a secret of her affairs with other men. "She thinks of Nate as the father of her children but not as her husband."[57] Elizabeth and Nate have not slept together for years. Nate also confides to Elizabeth his numerous love affairs. "Dutifully, he tries to make them happy. . . . They abound, they swarm."[58] Elizabeth does not reproach Nate for his affairs, as long as she is in control of them. "She claims she doesn't care what he does, who his ladyfriends are, as she puts it, as long as the children are protected."[59]

Despite their extramarital affairs, Nate and Elizabeth continue to live together, while exploiting other lonely people who become involved with them. Elizabeth takes advantage of Chris, the latest of her lovers, to regain the excitement and vitality which her own marriage lacks. When Chris begins to cling to her and pressures her to move in with him, Elizabeth uses the children as an excuse; she tells him that she cannot leave the children and breaks off the affair, refusing to speak to him.

Nate also exploits Martha, his current mistress, who is the earth-mother that Elizabeth once was. Martha is hurt when she learns that Nate does not love her and never planned on living with her. Although Nate tries to appease Martha by telling her that he understands her anger, Martha feels that Nate has been using her when she says, "'So why did you come?' . . . . 'Running away from mother? Wanted some other nice lady to give you a cookie and a tumble in the sack?'"[60] Martha becomes bitter and turns to drinking to assuage her loneliness when Nate begins to visit her less frequently. Like Elizabeth, Nate does not hesitate to leave Martha when Elizabeth abandons Chris, because he now feels that there is an imbalance. When Nate once again turns to his wife, Martha realizes that Elizabeth was completely in control of her husband's love affair by inviting her to lunch, getting her drunk so that she would talk too much, and sympathizing with her when she complained about Nate:

> So for a week now, ever since that night, she's spent the afternoon in there lying on the bed that used to be his, half his, and he's been bringing her cups of tea, one each afternoon. She accepts them with that dying swan look of hers, the look he can't stand and can't resist. It's your fault, darling, but you may bring me cups of tea. Scant atonement.

> And an aspirin out of the bathroom and a glass of water. Thank you. Now go away somewhere and feel guilty. He's a sucker for it. Like a good boy.[61]

Lesje, a young paleontologist, and William, with whom she lives, also share a meaningless relationship. Although they live together "They've always promised to give each other a lot of room."[62] William spends a lot of time away from Lesje, working at his sewage disposal project, while Lesje spends most of her time at the museum, where she works. Lesje has fantasies about prehistory instead of William. Lesje finds herself regressing, a daydream which she has carried over from early childhood and adolescence. Although her daydreams turned from dinosaurs to men as she matured, lately she finds this unrewarding, as her thoughts turn to William:

> . . . she can no longer daydream about William, even when she tries; nor can she remember what the daydreams were like when she did have them.[63]

Although Lesje and William make love, they do not experience any emotion:

> They would make love like two salmon, remotely, William fertilizing the cool silvery eggs from a suitable distance. He'd think of his children as issue. His issue, uncontaminated.[64]

Lesje and William share expenses; they also share a physical space, eating and playing cribbage on the same card table, but do not share each other's thoughts and dreams; they are isolated from one another. As William concentrates on his cribbage game, bent on winning, Lesje's mind is on fiction. She has romantic dreams of Lake Gladys, in The Lost World, where she holds Professor Summerlee's emaciated hand, while they witness a plesiosaur together.

Lesje feels more isolated and lonely than ever when she leaves William, after Elizabeth tells him that Lesje is having an affair with

Nate. Lesje buries herself in her work to avoid going home to an empty house. She begins to feel that her haphazard life with William was better than being alone. At least then she had daily routines, which held her life together and gave it some purpose. Without such routines, Lesje is weightless and drifts along aimlessly, for Nate can never get away from Elizabeth and the children before ten or later.

So lonely is Lesje that she envies the technicians at the museum, who leave work at five o'clock. They have no need to stay late, as does Lesje, who has nowhere to go. Lesje would gladly welcome an invitation to go out for a beer with one of them and would even make love without any attachment:

> . . . she very much wants one of them, either of them, to say, "Come out for a beer." She would watch baseball games on television with them, eating potato chips and drinking from the bottle. She would hold their hands, roll on the carpet with them, make love as an afterthought, attaching no more meaning to that than to any other healthy exercise, a swim, a jog around the block. It would all be friendly and without any future. She wants actions, activities, with no significance and no hidden penalties.[65]

When Nate finally moves out and takes up his life with Lesje, Elizabeth experiences the same loneliness and isolation as Lesje. She, like Lesje, cannot bear to go home to an empty house. Elizabeth prefers to wait in the depressing underground Pilot Tavern for a stranger, who she hopes will help to ease her loneliness:

> She can still leave, but what then? She'd have to go back, pay off the baby-sitter, and lie down alone in the house that is empty but not empty, listening to the barely audible breathing of her children. When they're awake she can stand it. Though they're hardly great company.[66]

Like Lesje, Elizabeth would rather seek oblivion through sex with a stranger instead of being alone; she settles for "a night with no stars,

a road running straight to a cliff edge."[67]

Rennie, the protagonist of Bodily Harm, is typical of the heroines of the earlier novels of Margaret Atwood and Alice Munro. She grew up in a small town called Giswald, where a woman's goal in society is still to marry and raise a family. Men remain the breadwinners and continue to assume the important roles in society, as was the case with Rennie's grandfather. Like the heroines in the earlier novels of both Atwood and Munro, Rennie once dreamt of competing with men and hoped to be as prominent, but discovered that society had not changed significantly from her grandmother's day:

> My grandmother worshipped my grandfather, or so everyone said. When I was little I thought of him as a hero, and I guess he was, he was about the closest you could get in Griswald unless you'd been in the war. I wanted to be like him, but after a few years at school I forgot about that. Men were doctors, women were nurses; men were heroes, and what were women? Women rolled the bandages and that was about all anyone ever said about that.[68]

Rennie is also similar to the earlier heroines in her fear of family responsibility and entrapment. She could not wait to flee her small-town environment. She did not want to sacrifice herself for a family, as had her mother, and did not want to live long enough to get like her grandmother. Rennie expresses her need for freedom when she tells us, "I didn't want to have a family or be anyone's mother, ever; . . . . I didn't want to cope. I didn't want to deteriorate."[69] Rennie transcends her small-town background by gaining an education on a university scholarship, "the only other respectable way out of Griswald for a young single woman," which prepares her for earning her own living as a journalist.[70]

Rennie is an outgrowth of the women's liberation movement. She wrote several articles on the movement "back in the early seventies when

they were still doing pieces about the liberating effects of masturbation."[71] Rennie, who once believed in love and that "there was a right man, not several and not almost right," no longer holds this dream.[72] Like the earlier heroines, she also suffers because of her negation of marriage and family life. What Rennie did not foresee was the loneliness which she would experience in later years as a result of not having a husband and family to turn to for love and emotional support.

By the time that Jake moves in with Rennie, she has failed at love and is disillusioned with sex. She now seeks companionship from a man who does not love her and with whom she has nothing in common. Rennie no longer trusts men and is afraid of love because it makes her vulnerable. "Being in love was like running barefoot along a street covered with broken bottles. . . . It made you visible, soft, penetrable; it made you ludicrous."[73]

Jakes does not turn out to be the companion that Rennie sought. He rearranges her apartment to look like a brothel, discarding most of her furniture and choosing a plump dark pink sofa that resembled a woman's thighs for the living room. He decorates her apartment with paintings of sexy, partially naked women. For the bedroom, he chooses a painting of a woman lying feet first on a sofa, which was similar to the one in the living room, with a bull in the background waiting to charge her. Not only does Jake rearrange Rennie's apartment, but he goes to work on trying to rearrange her by turning her into a sex symbol: "Put your arms over your head, Jake said, it lifts the breasts. Move your legs apart, just a little. Raise your left knee. You look fantastic."[74] It is only after Rennie tries to strengthen their relationship that she discovers that Jake is not interested in what she thinks but is more interested in

her body:

> Screw your mind, Jake said. . . . No, he said, I couldn't screw your mind even if I wanted to. . . . You can't rape a woman's mind without her consent, you know that.
> You can try, Rennie said.
> Not me, Jake said. I'm not a mind man. I'm more interested in your body, if you want the truth.[75]

Once Jake learns that Rennie has cancer, their relationship begins to deteriorate. Rennie needs love and emotional support after her operation and can no longer indulge him in his fantasies:

> Fight for it, he said. Tell me you want it. This was his ritual, one of them, it had once been hers too and now she could no longer perform it. She didn't move and he let go of her. He put his face down on her shoulder; his body went limp. Shit, he said. He needed to believe she was still closed, she could still fight, play, stand up to him, he could not bear to see her vulnerable like this.[76]

At a time when Rennie most needs Jake, he abandons her, Rennie suffers from fear and loneliness after Jake moves out. While she is out grocery shopping, a pervert enters her apartment through a window and leaves a length of rope on her bed. Even the police invade her privacy and offer no protection when they break the lock and enter her apartment to investigate the break in, while she is away. They suggest to Rennie that because she is single and lives alone, she has invited the attentions of this pervert by having different men visiting her apartment and by deliberately undressing in front of an open window.

Rennie defends herself by telling the police that she does not entertain men, closes the curtains at night, and undresses in the dark. The older policeman smiles at her, suggesting that he is familiar with the ways of single women. Rennie is suddenly angry; she unbuttons her blouse and pulls down her slip strap. The policeman is alarmed and asks

her what she thinks she is doing. Rennie answers, "I want you to believe me, . . ."[77] Rennie continues to live in fear, even though she changes the locks on her doors and puts safety locks on her windows. She has nightmares and feels that the pervert is still lurking around her apartment.

Rennie manages to get an assignment to write a travel piece on St. Antoine, an island resort, where she hopes to escape from her desolate way of life. She, however, discovers that living alone is also a danger in St. Antoine. This is first revealed to her by Dr. Minnow, one of the passengers on her flight, who is a native of the island. Dr. Minnow asks Rennie whether she has a husband. "He looks down at her anxiously, and Rennie sees that this isn't an advance, it's concern."[78]

Rennie is lonely and adrift when she settles into her room at the Sunset Inn. She foresees a future of loneliness and isolation. "Rennie feels momentarily that she may be spending the rest of her life in rooms like this. Not her own."[79] She hears a couple making love in the adjacent room; this reawakens old feelings, and Rennie finds it painful to be alone. At one time Rennie would have been irritated by this or sexually aroused if she was with a man. Now this intrusion is like a voice from the past, mournfully bringing to mind something that she has lost and will never recover.[80]

Rennie again feels lonely and isolated when her room at the Sunset Inn is broken into. She discovers that the box she picked up at the airport for Lora, a resident of the island, is stolen. Rennie is fearful when she lies in her bed after the break in. "She wants somebody to be with her, she wants somebody to be with. A warm body, she doesn't much care whose."[81]

Rennie becomes a prime suspect in a political uprising on St. Antoine. Alone, unprotected and unable to escape from the island when the planes are grounded, she suffers untold physical and mental abuse from the island authorities when she is arrested and thrown into prison with Lora, whose boyfriend Prince is politically involved. Rennie suffers hunger and thirst when she is sustained by a piece of bread and salty tea. She defecates into a bucket, is denied soap and water, and does not even have a comb for her hair:

> Rennie can smell their bodies, unwashed flesh, and the putrid smell from the bucket, Lora is out of cigarettes for the time being, she's picking at her fingers, Rennie can see her out of the corners of her eyes, . . . She's having trouble remembering which day this is, they should have begun when they got here, scratches on the wall, perhaps this is the day her ticket expires, her twenty-one-day excursion. Maybe now someone will come looking for her, maybe she will be rescued. If she can only keep believing it, then it will happen.[82]

Rennie sees no end to her suffering and is tired of the endless fear. Although she hopes that someone back home will miss her and will come to her rescue, she knows that she has no one in the world except her aging mother, from whom she has long been estranged. In her isolation and loneliness, Rennie tries to remember someone from the past whom she has loved but finds it difficult. She tries to remember Jake's body, as she has often done in the past, but cannot even remember his face.[83]

Lora sleeps with the prison guards to get chewing gum and cigarettes and to try to save Prince's life. Rennie is disgusted with Lora when she offers her some gum, feeling that she should have more respect for herself. What Rennie does not know is that she is also protecting her from being raped by the guards. Rennie is made aware of this when one of the guards says, "'Her turn today,' . . . pointing at Rennie with

the other hand. 'You been doin' it every time.'"[84] Rennie is taken by surprise and is not prepared for this, knowing what she will be forced to do. Lora steps in front of her when Rennie breaks down and consents to sleep with the guards, and offers to go in her place.

Lora is removed from the cell, molested, kicked and severely beaten with the gun of one of the guards when she finds out that Prince is dead and lashes out at one of them. Rennie fears for her own life as she crouches in the corner of her cell in an effort to hide, and cannot bear to watch the brutality. Lora's bruised and broken body is thrown back into the cell, and Rennie fears that she may be dead. Rennie, who has never experienced any physical contact from her mother, reaches out and draws Lora's bruised and broken body onto her lap.

The author shows that Rennie has learned true compassion through her own suffering and has temporarily managed to forget about her own affliction:

> She moves the sticky hair away from the face, which isn't a face anymore, it's a bruise, blood is still oozing from the cuts, there's one on the forehead and another across the cheek, the mouth looks like a piece of fruit that's been run over by a car, pulp, Rennie wants to throw up, it's no one she recognizes, she has no connection with this, there's nothing she can do, it's the face of a stranger, someone without a name, the word <u>Lora</u> has come unhooked and is hovering in the air, apart from this ruin, mess, there's nothing she can even wipe this face off with, all the cloth in this room is filthy, septic, except her hands, she could lick this face, clean it off with her tongue, that would be the best, that's what animals did, that's what you were supposed to do when you cut your finger, put it in your mouth, clean germs her grandmother said, if you don't have water, she can't do it, it will have to do, it's the face of Lora after all, there's no such thing as a faceless stranger, every face is someone's, it has a name.[85]

Rennie takes Lora's lifeless hand and holds it between her own hands, desperately trying to will life back into her. She thinks that Lora may still be alive when she imagines seeing her move, but is afraid to lower her head to her heart, for fear that she is really dead and that she is now truly alone.

In their quest for self-identity, these women have reached a higher level of understanding of reality through their loneliness, isolation and alienation from society, which they have experienced as a result of their departure from the norms of society. Women have finally discovered that they cannot lead a meaningful existence apart from society. The feminine quest for self-identity moves towards circularity as these women try to reintegrate with society on multiple levels.

ENDNOTES

CHAPTER III

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[8]Susan Warwick, "Growing Up: The Novels of Alice Munro," Essays on Canadian Writing, 29 (Summer 1984), p. 210.

[9]Munro, Lives of Girls and Women, p. 200.

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[13]Munro, Who Do You Think You Are?, p. 144.

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[35]John Lauber, "Alice in Consumer-Land: The Self Discovery of Marian MacAlpin," The Canadian Novel: Here and Now, ed. John Moss (Toronto, 1978), p. 21.

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[45]Ibid., p. 325.

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[54]Adele Wiseman, "Readers can rejoice Atwood's in form," The Toronto Star, September 29, 1979, p. E7.

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[72]Ibid., p. 64.

[73]Ibid., p. 102.

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[75]Ibid., p. 104.

[76]Ibid., p. 201.

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[78]Ibid., p. 31.

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CHAPTER IV

Reintegration with Society and a Return to Nature Through Procreation

Circularity in the feminine quest for self-identity begins with the belief that women must emulate the men in their society in order to find self-identity. The socially imposed role of wife and mother is rejected in favour of a career and gaining equality with men. Del, in Munro's Lives of Girls and Women, departs from society, falsely believing that masculine powers are to be valued over feminine ones, and rejects her own femininity by refusing to have children. Rose, in Who Do You Think You Are? breaks up her marriage to pursue a career of her own, as does Joan, in Atwood's Lady Oracle, when she rejects her domestic role, believing that her writing career will bring her happiness.

In their quest for self-identity, women reach a higher level of understanding, discovering that they have distorted reality. They also recognize their own uniqueness in nature, and once again return to the traditional norms of the society which they once rejected. Ainsley, a self-proclaimed "emancipated" woman in The Edible Woman, returns to society by adopting the socially imposed role of wife and mother. Her roommate also learns that she must return to the consumer-oriented society which she once rejected because she believed that it was pushing her into marriage and motherhood. Similarly, the unnamed narrator of Surfacing discovers that she must return to an imperfect society. As she recalls the events which lead up to the abortion of her child, she recognizes

that she is as guilty of destroying nature as were the Americans she condemned. The narrator returns to society in a creative manner when she discovers her own uniqueness in nature through procreation.

The feminine quest for self-identity ends in circularity when women once again embrace the socially imposed role of wife and mother, as does Lesje in Life Before Man, when she hopes to become a wife and mother by marrying Nate. Similarly, Rennie's quest for self-identity ends in circularity when she tries to recapture the traditional role of wife and mother (Bodily Harm). Rennie's chances for marriage and motherhood are, however, almost nonexistent when she is terminally stricken with cancer.

Finally, the feminine quest for self-identity comes full circle in The Handmaid's Tale. Margaret Atwood takes a leap into the near future, creating a terrifying society in order to demonstrate the dangers which lie ahead for women who carry their fight for freedom to excess and forsake their grounding in nature through procreation. Women are denied education, are prohibited from pursuing their own careers, are confined to the home, and eventually lose all freedom and identity. Offred remembers her own mother's rebellion against society in her fight for abortion and the choice of having a child out of wedlock. She realizes that women like her mother have gone too far in their quest for self-identity, which led to women's complete loss of identity and imprisonment by a new puritanical military régime.

In her quest for self-identity, Del mistakenly assumes that she must emulate the men in her society in order to gain respect and have a life of her own (Lives of Girls and Women). Del misconstrues her mother's meaning when she tells her that she foresees a change coming in the lives of girls and women but that it is up to the women to effect

this change. Del assumes that this change will be brought about by gaining equality with the men in her culture at the expense of denying her own femininity in refusing to have children. Although Del's own mother urges her to gain respect and strive for a life of her own when she encourages her to have a good education, she also warns Del that part of a woman's self-fulfillment lies in being close to nature through procreation. Mrs. Jordan cautions Del, "You will want to have children, though."[1]

Del experiences a dichotomy when she is unable to unite her physical and intellectual spheres of being. Although she longs to develop her intellectual powers which in her society are viewed as masculine, she at the same time wants to develop her physical powers which are associated with femininity and procreation. Del believes that she must choose between the two: ". . . when I would see an article in a magazine called 'Femininity--It's Making a Comeback!' or a quiz for teenagers with the heading 'Is Your Problem that You're Trying To Be a Boy?' I would turn the page quickly as if something was trying to bite me. Yet it had never occurred to me to want to be a boy."[2]

What Del does not understand is that it is not by denying her feminine powers but by uniting them with her masculine ones that the inward and social divisions which exist between the sexes will begin to dissolve. It is not by creating a gulf between the sexes, whereby each remains isolated in one's chauvinism, both inwardly and socially, but in learning to co-exist with men, while at the same time accepting her uniqueness in nature through procreation, that the dichotomy which Del experiences between the masculine and feminine spheres of her being will be resolved.

Nancy Bailey, using Jungian theory to reflect on Del's predicament, proposes that the well integrated personality of both sexes combines

both the masculine and feminine powers, which closely correspond to the Jungian conception of the whole self.[3] Carl Jung believed that the well adjusted person of both sexes must successfully unite within the self the masculine powers of cognition, action and distinctiveness, which he termed Logos, with the feminine powers of relatedness, sensation and intuition, which he called Eros.[4] The Logos powers of initiative, courage, objectivity and wisdom become distorted in men who lack the feminine powers or who have repressed them, resulting in sterility, violence, egotism and death, which are opposite powers.[5]

This imbalance between the powers of Logos and Eros characterizes the men in Lives of Girls and Women. Uncle Craig, who is childless, never completes his genealogy; Jerry thinks the world will come to an end and hopes to win the Nobel Prize before it does, and Uncle Bill, who is dying of cancer, is nostalgic over his dead mother despite having a lush and youthful wife at his side. In emulating the men in her society, Del cannot hope to effect the change in society which her mother foresees for women.[6]

The feminine characters also display an imbalance between the masculine and feminine powers, lacking that which is necessary if one is to bring about a change in society. The aunts lack the masculine qualities which society has stunted by idealizing passivity, dependence and inaction. Del's friend Naomi is equally dependent and sterile of thought. Her femininity is purely physical and predatory in her preoccupation with her hope chest collection and pursuit of a husband. Mrs. Jordan also displays an imbalance of masculine and feminine powers by espousing masculine qualities and repressing her feminine ones, which results in her brittleness and eccentricity. Fern Dogherty achieves a

greater level of balance between her masculine and feminine powers because of her sensuality but remains unfulfilled as an artist.[7]

Del also fails to achieve a harmony between her masculine and feminine powers and does not find self-fulfillment in her quest for self-identity at the end of the novel; she concentrates upon her masculine powers in resolving to get on with what she believes to be her "real life," that of becoming a writer, at the expense of denying her feminine powers, thereby losing out on marriage and motherhood:

> Now at last without fantasies or self-deception, cut off from the mistakes and confusion of the past, grave and simple, carrying a small suitcase, getting on a bus, like girls in movies leaving home, convents, lovers, I supposed I would get started on my real life.
> Garnet French, Garnet French, Garnet French.
> Real life.[8]

Alice Munro shows that "real life" for women does not lie in simply developing intellectually when she undercuts Del's statement by comparing her to an actress in make-believe life. The author shows that "real life" or self-fulfillment for women includes marriage and having a family. Munro shows that in deciding to become a writer instead of marrying Garnet French, Del misses out on having a husband and family, which is also part of "real life".

In developing and valuing masculine powers over feminine ones, Del neglects her mother's advice of cultivating her feminine powers of procreation. She and the heroines that follow in the early fiction of both Atwood and Munro fall into the very pattern against which Rosemary Ruether cautions women. Ruether aptly reminds us that although women must develop their intellect, creative powers and the will, all of which they have been denied by society, they must not neglect their identification "with nature, the earth and the body in its despised and rejected form.

To simply reject this identification would be to neglect that part of ourselves we have been left to cultivate and to buy into the very polarization of which we have been primary victims."[9]

Although Rose in Who Do You Think You Are? does not initially reject her identification with nature, she however falls into the very pattern Rosemary Ruether speaks of. Rose eventually abandons her husband and child, and buys into the masculine world in order to seek freedom and equality with the men in her culture. Although Rose is successful in achieving her goal, she nevertheless remains unfulfilled, and her quest for self-identity ends in circularity.

Rose loses her husband and daughter to another woman who is content to take up the role which Rose gave up. Even though Patrick's new wife is independently wealthy, she is well aware of the importance of having a husband and family, and finds self-fulfillment in her domestic role. Rose later begins to question the choice that she has made, as she compares her own lifestyle to that of Patrick's new wife, and concludes that his wife has made a wise choice in marrying Patrick. Rose comments on Patrick's success and confesses to her friend Jocelyn that Patrick has married a sensible woman who manages her domestic role with skill and ease: "Rose told about . . . how he had married a sensible woman even richer than he was, who had made a dazzling living room with mirrors and pale velvet and a wire sculpture like blasted bird cages. Patrick did not mind Modern Art any more."[10] Rose comes to realize that Patrick is really a nice person. She has a twinge of guilt when she tells Jocelyn that Patrick's new wife probably used the wedgewood vases which Patrick was once so proud of for laundry room containers. Rose confesses to Jocelyn that "'He's nicer than most people.'"[11]

Rose longs to recapture the domestic role which she gave up in favour of developing her masculine powers to gain equality with the men in her society:

> She would like very much to be dishing up a costly cabinet de diplomate out of a cut-glass bowl in a rich dining room with a big gleaming belly of sideboard behind her, and a dim picture of horses feeding, cows feeding, sheep feeding, on badly painted purple grass. Or she could do as well with batter pudding in the eating nook of a kitchen in a little stucco house by the bus stop, plaster pears and peaches decorating the wall, ivy curling out of little brass pots.[12]

The author shows that Rose misses the peace and tranquility associated with the domestic role which she abandoned in favour of competing with men in a patriarchal society. So lonely and isolated is Rose that she would gladly trade her career for quiet family life. The author ironically uses a badly painted pastoral scene to show that Rose, who once abandoned the peace and tranquility of her elegantly decorated home while married to Patrick, is now willing to settle for a modest home, even if the surroundings are in poor taste.

The quest for self-identity ends in circularity when Rose tries to recapture the love her husband once had for her. Rose discovers that she has not found self-fulfillment in her quest for self-identity. She finds herself tired, haggard looking and alone by the time she is a public success in interviewing celebrities on her own television show.

Nine years after her divorce from Patrick, Rose sees him in a Toronto airport, in the middle of the night, as she is returning home on a delayed flight from Yellowknife after appearing on one of her television shows. She is alone in the early hours of the morning, with no one waiting for her. Rose is self-conscious about her creased raincoat, graying hair falling over her face and running mascara. Contrary to her, Patrick

appears confident and well put together. He has lost his boyish thinness and is now pleasantly filled out. His once noticeable birthmark has faded, and he is no longer dressed in the motley school clothes she remembered him in, but is now fashionably dressed. Patrick's once prim authoritativeness has disappeared and is now replaced by an agreeable, responsible and slightly complacent manner.

At a moment when Rose is ready to confess her exhaustion to Patrick and is hopeful of regaining the magic of his love by merely touching his shoulder, as she had done in the past, she discovers that she has lost him forever and that he now looks upon her with disgust and loathing when their eyes meet:

> He made a face at her. It was a truly hateful, savagely warning, face; infantile, self-indulgent, yet calculated; it was a timed explosion of disgust and loathing. It was hard to believe. But she saw it.[13]

Marian, in The Edible Woman, also falls into the very pattern of buying into the masculine world which Ruether cautions against when she rejects her femininity by refusing to marry and have children in favour of maintaining her self-identity.

Although Marian at first rejects the mass-market food of a synthetic society, which she associates with herself as victim of society, she is unsuccessful in freeing herself from the imposed norms of society, as she once hoped. Marian merely returns to the society which she once rejected by eating the cake she bakes in her own image:

> Suddenly she was hungry. Extremely hungry. The cake after all was only a cake. She picked up the platter, carried it to the kitchen table and located a fork. "I'll start with the feet," she decided.

> She considered the first mouthful. It seemed odd but most pleasant to be actually tasting and chewing and swallowing again.[14]

Robert Lecker correctly maintains that Marian does not manage to free herself from the imposed norms of society when she eats her disembodied self, but merely succeeds in rejecting her femininity and returns to reality. Lecker arrives at this conclusion by demonstrating the inconsistency of believing that Marian must starve in order to survive.

Lecker writes that in Part III, Marian is believed to have succeeded in rejecting society with its consumerism and imposed roles and confirms her new identity by consuming her disembodied self. In Part III, the narrator is once again speaking in the first person. The cake Marian bakes and eats signifies her refusal to be a victim and is symbolic of her development.[15] Lecker rejects this interpretation as does Frank Davey, who has observed that this viewpoint is not accepted "because of the clarity of symbolism but only because such an interpretation <u>seems</u> consistent with the rest of the novel. . . ."[16]

Lecker points to the inconsistency of interpretation. Marian's reason for giving up food first stems from the fact that her job for an advertising agency has led her to reject synthetic forms of food because she equates food with being assimilated by society and in being exploited because she is a woman. However, at the end of the novel, Marian is once again a consumer when she is shown to be engaged in the metaphor of eating, which was first taboo. When Marian symbolically offers the cake to Peter and later to Duncan and then eats it herself, she "re-enters her female as food."[17] When Duncan ironically says, "you're back to so-called reality, you're a consumer,"[18] he is quite correct, as is Ainsley's argument, "'You're rejecting your femininity!'"[19]

Lecker contends that Marian's first rejection of mass-market foods, which are symbolic of her own existence, and later turning to vitamin pills, shows that the line between the natural and the synthetic disintegrates when she substitutes vitamin pills for food."[20] T. D. MacLulich supports Lecker's argument in maintaining that "Marian is using the products of the consumer society to sustain a rebellion which is ostensibly directed against that very society."[21] Lecker goes on to say that there is again a contradiction in believing that Marian's rejection of food is based on the assumption that we must starve in order to survive and that in refusing to eat she can survive. "Marian's non-eating turns into a metaphor of sustenance, and the non-eating/eating conjunction becomes an oxymoron. Marian is thriving on death as life."[22]

Lecker points out that if we examine the food metaphor in terms of what it says about the female role, when Marian refuses to eat she at the same time rejects her own culture which exploits women and views them as edible objects. It is thus logical to assume that once Marian refuses food, she will, in turn, find the natural, or true female self which is concealed somewhere in the middle of the gooey slogan sandwich. However, this does not happen; the wasted "she" in Part II becomes more artificial than ever after her refusal to eat. Not until Part III does Marian regain her identity as the "I" when she resumes eating. Lecker states: "Thus to deny the entrapments of consumer culture in favour of a more natural, non-consumer-oriented lifestyle is to discover that the natural and the culturized are identical."[23]

Lecker concludes that Marian's flight from her engagement party in the red dress, which is symbolic of the scarlet woman, as well as her pursuit of Duncan, symbolize the prostitute or seductress as well as

the female hunter. Duncan immediately acknowledges this role in suggesting that they find a motel, and Marian admits to herself that if she looks like a prostitute, she may as well be one. Lecker writes, "Thus she appears as a cheap prostitute--the female commodity par excellence."[24]

Lecker suggests that when Marian sees her red dress disintegrating in thin air, tattered and whispy as feathers in the snow behind her, it is not that she has succeeded in shedding her image of the exploited female object, but that it points to her disintegrating identity. Although we are led to believe that Marian now knows who she is after her affair with Duncan and plans to bake a cake in her own miniature image, we discover that this is really not so, as evidenced by the next to last chapter of Part II. Marian is as confused as ever over her own identity. Marian admits that she has failed in her quest for self-identity when Duncan says to her, "'. . . I thought you were the capable type,'" and she answers, "'I am' . . . 'I was. I don't know.'"[25] Marian also confesses that in the last few months she "hadn't been getting anywhere. And she hadn't accomplished anything."[26]

After her affair with Duncan, Marian's world begins to fall apart, and she is unable to take control of her own life. Duncan, who has succeeded in seducing her, rejects her, and she is confused about her feelings for Peter.

Atwood suggests that Marian is unstable and has been living in a world of fantasy. It can be seen that Marian has had a glimpse of reality when she contemplates seeing a psychiatrist. Duncan confirms this, telling her that this would only make her normal:

> "Maybe I should see a psychiatrist," she said gloomily.
> "Oh no, don't do that. They'd only want to adjust you."
> "But I want to be adjusted, that's just it. I don't

> see any point in being unstable." It occurred to her also that she didn't see any point in starving to death.[27]

Marian is again confused over her identity, as is evident from Duncan's argument with her at the end of the novel. He tells her that Peter was not trying to destroy her, but that she was really trying to destroy him. Marian has a sinking feeling, as she asks Duncan whether he really believes this. Duncan confuses Marian even further by telling her that he was really the one who was trying to destroy her, not Peter.

The author shows that society is predatory, its members feeding upon one another, through Duncan's statement that it really does not matter who was trying to destroy whom:

> ". . . . Maybe Peter was trying to destroy me, or maybe I was trying to destroy him, or we were both trying to destroy each other, how's that? What does it matter, you're back to so-called reality, you're a consumer."[28]

Marian is misguided by her own false perceptions in believing that Peter is trying to destroy her and failing to understand the inherently predatory nature of mankind. Marian admits this when she invites Peter to tea after her affair with Duncan: "Peter was not the enemy after all, he was just a normal human being like most other people. She wanted to touch his neck, tell him that he shouldn't get upset, that everything was going to be all right. It was Duncan that was the mutation."[29]

Sherrill Grace correctly argues that Marian's difficulty in adapting to society stems from a personal problem in that she has distorted reality. Grace writes that The Edible Woman is a novel concerning the problem of "personal identity and contemporary life."[30] Grace contends that Marian does not understand the motivation of her own actions and only sees the world through her own window. The return to the narrative voice in

Part III simply signifies that Marian has returned to normality and to being a consumer and predator. Grace goes on to say that Marian has learned very little by the end of the novel. It is the reader who draws the conclusions that we are cannibalistic, that we must eat to survive, and destroy or be destroyed. She further states that Marian survives at the end of the novel, but has had a narrow escape. It may be concluded that Marian has over-reacted to a real life situation, as Duncan comments at the end of the novel.[31]

Grace believes that when Marian panicks and feels like a trapped animal in the bar scene, where Peter first meets Len, and later in Peter's car, she is over-reacting to a real life situation, for we are all victims of our own society and in our personal relationships. Marian has also distorted reality in perceiving Ainsley, Clara and the office virgins as predators, Len as a philanderer, Peter a typically successful Toronto lawyer, and in choosing Duncan over Peter, who is his opposite - immature, selfish and enigmatic.[32]

Grace contends that Marian has no alternative; she must act or be acted upon. Her attempts to escape from Peter are in reality a failure to escape from a condition she does not sufficiently comprehend. Grace concludes that both the argument and structure of the novel are circular.[33] "Marion [sic] is trapped within 'the circle game' of her own perceptions and the 'power politics' of our consumer society--the choices resolve themselves into consuming or being consumed, thus, Marion [sic] returns to the point from which she began."[34]

Circularity in Marian's quest for self-identity is demonstrated in her perception that Clara is no longer the incompetent wife and mother. Marian speaks of Clara's new show of competence, in telling Duncan that

even though she has some trouble coping with Len, who has moved in with her family because he is showing signs of regressing and cannot look after himself, "Nevertheless she had sounded more competent than usual."[35]

A return to the traditional norms of society is also shown by Ainsley's getting her man, adopting the socially imposed role of wife and mother, and choosing to spend her honeymoon in the traditional setting of Niagara Falls. Circularity is further shown in Duncan's remark when Marian fills him in on Ainsley's forthcoming marriage to Fischer: "'Well,' . . . 'I guess it's a good thing for Fischer, mankind cannot bear too much unreality. . . .'"[36] In an interview with Sherrill Grace, Margaret Atwood says that The Edible Woman makes a negative statement about society. She points out that this novel does not conform to traditional comedy. The complications remain unresolved when Marian breaks off her engagement to Peter and the wrong couple gets married. Although the author makes a negative statement about society, she maintains that The Edible Woman ends in circularity when Marian returns to an imperfect society.[37]

That Marian fails to find self-identity is finally shown at the end of the novel. Marian symbolically severs her head from her body. "She plunged her fork into the carcass, neatly severing the body from the head."[38] Not only must Marian return to the predatory society which she once rejected but she must also learn to accept her femininity in acknowledging her uniqueness in nature through procreation, thereby reconciling the split between the mental and physical parts of her being.

Catherine McLay shares Grace's belief that Marian has changed very little at the end of the novel. She is the typically sensible, clear-headed young woman of our society.[39] Marian is no longer the traditional

virgin when she breaks up with Peter. He prefers one of the office virgins to Marian and ends up marrying one of them at the end of the novel. Although Marian gains her freedom, the implications are that it is the virgins who are successful in society and are the ones who marry. Even Ainsley, who proclaimed herself to be a "feminist", accepts this view in adopting the role of wife and mother which Marian rejects.[40]

McLay remarks that Marian's quest for self-identity ends in a spiral in that she reaches a higher level of reality, when she reasons that she must find a new job, a new apartment and a new lover. Her search for self-identity is, however, circular in her return to the beginning, "And she has discovered, in a world seen as alien and threatening, the need for integration not only of mind and body but of multiple aspects of the self, a discovery which anticipates the discoveries made by the 'I' in Surfacing and Joan, in Lady Oracle."[41]

McLay goes on to say that Marian takes up an active role in life, and an affirmation of the traditional order is seen in Ainsley's marriage to Fischer, who is preoccupied with womb symbols, in Marian's observation that Ainsley can look after herself, in Peter's remark that it is nice to know that there are still some nice girls around, and in Clara's show of competence at the end of the novel.[42]

Joan, in Lady Oracle, experiences the need for integration in a threatening and alienating world, which McLay speaks of, when she finds herself helpless and alone in a foreign country. She breaks up her marriage by seeking a career of her own, as did Rose, in Who Do You Think You Are?. Joan has difficulty writing and cannot adapt to her new life in a foreign country. Joan fails to find self-fulfillment; she learns that she has made a mistake in leaving her husband and longs to recapture

his love. She sends Arthur a postcard, telling him that she is alive and wants him back:

> I sat in exile on the Roman curb, on top of my portable Olivetti in its case, and wept. Pedestrians paused; some said things to me. I wanted Arthur back, I wanted him right here, with me. If I explained, how could he be angry? I'd handled things very badly. . . .[43]

Joan was also confident of her husband's love, in the same way as was Rose, in Who Do You Think You Are?. Arthur had once crossed the sea to propose to her after she left him and returned to Toronto. Joan imagines that Arthur will again cross the ocean to return to her, as he had in the past, after she has written to him, but secretly fears that she has lost his love forever when the days roll by and she does not hear from him:

> Arthur, I thought, my eyes filling with tears, where are you? Why won't you come and find me? At any moment he might appear at the door, unexpectedly. He had done it once.[44]

Joan resolves to return home to her husband and the domestic role she once rejected. She vows to confess all in the hope of saving her marriage and freeing her friends, who are being held by the police for her murder, once her secret has been discovered by a reporter who threatens to expose her: ". . . I'll have to see Arthur, though I'm not looking forward to it, all those explanations and his expression of silent outrage."[45]

Robert Lecker observes the folly of Joan's flight from the world of reality to that of fantasy, which is initially based upon a comic structure. The adverse implications of Joan's rejection of married life in favour of seeking her own self-identity are revealed in the novel's movement towards a negation of this structure.[46]

At the beginning of the novel, Joan states, "The truth was that I dealt in hope, I offered a vision of a better world, however preposterous."[47] Joan has difficulty in shaping her own life. She portrays a fictional world of despair; trapped in this artificial universe, she finds no way of escape. Arthur does not come across the sea to rescue her. The novel ends in circularity when Joan resolves to go to the Toronto authorities to confess her faked suicide and to return to her husband.

This circular structure suggests to Lecker that the quest for self-identity, traditionally identified with narrative resolution, becomes a sham. The circular structure also suggests "that the final 'message' of this novel which parodies the motifs and conventions associated with the search for self is ironic, that irony may also constitute an implicit comment on Atwood's previous fiction, . . ."[48] Lecker's implicit argument is that the heroine's quest for self-identity remains unresolved and that Atwood's future heroines also fail to find the self-identity that her earlier heroines sought. Eli Mandel indirectly supports this view in his confirmation that Atwood tends to create self-reflexive works which are a comment on one another.[49]

Lecker observes that the circular movement of the novel also describes the theme; "reality and fantasy are one, and to believe that it is possible to escape from either is the greatest of delusions."[50] Joan tries to avoid the realities of the real world by entering a world of fiction, only to discover that she is faced with the same problems that she encountered in the real world, which are even more intense because they are distilled.[51] Lecker argues that Joan does not find self-identity

but leads us back to the beginning of the novel, where she is still another person demonstrating her ability of being many people at one time, speaking in various tongues simultaneously.[52]

Joan fails to find self-identity by the end of the novel. She acknowledges her own stupidity and cowardice in implicating her friends when she learns that they are accused of her murder: "I should have stayed where I was and faced reality," she confesses.[53]

Sherrill Grace and Catherine Sheldrick Ross both support Lecker's argument in maintaining that the novel has a circular ending. Grace believes that Joan's quest for self-identity remains unresolved at the end of the novel. Grace writes that Joan will return to Toronto to confess her escapades and will free her friends who are charged with her murder. It is Grace's opinion that nothing has changed at the end of the novel; Joan has not learned any valid lesson. "The unconscious reporter covered in blood brings Joan back to reality."[54] Joan's quest for self-identity has ended in the knowledge that she must stop writing Costume Gothics and that she will start writing science fiction instead. Joan perceives herself as an escape artist, or a person who is unwilling to face responsibility.[55]

Ross is of the same opinion as Grace, in observing that Joan's quest for self-identity is unresolved at the end of the novel; the ending of the novel must make do with a circular ending, which is in reality the beginning. Lady Oracle ends with Joan returning to her old way of life, in observing that "'a man in a bandage can be as romantic as a man in a red-lined opera cloak.'"[56]

The unnamed narrator of Surfacing also fails to find self-identity. She returns to her parents' cabin home in the northern Quebec woods to seek moral guidance from her parents. She hopes to heal the split which has occurred between her mind and body, created as a result of her quest for self-identity, which alienated her from her parents and the traditional norms they espoused. Although the narrator is looking for her father, who is missing from his cabin home, the search becomes one of personal identity on the part of the narrator, for she can no longer accept the aridity of her own society and no longer fits into the traditional world of her parents.

The author alerts us through the use of symbolism to the fact that the heroine is subconsciously carrying a burden of guilt: "A mosquito lights on my arm and I let it bite me, waiting till its abdomen globes with blood before I pop it with my thumb like a grape."[57] The blood which the heroine splatters is here symbolic of the blood she has shed through the abortion of her child. As the narrator washes the supper dishes in her parents' cabin home, the water running off the dishes containing scraps of blueberry pie is described as "reddish blue, vein colour," again denoting the blood she has shed.[58] Later when the narrator and her friends are in the woods searching for her missing father, she tells us, "I went down to the lake with the bar of soap to wash the fish blood off my hands," symbolically washing her hands of the blood of her aborted child.[59]

The sunset in the woods also resembles the colour of blood, for it is described as "reddish purple", again denoting the blood she has shed.[60] Towards the end of the novel, as the narrator prepares to make love with Joe, in the hope of being impregnated to atone for the abortion

of her child, the sunset is "red, a clear tulip colour paling to flesh webs, membrane," symbolic of the blood and the foetus of her aborted child.[61]

Back at the cabin after the narrator and her friends are unable to locate her father, she discovers her father's gift of rock paintings, believing them to be the lunatic drawings of an old man who has become bushed:

> I was expecting a report of some kind, tree growth or diseases, unfinished business; but on the top page there's only a crude drawing of a hand, done with a felt pen or a brush, and some notations: numbers, a name. I flip through the next few pages. More hands, then a stiff childish figure, faceless and minus the hands and feet, and on the next page a similar creature with two things like tree branches or antlers protruding from its head. On each of the pages are the numbers, and on some a few scrawled words: LICHENS RED CLOTHING LEFT. I can't make sense out of them. The handwriting is my father's, but changed, more hasty or careless.[62]

Upon later re-examination of her father's drawings, the narrator learns that they are not drawings but photographs, taken by her father, of original rock paintings marking the sites where powerful and protective ancient gods dwelled. She also fathoms the significance of these photographs once she discovers correspondence between her father and a university professor: "Some state that the sites of the paintings are the abodes of powerful or protective spirits, which may explain the custom, persisting in remote areas, of leaving offerings of clothing and small bundles of 'prayer' sticks."[63]

That the narrator fails in her quest for self-identity is shown in her search for these protective and powerful gods, with the help of her father's gift of maps and numbers, in the hope of finding spiritual healing and moral guidance. The narrator dives into the sacred waters,

which are symbolic of baptism or rebirth. What she discovers is her drowned father with the camera cord wound around his neck, which reminds her of the foetus of her dead child. Donald Bartlett proposes that this "mythic journey into a psychological underworld convinces her of the sanctity of life and of its double imperatives: selfhood and social commitment."[64]

Memory begins to flow back as the narrator recalls the events of the abortion, accompanied by the feelings of amputation and emptiness. She surfaces and experiences the healing powers of these powerful and protective gods. Feeling returns to her body, and she now understands that the Indians had discovered where to find salvation and had marked the sacred places, but that her father "had discovered new places, new oracles, they were things he was seeing the way I had seen, true vision; at the end, after failure of logic."[65]

The narrator concludes that she has survived the dangerous journey into the underworld and has seen true vision because of her father's gift or talisman of guides, numbers and man-animals. She, however, knows that her father's gift of knowledge is not enough to protect her:

> . . . the power from my father's intercession wasn't enough to protect me, it gave only knowledge and there were more gods than his, his were the gods of the head, antlers rooted in the brain. Not only how to see but how to act.[66]

To complete this knowledge, the narrator knows that she must search for her mother's gift of example, which will show her how to conduct her life. The narrator returns to the cabin after her mythic journey into the underworld and looks for clues which will enable her to complete her parents' gifts leading to spiritual healing and moral guidance.

The narrator finds a loose page of a drawing that she had done as a child. On the left was a pregnant woman with a round belly, with a child sticking out; opposite her was a man with horns and a barbed tail. The baby was a drawing of herself before she was born, while the man represented God. The narrator had endowed God with horns and a tail because she had then just learned from her brother about the devil; she reasoned that if the devil had horns and a tail, it would also be advantageous for God to have them. Although this old meaning is now lost to her, she is, nevertheless, aware that this drawing is a gift of maternity from her mother.

Circularity in the heroine's quest for self-identity is shown in the narrator's renewed feeling of life and a return to nature in her act of procreation, as a result of her parents' gifts. Circularity is also demonstrated in the narrator's choice of a man who is still close to nature, to father her child. Like Addie's husband, in Lives of Girls and Women, Joe has remained close to nature, unlike their friends who are "turning to metal, skins galvanizing, heads congealing to brass knobs, components and intricate wires ripening inside."[67] That Joe is close to nature and still untouched by the destructive forces of mechanization is revealed at the beginning of the novel; the narrator compares him to a species which is fast becoming extinct:

> From the side he's like the buffalo on the U.S. nickel, shaggy and blunt-snouted, with small clenched eyes and the defiant but insane look of a species once dominant, now threatened with extinction. That's how he thinks of himself too: deposed, unjustly. Secretly he would like them to set up a kind of park for him, like a bird sanctuary. Beautiful Joe.[68]

The narrator atones for the abortion of her child in emulating her mother who was close to nature:

> . . . he's holding back, he wants it to be like the city, baroque scrollwork, intricate as a computer, but I'm impatient, pleasure is redundant, the animals don't have pleasure. I guide him into me, it's the right season, I hurry.
>
> He trembles and then I can feel my lost child surfacing within me, forgiving me, rising from the lake where it has been prisoned for so long, it's eyes and teeth phosphorescent; . . . .[69]

With the help of the protective Gods, the narrator merges with nature after her act of procreation, rejecting the mechanized world of her friends by eating food in nature which is untouched by humans, and treading where only animals have travelled:

> The animals have no need for speech, why talk when you are a word
>
> I lean against a tree, I am a tree leaning . . .[70]

Through the intercession of the ancient gods, the narrator sees her mother's spirit feeding the jays, as she had once done in life, and that of her father in the form of a wolf. The narrator, who was once obsessed with finding the ghosts of her parents, releases them to nature when she discovers that they cannot see her. Margaret Atwood explains that "This means that she can't enter the world of the dead, and she realizes, OK, I've learned something. Now I have to make my own life."[71]

What the narrator learns is that she cannot live in the wilderness but must return to society with her unborn child, thereby fulfilling the socially accepted role of motherhood. Linda Rogers correctly points out that the narrator realizes that she is not an animal and cannot live alone in the wilderness, thus proving that she is dependent upon society. Rogers maintains that the heroine is not resurrected after her dive into the sacred waters but merely returns to a normal state of affairs. "Even life in the womb is surreal, grotesque. There is no state of innocence and there is no state of grace. The nightmare overcomes the dream. There

is no escape. The fiction is a glassy mirror to cold realities."[72] Rosemary Sullivan is of the same opinion; although she contends that the inconclusive ending is "one of the most evasive postures of our contemporary culture,"[73] she, nevertheless, says that the narrator learns "that she cannot abdicate from history, or from society."[74]

On the morning after the narrator sees the ghosts of her parents, she examines what she believes to be the footprints of her father, and discovers that they are her own. Although she is convinced that she has seen the ghosts of her parents, she also knows that neither her parents nor the protective gods can help her now:

> No gods to help me now, they're questionable once more, theoretical as Jesus. They've receded, back to the past, inside the skull, is it the same place. They'll never appear to me again, I can't afford it; from now on I'll have to live in the usual way, defining them by their absence; and love by its failures. power by its loss, its renunciation. I regret them; but they give only one kind of truth, one hand.[75]

The narrator now understands that her parents were human and, like herself, were not free of sin: ". . . Our father, Our mother, I pray, Reach down for me, but it won't work: they dwindle, grow, become what they were, human. Something I never gave them credit for; but their totalitarian innocence was my own."[76] Catherine McLay correctly maintains that the heroine returns to society once she recognizes her own fallibility, as well as that of the rest of society. She discovers a harmony of the self, in the integration of mind and body, reason and emotion. "Her final return to society, then, is an affirmation of her need to be human and to live with other human beings in an imperfect world. Ultimately, it is an affirmation of the self in its two faces of mind and body."[77] Once the heroine acknowledges her own humanity and guilt she no

longer views others as the enemy and accepts her own limitations, as well as those of others, and her own ability to act and to be held responsible.[78] Jerome Rosenberg shares McLay's belief that the protagonist recognizes the strengths and weaknesses of humanity at the end of the novel and that she learns that she cannot live apart from humanity. She now returns to society but does not bring with her any elixir or secret knowledge that will transform the world into a better place.[79]

Rosenberg feels that Atwood should have bridged the gap in knowledge between the silent mystical world of the deep and that of ordinary consciousness and speech, by providing some mystical insights which would dramatically alter interaction. He points out that the narrator alludes to such mystical knowledge when she refers to her nearly drowned brother. She says, "If it had happened to me I would have felt that there was something special about me, to be raised from the dead like that; I would have returned with secrets, I would have known things most people didn't."[80]

Rosenberg points out that it is precisely such knowledge which the narrator must avoid, for to possess knowledge which interprets death and enables her to see a new life vision is an unpardonable sin, and would alienate her from the rest of society. Nor must the narrator think that she is better than the rest of humanity because she is free from sin. She must acknowledge that she shares in the corruption of society:[81] "I have to recant, give up the old belief that I am powerless and because of it nothing I can do [illegible] ever hurt anyone."[82]

The narrator returns to the imperfect society which she once rejected, with the knowledge that she must learn to cope with its imperfec-

tions, for withdrawal means death: "The word games, the winning and losing games are finished; at the moment there are no others but they will have to be invented, withdrawing is no longer possible and the alternative is death."[83] Robert Lecker argues that at the end of Surfacing, the narrator has come full circle, facing an uncertain beginning.[84] Eli Mandel is more blunt in his statement: "At the end, nothing is resolved."[85] Lecker suggests that Surfacing is yet another example of Atwood's creation of self-reflexive works in which irony and ambivalence pervade the novel. He maintains that the narrator does not transcend the past by finding "new meaning in the present."[86] Lecker goes on to say that while many critics have argued that the unnamed narrator of Surfacing emerges from her descent into the primeval preconscious, armed with secret knowledge, which leads her to discover true meaning and purpose in life, it is his belief that at the end of the novel, the narrator, who remains nameless, does not "reject the artificial culture-bound aspect of her previous existence."[87]

Lecker concludes that the narrator admits that "from now on I'll have to live in the usual way,"[88] and that "the usual way" for the narrator is to be confused over her own identity. That the narrator of Surfacing is confused is shown when she looks at herself in the mirror and says, "I turn the mirror around: in it there's a creature neither animal nor human, . . ."[89] Lecker observes that the narrator becomes aware that the natural woman in modern life is equated with the center-fold body which is distinguished in culture with the "tanned body on a beach with washed hair waving like scarves; . . . ."[90] The heroine of Surfacing returns to the society of tanned bodies of sunbathers which she left behind. If she remains buried in nature, she will be viewed by the world

from which she is trying to free herself in terms of the back to nature cliché. In the last chapter, the heroine announces by her action that she is simultaneously submerged as she emerges.[91]

While the narrator has come full circle in her return to society and has not found any new knowledge, her descent into the primeval preconscious has now led her to accept her own uniqueness in nature through procreation, a role which she once rejected by agreeing to have an abortion. The narrator re-enters her own time, returning to society with her unborn child, who is "No god and perhaps not real, even that is uncertain; . . . . It might be the first one, the first true human; it must be born, allowed."[92]

In accepting Joe and in anticipating her unborn child the narrator is also open to loving and trusting and, therefore, moves back to society in a creative and responsible manner. Reason has been integrated with emotion, and the mind and the body are one when she returns to the society which she once rejected.

Annis Pratt uses Carol Christ's theory to show that the heroine of Surfacing gains spiritual insight by paying close attention to the chemistry of her body. The heroine's quest for self-identity ends in self-fulfillment and power, once she taps her natural energies and is made aware of her grounding in nature.[93] Pratt writes that Carol Christ distinguishes the spiritual quest defined as the "self's journey . . . in relation to cosmic powers," between the social quest involving a flight from "a stifling society to discover or create a different society" but, nevertheless, acknowledges that the interiority of such quests, which are characteristic of the structure of Surfacing, "may also have communal dimensions."[94]

Pratt proposes that the feminine quest for self-identity ends in circularity when the heroine of Surfacing returns to society to take up the socially accepted role which she once rejected. The narrator now feels comfortable in this role because she no longer feels inferior to the men in her society and is no longer threatened by them. This reintegration with society is now possible for her because she now views her role as central after her rebirth. No longer does she feel like a second-class citizen but is completely transformed and is wholly determined to exercise her powers and to return to the world of culture.[95]

This transformation is brought about by the union of the heroine's spiritual and psychic energies with the natural, empowering her with an impelling force which she brings to bear on her world. She is now able to shift her place from the edge of society to one that is central and dominant, once she has discovered her selfhood, in recognizing her own uniqueness in nature. Her newly gained power now enables her to push patriarchy to the edge of society, turning it inside out, where it can no longer limit her. She is turned into a victor instead of victim. While the reader does not directly experience the heroine's reintegration with society, it is made clear that the heroine will never again see herself as a second-class citizen of society.[96]

The feminine quest for self-identity ends in circularity in Life Before Man. The women in this novel have achieved the balance which Rosemary Ruether speaks of in Liberation Theology; they possess a will of their own, are well educated, creative and self-supporting. No longer do these women reject the traditional role of wife and mother in society, as had Del in Lives of Girls and Women and Marian in The Edible Woman. Although these women have achieved that level of independence which Mrs.

Jordan predicted for the generation of women to follow, they have also recognized the importance of marriage and having a family as a means of obtaining the self-fulfillment which Mrs. Jordan speaks of to her daughter in Lives of Girls and Women.

The importance of having a family is well recognized by Elizabeth, a married woman with a career of her own. She remembers how she and her sister were abducted by their childless Aunt Muriel, who had more money and power than their own mother. Elizabeth now understands that her mother was not depraved and had not sold them to her Aunt Muriel for drinking money, as her aunt had told them. She now realizes that her mother had not deserted them but had felt powerless and unequipped to look after them when her husband was no longer there, and that her aunt probably stole them from her mother while she was out looking for work. "Then, once Auntie Muriel had the children safely barricaded into her own house, she'd probably told their mother she was unfit and it could be proved in court if necessary."[97]

Elizabeth, who still feels the crippling effects of her aunt's power over her, fears losing her own children to her. She, however, visits her aunt out of defiance and cannot help flaunting them in front of her aunt, who is now childless and alone in her old age: " . . . see, these are my children. Look how beautiful, how intelligent, how normal they are. You never had children. You can't touch them. I won't let you."[98] That Elizabeth values motherhood is further shown in her fight against depression after her lover Chris commits suicide:

> I know I have to keep on living and I have no intention of doing otherwise. You don't have to worry about that. If I were going to take a carving knife to my wrists or do a swan dive off the Bloor Street Viaduct I'd have done it before

> now. I'm a mother if not exactly a wife and I take that seriously.[99]

Elizabeth does all in her power to hold on to her socially-accepted role of wife and mother. Despite the fact that Elizabeth knows that she is not exactly a model wife because of her numerous love affairs, she, nevertheless, values her position in society. She desperately tries to keep her family together when Lesje sets out to break up her marriage. Elizabeth invites Lesje to dinner when she finds out about the affair with her husband. She puts Lesje to the test and tries to discover her weakness by forcing her to participate in the party games she conducts:

> "Lesje?" Elizabeth says. "You walk the plank next." Lesje opens her mouth, then closes it. She can feel herself blushing. She knows this is not just a game, it's a challenge of some sort.[100]

The author shows that for Elizabeth, the game she is playing is one of life and death when she tells Lesje that it is her turn to walk the plank, for it involves holding on to her husband and keeping her family together.

Not only does Elizabeth value motherhood, but she also needs the emotional support and companionship that a husband provides. Like Addie, in Lives of Girls and Women, who was lonely and in need of emotional support and companionship after she became estranged from her husband, Elizabeth foresees the years of loneliness and emptiness which lie ahead of her without a husband, knowing that her children cannot fill the void:

> Already they're preparing for flight, betrayal, they will leave her, she will become their background. They will discuss her as they lie in bed with their lovers, they will use her as an explanation for everything they find idiosyncratic or painful about themselves. If she makes them feel guilty enough they'll come and visit her on weekends. Her shoulders will sag, she will have difficulty with shopping bags, she will become My Mother, pronounced with a sigh. She will

> make them cups of tea and without meaning to
> but unable to stop will pry, pry like a small
> knife into their lives.[101]

That Lesje aspires to the traditional role in society is shown in her desire to be close to nature through procreation. Lesje needs more than her career as a paleontologist in order to find self-fulfillment. She seeks to integrate herself within society by adopting the traditional role of wife and mother. Living with William out of wedlock does not bring self-fulfillment for Lesje. She seeks stability and resents the fact that William does not want to father her child:

> This is the crux: William does not want to
> have a child by her. With her. Though she's
> hinted; though she could spring one on him
> unannounced. Guess what, William, I have a bun
> in the oven. Your bun. Well, he'd say, take it
> out.[102]

Lesje is equally unhappy when she falls in love with Nate and he becomes her lover. She resents Nate's children and his still being married to Elizabeth:

> Elizabeth is the mother of his children. It's
> true she asked him to come over and help hang the
> new curtains in the children's room and it's also
> true he went; perhaps he shouldn't have. But that
> was a month and a half ago; he doesn't see why
> Lesje keeps bringing it up. They love each other,
> he tells her; who cares what's on file in the
> Registry Office? But Lesje turns away from him in
> bed, curling in on herself. Or she stays late at
> the Museum, or she brings home thick books filled
> with diagrams of fossil teeth and reads them at the
> kitchen table until she thinks he'll be asleep.[103]

Lesje again expresses the need to be close to nature through procreation when she tells Nate that she wants to have his child after he moves in with her: "A week ago Lesje raised again the subject of a child, for herself, for them. She was tentative about it; but maybe, before

she gets too old, maybe now is the right time?"[104]

Not only does Lesje seek motherhood, but she wants to have a child in wedlock. Lesje is aware of the importance of the role of wife and mother in society, and once again tries to integrate herself within society:

> Though her own conservatism, unsuspected till now, appalls her, she wants to belong, to be seen to belong; she wants to be classifiable, a member of a group. There is already a group of Mrs. Schoenhofs: one is Nate's mother, the other is the mother of his children. Lesje isn't the mother of anyone; officially she is nothing.[105]

Marriage and motherhood continue to be a mark of success for women in the society which Margaret Atwood creates in Bodily Harm. Circularity in the feminine quest for self-identity is shown in the portrayal of the ideal woman, who finds self-fulfillment through marriage and motherhood, while at the same time having a life of her own. The young female judge embraces the values which Addie prescribed for her own daughter and the generation of women to follow (Lives of Girls and Women).

The young female judge whom Rennie interviews is a perfect example for Rennie's assignment on her "'Woman of Achievement' series."[106] She is a happily married woman who runs her elegant home with perfection. The young woman has two beautiful and healthy children and an adoring husband who does not resent his wife's success because he is happy and successful in his own career. Rennie, who is only one year younger than the judge, feels inferior to her and senses that there is something missing in her own life, as she notes the ease and perfection with which the judge manages her life. "The judge had it all together and Rennie was beginning to see this as a personal affront."[107]

Rennie tries to mar this perfect picture by suggesting to the judge that she must have suffered along the road, only to discover that she rose to success with relative ease and that she enjoys her work immensely.

This young woman has found the self-fulfillment which Rosemary Ruether speaks of in Liberation Theology. She has not lost sight of her grounding in nature and is at the same time a creative and responsible member of her society, who accepts the socially imposed role of wife and mother, which does not preclude her personal growth.

Rennie and her single friend Jocasta are contrasted with the young judge in their failure to find self-fulfillment. They discover that casual relationships are unrewarding, leaving them feeling lonely and abused. Jocasta tries to keep up with the younger generation. She does a lot of moving in and out as she drifts from one love affair to another. Jocasta finds it increasingly difficult to relate to men who have taken on the mystery that women once possessed. She also finds it more and more difficult to fill her sexual needs as she grows older because of a return to chastity and a lack of sexual interest on the part of the men she meets. Jocasta reveals her frustration to Rennie when she tells her about one of her recent dinner dates:

> So I admire him some and he asks me back to his place, . . . and he wants to talk about himself some more. Okay, I don't mind listening, but all this time he doesn't touch me. What's the matter, you think I have vaginal warts, I want to ask him,
> . . .
> So nothing happens and finally I say, I'm really tired, this certainly has been nice but I've got to get home, and he says, Why don't you stay the night? Funny you should ask, I think, . . . so we go into the bedroom and I swear to God he turns around so his back is to me and he takes off all his clothes. I can't believe it, I stand there with my mouth open,

> and before you know it he's all tucked into his side of the bed, . . . so I climb into the bed, expecting to be embraced passionately, maybe he's just afraid of the light, but he says good night and turns over and goes to sleep!
>
> Talk about feeling like an asshole. Now if a girl did that, what would she be called? There I was, horny as hell from looking at his shoulders for about five hours, and he's sleeping away like a baby. So I got up and spent the night on his sofa.[108]

Rennie is equally unsuccessful in her relationships with men. She learns that her chances of integrating with society by becoming a wife and mother are over when she is told that she has cancer:

> Ready to have babies yet? the doctor asked, his standard opening joke as he snapped on his prophylactic gloves. You're heading for the cutoff point. He'd been saying this for six years. Half an hour later, everything ceased to be funny.[109]

Rennie, who has sacrificed marriage and motherhood for casual affairs with men like Jake, had paid scant attention to family life. Only once does Rennie ask Jake whether they should have a baby, to which he replies, "If you don't like the road, don't go, . . ." I'm not too good at lifetime goals. Right now I like the road."[110]

Rennie's quest for self-identity ends in circularity in her desire to return to the traditional norms of her society by having a family, now that she finds herself alone, with no one to assuage her loneliness and the pain of her impending death. Rennie also asks her doctor, only once, whether she can still have a baby after he tells her that she has cancer. Rennie's disappointment is clearly evident when Daniel tells her "It's a risk," and she sarcastically exclaims, "God forbid I should take a risk, . . ."[111]

Rennie further tries to reintegrate herself to society in her continued search for love and a lasting relationship in the face of

strong odds. Rennie longs to meet a man who will love and take care of her, filling the gap she now experiences in life. After her operation, Rennie turns to her doctor for love and emotional support because she lacks a husband and family. "She fell in love with him because he was the first thing she saw after her life had been saved."[112]

Like her friend Jocasta, Rennie learns that men are reluctant to become physically involved. Although Rennie sees in Daniel the husband who would now give her love and emotional support, he is not anxious to go to bed with her. When she tearfully summons Daniel, pretending to be on the verge of suicide, he finally consents to make love to her. Rennie feels empty and abused after they make love; she learns that Daniel does not love her but that he has merely used her to compensate for his own feeling of inadequacy:

> The fact was that he had needed something from her, which she could neither believe nor forgive. She'd been counting on him not to: she was supposed to be the needy one, but it was the other way around. He was ashamed of himself, which was the last thing she'd wanted. She felt like a vacation, Daniel's, one he thought he shouldn't have taken. She felt like a straw that had been clutched, she felt he'd been drowning. She felt raped.
>
> This is what terminal means, she thought. Get used to it.[113]

The author equates casual sex with death in Daniel's abuse of Rennie and suggests that she is now trapped in this meaningless existence which is terminal.

Rennie makes a last attempt to reintegrate with society when she hopes that Paul, a St. Antoine dope runner, will marry her. Rennie also discovers that Paul has been using her and that he has no intention of marrying her:

> Don't expect too much, he said last night.
> Too much of what? said Rennie.
> Too much of me, said Paul. He was smiling, calm as ever, but she no longer found this reassuring. . . .
> Next you're going to tell me there isn't very much, said Rennie. Right?
> Maybe there isn't, said Paul.
> Rennie didn't know she was expecting anything until she was told not to. Now they seem vast, sentimental, grandoise, technicolour, magical, ridiculous, her expectations.
> What am I doing here? thinks Rennie. I should take my body and run. I don't need another man I'm not supposed to expect anything from.[114]

Paul eventually makes it crystal clear to Rennie that he has no intention of taking her seriously when he tells her that their relationship is merely transient: "'You're on vacation.' He rolls over on top of her. 'When you go back home, I'll take you seriously.'"[115] Nevertheless, Rennie continues to have fantasies of being Paul's wife as she washes up the supper dishes in his home. She is startled by footsteps and suddenly acts like a helpless and dependent wife: "Wiping her hands on the dishtowel, she goes to the second bedroom and knocks at the door. 'Paul,' she says. Feeling like a wife. Incapable."[116]

Rennie fails to find self-fulfillment in her quest for self-identity. Not only does she face death, but she is left alone and unprotected to face the island authorities, who suspect her of being politically involved, after Paul deserts her. "No goodbye kiss and just as well, she didn't want anything against her mouth just now. They touched hands for a moment, that was all."[117]

The feminine quest for self-identity comes full circle in The Handmaid's Tale, a story set in the near future in a locale resembling Cambridge, Massachusetts, which has been taken over by a new military

régime. In this new society women are relegated to the traditional role of wife and mother; childbearing is exalted in the Republic of Gilead in an attempt to reverse the rapidly declining birth rate of the old order, which has been brought about by abortion, the spread of sexually transmitted diseases and the effects of nuclear waste.

We witness a return to the type of society which is reminiscent of that portrayed by Alice Munro in Lives of Girls and Women. The women in this new society are uneducated and are content to assume the socially prescribed role of wife and mother. They derive their identity from the man they marry or the male member of their family with whom they live.

The Commanders' Wives are at the top of the social scale in the Republic of Gilead. They derive their identity and status in society from the Commander they marry. The Commanders' Wives lead uneventful and unfulfilling lives, similar to the housewives in Lives of Girls and Women. They spend their time gardening, sewing, knitting and unravelling their knitting:

> This garden is the domain of the Commander's Wife. . . . Many of the Wives have such gardens, it's something for them to order and maintain and care for.
>
> . . . Sometimes the Commander's Wife has a chair brought out, and just sits in it, in her garden. From a distance it looks like peace.
>
> . . . Perhaps she's sewing, in the sitting room, with her left foot on the footstool, because of her arthritis. Or knitting scarves, for the Angels at the front lines. . . .
>
> Sometimes I think these scarves aren't sent to Angels at all, but unravelled and turned back into balls of yarn, to be knitted again in their turn. Maybe it's just something to keep the Wives busy, to give them a sense of purpose.[118]

The author here alludes to the meaningless existence that these women lead, which on the surface appears to be peaceful, as well as to the lack of purpose in their lives, in their useless task of knitting and unravelling.

The Commanders' Wives while away their time by giving tea parties and running down the Handmaids who are assigned to their households. The Commanders' Wives are as empty headed and without purpose as the women who married doctors and lawyers in Lives of Girls and Women:

> Probably Serena Joy has been here before, to this house, for tea. Probably Ofwarren, formerly that whiny bitch Janine, was paraded out in front of her, her and the other Wives, so they could see her belly, feel it perhaps, and congratulate the Wife. A strong girl, good muscles. No Agent Orange in her family, we checked the records, you can never be too careful. . . .
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Such a, so well behaved, not surly like some of them, do their job and that's that. More like a daughter to you, as you might say. One of the family. Comfortable matronly chuckles. That's all dear, you can go back to your room.
>
> And after she's gone: Little whores, all of them, but still, you can't be choosy. You take what they hand out, right, girls? That from the Commander's Wife.[119]

The Commanders' Wives witness the Handmaids giving birth, along with the other women in the community, turning it into a celebration which gives them an excuse for eating and drinking, as is demonstrated when Janine gives birth: "First they'll wait for the results, then they'll pig out."[120]

A return to the traditional order of society is demonstrated in restricting education to men, as was the case in the society in Lives of Girls and Women, where education for women was viewed as indecent and a detriment to their chances of marriage. The narrator discovers

that Serena Joy is forbidden to share the literary world of her husband when the Commander summons Offred to his room to play Scrabble, which is forbidden for his wife: "Now it's dangerous. Now it's indecent. Now it's something he can't do with his wife."[121]

A return to the traditional norms of society is also shown in the social position of women in the Republic of Gilead. Econowives are women who marry low ranking men and who perform any chores they are capable of doing. Like the housewives on Flats Road, in Lives of Girls and Women, these women remain uneducated and are trapped in the poverty into which they are born, without any hope of freeing themselves. The Marthas are unmarried women who are no longer of marriageable and fertile age. These women are content to perform the cooking and household chores in the homes of the Commanders to whom they have been assigned; they derive their identity from the household of the Commander they serve, much in the same way as the aunts in Lives of Girls and Women, who live and serve in their brother's home.

Young women are compelled by society to guard their virginity in exchange for marriage and motherhood, as were the young women in Lives of Girls and Women. In this puritanical society of Gilead, young men and women wed in arranged groups. Young women have no prior contact with men and never experience love and romance. Marriage is for the sole purpose of procreation. "The marriages are of course arranged."[122]

Circularity in the feminine quest for self-identity is finally shown in the complete loss of the freedom and identity which the women in the seventies and eighties had fought to achieve prior to being taken over by this new military regime of Gilead.

The narrator gradually reconstructs the events of her past leading up to the formation of this new regime. She first experiences a loss of freedom when her sizeable bank account is frozen by the new republic, and is unable to withdraw money from her account. The narrator notices that the woman who is usually at the corner store has been replaced by a man. He punches in her account number and when the red light appears, he tells her that it is no longer valid. The narrator expresses disbelief when she says, "You must have made a mistake, . . . Try it again."[123] The man shrugs, giving her an exasperated smile, and tries her number again. The narrator now sees that the man has used the right number but again sees the red light.

The narrator and the women of the old order also lose their freedom to work when they are dismissed, without notice, from their positions by their supervisor. He gives them ten minutes to gather up their belongings, under the supervision of armed guards, who stand in the corridor: "I have to let you go, he said. It's the law, I have to. I have to let you all go."[124]

The narrator discovers from her best friend Moira, who comes to the narrator's home after she is fired, that women's freedom has further been curtailed: "Women can't hold property any more, she said. It's a new law."[125] This loss of freedom to own bank accounts, work and possess property renders the women of the old order powerless. Moira explains the reason for this curtailment of freedom:

> They had to do it that way, the Compucounts and the jobs both at once. Can you picture the airports, otherwise? They don't want us going anywhere, you can bet on that.[126]

With this loss of freedom, the narrator finds herself totally dependent upon her husband and begins to feel helpless and patronized by him: "We'll get through it, he said, hugging me. You don't know what it's like, I said. I feel as if somebody cut off my feet."[127] The narrator discovers that her husband is not overly upset over her loss of independence, telling her that it is only a job and that he will look after her. Her own resentment is clearly expressed when she says, "I guess you get all my money, . . . And I'm not even dead."[128] Furthermore, the narrator's husband does not encourage her to protest against her loss of freedom. The narrator falls into her new domestic role somewhat reluctantly. Luke discourages her from going on marches, telling her that she has her own family to look after. The narrator tries to adjust to domestic life by doing more housework and baking. She "tried not to cry at mealtimes."[129]

The author shows that although women have a new freedom, society has not fully accepted this change. Men still continue to associate women with the domestic role which was imposed by society. In actual fact, although women value their own independence, men secretly enjoy having a woman at home to look after the domestic needs of the family, and having a woman dependent upon them.

It is clear to the narrator that the balance of power has shifted in her own household and that her husband enjoys her being dependent upon him. With this loss of independence is a loss of self-hood; no longer does the narrator feel equal to her husband but feels that she is merely his possession: "He doesn't mind this, I thought. He doesn't mind it at all. Maybe he even likes it. We are not each other's, my

more. Instead, I am his."[130]

The narrator suddenly loses her freedom of choice, speech and mobility. As a result of her marriage to a divorced man, which is illegal under the new régime, she loses her baby to a childless family, and her husband is shot when they are trying to cross the border to freedom. She finds herself drugged and imprisoned at the Red Centre with similar women of childbearing age. These women are being recruited for a tour of duty of two years, during which time they will pass from one childless home to another, in order to reverse the rapidly declining birth rate. Aunt Lydia tells them to forget the past and teaches them to submit to sex without emotion with aging Commanders for the sole purpose of procreation: "Arms at the sides, knees bent, lift the pelvis, roll the backbone down. Tuck. Again. Breathe in to the count of five, hold, expel."[131]

These women, who are known to the community as Handmaids, are dressed in red, except for a white ruffle around the face which prevents them from seeing and being seen. They are forbidden to speak to one another or to have any emotional or physical contact. They are beaten by the Aunts with electric prods when they disobey. It is only after the Handmaids have gone to bed and once the Aunts have slackened their guard, that they dare to reach out to one another: "We learned to whisper almost without sound. . . . and touch each other's hands across space. We learned to lip-read, . . . watching each other's mouths."[132]

Not only do these women lose their freedom of choice and speech, but they are continuously guarded, even when they are out walking. The narrator misses the days of freedom when women were free to walk the

streets unprotected. She also misses having her own money to buy the clothes of her own choice. The narrator expresses this loss of freedom when she says: "I think about having such control. Now we walk along the same streets, in red pairs, and no man shouts obscenities at us, speaks to us, touches us. No one whistles."[133] The narrator tells us that although the Angels who guard the Handmaids are objects of fear, so hungry are they for human contact and freedom that they would have gladly offered their bodies to them, which they no longer owned: "If only we could talk to them. Something could be exchanged, we thought, some deal made, some trade-off, we still had our bodies. That was our fantasy."[134]

The narrator further loses her freedom to read and write. She has nothing to read, except for the word FAITH, which is embroidered on a small pillow that has been overlooked in her room, and she fears that she will be discovered: "If I were caught doing it, would it count? I didn't put the cushion here myself."[135] We learn from the narrator that she is prohibited from writing, in the narration of her story. She says, "It isn't a story I'm telling. It's also a story I'm telling, in my head, as I go along. Tell, rather than write, because I have nothing to write with and writing is in any case forbidden."[136]

Finally, the narrator experiences a loss of freedom in being forced to procreate against her will. The Handmaids are trained to become vessels for procreation at the Red Centre They are indoctrinated by being shown porno movies, typical of the seventies and eighties when women fought for "liberation". They are also shown documentaries of Unwomen who, according to the Aunts, wasted their time crusading for women's rights and abortion, a crime now punishable by

death. In one of these documentaries the narrator's own mother is shown as an example of a woman who defied society by having a child out of wedlock and who fought for abortion:

> My young mother, younger than I remember her, as young as she must have been once before I was born. . . . She's wearing the kind of outfit Aunt Lydia told us was typical of Unwomen in those days, overall jeans with a green and mauve plaid shirt underneath and sneakers on her feet; . . . . She's in a group of other women, dressed in the same fashion; she's holding a stick, no, it's part of a banner, the handle. The camera pans up and we see the writing, in paint on what must have been a bedsheet: TAKE BACK THE NIGHT. This hasn't been blacked out, even though we aren't supposed to be reading. The women around me breathe in, there's a stirring in the room, like wind over grass. Is this an oversight, have we gotten away with something? Or is this a thing we're intended to see, to remind us of the old days of no safety?
>
> Behind this sign there are other signs, and the camera notices them briefly: FREEDOM TO CHOOSE: EVERY BABY A WANTED BABY. RECAPTURE OUR BODIES. DO YOU BELIEVE A WOMAN'S PLACE IS ON THE KITCHEN TABLE? Under the last sign there's a line drawing of woman's body, lying on a table, blood dripping out of it.[137]

The narrator nostalgically remembers her mother in her fight for freedom, their differences of opinion, and now longs for her mother and the freedom she has lost: "I want her back. I want everything back, the way it was. But there is no point to it, this wanting."[138]

Finally, the narrator loses all identity when she is assigned to the household of a Commander called Fred and is given the name Offred. Her new name indicates that she now belongs to the household of Fred, until she provides the household with his child. The narrator is destined never to regain her own identity, for once she gives birth to Fred's baby, she will be reassigned to another Commander, from whom she will assume a new identity: "She'll be allowed to nurse the baby, for a few months, they believe in mother's milk. After that she'll be transferred, to see if she can do it again, with someone else who needs

a turn."[139]

For Offred there is no escape from this never-ending sexual slavery of passing from one Commander's bed to another. Offred's loss of identity is aptly expressed by Amin Malak: "The women then become possessed articles, mere appendages to those men who exercise sexual mastery over them."[140]

Offred is also ever fearful of being declared an Unwoman, who is no longer able to bear healthy childre and of being banished to the Colonies, where women are slave labourers, cleaning up nuclear waste. Offred, who is a victim of this puritanical military society, contemplates her position as she returns home after having witnessed one of the Handmaids giving birth. She blames her present predicament on her mother and the women of her generation who fought for a women's society:

> By now I'm wrung out, exhausted. My breasts are painful, they're leaking a little. Fake milk, it happens this way with some of us. We sit on our benches, facing one another, as we are transported; we're without emotion now, almost without feeling, we might be bundles of red cloth. We ache. Each of us holds in her lap a phantom, a ghost baby. What confronts us, now the excitement's over, is our own failure. Mother, I think. Wherever you may be. Can you hear me? You wanted a women's culture. Well, now there is one. It isn't what you meant, but it exists. Be thankful for small mercies.[141]

The author cautions women that they must guard against carrying their fight for equality to excess. She also warns that there is a danger for future generations of women who forsake their grounding in nature through motherhood in favour of sexual and economic equality with men in our society; women risk losing their uniqueness in nature or their true identity, which is that of being a childbearing woman.

Atwood further points to the danger of sexual liberation for women, which can lead to infertility through the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, resulting in a drastically declining birth rate, similar to that of the Republic of Gilead.

The author finally cautions that women must guard against bringing about a society they neither envisioned nor hoped for, through their fight for equality.

ENDNOTES

CHAPTER IV

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[9]Ruether, "Mother Earth and the Megamachine," p. 124.

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[15]Robert Lecker, "Janus through the Looking Glass: Atwood's First Three Novels," The Art of Margaret Atwood, ed. Arnold E. and Cathy N. Davidson (Toronto, 1981), p. 179.

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[17]Lecker, "Janus through the Looking Glass: Atwood's First Three Novels," p. 179.

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[29]Ibid., p. 284.

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[37]Grace, Violent Duality - a study of Margaret Atwood, pp. 95-96.

[38]Atwood, The Edible Woman, p. 286.

[39]Catherine McLay, "The Dark Voyage: The Edible Woman as Romance," The Art of Margaret Atwood, ed. Arnold E. and Cathy N. Davidson (Toronto, 1981), p. 123.

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[41]Ibid., p. 126.

[42]McLay, "The Dark Voyage: The Edible Woman as Romance," p. 138.

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CONCLUSION

It has been shown that in the early writings of Margaret Atwood and Alice Munro, the protagonists who embark on the road to self-identity stem from a poor and uneducated background or a small-town environment. These women are not content to continue in the cycle of poverty into which they are born or to leave their fate to chance. They take destiny into their own hands, as did Addie and Del, in Lives of Girls and Women, when they tried to transcend their poor small-town background by seeking learning. Similarly, Marian, in The Edible Woman, who comes from a small town where young women must guard their reputation in exchange for husband and family, pursues her own self-identity by gaining an education and becoming self-supporting instead of relying on a husband to secure her place in society.

The success of the protagonists in the novels of Atwood and Munro, in freeing themselves from the traditional norms of their society, is largely due to their personalities. Their pride, intelligence, ambitious nature and love of freedom do not enable them to be content in the traditional role outlined by society. These women look for a greater challenge than domesticity. Their autonomous nature leads them to break away from society, as does Rose in Who Do You Think You Are?, when she abandons a comfortable home and marriage in exchange for seeking her own self-identity.

The protagonists in the writings of Atwood and Munro succeed in finding equality with the men in their society; they become as sexually

free as men and are as economically successful, but do not find happiness. In their quest for self-identity, these women fail to combine femininity with the success which is usually associated with the men in their society. They discover that men are attracted to beauty and femininity, or the characteristics which are usually associated with the Eros powers of relatedness, sensation, and intuition, which are underdeveloped in their own personality. The protagonists, in the writings of both Atwood and Munro, are abandoned by the men in their culture when they neglect their feminine powers and grow more masculine in developing their masculine Logos powers of initiative, courage, objectivity and wisdom. These women suffer psychologically when they find themselves lonely, isolated and alienated from the rest of society.

Women reach a higher level of reality when they discover that they have distorted reality in believing that self-fulfillment lies in assuming the masculine role in society at the expense of denying their own femininity. There is a new development in the quest for self-identity when women once again seek to reintegrate themselves within the bounds of society, in the same manner as the young female judge in Bodily Harm who successfully combines a career with marriage and motherhood.

Although women change dramatically during the course of their quest for self-identity, society does not alter to any noticeable extent. Men continue to admire women who do not openly flaunt their love of knowledge and prefer women who adhere to the domestic role, as did Rose's father in Who Do You Think You Are?. Marriage and motherhood continue to be marks of success for women in a patriarchal society. Men still associate women with the domestic role, as did the Polish Count, in

Lady Oracle, who believed that men were the great thinkers and warriors, while women only knew about babies and sewing. Rennie, in Bodily Harm, who wanted to be a doctor like her grandfather, also discovers that it is the men in society who hold the important positions. Men were doctors, while women had the thankless task of rolling bandages. Lesje, in Life Before Man, also discovers that a single woman has no status in society; although she is self-supporting as a paleontologist, she wants to marry Nate and to have his child in order to belong to society. Men continue to enjoy having a woman dependent upon them and are content to have a woman to look after the domestic needs of the family, as is the case for the narrator's husband in The Handmaid's Tale, when she loses her job and is completely dependent upon him.

It can finally be concluded that although women must continue to seek education and the right to be self-supporting, they must not neglect their femininity. Women must also earn the respect and acceptance of the men in their culture, if they are to co-exist with men in a harmonious manner. Moreover, women should not demean their role of wife and mother in society. Motherhood, which is unique to women, should be viewed as a means of strength and self-fulfillment.

While it is important for both men and women to be self-sufficient in a materialistic society, it is equally important to have the love and emotional support which is required to fill the emotional needs of all human beings. This emotional need has been shown to be important to the happiness of the heroines of both Margaret Atwood and Alice Munro. The women in the novels of both Atwood and Munro have discovered that although they have achieved equality with the men in their culture, they

have failed to find self-fulfillment when they are rejected by the men in their culture and find themselves lonely and alienated from the rest of society. Hence, the domestic role of women, who create a happy and secure home environment, should not be minimized in our own generation, as well as in the generations that follow.

Finally, women must seek a healthy balance in their personal lives. They must guard against bringing about a morally corrupt society that may endanger a woman's uniqueness in nature through the spread of sexually transmitted diseases or a society that is as cold, loveless and puritanical as the one found in the Republic of Gilead in The Handmaid's Tale, which distorts the positive forces of nature by forcing women to procreate against their own will.

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