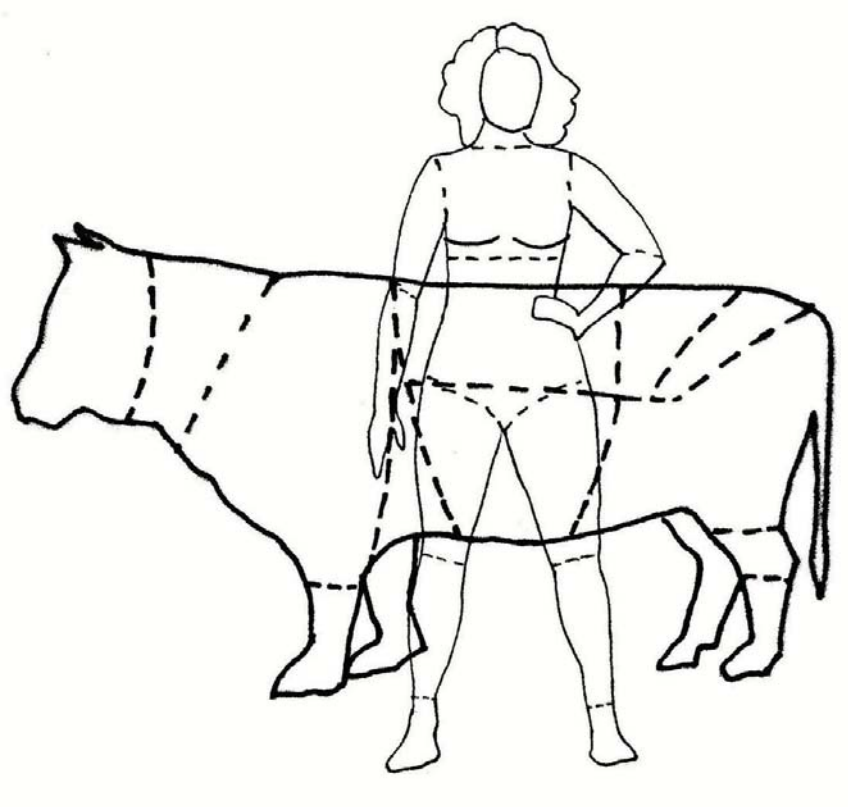
JYVÄSKYLÄ STUDIES IN EDUCATION, PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIAL RESEARCH
312

Johanna Lahikainen

"You look delicious"

Food, Eating, and Hunger in Margaret Atwood's Novels



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UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

JYVÄSKYLÄ 2007

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation analyses the motif of food, eating, and hunger in novels by the Canadian author Margaret Atwood. The primary material consists of ten novels: *The Edible Woman* (1969), *Surfacing* (1972), *Lady Oracle* (1976), *Life Before Man* (1979), *Bodily Harm* (1981), *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), *Cat's Eye* (1988), *The Robber Bride* (1993), *Alias Grace* (1996) and *The Blind Assassin* (2000).

The motif of food, eating, and hunger is most explicit in *The Edible Woman* and *Lady Oracle*. In other novels it is more implicit, an undercurrent.

Food and eating do not only have tangible representation, but a symbolic, metaphorical level. Representation of food, eating, and hunger in fiction is intertwined with the issues of body, power, otherness, gender, class, ethnic orientation, religion and experience.

This dissertation's methodological basis lies in feminist literary criticism, and feminist psychoanalytic literary criticism. To be more specific, this work relies on feminist close reading and feminist readership theory, and feminist object-relations theory. Both of these approaches are needed in order to give an adequately multifaceted reading of Atwood's rich and complex use of the motif of food, eating, and hunger.

The motif is a way of portraying things, which might otherwise be silent, would lack words or would be too banal when put in words: such as depression, fear, pleasure and feeling of deplacedness. It is often a tool for depicting the often-violent sexual difference. The motif appears in connection with the experience of power and powerlessness in relationships, as well as repressed, problematic or cherished memories. Atwood's novels present a fictional world where the motif of food and eating is one way of portraying the characters' situations, feelings and possibilities in life.

Atwood's novels are in dialogue with feminism and psychoanalytic thinking. Her protagonists are traumatised, divided selves, and this traumatisation is visible in the novels' narratives and narration. They tell their story in bits and pieces, in a lingering style, which engages the reader. They see themselves as faulty and unreliable narrators, and often ponder and apologise for this. Readers, myself and others, can become implicated, emotionally engaged with textual others, e.g. narrators or characters. This dissertation explores implicated readers' reactions to the novels' endings.

Key words: Food, eating, hunger, Margaret Atwood, feminist close reading, implicated reading, feminist object-relations theory

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September 2007 Johanna Lahikainen

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Eating is our earliest metaphor, preceding our consciousness of gender difference, race, nationality and language. We eat before we talk. (Atwood 1988, 53.)

It's [death] one of the great themes of literature, along with love, war, nature – and what else? Meals, perhaps. There are a lot of meals in my writing. Meals are more precise than deaths. (Atwood and Beaulieu 1998, 120.)

[Food] articulates in concrete terms what is oftentimes vague, internal, abstract. (…) Food cooked, eaten, and thought about provides a metaphoric matrix, a language that allows us a way to get at the uncertainty, the ineffable qualities of life. (Schofield 1989, 1.)

Margaret Atwood's novels and their abbreviations in this work

The Edible Woman	1969	EW
Surfacing	1972	S
Lady Oracle	1976	LO
Life Before Man	1979	LBM
Bodily Harm	1981	BH
The Handmaid's Tale	1985	HMT
Cat's Eye	1988	CE
The Robber Bride	1993	RB
Alias Grace	1996	AG
The Blind Assassin	2000	BA

1 INTRODUCTION

Food is essential for all living creatures. The distinguished Canadian author Margaret Atwood has written: "Eating is our earliest metaphor, preceding our consciousness of gender difference, race, nationality and language. We eat before we talk" (Atwood 1988, 53). Food and eating do not only have tangible representation, but, as Atwood above states, a symbolic, metaphorical level. This symbolic aspect is of great importance: the images and metaphors of eating and food express much more of human life than one would think at first.

According to Mary Anne Schofield, food

> articulates in concrete terms what is oftentimes vague, internal, abstract. (…) Food cooked, eaten, and thought about provides a metaphoric matrix, a language that allows us a way to get at the uncertainty, the ineffable qualities of life. (Schofield 1989, 1; see also Lupton 1996, 8; Sceats 2000, 1; Parker 1995, 367; Nicholson 1987, 38.)

In literature, then, metaphors of food are important and worthy of study. Representation of food, eating, and hunger in fiction is intertwined with the issues of body, power, otherness, gender, class, ethnic orientation, religion and experience (see e.g. Kainulainen and Parente–Čapková 2006, 8.)

Food, eating, and hunger have always been a motif in narratives. As Elaine Risley, the protagonist of Atwood's seventh novel *Cat's Eye* thinks, the story of "Eve and the Fall (…) was only about eating" (CE, 286). In the present time, writing about food is as strong as ever, or, if possible, even more intense. In the area of fiction, writers ponder food issues, and, for example, detective novel writers publish cookbooks, with recipes for dishes and drinks represented in their fictional books.[1] There is a significant amount of academic writing on the subject of food and eating, from famine in the third world countries to the analyses of obesity, and from studies on anorexia nervosa, bulimia and compulsive eating to explorations in various writers' and artists' food motifs.

To some writers, food and eating have many important functions in the narrative. One of these writers is Margaret Atwood. For her, food is an issue of politics: "By 'politics'… I mean who is entitled to do what to whom, with impunity; who profits by it; and who therefore eats what" (Atwood 1982, 394;

Stein 1999, 75). This sentence politicises several senses of eating: the symbolic eating and the real activity, which we practice daily.

Atwood's interest in food and eating is strong. Not only does she use food metaphors extensively in her fiction, but she has also edited *The CanLit Foodbook*, a fundraiser for imprisoned writers around the world. The book contains recipes and food descriptions from Canadian literature and writers. Her knowledge of practices and values, the theory around food and eating is notable. According to her, authors use food and eating "because they reveal character, slimy as well as delectable, or provide metaphors or jumping-off points into the ineffable or the inferno" (Atwood 1988, 52).

We are not only physically, but mentally "hungry". We often see, especially as children, other people as satisfiers or deniers or our needs. We do not live on bread alone, we need interaction with other people. We need mental food; we need nourishment from others. Physical and mental nourishment are necessary for our survival, and they are tied to issues of power and gender.

In this dissertation I examine the motif of food, eating, and hunger, concrete and symbolic in Margaret Atwood's ten novels from *The Edible Woman* (1969) to *The Blind Assassin* (2000).

The term motif is one of the basic concepts of literary criticism. Motif comes from thematics, which is a field of literary criticism. The main concept of the stream is theme, and motif is its subclass. Theme is what "the literary work is about", but it should be distinguished from text's subject. Literary work's subject is concrete; its theme more abstract. If novel's subject is marriage, its theme might be problems in that marriage. Theme crystallises the work's meaning, its message to the reader. Some critics argue that the meaning is inherent in the text, regardless of its reader, and some critics insist that each reader interprets the meaning. (Suomela 2001, 141-144; Rimmon-Kenan 1995, 9.)

Motif is a component, a piece of the work's theme. There can be several motifs, which put together construct the novel's theme, its "aboutness", its meaning. (Suomela 2001, 144-145; Segre 1995, 25; Rimmon-Kenan 1995, 9.) If the novel's theme is marriage's problems, its motifs could be adultery, desire, conflict between dependency and independency, iterative image of a wedding cake et cetera.[3]

Many Atwood scholars have noted the importance of food in Atwood's fiction, but only a few had explored it further (e.g. Sceats 2000; Parker 1995). This work dedicates itself to this topic.

This dissertation's methodological basis lies in feminist literary criticism, and feminist psychoanalytic literary criticism. To be more specific, I rely on feminist close reading and feminist readership theory, and feminist object-relations theory.

In my opinion, both of these approaches, the feminist close reading and psychoanalytic approach, are needed in order to give an adequately multifaceted reading of Atwood's rich and complex use of the motif of food, eating, and hunger.

I see that the motif of food, in Atwood's novels, is a way of portraying things, which might otherwise be silent, would lack words or would be too

banal when put in words: such as depression, fear, pleasure and feeling of deplacedness. It is often a tool for depicting the often-violent sexual difference. The motif appears in connection with the experience of power and powerlessness in relationships, as well as repressed, problematic or cherished memories. Atwood's novels present a fictional world where the motif of food and eating is one way of portraying the characters' situations, feelings and possibilities in life.

In one interview, Margaret Atwood has said the following of her novel *Cat's Eye*:

> Part of fiction writing I think is a celebration of the physical world we know — and when you're writing about the past, it's a physical world that's vanished. So the impulse is partly elegiac. And partly it's an attempt to stop or bring back time. (Atwood in Ingersoll 1992, 236-237.)

This attempt to celebrate and describe the present world, which will be history, and the times that already are history, is visible in the food motif in Atwood's novels. Food is an essential part of time to Atwood's protagonists. It is connected with past and present happiness and unhappiness. The food motif is sometimes decorative, an illustration of time and place, but usually it is suggestive of something deeper in the protagonists' lives. It is coloured by strong feelings, be it nostalgia for one's youth, or symbolic hunger for love, companionship, freedom, or supporting community.

The motif of food, eating, and hunger is most explicit in *The Edible Woman* and *Lady Oracle*. In other novels it is more implicit, an undercurrent. In *Alias Grace* and *The Blind Assassin* this undercurrent of food is stronger than in others, but in all her novels it is present.

The motif of food is almost always visible in Atwood's novels: usually one cannot read five pages of Atwood's novel without a depiction of food, such as tea making, picnic, or dinner. The characters' physical hunger or lack of it, their eating or non-eating, cooking and the food they eat are portrayed, sometimes in detail. Symbolic hunger is present in the relationships between the characters and their vision of others. The heterosexual intimate relationships of the novels are narrated with images of symbolic hunting and symbolic cannibalism (e.g. McLay 1981, 128; Parker 1995, 36[4]). Characters "hunt" each other in order to get something, for instance sex, marriage or pregnancy. Hunters can be depicted as meat-eating plants and their victims as carcasses of meat in the butcher's shop.

1.1 The Political Writer

> Literature is political. (Fetterley 1981, xi.)

> **Fitz Gerald**: How do you react to critics who label you a political writer?
> **Atwood**: I *am* a political writer. (…) The easy answer is that everything is "political". (Atwood in Fitz Gerald and Crabbe 1992, 137.)

> Women are human beings; they are equal human beings. I happen to believe that. And I will fight to eliminate inequalities as I have done. (…) You know, women are equal human beings. That also means they're equally fallible. (Atwood in Meese 1992, 183.)

Margaret Atwood is often described as a political writer, who raises difficult questions and criticises inequality. She is a member of the Amnesty International and writer's organisations such as P.E.N. and the Writer's Union of Canada (of which she is a founding member). She was even asked to run for the mayor of Toronto in 1988, but she refused (Cooke 1998, 290).

Atwood is very observant with inequalities and differences between genders, classes and nationalities in her fiction, non-fiction and interviews. Labels like feminism, human rights, nationalism, leftist values and anti-Americanism are often used to characterise her writing and activities.4 She herself is not willing to portray herself with "isms", but seems to think that political commentary is a given part of being a writer:

> When you begin to write, you deal with your immediate surroundings; as you grow, your immediate surroundings become larger. (…) I began as a profoundly apolitical writer, but then I began to do what all novelists and some poets do: I began to describe the world around me. (Atwood 1982, 14-15.)

Atwood seems to want to deny labels in order to avoid being categorised too rigidly. She is familiar with the literary circle and with the academic world where politics can often be seen negative: writer's work can be dismissed, ignored or belittled by calling her, for example, feminist, and her work as propaganda.

In addition to the above labelling, Atwood has repeatedly resisted the often-problematic autobiographical reading of her fiction. The following comment on Luce Irigaray by Margaret Whitford could also be applied to Margaret Atwood:

> This is not just a personal stance of suspicious defensiveness, but the well-founded realization that one way of neutralizing a woman thinker whose work is radically challenging is to 'reduce' her to her biography (…) The topoi of Simone de Beauvoir's reception include: reducing the book to the woman, by focusing on her appearance or her relation with Sartre; using the personal to discredit the political, by reducing her political commitments to emotional problems; representing her as a cold and uncaring political woman (read: not really a woman); or presenting her as a bluestocking (again, read: unfeminine) (Whitford 1991, 1-2.)

Although it is important not to forget the author's life altogether, we have to be careful not to fall into this sexist trap. Atwood has been careful not to give the impression that her oeuvre would tell of her life, past or present. This stance is easy to understand. As Atwood remarks, often the admitted resemblance of life and fiction may be used to undermine the literary value of writing, especially if the writer is female (Atwood in Oates 1992, 72).

In an interview given to Finnish women's magazine *Anna*, Atwood begins the discussion by saying that she doesn't want to speak of possible autobiographical links of the book in question, *The Blind Assassin* (Knutson 2000, 77). She has also stressed that her childhood was happy and she is "[u]sing other people's dreadful childhoods" as her material (Atwood in Lyons 1992, 221).

Atwood is also an academic expert of literature, graduated with honours in English. Since Atwood knows literary theory, it is even more understandable that she has a doubtful stance against simple flattening of the fiction by merging the protagonist and author.

The fundamental quadruple of literary criticism consists of author, text, reader and context. There are several views of their order and importance. Some literary critics concentrate on the author and emphasise writer's biography and/or intention. Other scholars, often influenced by The New Criticism of the 1950s see that the text is autonomous. Knowledge of its writing context is not necessary and readers with proper literary competence will always interpret the text correctly. Some literary critics emphasise the reader: the text is not alive without its reader, who may interpret it in various ways. Especially feminist critics argue that the context is important. Gender, nationality, class, ethnic origin and sexual preference influence writing, reading, interpreting and publishing. Most scholars agree that all these aspects of literary criticism and interpretation are important, but it is often meaningful and practical to emphasise one or two of these viewpoints. (See e.g. Mills 1995, 9; Kurikka 2006, 15, 26-27, 29-30, 35; Parente-Čapková 2006, 197; Tuhkanen 2006, 61, 63, 72; Burke 2006, 45; Mikkonen 2001, 66, 68, 70.)

Writer's intention is one of the basic questions in literary theory. How aware the writer is of her text? Should we take her intention seriously, as our starting point or as an interesting curiosity? Is it possible to find out the writer's true intention at the time of writing? Can even the writer know what it was? Which one is more important, writer's or reader's view of the text? (See e.g. Kaarto 2006, 84, 87, 104; Burke 2006, 49-50; Mikkonen 2001, 79-80.)

Writing is a multifaceted and complex activity. Writer might aim to say something, but language and subconscious forces will alter and colour this message. Writing can often surprise its writer, and a writer can be unaware of certain structures she has used or which – one might argue – have used her. There is no guarantee that the result is what the writer has intended. Fiction is open to multiple interpretations; art is always more than its components. (Morris 1997, 27, 108, 166, 190; Burke 2006, 47; Kaarto 2006, 84, 87, 104; Mikkonen 2001, 72.)

After this discussion we can now safely move to Atwood's biography.

Margaret Eleanor Atwood was born on 18th of November in 1939. Her mother Margaret Killam Atwood was a teacher, described by her daughter as "a very lively person who would rather skate than scrub floors (…) a tomboy". His father Carl Edmund Atwood was a scientist, biologist specialised in insects, "who reads a great deal of history and has a mind like Leopold Bloom's". (Atwood in Oates 1992, 70). She has an older brother Harold (1937-) and a younger sister Ruth (1951-). Because of her father's fieldwork, the family spent years living in the Northern Canada's bushes. This saved Margaret and her brother from going school for the early years; their mother taught them. This Atwood finds "a definite advantage" (ibid.).

After years of travelling Atwood's family moved to Toronto where her father worked at the University of Toronto, but even after this they used to leave the city for summers in order for their father to do research. The travelling life has continued in Atwood's adulthood (she has travelled extensively, visiting, for example, Afghanistan).

Depending on the source, Atwood started writing at the age of five or even as late at the age of sixteen. Both are probably right: the difference is in how you define writing. As a girl Atwood wrote a novel and several stories and in high school she participated in writing the school magazine. She herself states she became a writer at the age of sixteen, "and after that writing was the only thing I wanted to do" (Atwood 2002, 14). However, she found that desire difficult to realise – a writer's career was not common in Canada in the 1950s, especially for a woman.[5] When she studied English at Victoria College, University of Toronto (1957-1961), there was no visibly distinct Canadian literature, which made her goal appear even more complicated. The masterpieces were British, not Canadian – there was no tradition to join. The Canadian writing, however, did exist, but it was more or less invisible as its own national genre. Atwood has made efforts at studying this invisibility in her non-academic studies of Canadian fiction, *Survival* and *Strange Things*.

1961 was important in Margaret Atwood's life, maybe even a watershed: she graduated from Victoria College with honours. Her first book, a collection of poetry called *Double Persephone*, was published, and it was granted the E. J. Pratt Medal for Poetry. Atwood continued her studies in Harvard, USA, with a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship grant, and finished her Master of Arts studies there 1962.[6] She started writing her doctoral dissertation and did all the required studies. Atwood says she chose the academic path "because at that time in English Canada it was impossible to make a living as a writer. You were forced to do something else" (Atwood and Beaulieu 1998, 31). Having overcome this notion, she decided to discontinue her dissertation and moved back to Toronto to begin writing a novel and to work in a market research company, like the protagonist of her first published novel, *The Edible Woman* (1969).

Since these two debuts in literary fields, Atwood has published constantly and widened her field. So far, (2007) she has published twelve novels, several volumes of poetry and short story collections, and continues to write. Her oeuvre includes multiple genres and literary fields: from popular literary

criticism and critiques to plays and opera libretto. She has written to several audiences ranging from children to academics. She has even drawn and written a political cartoon strip for a Canadian magazine *This Magazine* under the pseudonym "Bart Gerrard". The cartoon introduces "Survivalwoman", "a superheroine who defends Canadian culture against Canadian bureaucrats and the United States". (Stein 1999, 1; Oates 1992b, 80; Cooke 1998, 78, 220.)[7] She has also illustrated her children's book *Up in the Tree* (1978) using an alias.

Atwood's non-fiction texts, such as lectures, speeches, book reviews and writing of her own writing have been published as several books, including *Second Words. Selected Critical Prose* (1982), *Negotiating with the Dead. A Writer on Writing* (2002), *Curious Pursuits. Occasional Writing* (2005), and *Writing with Intent* (2005).

There are also numerous Atwood's interviews available in a written form, for instance two books edited by Earl G. Ingersoll: *Waltzing Again. New and Selected Conversations with Margaret Atwood* (2006), and *Margaret Atwood. Conversations* (1992). (See also *Two Solicitudes* (1998). For other, shorter interviews see e.g. Reynolds and Noakes 2002; Metzler 2000; Mendez-Egle and Haule 1987). The Margaret Atwood society gathers students, scholars and other interested people together for instance through an electronic mailing list.

Margaret Atwood has received honorary degrees from several universities and a long list of prizes and awards, including Canada's Governor General's Award for her poetry in 1966 and for the novel *The Handmaid's Tale* in 1985, and Britain's Booker prize in 2000 for her novel *The Blind Assassin*. She is considered the most important Anglophone Canadian author of our time and one of the most distinguished contemporary writers writing in English. She lives in Toronto with author Graeme Gibson. They have a daughter, Eleanor Jess Atwood Gibson (1976-).[8]

Now we turn to literary and feminist criticism on Atwood's work. How have scholars studied Atwood's writing?

1.2 Criticism on Margaret Atwood

Margaret Atwood's texts have inspired a significant amount of academic studies in North America and Europe (and there are academic studies of her carried out as far as in India and China). Most of the writings about her work concentrate on female subjectivity and its qualities and possibilities in her oeuvre – as her own writing does. The quantity of these studies can be seen as overwhelming, even exhausting. As Pilar Cuder, the author of *Margaret Atwood. A Beginner's Guide* comments: "Approaches to Atwood's fiction have come from such a wide range of stylistic and ideological perspectives that it is hard to systematize or transmit their full wealth" (Cuder 2003, 73). Carole L. Palmer, a co-editor of *Margaret Atwood. A Reference Guide*, wrote in 1991, "Atwood's

prolific writing has generated a monumental amount of diverse scholarly and popular commentary" (Palmer 1991, vii. McCombs and Palmer's reference guide includes more than 2000 items about Margaret Atwood, including literary criticism in magazines, as well as her interviews).[9]

Cuder divides the critical approaches to Atwood's fiction into six categories:

1) Feminist Criticism (consisting of the following lines: Women's victimisation, Language and identity, Gender and genre, Women and art)
2) Feminist Psychoanalytic Criticism (Narcissism, Psychoanalysis and therapy, Mothers and daughters)
3) Myths, Archetypes and Religion
4) Canadian Nationalist Criticism (The wilderness, Ecology: Americans versus Canadians, Canadian History and Politics)
5) Postcolonial Criticism
6) Postmodernism (Metafiction, Irony, Parody and Intertextuality) (Cuder 2003, 58-73.)

In the field of Feminist Criticism, in her book *Strategies for Identity* (1993) Leonora Rao discusses Atwood's texts from multiple angles, drawing from various theoretical backgrounds. Her study fits many of Cuder's categories. In regard to this segment, Rao discusses Atwood's novels critical dialogue with genres, and explores the concept of the protagonists' identities and selfhoods. Alice M. Palumbo (2000) examines how Atwood's novels explore boundaries within and between characters and their environments. Charlotte Sturgess (2000) points out the connections between gender and genre in Atwood's short stories, and Sherrill Grace (1994), too, studies gender and autobiography in her writing. Coral Ann Howells (2000) discusses the way in which Atwood's novels transgress genres such as dystopia, Gothic romance, *Kunstlerroman* and historical novel. Susanne Becker (1999) has examined Atwood's writing's Gothic elements in depth. Dieter Meindl (1994) studies gender and narrative perspective in Atwood's short stories. He concludes: "Atwood's stories display a gender-based rather than a language-based conception of reality" (Meindl 1994, 228; see also Rao 1994.) Rigney (2000), too, writes of Atwood's gender politics, which she sees "trickier than her narrative style" (Rigney 2000, 161).

In the area of Feminist Psychoanalytic Scholarship on Atwood, J. Brooks Bouson's Brutal Choreographies. Oppositional Strategies and Narrative Design in the Novels of Margaret Atwood (1993) is a thorough and excellent analysis of Atwood's works. It could be categorised in both of the first two segments, because its interest is in psychology and feminist politics, narrative structures and female self. She concentrates on "Atwood's family and romance dramas, her evolving story of the female self-in-crisis, her novelistic subversion of romantic love ideology, and her ongoing gender and power politics" (Bouson 1993, ix. She reads the novels from EW to CE). Shannon Hengen (1993) analyses Atwood's images of power and mirrors, using psychoanalytic theories of mirror stage and narcissism. Hengen sees that Atwood's male characters represent

negative "regressive narcissism" and female characters more positive "progressive narcissism" (Hengen 1993, 25, 37, 45).[10] Rao (1993) explores Atwood's protagonists' "[c]onstructions of the [s]elf", drawing from various theorists, such as Lacan, Irigaray, Kristeva, and Cixous. Rigney (1978) analyses *Surfacing* as "an exploration of a world beyond logic" (Rigney 1978, 93). She relies on feminist psychoanalytic theory and R. D. Laing's thoughts of psychological illness. According to Roberta Rubenstein (1987), Atwood's protagonists have "dilemmas of symbiosis and separation (…) confusion about ego boundaries and body image" (Rubenstein 1987, 65).

In addition to Cuder's categories, there are non-feminist studies concentrating on psychoanalysis. Sonia Mycak (1996) is interested in the issue of the divided self in Atwood's novels, as I am, but she focuses on the theories of the split subject by Jacques Lacan (and Julia Kristeva) and thus her approach differs from my own perspective. In her analysis, she uses, for instance, concepts 'mirror stage' and 'chora'. Mycak includes perspectives of phenomenology in her analysis, too (she examines the novels EW, LO, LBM, BH, CE and RB).

In the area of Myths, Archetypes and Religion, Sharon R. Wilson (2000) examines the use of myths in Atwood's texts. Wilson argues that Greek myths such as the Demeter and Persephone and Daedealus and Icarus are present in Atwood's writing (Wilson 2000, 215). Annis Pratt (1981) includes Atwood's *Surfacing* in her study *Archetypal Patterns of Women's Fiction*, and sees it as a novel of "rebirth and transformation", like for instance Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*. According to Pratt, *Surfacing*'s protagonist is in search for the "Elixir of Maternity". (Pratt 1981, 135, 157.)

In the segment of Canadian Nationalist Criticism, essays in Barbara Godard's (ed. 1987) *Gynocritics / Gynocritique* discuss Atwood's novels and non-fiction in relation to Canadian literature, the "CanLit" scene with a feminist emphasis. Paul Goetsch (2000) contextualises Atwood's Canadian nationalism to Canadian history, and connects and compares her nationalism with another Canadian author Hugh MacLennan. Ronald B. Hatch (2000) reads the thematic of land and ecology in Atwood's texts.[11]

To give examples of Postcolonial Criticism on Atwood, Colin Nicholson (1994) analyses "constructions of post-colonial subjectivity" in Atwood's early poetry. According to him, Atwood explores the Canadian's fragile identity and women's position in this country, which is insecure of itself – and a patriarchy (Nicholson 1994, 11). Howells has studied Atwood's "Canadian signature" in several occasions (Howells 1996, 20). Her article (2003) examines *The Robber Bride*'s representation of being Canadian. In a chapter in one of her books, Howells (1996) concentrates on the motif of postcolonial identity and location in Atwood's writings (Howells's writings can also be included in the segment of Canadian Nationalist Criticism).

In the segment of Postmodernism, Waugh (1989) examines how contemporary women writers, Atwood among others, have a complicated relationship with postmodernism. Rao (1993), however, sees that Atwood is a postmodernist writer (in my opinion her definition of postmodernism overlaps

with postmodern, see the chapter The Question of Postmodernism). Rao sees that Atwood's writing's "epistemological and ontological concerns", such as the suspicion of grand narratives and the possibility to write truthful stories of the world are clearly postmodernist, and she analyses the "high degree of self-consciousness and self-reflexivity" in Atwood's fiction (Rao 1993, xi-xii). Lorna Irvine (2000) analyses Atwood's use of such popular culture's phenomena as kitsch, camp and trash. Linda Hutcheon (1989 and 1991) concentrates on the use of postmodernism and irony by Canadian writers.

In addition to the above, there are also many overall introductions and explorations of Atwood's large oeuvre, and although they may bring up perspectives from Cuder's categories, they are not committed to these ways of reading. For instance, Karen F. Stein's *Margaret Atwood Revisited* (1999) reads Atwood's novels, poetry and short-stories with an emphasis on the narrators and the narrative strategies. Stein's book is, in my opinion, a precise, well-researched, well-written and a thorough study of Atwood's writing, and I refer to it often in this dissertation.

In addition to Cuder's segments, there are also numerous readings of Atwood as a poet. Lothar Hönnighausen (2000) argues that her "poetic stance (…) has been over-simplistically described as either autobiographical or mythopoeic" (Hönnighausen 2000, 97; for other readings of her poetry see Walker 1987; McCombs 1994, Cooley 1994; Nischik 2003). Atwood's output as a literary critic has been analysed by scholars (see e.g. Pache 2000), and her writing process has been under scrutiny too: Reichenbächer (2000) analyses the process of writing and re-writing *The Edible Woman*. Lynne Pearce (1997) carried out a qualitative Atwood reader research in Britain and Canada. The text in question is short story "Death by Landscape" from the collection *Wilderness Tips* (1991) (Pearce 1997, 220-251).[12]

As it is impossible to cover all that has been written about Atwood I will concentrate mainly on the studies that are interested in food and eating in her fiction, and on the feminist studies that emphasise psychological approaches, these being the major interests of my own study.

What have scholars written about food and Atwood's writing?

Emma Parker (1995) argues that in Atwood's novels "eating is employed as a metaphor for power and is used as (…) means of examining the relationship between women and men. The powerful are characterized by (…) eating (…) the powerless by (…) non-eating" (Parker 1995, 349. Parker examines Atwood's novels from EW to CE). Sarah Sceats (2000) discusses food and eating in Atwood's fiction in a chapter called "Sharp appetites: Margaret Atwood's consuming politics", in her book *Consumption and the Body in Contemporary Women's Fiction* (Sceats 2000. She analyses the novels from EW to AG, but does not include *Surfacing*). Other writers examined by Sceats are, for example, Doris Lessing and Angela Carter. According to Sceats, food and eating have complex implications in Atwood's novels: "[H]er extensive symbolic use of food and eating (…) highlight themes such as the commodification of women, the duplicity of sexual predation or the negative power of the victim". She stresses

that Atwood's language of food concentrates on the issue of women and responsibility (Sceats 2000, 4, 9.)

Some other writers, such as Cameron (1985), Chernin (1985), Wilson (1989), Waugh (1989), Adams (1990) and Brain (1995) also analyse food and eating in Atwood's writing, but in a smaller scale. Cameron, Wilson, Chernin, Adams and Brain concentrate on *The Edible Woman*, and Waugh studies *The Edible Woman* and *Lady Oracle*. None of these writings about food and Atwood above – due to their time of writing and publishing – include *The Blind Assassin* (2000).

My intention is to examine motif of food, eating, and hunger in Atwood's oeuvre with more detail and depth and from additional perspectives compared to these article- or chapter-length studies. I also include *The Blind Assassin* to my reading.

As for instance Carol Gilligan notes, women often emphasise and prefer connection and attachment to separation and competition (Gilligan 1983, 62). The present dissertation will apply this kind of an approach; instead of attacking others, this work tries to create a web between its writer and others.

In the following, I will ponder Atwood's writing in relation to modernism and postmodernism.

1.2.1 The Question of Postmodernism

In the twentieth century literature and literary criticism, the two most powerful terms used to describe phases and types of literature are modernism and postmodernism. Is Margaret Atwood a modern/modernist or a postmodern/postmodernist author? It, of course, depends on how you define these concepts.

Douwe W. Fokkema lists modernist ambitions as

1. The presentation of the text as not being definite or complete
2. Epistemological doubt with respect to the possibility of representing and explaining reality
3. Metalingual scepsis as to the possibility of expressing adequately whatever knowledge about the world one thinks to have found
4. Respect for the idiosyncrasies of the reader, or the idea that reading is a private affair upon which even the writer should not intrude. (Fokkema 1984, 19; see also Barry 1995, 82.)

One of the modernist goals is impersonality, which is also important in the American literary criticism movement of New Criticism. They saw the work of art being totally independent, and that it should be explored only as such. Ideological, historical and cultural interpretations were considered unnecessary, even wrong.

If one contemplates the above elements of literary modernism, one can argue that Atwood's writing shares certain issues with modernism. There is

continuing doubt whether or not the narrators can relate the story trustworthily or at all, and even whether the events and feelings can be described with language. However, there are differences: for instance, impersonality is not an Atwoodian trait.

Postmodernism can be seen as a new mode of literature, or "a continuation of the more extreme aspects of modernism" (Fokkema 1984, 37; see also Barry 1995 83). I am inclined to agree with the latter view. According to Fokkema, qualities of postmodernism can be described in the following way:

1. The author is seemingly unconcerned with the status of his text, where and how it begins, how it connects, where and how it ends, and whether it consists of linguistic or other signs. (…) the Postmodernist aims at destroying the idea of connectivity by inserting texts that emphasize discontinuity, such as a questionnaire or other unrelated fragments (…)
2. With respect to the relation between text and social context (…) the Postmodernist (…) has completely given up the attempt at explaining. (…) he will rather provide a parody of explanation (…) words invent our world, words shape our world, words are becoming the sole justification of our world.
3. [T]he question of how a story should be told appears to be more important than the story itself. (…) The code is not supposed to produce "sense."
4. The reader is often addressed, instructed, questioned in the text. (…) At times, there is an attempt to make him into a major character (…) the Postmodernist writes (…) impossible worlds, worlds that (…) can only exist in our imagination. (Fokkema 1984, 43-48, 54; see also Barry 1995, 91.)

I am inclined to see Atwood as a late modern, postmodern, but not really a *postmodernist* author. If one sees the high postmodernism as Fokkema does, the connection between Atwood's writing and postmodernism is not firm.

Although I do think that Atwood does play with and use some of the conventions of the high postmodernist writing, I do not see her oeuvre in general as postmodernist. In my opinion, Atwood can be seen as a writer, who is in feminist dialogue with postmodernism.[13]

According to Patricia Waugh, the stance of feminine/feminist writing is somewhat that of an outsider to both standard modernism and postmodernism. Postmodernism and feminism were both emerging forcefully in the 1960s and they have some common literary goals. Waugh states that both "embraced the popular, rejecting the elitist and purely formalist celebration of modernism (…) Both movements celebrate liminality, the disruption of boundaries, the confounding of traditional markers of 'difference', the undermining of the authorial security of the 'egotistical sublime'. (Waugh 1989, 3-4.)

Waugh argues that although there often are common aspirations and interests, postmodernism does include themes that feminist and female writers do not share. The movement is often defined masculine, and Waugh sees that

there is a tendency in postmodernism to ignore of the issue of gender altogether. (Waugh 1989, 4-5.)[14]

In my opinion, Atwood is modernist in the sense that she concentrates on biography and the characters' inner lives. Postmodernist characteristics in her writing include the address of the reader and the focus on how the story is told, the figure of the writer as a trickster, and puzzle narratives.[15]

Atwood's novels are intimate, confessional autobiographies or biographies, late modern psychological novels of memory, of remembering.

Next, I shortly discuss some theories of food and eating.

1.3 Food and Eating

> **Lyons**: Food and eating (…) seem to be central in several of your novels in different ways.
> **Atwood**: As in human life. (…)
> **Lyons**: Do you connect that with women or the female condition?
> **Atwood**: (…) It's a human activity that has all kinds of symbolic connotations depending on the society and the level of society. In other words, what you eat varies from place to place, how we feel about what we eat varies from place to place, how we feel about what we eat varies from individual as well as from place to place. If you think of food as coming in various categories: sacred food, ceremonial food, everyday food, and things that are not to be eaten, forbidden food, dirty food, if you like – for the anorexic, all food is dirty food. (Lyons 1992, 228.)

Food is something we all share: we all have a relationship with food and an attitude (or attitudes) towards food, from the very beginning of our lives. Food is a part of our first interaction and communication with other people. Mother's breast or a nursing bottle represents the first negotiations with the outside world. Love, one's sense of self, and food are intertwined in early childhood, and hunger, satisfaction and the other person are tied into complex interdependency, which colours our adulthood, too. (Klein 1992, 13, 19, 22-24, 32; Sceats 2000, 1; Chernin 1985, xi-xiii; Lupton 1996, 7-8.)

"A person is what she eats" is a common phrase, even a cliché. In this context food is seen as a part of identity, something that "creates" you or strengthens what you are. Gender, nationality, ethnic origin or identification, religion and class are linked with food: what, where and how one eats. Many scholars find food and eating essential in our ways of constructing our subjectivity and identity. (Lupton 1996, 1; Sceats 2000, 1; see also Pöysä 2001; Koistinen 2001; Atwood 1988, 52-53; Mäkelä, 2006, 20-21.)

In contrast to the idea of food as empowering and enabling, food can also be seen as something that weakens your identity and is stronger than one's self. For instance, Julia Kristeva writes that food crosses our borders when we eat, vomit or defecate, and thus it can be seen as threatening our idea of bodily soundness and integrity. Food interferes our vision of our bodies as clean: preparing and eating are dirtying practices and there is always the danger that

food is or becomes rancid. Food is the other and it becomes a part of us. (Kristeva 1993, 199, 206-207; Lupton 1996, 112-117; Sceats 2000, 1.)

Our culture and language define what we eat. Food and eating can bring people together, but they can also keep them apart (Mäkelä 2006, 20-21). For example, others' eating habits may appear disgusting. Food is an important part of religion and rituals. The communion, "a simulated meal" is an essential element of Christianity (Sceats 2000, 11). Eating can be holy, and similarly non-eating can be seen as sacred: fasting is a common religious practice – some examples of this are the Muslim Ramadan and the fasting of the Christian saints and martyrs (Bynum 1988, passim.). For some, certain food appears as something polluting and contaminating, and therefore it needs to be treated in a certain way, for instance the Jews want their meat to be *kosher*.[16]

Food is closely connected to control and power: For instance butchery, definitions of the edible and the inedible and preparation of food are areas bound with power issues. Questions like "who prepares for whom", "who eats and what", "where and how", "who pays" et cetera are all connected with status and power. (Probyn 2000, 2; Lupton, 1996, 26-27, 29-30; Wolf 1990, 155-157.)

Emotions are essential in eating. Fear, shame and disgust are part of our eating practices. Even though food can be a source of distress and abjection, it also gives us immense pleasure. Eating can often be sensually satisfactory. Appetite and lack of it are emotional retorts to situations. (Lupton 1996, 3, 31-36; Sceats 2000, 1; Probyn 2000, 11; see also Haasjoki 2006, 162.)

In *Totem and Taboo*, Sigmund Freud speaks of psychic cannibalism (Freud 1989, 103). Following Freud, Mary Levens argues that cannibalistic thoughts are apparent in eating disorders and they are tied to the issues of connection and separateness, autonomy and individuation. Relationship to another person can become threatening: the other has the power to devour and engulf one's self. Food can become a means to have a self that closeness cannot destroy, a surviving self. (Levens 1995, ix-x.)

Food and sexuality are also connected. Freud sees an analogy between the hunger for food, and libido, which is hunger for life and hunger for sexual satisfaction (Freud 1962 (1905), 1). People do often charge food with erotic and sexual tensions. Language of love is often language of eating. Mouth is essential in early relationship with the world and the mother, in eating and in sexual relationships (see e.g. Lupton 1996, 18-19).

From one's early infancy on, eating is gendered. Orbach notes that baby girls and girls are often given much less holding and feeding than baby boys (Orbach 1986, 46). Girls and women are usually educated to control their eating and to survey other people's eating, too. Adults criticise and comment on girls' appetite and eating in a very different way than that of the boys'. One can even argue that an important aspect of socialisation for girls is to become a good dieter, an expert in weight loss, weight watching and healthy eating. (Lupton 1996, 37-67; Puuronen 2001; Orbach 1986; Polso 1996, passim; see also Wolf 1990, the chapter "Hunger".)

In a cultural sense gender is produced by eating: you are a (typical or some specific kind of) man or woman if you eat or cook certain things (Mäntymäki 2006, passim; Puuronen 2001; Pöysä 2001; see also Koistinen 2001).

Deborah Lupton writes, "food and eating are feminine and embodied" (Lupton 1996, 3, 39, 109-110; see also Sceats 2000, 2; Nicholson 1987, 47). Women are often the ones to buy and prepare food, at least in families and on daily basis, on everyday level, but famous chefs are usually men (see also Mäkelä 2006, 26). Women can also be thought as "food" during breast-feeding. Sweets and chocolate often have feminine names like Marianne. Women are often associated with something sweet and tasty and men are often portrayed as the eaters. In contrast to this, we do have stereotypical images of the greedy female ogress and the male ascetic.

Although women are connected to eating in several ways, Parker argues that in fiction women are not usually portrayed eating, because "consumption embodies coded expressions of power" (Parker 1995, 349). There is indeed an ambiguity with women, food and eating expressed in cultural artefacts, for example in television series. Female characters are seldom hungry and they rarely empty their plates, unless their character is grotesque.[17]

Next, we turn to the methodological basis of this dissertation.

1.4 Feminist Literary Criticism

> [W]e are all either men or women — which is a part of our fundamental identity and being in the world. (Chodorow 1989, 167.)
>
> Sexual difference is one of the questions, if not *the* question to be thought in our age. (…) Sexual difference is probably that issue in our own age, which, if thought, might be our 'salvation'? (Irigaray in Whitford 1991, 9-10, italics original.)

Examination of gender and sexual difference is central to the present dissertation. Gender is a crucial element in our lives: it has an effect on how we see the world and other people, and how the others see us; even on how we are in the world.

In the 21st century, most feminists agree that there is no universal femininity. There are different women (and men, and people who want to be labelled neither women nor men) and different feminisms – but we do have things in common too: we share some experiences, interests, needs, hopes and dreams. (E.g. Nyman and Roivas 2003, 19-20, 26-27.)

Literature and writing have always been essential to the feminist movement. Many important feminist works can be defined as literary criticism or they at least analyse literature and art. Feminist movement has seen and continues to see language and literature as forces that can designate and create certain kinds of ways of being female and male. Sara Mills writes, "as well as keeping people in their place, language can also be one of the many ways that

they can question their position" (Mills 1995, 14). Language contains power: It can subdue and liberate.

As there are several kinds of feminisms, there are also several kinds of feminist literary criticisms. In spite of their differences, there is a common ground: gender is seen as a constitutive factor whether one concentrates on the writer, the text or the reader. (See e.g. Mills 1995, 3; Koskela & Rojola 1997, 141; see also Rojola 2004, 26-30.)

In her *Feminist Stylistics*, Mills sees that in feminist reading,

> stress is laid on the interaction between the text and the reader in the production of interpretations, and there is an emphasis on the factors beyond the conscious control of both writer and reader in the analysis. (…) As well as there being certain ideologically constructed frameworks within which we interpret the text, it is also clear that the text itself influences the way that we read. (Mills 1995, 66.)

Hence, feminist close analysis does not see writer, text or reader as separate entities with total control of self. They are in conversation and negotiation with each other and with the society. There are "discursive parameters" and "discursive pressures" that guide the writer and reader. Language is not an innocent tool, which the writer picks up and uses as she will. As Mills formulates, "Language is clearly not simply a place where meanings are imposed, but rather a site where certain meanings are negotiated over, or struggled over". Writers and readers are influenced by discourses and society, but they are not passive recipients or unable to control what they write and interpret. (Mills 1995, 66, 103, 198.)

1.4.1 Feminist Close Reading

My work is feminist literary criticism, and it could be defined as a feminist close reading of the food motif in Atwood's novels. In this dissertation, I mostly rely on two British feminist literary critics, Sara Mills and Lynne Pearce.

My other methodological basis, feminist psychoanalytic literary criticism will be introduced in the chapter Narrative and Trauma – Feminist Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism, which follows this discussion of my dissertation's connections to feminist close reading and feminist dialogic theory.

One of the influential books on feminist literary criticism, Toril Moi's *Sexual / Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (1985), saw the movement strictly as one divided into American and French styles of criticism. She saw that the American field was overtly practical and did not ground its interpretations in theory, and in her opinion French field was preferable in its theory centredness. (Moi 1990, passim.) Mills and Pearce come to the field of feminist literary criticism with a very critical stance of this vision of two different, even opposing approaches. Mills et al. note that the vision of French feminism as overtly theoretical, and Anglo-American Feminism as theory shunning is simply not true (Mills et al. 1989, 1). In addition, feminists cannot simply be put in groups with nationality labels: it is misleading.

Mills and Pearce represent feminist literary criticism, which has theoretical ambition and interest in the analysis of texts.

Close reading is one of the basic methods of literary criticism, and was formulated by the American New Criticism movement in the 1950s. *Feminist* close reading is radically different in comparison to the traditional method. In the 1960s and the 1970s, feminist critics – with e.g. deconstructionists and reader-response theorists – criticised strongly The New Criticism's idea of the text as autonomous, independent entity. According to them, context, writer and reader matter. They found the New Criticism's aim to have a scientific and objective analysis, and their inclusion of texts outside their canon deeply problematic. Feminists demanded that gender, power and other factors must be taken into consideration in the interpretation process. From the 1980s on, feminists and postcolonialists have stated that race, ethnic background, class, age and sexual orientation, too, must be included in literary theory and interpretation practice. (Mills 1995, 9; Keskinen 2001, 98, 101-102, 113; Nyman and Roivas 2003, 14-15, 19-20; Rojola 2004, 26-30; Ahokas and Rantonen 1996, 81-82; Mikkonen 2001, 70.)

Close reading is still considered as a good tool for literary critics, because it is thorough, but its original version is problematic (Korsisaari 2001, 294.).

Feminist literary criticism does not merely mean using master's tools with feminist perspective: feminist literary criticism is radically different room of her own although it is entwined with other literary criticisms (Rojola 2004, 26-27).

My way of using feminist close reading, is based on Mills's book *Feminist Stylistics*, in which she offers a set of strategies for text analysis for a feminist reader. By feminist stylistics she means "an analysis which identifies itself as feminist and which uses linguistic or language analysis to examine texts" (Mills 1995, 1). This feminist text analysis draws from feminist studies, literary criticism and language studies.

Feminist close reading is grounded on the so-called Anglo American feminism, which emphasises the scrutiny of the content and images of women in fiction. Mills sees that in the past the problem of feminist close reading has been that it has produced too many intuitive, unreplicable feminist close readings.[18] The model of reading she offers is more theorised, grounded and replicable; it has a more elaborate view of gender and gendered writing. Together with the analysis of characters and textual metaphors it focuses on narration and uses narratological concepts such as focalisation (i.e. the text's point of view, from whose view the story is told), implied author, implied reader, real author, real reader, et cetera. Feminist close reading studies the gendered subjects and their possibilities in the text. What are the subject positions available for women in the text? And to men? What is the text's underlying conception of sexual difference? (Mills 1995, 2, 14-15, 17.)

Mills divides this question-based model into six levels of analysis:

1. Context and Theoretical Model
2. Gender and Writing
3. Gender and Reading

4. Gender and Individual Lexical Items
5. Gender and Clause Level/Sentence Level
6. Gender and Discourse Level (Mills 1995, 199-102.)

In the present context, the most important levels include Gender and Writing, Gender and Reading, and Gender and Discourse.

The first level, named Context and Theoretical Model, asks basic questions regarding genre, context, reader position and reader orientation (Mills 1995, 199).

The second level, Gender and Writing, focuses on the gendered way of narration in the text, posing the following questions: "Is the narration first person or third person, and is that narration from the point of view of a character within the text or is it narrated by a voice external to the text? (…) What purpose does knowing that the author is male or female serve (…)?" (Mills 1995, 200.) Mills sees that the argument of whether there is a difference between female and male writing is somewhat misplaced. Any woman can write a male sentence or a novel and vice versa. There is gendered writing, but it is not necessarily tied to one's sex. Nevertheless, sex matters. Women are published, read and criticised differently from men and their relationship to the tradition is also different. (Mills 1995, 53, 65.)

The third level, called Gender and Reading, scrutinises the position of the reader. It prompts the reader to ask the following questions: "Does the text address you as male or female? What sort of male or female? (…) Do you feel that the position which you are reading from is aligned with [text's pronoun positions such as "I", "we"]? (…) Does the text assume that you will agree with certain of its statements? Are these statements about gender?" (Mills 1995, 200.) Mills advises the reader to pay attention to questions of ethnic background, class and sexual orientation when analysing the text's implied reader. Every text addresses its reader(s) and gender is essential in this process.[19] Although there can be various readings of a text, there usually is one which is seen as dominant and that all can agree upon: for instance, what happens in a text. If the text's addressee is male, a female reader may feel that she is positioned as an overhearing or resistant reader (and a male reader may feel same when the addressee is clearly female). (Mills 1995, 68-69, 75; see also Fetterley 1981, passim.) In other words, this text does not see you as its primary target audience and you may identify with, for instance, the victim of a crime story, when the addressee is a person who identifies with the detective or the murderer.

Usually a text is "overdetermined", in other words, it has many positions for the readers and readers can identify not only with the characters but also with the implied author or the image she has of the real author, or the text's ideological message et cetera. (Mills 1995, 74). What early feminist literary critics did not acknowledge is that not all texts address readers according to gender, or at least do not do that consistently. Narratives can also play with gender and gendered identities. One good example is Jeannette Winterson's novel *Written on the Body*, where the gender of the narrator-protagonist is never

revealed. Also the issue that women could not identify with the position of the male addressee or vice versa is not so simple. The early feminists thought that for women it was always uncomfortable to read a text where the addressee was male. However, this is not necessarily the case. Even if a woman is positioned as an over hearer, she can find the text interesting and enjoyable. The same applies to the treatment of female characters in the text. Their stories and fates may not be politically correct, but female readers can nevertheless enjoy them, and even find (mixed) pleasure in representation of female masochism. Gender matters in reading, but not in a straightforward or simplistic way. (Mills 1995, 76-78.)

In the fourth level, Gender and Individual Lexical Items, the feminist reader is encouraged to analyse words, names and pronouns and their gendered charge. This level reminds us of language's power to define and mark women and their position in society. The pronoun "he" stands for both human and male; masculine position is the unmarked and feminine the marked one. On the level of language, women are marked with several affixes (such as actress), which contain elements that are often condescending and even despising. (See e.g. Mills 1995, 87.) A female writer or a woman writer is one of these. When discussing of male writer, it is not usually considered necessary to underline his sex. But in the case of woman writer, her sex is brought up in different ways. Feminists have different opinions of the use of these markings: some see that they are trivialising, but some see them as a way of making women visible. (Mills 1995, 94-95.)

On the fifth level, which is Gender and Clause Level/Sentence Level, the feminist close analyst concentrates on statements and actors: "Are there statements in the text which are gender-inflected? (…) Does the text assume you hold certain gendered assumptions? (…) Are males and females compared with different elements? (…) Who acts in the text?" (Mills 1995, 201.) In this section Mills focuses on, for example, metaphor and humour. Even though the text might seem objective to the reader, for instance metaphors can tell that it has assumptions of gender. To give an example, the metaphors of women can be derogatory, and when male characters actively do things in the text, female characters represent obstacles and conquests. In this context, women are put into a position of an object and men hold the power as subjects. However, Mills reminds us that one should not do simplistic readings, i.e. to say that, for example, if there are more verbs attached to a man than to a woman, the text reproduces sexist values. Rather, the feminist reader has to be alert to the contexts and discourses of the words and sentences. (Mills 1995, 128-158.)

On level six, Gender and Discourse, the feminist reader focuses on the larger elements in the text. One examines focalisation, characters, description of bodies, and larger context of the text's subject positions: what roles do women and men have in the texts? The questions to be asked include: "Are there larger structures in the text which seem to be gendered? (…) Are they [the male and female characters] described in the same way? (…) Are there power hierarchies (…) Do they relate to gender, race, class, or sexual orientation? Are there narrative pathways which seem to be gender-specific? (…) Is the text resolved

in certain ways which seem to have implications for gender? (…) Who is speaking? Who does the text focus on? (…) Whose interests does the text seem to be working in? (…) What elements are associated with males and females in the text?" (Mills 1995, 202.)

One can think that things like focalisation have nothing to do with gender. However, this is not the case. Focalisation points out to the text's alignment, which can be misogynist even though it at the first look appears to be objective. The feminist and/or female reader may feel excluded or feel uncomfortable, but has problems explaining why. Text's alignment can of course also be feminist. (Mills 1995, 178-187.)

Feminist close reading is often used in "suspicious reading" of texts that appear misogynist, but the method can and is used to analyse feminist texts, too (Mills 1995, 15). The fact that I see Atwood as a feminist writer does slightly change the attitude with which I use the method of feminist close reading. It makes my reading more auspicious.

1.4.2 Dialogic Theory and Feminist Writing

In much of her writing, Pearce uses some key concepts of Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogic theory and revises them with an emphasis on gender and feminism.[20] She sees that reading is always "'dialogic', if power-inscribed, *relationship* between text and reader" (Pearce 1997, 2, italics original). Reading is not just something to be done to texts, but there is a complex interaction between the text and the reader.

Pearce's version of the dialogic criticises the Bakhtinian model for its lack of understanding of how complex the scene of narrating is. Bakhtin importantly argues that every utterance is made to reach somebody, to speak to somebody, that every "I" needs a recipient, "you", but he misses the fact that there are several intratextual and extratextual addresses. Pearce writes:

> [T]he Bakhtinian model does not make clear (…) the *multiplicity* of agents that can be represented by 'addresser' and 'addressee' of the text, including the whole army of 'implied' authors and narrators, and 'implied' or 'ideal' readers. (…) What the model lacks in its complexity of vision (…) it certainly compensates for in its intensity (the absolute insistence that every utterance is inscribed and directed by an awareness of its potential audience) (Pearce 1997, 68.)

In Pearce's view, much of contemporary feminist writing has more dialogic relation in their narratives than in texts by the dominant groups: the "I-thou" relation of the texts is more underlined. The narrators and protagonists ally with their readers – intratextual and extratextual – poignantly. According to Pearce, these "signs of intimacy" are not visible to the same degree in typical male or masculine writing, because "men have traditionally assumed a universal male readership: all the world (…) is ['their'] ally". (Pearce 1997, 39, 67.) For the "muted" groups, the situation is different:

> [T]he repressive and excluding forces of dominant patriarchal culture and discourse (…) have forced women into oppositional rhetorical strategies (such as use of their

> own 'coded' languages) (…) [and thus women writers are] by necessity, more self-consciously dialogic. (Pearce 1997, 39.)

In analysing Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, Pearce observes that the narrator's way of address is "intimate" and "ambiguous", and that the narrator "tells her story to a nameless 'ally' who can be seen both as a fictional character in the text and also as the reader" (Pearce 1997, 69, 77 n. 18). This way of allying with the reader and addressing the text to "you" who can be both an intratextual and extratextual reader, is also visible in Atwood's other works, especially in those told by a first person narrator (*The Blind Assassin* is a good example).

The feminist strategy of dialogic writing can be seen, when it is not addressing the reader in addition to a character, in "the relationship *between* the fictional characters", which is intimate and may even contain languages of their own. Women narrators (and writers) can ally with women readers in an exclusive way, i.e. make the men over hearers or outsiders. (Pearce 1997, 70, italics original.)

'Polyphony' is one of the key terms in Bakhtinian theory of dialogic. Dialogue and polyphony are often used as synonymous, but Pearce makes the following distinction:

> '[P]olyphony' is associated with the macrocosmic structure of the text (literally, its 'many voices') and 'dialogue' to reciprocating mechanisms *within* the smaller units of exchange, down to the individual word. (Pearce 1994, 46, italics original.)

It is a commonly held view that Margaret Atwood's novels are complex and ambiguous, giving the reader space to spin her own story (e.g. Cuder 2003, 2). There is always a "sense of a double perspective" (Reynolds and Noakes 2002, 19; see also Rao 1993, xi; Stein 1999, 6; Howells 1996, 2, 4). As Katarina Gregersdotter puts it, Atwood's narratives are "plural, nonlinear, and her regular use of irony makes them ambiguous" (Gregersdotter 2003, 27). Sometimes several questions – and always the future of the protagonist, with the exception of *The Blind Assassin* – are left unresolved. I do find the concept of polyphony useful in describing Atwood's novels' typical way of presenting conflicting views of same relationship or event.

Often in Atwood's novels there is a dialogue between feminist and patriarchal discourse. Because of this polyphony the feminist reader is often unable to make just one interpretation of the novel.

Atwood has said that her protagonists can be seen as sane or insane, depending on the interpreter: "you have a choice of thinking the central character is crazy or thinking she is right. Or possibly thinking she is crazy and right" (Atwood in Gibson 1992, 14). I interpret this quotation as a suggestion that the protagonists can be interpreted as both mad *and* right, having distorted *and* correct views of the other characters and their fictional world. Both interpretations are correct and grounded in the text.

An important aspect in Atwood's writing is the element of *excess*, which makes several interpretations of the narrative possible. Her narrators' opinions, depictions and metaphors are *in excess*, exaggerated, which often creates comic

or scary effects. This element undermines the seeming seriousness of the narrative; it is a wink from an ironist narrator. Susanne Becker sees that in Gothic novels excess is "a pleasurable but also subversive (…) strategy", a hyperbole, which warmly mocks, for example, the narrator herself, her perceptions, traditional romantic narrative, or reader's expectations (Becker 1999, 25-26).

However, I do not see Atwood's novels as *fully* polyphonic texts in the Bakhtinian sense. According to Pearce, in a polyphonic novel per se there is "maximal exchange between voices" (Pearce 1994, 54). This cannot happen in Atwood's novels because (especially the first person) narrators are so dominant and selective in their narrating.

Now I will turn to Atwood's relationship to feminism and to the tradition of feminist and female writing.

1.4.3 Feminist Dialogue

Feminist theorists Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar see that there is "a female affiliation complex", which works in women's writing (this term is derived from Edward Said). According to Gilbert and Gubar, there are three possibilities for a woman writer to position herself within the literary tradition. This theory and especially the question of how to identify writer's affiliation is further theorised by Pearce and Mills. The first possible position is to ally with the male tradition. That means speaking like a man, using masculine voice and ways of writing (i.e. mainstream realist tradition). The second position is to adopt a traditionally female way of writing, which means using language that is seen conventionally feminine. This means using long and winding sentences, which include, according to Mills, "a large number of clauses which display epistemic modality" (Mills 1995, 59). In other words, the power of the words is negotiated, even watered down. There is a statement, which is weakened and made lingering and complex. These writers are also connected with the male tradition, since they adopt the position of the other of the tradition.

In the third position, the (usually feminist) writer allies herself with the female tradition. In this stance, the author "signals to her readers that she is not writing within the mainstream tradition and is drawing attention to the fact that she is a woman writing to women" (Mills 1995, 61). For example, the metaphors and symbols can differ from the traditional female imagery, but do not simply belong to the male tradition either. For instance, masculine attributes can be attached to a female character and this is not criticised as a negative thing. There is a stress on female characters and their relationships with other women. This categorisation is not tied to gender. A man can write as well in the female tradition as a woman can ally herself with the mainstream tradition. (Mills 1995, 58-62.)

In my opinion Atwood's novels affiliate themselves with the female (and feminist) tradition.

Apart from polyphony, other important concepts from dialogic theory, used by Pearce, include intonation and extra-literary context. She sees them as "central to establishing conspiratorial intimacy between (…) the text and its reader". The intonation can be understood as "tone of voice", meaning that the way in which the utterance is made is as important as the utterance itself. The tone can be angry, tender, threatening, et cetera. The extra-literary context means that the allying with the narrator requires "consciousness of a gendered context". In other words, this relationship calls for feminist sensitivity, feminist knowledge. (Pearce 1997, 72-74.)

The concept of extra-literary context works with Atwood in the matter of feminism. In Atwood's interviews, talks and non-fiction writing her dialogue with and interest in feminist discourses is clear. One can even find a commitment to women and their issues.

The beginning of Atwood's writing career collides with the beginning of the so-called second wave of the feminist movement. Many active feminist streams of thinking began as movements in the 1960s and 70s. Their groundwork could have been laid even two hundred years before, but they did not emerge earlier as active groups of activists and analysts. Feminists raised a number of issues, such as abortion, domestic violence, motherhood, unequal pay, separatism, lesbianism et cetera.

In my opinion, there are some connections between Marxist or socialist feminism and Atwood's novels. Atwood's protagonists are in subordinate positions in the society. There are less choices and possibilities for women than for men. Capitalism and consumerism influence the protagonist's life in negative ways.

One can see connections between Atwood's writing and especially three strands of feminist thinking: radical feminism, psychoanalytic feminism and postmodern (or French feminism).[21] (The chapter Narrative and Trauma – Feminist Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism returns to the issue of Atwood and psychoanalytic feminism.)

There are intertextual allusions between Atwood's oeuvre and radical feminism. For instance, the issue of reproduction and who is in control of it is visible in *The Handmaid's Tale*. In her introduction to the strands of feminism, Tong even goes on to classify Atwood as a radical feminist who has developed the ideas of motherhood along with thinkers like Andrea Dworkin (Tong 1992, 81). Criticism of violent pornography is present in *Bodily Harm*. The problem of "man made language" (Spender 1981), and how to tell a (woman's) narrative with it is thematised repeatedly in Atwood's novels.

What I see to be intertextually valid between Atwood and postmodern feminism (and radical feminism) is the significance of the body as a site of meaning, pleasure and pain. The style that especially Cixous uses in her "The Laugh of the Medusa" has in its irony and wordplay, in my opinion, something in common with Atwood's writing (Cixous 1991). Cixous's, Irigaray's and Kristeva's thoughts about writing the feminine can also be seen as thematised in Atwood's fiction.

Some clearly feminist themes and issues repeat themselves throughout the "Atwoodian canon" (Stein 1999 uses the term): female identity, female body, interest in the "Gothic sensibility" of romance, the fear and desire between sexes, the complex relationships between women. Protagonists often have dubious feelings of their bodies. Catherine Rainwater states that in Atwood's oeuvre, the body is repeatedly "a war zone" (Rainwater 1987, 14). Also the concern for the nature, love of the Canadian "bush", flora and fauna (and especially the insects) are important themes.

One of the arguments for Atwood's implied reader's gender and her affiliation with the female tradition is her writing's concentration on women and their experiences. And of course, the author's own gender is at work here too (it is still so that women read books by men and women, but most men read mostly books written by men). In her ten novels there are two male characters with focalisation, Nate Schoenhof in *Life Before Man* and Simon Jordan in *Alias Grace*. Nate shares the narrative space with two at least equally space taking female protagonists, and Simon has less narrative space than Grace who is the main character in a higher degree than Simon. Importantly, these men do not have first person voices, which makes the reader's alignment with them more difficult. The external narrator always has a lot of space to interfere with the reader's sympathy and identification, and especially in Simon's case the narrator portrays him in a problematic light, at least for the feminist reader.

One could argue that Atwood's books imply a reader, which is feminist or at least interested in women's lives and their stories. The implied reader does have a thought that women do have the role of the other in society, and that society is patriarchal, or at least the reader is narrated a story that tells of this kind of a world, meaning that the implied reader cannot be wholly misogynistic.

Having said this, it is clear that the novels also contain criticism towards feminism. One way of putting Atwood's novels' relationship with feminist discourses could be that they are *in dialogue*. Especially the criticism of very strict standpoint radical feminism is explicit: protagonists do speak about consciousness-raising groups and the goals of radical feminism and often feel alienated and detached from them.

Almost all Atwood's protagonists are English speaking white Canadians, middle-class and heterosexual. Elaine in *Cat's Eye* calls herself "hopelessly heterosexual" (CE, 401), being partly ironic – she feels that the Women's Liberation Movement demands lesbianism from a proper feminist. Most protagonists are writers, artists and scholars, and passionate about their work.

From this, one could summon that the implied reader of the novels is Western, white, middle-class, heterosexual woman, who is passionate about her work or is at least interested in the stories of women like this. However, these categories are often oscillated and questioned in Atwood's novels. Being white and Canadian is problematised in *Bodily Harm* and *Life Before Man*. As Elaine's comment above shows, heterosexuality is not considered as a given and natural thing, but a complex construction. The relationships between women are given a plenty of space, and they include passionate desire and hatred, although

desire is not marked as lesbian. Although the narratives always include heterosexual romances, the woman is in the centre, and her relationships with other women are at least equally important to her. Atwood's stories have also been selected into anthologies of lesbian writing, for instance into Margaret Reynolds's 1993 *The Penguin Book of Lesbian Short Stories*.[22]

To summarise, feminism is accepted in Atwood's novels as an important factor in women's lives, but it is also questioned. The message seems to be that there should not be any universal and restrictive claims for women, not from patriarchy nor from feminism. As Atwood has said in an interview, to her feminism means "human equality and freedom of choice" (Atwood in Brans 1992, 142).

Stein sees Atwood's writer personae as a "trickster", a definition Atwood herself has used to describe writers. The trickster is

> [A] messenger, a teacher, a shape changer, an artist, a liar, a figure in touch with the life force. Tricksters delight in playing, in fabricating (making, lying), in crossing boundaries, in disrupting conventions. The trickster figure embodies contradictions, often using humor, parody, and satire to express hypocrisy and pretension. (Stein 1999, 6.)

One of Atwood's ways to negotiate and rewrite tradition is her feminist dialogue with genres. Although Atwood uses realist conventions, she cannot straightforwardly be called a realist writer, because her writing always includes non-realist elements, especially the Gothic and Gothic horror. Atwood skilfully uses different genres "with vengeance", with her own modifications: she puts a woman in the centre of the story, a place traditionally reserved for the masculine protagonist. As Rachel DuPlessis puts it, Atwood does "rectify narrative by major attention to muted stories" (DuPlessis 1985, 122).

The use of genres gives a possibility to stretch the limits of realist writing. Genres such as Gothic and science fiction give more space for exploring and renegotiating genders and gendered systems than the realist form does (e.g. Lefanu 1988, 5). It is possible to see Atwood's novels as an effort to discuss genres, make feminist and different versions of familiar patterns – maybe even make Atwoodian and feminist collection of different books, a sort of unique library.

Atwood's novels can be described as "failed romances" – stories where the pattern of romance is questioned and undermined (see also e.g. Bouson 1993, 6). They are constantly criticising and commenting on the genres of romance and the Gothic, which are pointedly female genres. Love stories are not like they are "supposed" to be, they are disappointments. In romance the protagonist's feelings change from fear to love, in Gothic the opposite way around (Modleski 1982, 60-61). In some of Atwood's novels – *The Edible Woman*, *Lady Oracle* – the atmosphere constantly switches from horror to pleasure, from Gothic to romance.

In my view, Atwood's oeuvre presents sharp criticism of Western patterns of gender polarity. Stein writes that Atwood's texts "call into question conventional sex-role stereotypes" (Stein 1999, xi). Atwood's retrospective

narrators often use tools of irony and comic to emphasise and undercut or emphasise this criticism. Her fiction is coloured by serious laughter, or a snort towards the world it describes. Sara Mills formulates:

> Feminist text analysis (…) can develop into a form of consciousness-raising, a 'making aware' of that which seems to be self-evidently normal or neutral, a 'making strange' of the ordinary, and forcing readers to re-examine the text in the light of a consideration of gender. (Mills 1995, 39.)

If we take the third word, "analysis", away, I think the above could be said of Atwood's novels.

Next we will explore what happens when the feminist reader engages emotionally with the text, as many, myself included, do with Atwood's fiction.

1.4.4 The Implicated Reader

> [W]e learn to accept that our commitment to books, as to people, brings with it a chain of emotional consequences that we must be prepared to face up to on our own. (Pearce 1997, 138.)

In her book *Feminism and the Politics of Reading*, Pearce discusses the difference between reading as a practice and process, and between the feminist reader and the "implicated reader". Pearce claims for "an alternative model of reading, which goes 'beyond interpretation' and characterizes the text-reader relationship as non-instrumental and *implicated*" (Pearce 1997, 14, italics original). Gradually, during her own scholarship, she has become aware of a split between the feminist reader and the affected, emotionally involved reader, which she calls implicated reader.

In the course of reading, the reader may be seduced by the text and (momentarily) forget one's feminism. This does not happen because she is incompetent, but because the text invites her in, and she enters the text as emotionally, not ideologically charged. In spite of this oscillation, gender is always present in the text and the reader is aware of this. (Pearce 1997, 2-3.)

This is not to say that feminist reading position could not be emotionally involved, but the emotional identification is sometimes in friction with feminist consciousness (ibid.).

Pearce compares reading to a romance, which is filled with feelings such as anxiety, joy, desperation (and which also makes feminists often forget, at least for a while, their politics). Reader is (sometimes) a lover, whose aim is "not to understand" but to "engage". (Pearce 1997, 3, 6, 23.)

The usual avoidance of affect in critical reading practices has connections, according to Pearce, to gender and class. The cognitive, rational interpretative reading position implies a stance of the middle class, bourgeois, educated and masculine. These professional reading practices are strictly disconnected from reading with emotion, which is connected with the reading habits of the working class, uneducated and women. According to a traditional perception,

the lack of education leads to emotional involvement with art. This involvement has to be controlled by professional readers, and to fail to do this is unprofessional, even embarrassing. Though the issue of pleasure has been brought into question of reading (e.g. Roland Barthes's work), this emotion happens in connection to the act of interpretation, not in connection to the text. (Pearce 1997, 4, 7-10.)[23]

Pearce sees that her model of reading as a romance includes acknowledgement of a specific "textual other" with whom the reader actively engages. The feeling is not placed on the act of the interpretation, but on the textual other. This textual other can be:

1. a character in the text (…)
2. structure of feeling (i.e. there are emotions in the text that the reader recognises and may identify with)
3. an interlocutory subject position (how a character in the text positions *us*)
4. an author function
5. an interpretive community
6. the (covert/overt) audience/addressee of our own reading" (Pearce 1997, 17).

Following Ien Ang's study *Watching Dallas*, Pearce argues that the readers/viewers can be involved with a text even though it would describe a totally different life from their own. The characters and the plot can be unbelievable and inauthentic, and the reader/viewer can be unable to identify with the characters or even dislike them – but nevertheless the reader/viewer is reading/viewing with an interest. Ang and Pearce see that this is due to the "tragic structure of feeling", which can be found in these texts.[24] There are emotions in the text that the reader/viewer recognises and may identify with, "a cycle of disaster and recovery", which can give the reader a space to work her own feelings and experience catharsis. However, Pearce notes that catharsis can sometimes be impossible if the structure of feeling is too tragic for the reader/viewer: "whilst interpellation by a tragic structure of feeling might be *ultimately* reassuring, certain phases of the cycle will be distressing for certain viewers; and sometimes the distress will be *in excess* of the recovery that ensues". (Pearce 1997, 16, italics original.)

I see that the prolific amount of Atwood readers throughout the world prove that there is a "structure of feeling" in her work with which they can relate to, and engage with. I also think that the differing scholarly interpretations of the novels' endings can be connected to this theoretical context. To some readers, the cycle of disaster and recovery is not solved in a sufficiently satisfactory way; the novel does not give a sufficient catharsis. This can also explain my own feelings of discomfort with some of Atwood's novels' endings.

As said earlier, a text has several intratextual and extratextual addressees. However, there are "preferred" reader positions. Pearce uses the example of

Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982) when arguing that the readers are hungry to see that they would be preferred or awarded as readers, i.e. the text would in its turns and especially in the ending give the reader the feeling that she is the ideal reader of the book. In other words, when reading for instance *The Color Purple*, reader can feel included and excluded in terms of her class, race, gender and sexual orientation. Pearce uses the term "reader jealousy" to describe the emotions contained with this search for recognition by the text. One can feel jealousy when understanding that this text addresses a different reader, not me. (Pearce 1997, 47-48.)

The search for the feeling of being recognised by the text can lead into feelings of discomfort and frustration:

> [W]hereas the text's characters are fixed in the historical moment of their first inscription – performing the same roles, living the same lives, over and over again – the reader is free (if not actually compelled) to wander: to make her repeated journey through their landscape without *ever* being able to make herself seen or heard, without ever being able to make the connection between her life and theirs. (Pearce 1997, 24-25, italics original.)

We are "ghostly readers": we become emotionally engaged with the textual other, but we cannot become active agents in the text; we cannot change anything. For example, we cannot warn or give advice to the characters even though we would like to. (Ibid.)

Although this approach seems to give a significant amount of power to the text and to diminish the power of the reader, Pearce sees that this is not straightforwardly so. Although the text "initiates the relationship" and the reader is in "a reactive position", the reader is active and has power. She chooses whether to take the position what the text offers, for example, of an enemy or an ally, and how to be in dialogue with it. (Pearce 1997, 49.)

Pearce uses Barthes's work *A Lover's Discourse*. *Fragments* (2002 [1977]), a "dictionary" of love, in formulating the phases and feelings that the reader undergoes when engaging with a text as an implicated (or amorous) reader. The first of these phases is *ravissement* (ravishment) or enamoration, passionate falling in love. Pearce sees that there are several feelings associated with this early phase of love: enchantment, devotion and fulfilment. After the passionate and joyous ravissement comes the *sequel*, in which the feelings are more mixed: there is anxiety, frustration, jealousy and disappointment. (Pearce 1997, 85-186.)

Every time we read a text we do expose ourselves to enchantment, although we may be feeling resistant. Our extratextual, social and psychological situation plays a big part in this: for example, why do we read the text, what presuppositions do we have of the text and its author, and even what is our own personal love life like at the moment of reading. (Pearce 1997, 86-87.)

Attraction can lead to devotion. As Pearce notes, many of us have some works of art that are immensely important to us (or have been, at some point of our lives). (Pearce 1997, 107-108.) Fulfilment can follow attraction and devotion. We search for a space of "amorous embrace", in which time seems to stand still and everything is blissful – an idyll. (Pearce 1997, 88, 119.)

When the first thrill of love is experienced, sequel follows. In Barthes's words, the sequel is "the long train of sufferings, wounds, anxieties, distresses, resentments, despairs, embarrassments, and deceptions" that comes after the beginning of a love affair. (Barthes 2002, 197-198.) Pearce's reading of textual enamoration's sequel examines, for example, anxiety, frustration, jealousy, and disappointment. (Pearce 1997, 139.)

In disappointment, one loses the amorous relationship with the text. A third party plays an important part in "text-reader disappointment". This third party presents itself as a rival and an informer, which shakes and destroys the amorous reader's devotion. However strong this third party is, it nevertheless is the reader herself who lets the disappointment come in and decides to stop loving. (Pearce 1997, 170-171.)

Pearce does not think that her textual enamoration "method" is a mode that should be preferred to others. One of her aims is to warn the feminist readers of the possible problems of implicated reading and interpretation. She finds it important to be aware of the oscillating reader positions. (Pearce 1997, 190.)

I see that my own reader position is combined of these two, the feminist reader and the implicated reader. I do realise that my position shifts during reading, from a critical feminist reader to the humanist, engaged reader and vice versa. I cannot deny my emotional engagement with these novels and I do not see it necessary to do so. However, I aim to acknowledge when my reading position oscillates and changes.

As I say in the very beginning of this introduction, I find it necessary to include psychoanalytic perspectives to analyse the complex motif of food, eating, and hunger in Atwood's novels. Although feminist close reading enables me as a reader to analyse the motif, the psychoanalytic theory gives additional help in answering my questions; it helps me to dig deeper, and to understand more. These two methods compliment each other. When I first read *The Edible Woman* and started to study the patterns of eating in Atwood's fiction, I noticed that I was interested in the question "why", in addition to the question "how". I wanted to know what was the underlying "reason" of all these power struggles in my primary material, and during the process of writing and reading I became aware that the feminist object-relations theory and theory on divided self helped me to understand the less concrete connotations and meanings of the motif of food, eating, and hunger.

In the following, I will introduce this dissertation's other methodological basis, in addition to feminist close reading: feminist psychoanalytic literary criticism. First, I will explore the connections between trauma and narration.

1.5 Narrative and Trauma – Feminist Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism

1.5.1 Narrative and Trauma – Traumatic Narration

As many scholars note, all Atwood's protagonists have suffered a trauma or a loss in their childhood or later in their lives, and in the present time of the novels they are dealing with the consequences of this (e.g. Cuder 2003, 49; Mycak 1996, 11-16). As Mycak crystallises, the selves of the protagonists are divided, "neither integrated nor whole (…) identity is dislocated, alienated, splintered, and split" (Mycak 1996, 9). In my opinion, this context of traumatisation is visible in the novels' narration.

In her discussion of focalisation, Mieke Bal writes:

> Memory is an act of 'vision' of the past but, as an act, situated in the present of the memory. It is often a narrative act: loose elements come to cohere into a story, so that they can be remembered and eventually told. But as is well known, memories are unreliable (…) and when put into words, they are rhetorically overworked so that they can connect to an audience, for example, a therapist. Hence, the 'story' the person remembers is not identical to the one she experienced. (Bal 1997, 147.)

There is always a gap between the narrator and her story's experiencing character, even though they would be the same person. According to Bal, the act of narration becomes more complex when a traumatic experience is involved:

> Traumatic events disrupt the capacity to comprehend and experience them [happenings] at the time of their occurrence. As a result the traumatised person cannot remember them; instead, they recur in bits and pieces, in nightmares (…). The incapability that paralyses the traumatized person can be situated on both story and text levels. (…) At the later time of remembrance the subject cannot shape a story out of them. (Bal 1997, 147.)

The above quotation could be a description of Atwood's novels. The narrators do succeed in telling their story, but their ability to narrate reliably or at all is always thematised. There is a sense of painfulness in the act of narration: remembering and telling the story hurts.

In Atwood's novels, there is usually a dialogue with the past and present of the protagonist. The memories and today alternate. The protagonists often appear to live in their pasts at least as much as in their present (with the exception of *The Edible Woman*). When discussing a book for children, *Something Very Sorry*, Bal writes:

> The girl's slowly returning memories of the accident alternate with her experiences in the hospital and the happy past before the car crash. These delicate alternations contribute to the story in a very meaningful way: they provide insight into the broken sense of self of the traumatized child in a modulation that makes the reader experience it with her on an emotional level as well. (Bal 1997, 83.)

This portrayal is reminiscent of Atwood's novels' pattern: we meet the protagonist in a situation, where something traumatising has happened to her, and she is trying to figure out how she got into that position. She ponders what her life is like now, and, sometimes, what it might be in the future.

The novels are often two-dimensional: first, there is the retrospective narrator who tells the retrospective story and comments it and her present life is narrated too. Second, there is the story of the survival of that character, the retrospective narrator's former self.

In the course of the novels narrators tell us of their (or the characters') pasts and presents in fragments, and there are dreams and nightmares that reflect the past traumas and happenings. The narrative is built like a puzzle, from which we weave a story along with the narrator (e.g. Cuder 2003, 2-3). This situation presents a dilemma or an enigma to the reader. As in Bal's example, this narrative structure points to a "broken sense of self", and makes the readers emotionally involved. Through the narrative, the narrators and protagonists are remembering their lives, and building subjectivity.

Stein sees Atwood's narrators as victims, witnesses, reporters and Scheherazades (Stein 1999, 7). Often there is a serious threat hanging above them, which makes the allusion to *The Arabian Nights* plausible.[25] Imprisonment, mental or physical, is always an issue to Atwood's protagonists. Some of the protagonists are stuck in an unwanted work, in a very painful phase of their lives, or even in prison. They feel trapped and haunted. There are allusions to death and suicide in the novels and the atmosphere is gloomy and forbidding. Often the protagonists are even threatened by death, and there is always a sense of insecurity: will an internal or an external violent force interrupt the story? Will the narrator be able to tell her narrative to us, or will something dreadful happen to her?

The traumatic narration is also visible in the question of the narrator's reliability. In fiction, the narrators may often lie. They can try to make things look better than they were, they can try to make themselves and their actions look more acceptable and proper than they actually were at the time of the happenings. Atwood's narrators are often unreliable and unstable: they admit lying about their lives and the events to the reader. Their view of the narrative world is very subjective and filtered through their own, often-confused minds.

In most Atwood's novels the focalisor coincides with the character and this gives the character an advantage over the other characters (Bal 1997, 146). In addition to this, when the narrator is the same person as the character and the focalisor, the perspective is totally hers. The other characters and events are seen through one medium, which gives very little space to the other characters. However, the admitted and thematised subjective stance of the narrator brings suspicion to the mind of the reader, who understands that this is clearly only one person's partial view.

Although Atwood's novels have very open and ambiguous endings, in one way we know that there has been "progress". The narrators and protagonists have explored something that was traumatising to them. By narrating and remembering their lives they, in a way, become subjects of their

stories. As Bal reminds us, the position of a speaker is a position of power. Telling a story is a "creative power", and it can be "a life-giving act". (Bal 1997, 53, 55.)

In the following, I will shortly explore some basic questions of psychoanalytic literary criticism.

1.5.2 Literature and Psychoanalysis

> To be sure, psychoanalytic explanations for women's oppression do not provide a total explanation for female subordination. Legal, political, and economic structures must also be taken into account. Nevertheless, to free herself from what is holding her back, a woman must do more than fight for her rights as a citizen; she must also probe the depths of her psyche in order to exorcise the original primal father from it. Only then will she have the space to think herself anew and become who she has the power to be. (Tong 1992, 172.)

In the 1960s and early 1970s, many feminist scholars were very suspicious, even hateful towards Freud and Freudian thinking (see e.g. Kate Millett's 1971 classic *Sexual Politics*). Since then, there has been a lot of interest towards Freud and psychoanalysis among feminist thinking and an interest towards femininity and women within the more traditional psychoanalytic thinking.

The people who started to rewrite Freud's thoughts from a feminist perspective showed that in spite of his evident failures and misunderstandings, Freud had a reminiscent idea from the feminists: one is not born a woman, one grows to be a woman (and is educated and moulded to be one). Psychoanalysis never ignored gender, it never thought that gender was meaningless, and thus it differed from many other theories. (See e.g. Chodorow 1989, 2; Mitchell 1974.) Psychoanalysis gave the feminists the concept "unconscious", which makes it possible to interrogate female psyche further than the idea that women's behaviour is merely about role learning.

My own interest in psychoanalytic theory falls in the category of the feminist object-relations strand, represented by Nancy Chodorow and Jessica Benjamin, whose thoughts I will introduce in this chapter. At first, however, I will discuss another field of intensive interaction: literary criticism and psychoanalysis.

Psychoanalytic literary criticism is an old and well-established strand of literary criticism. One can argue that psychoanalytic literary criticism has emerged at the beginning of the 20th century, after Freud's early publications (if not earlier). Although it has a long tradition, psychoanalytic literary criticism is often thought to be somewhat problematic. Peter Brooks argues that in spite of their "promises (…) literature and psychoanalysis remain mismatched bedfellows" (Brooks 1987, 1). Psychoanalytic literary theory concentrates on the author, the text, or the readers. In the first instance, the study concentrates on the author's life and sees her work deeply connected with her life and experiences.[26] When the text is studied, the critic concentrates on psychological phenomena in the text. For instance, the critic explores character's psychic

process, such as the Oedipus complex. Psychoanalytic study on readership analyses the psychology of reading: what happens in the situation of reading and interpretation?

Psychoanalytic critics often disagree on the relationship between literature and psychoanalysis. There are critics who think that psychoanalysis and literature are equal in power, they are both texts and literature. Some see that psychoanalysis is an explanatory force that helps to interpret fiction, some use literary theory to explore a psychological issue. (Rimmon-Kenan 1987, xii-xiii.)

One of the discussed problems of psychoanalytic literary criticism is its way of using a theory of "real people" for interpreting textual characters. Fictional characters, of course, are not round and human in the same way as, for instance, the writer and the reader of this text. This, however, does not mean that we would not read them as real people. Pearce points out that although one cannot argue that characters are "authentic persons", one must however understand that in our readings, at least in our private readings, we turn our blind eye to this fact. (Pearce 1997, 17-18.) We desire to see the characters as authentic persons, like us. This does not mean that they would not be fiction and discourses, but, in a way, also we and our experiences are discursive and narrative: we build our life with narratives.

Although the characters are not real people, the texts contain psychological symbols and structures. Brooks argues:

> [T]he structure of literature *is* in some sense the structure of mind – not a specific mind, but (…) the dynamic organization of the psyche, a process of structuration. (…) we sense that there ought to be, that there must be, some correspondence between literary and psychic process, that aesthetic structure and form, including literary tropes, must somehow coincide with the psychic structures and operations they both evoke and appeal to. (Brooks 1987, 4, italics original.)

In my opinion, there are convincing arguments to back up the idea of literature and psychoanalysis as texts. We can perceive psychoanalysis and other major theories as texts or discourses themselves. They interact with fiction and scholarly work. This does not merely mean that fiction is influenced by, for example, psychoanalysis, but the other way around, too. Theories are affected by poems, plays and prose. We can see that, for instance, Freud found his concept of Oedipus complex from a play by Sophocles. As Brooks remarks, "much of Freud's understanding of interpretation and the construction of meaning is grounded in literature, in those 'poets and philosophers' he was the first to acknowledge as his precursors" (Brooks 1987, 16). Maybe one could even argue that it is better to use psychoanalysis in order to interpret fictional characters than to for understanding real people, since both are texts. Fiction and psychoanalysis can be seen as textual discourses, which present a person in a certain light.

Although I do see psychoanalysis and literature as textual constructions, I am inclined to agree with Brooks in his argument that psychoanalysis is not like any intertext available:

> One can resist the notion that psychoanalysis 'explains' literature and yet insist that the kind of intertextual relation it holds to literature is quite different from the intertextuality that obtains between two poems or novels, and that it illuminates in quite other ways. (…) Psychoanalysis is not an arbitrarily chosen intertext for literary analysis but rather a particularly insistent and demanding intertext (Brooks 1987, 16-17.)

According to Brooks, one can read Freud's view of analysis situation as an act reminiscent of reading and interpretation. Narrators are usually remembering and retelling, like people in analysis. The reader and the analyst construct their own readings and interpretations of what they read/hear. Brooks calls this way of thinking a transferential model. Transference means the emotional investments, the emotional and psychic processes that are triggered in the situation of analysis and reading. All parties, the narrator/analysand, the text/talk and the reader/analyst and her interpretation are important and in interaction and dialogue. Brooks writes:

> Meaning in this view is not simply 'in the text', nor wholly the fabrication of a reader (or a community of readers), but in the dialogic struggle and collaboration of the two, in the activation of textual possibilities in the process of reading. Such a view ultimately destabilizes the authority of reader/critic in relation to the text since, caught up in the transference, he becomes analysand as well as analyst. (Brooks 1987, 14.)

This view of the interaction between the text and the reader is reminiscent of Mills's view presented in the chapter Feminist Literary Criticism. According to Brooks, everyone is involved, as well as conscious and unconscious processes are at work in this "dialogic struggle and collaboration".

Next, I will turn to feminist object-relations theory, and especially to two of its representatives: Nancy Chodorow and Jessica Benjamin. After this, I will discuss the concept of divided self. In my opinion, these two psychoanalytic perspectives are important and necessary in interpreting Atwood's novels, especially the characters' relationships. Given Atwood's emphasis on her characters' inner lives and troublesome presents and pasts, the psychoanalytic approach is significant. Food, of course, is essential in the construction of one's self and one's relationships to others, and thus an important aspect of psychological thinking (see the chapter Food and Eating).

In this dissertation, when it is relevant to my topic, I want to explore the traumatic narration of Atwood's texts, and I will test the usefulness of the feminist object-relations and the concept of divided self in the analysis of her novels. In my opinion, Atwood's novels are in dialogue with feminist psychoanalytic theory. This dialogue is sometimes highly ironic (in her lighter novels, in particular), but sometimes quite serious (for instance in *Surfacing* and *Cat's Eye*).

1.5.3 Feminist Object-Relations Theory

> I would like to see. Or to be seen. (…) there must be two looking. (AG, 379.)
>
> Despite the appearance of gender neutrality and the freedom to be whatever we like, gender polarity persists. And it creates a painful division within the self and between self and other; it constantly frustrates our efforts to recognize ourselves in the world and in each other. (Benjamin 1988, 172.)

Of course, after Freud, there have been several and different kinds of interpretations and applications of his works. Object-relations theory is one of them, and influential names in this field include, for example, D.W. Winnicott and Melanie Klein. While classic Freudian readings often concentrate on intrasubjectivity and drives within the person, the object-relations theory concentrates on intersubjectivity: how the self grows and is constructed in relation to other people. However, intrasubjectivity and intersubjectivity are not necessarily exclusive, but rather complementary (see e.g. Benjamin 1995, 4).[27]

Nancy Chodorow divides psychoanalytic feminism into three strands: Lacanian psychoanalytic feminism, object-relations psychoanalytic feminism, and interpersonal psychoanalytic feminism. Of these, the latter two are in many ways connected and reminiscent, but the object-relations mode pays more attention to the unconscious than the interpersonal strand does. The interpersonal mode discusses the cultural valuation and standardisation of femininity and it can be called cultural school feminism. The Lacanian stream stands out as more different from the other two. It focuses on language, its phallogocentrism, and considers the subject inevitably split. (E.g. Chodorow 1989, 184-193.)[28]

I use mainly object-relations psychoanalytic feminism, especially Chodorow and Benjamin, and to a lesser extent, interpersonal psychoanalytic feminism, especially Carol Gilligan. For my purposes, the Lacanian stream is too abstract and I do not personally find it meaningful in connection to my own interests.

According to Jessica Benjamin, in order to become healthy individuals, who see others as their equals, we need the others to recognise us. By recognition she means "response from the other which makes meaningful the feelings, intentions, and actions of the self. It allows the self to realize its agency and authorship". (Benjamin 1988, 12, who discusses here critically the ideas of Hegel and Freud; Chodorow 1989, 103-105.) This recognition, however, is distorted by the polarity of the cultural meaning of genders, the binary opposition in which male and female are seen as two ends of a pole, far away from each other. This distortion of recognition starts in childhood, when the child sees that mother and father are different: the other is passive and gives soothing, the other is active and gives excitement. (Benjamin 1988, 171-175; see also Mead 1963.)

Our culture emphasises separation, especially the separation and difference of the Oedipus complex, which is claimed to be happening at the age of three. A boy child feels that in order to become a subject he must identify

with the masculine power and – because of the cultural repudiation of femininity – he has to abandon the mother and what she represents: nurturance and dependency. A girl child is denied the similar identification with the powerful father and she more easily remains in the area of cultural femininity: dependency and passivity. She may try to reverse the roles as an adult, taking the role of the independent individual, but it always means repudiation of the feminine. Woman has no independent subjectivity or sexuality in this pattern of unequal recognition. (Benjamin 1988, 76, 78, 99, 109, 111, 115, 168, 218; Chodorow 1989, 6, 34, 42,109-111; see also Horney 1926.)

Benjamin writes,

> The sexual difference (…) [is] interpreted in terms of complementarity and unequal roles, subject and object. The aspect of will, desire and activity – all that we might conjure up with a subject who is an "I" – was assigned to the male gender alone. (Benjamin 1988, 88.)

In the Western societies, the stress on separation, masculinity and Oedipus complex has led to a situation where the necessary mutual recognition between women and men is not working. When the primary recognition is thought to be happening between father and son, between men, woman is "a contested point on the triangle, never an other whose different and equal subjectivity need be confronted". Gender polarity is the ruling system, where "[e]ach gender is able to represent only one aspect of the polarized self-other relationship". (Benjamin 1988, 170-171, 181.) Thus the female self is a self "in relation and involved with boundary negotiations, separation and connection". The male self becomes "more distanced and [is] based on defensively firm boundaries and denials of self-other connection". (Chodorow 1989, 2, 32-33, 45-46, 109-110.)

Mother and women are associated with dependency and attachment, father and men are equalled with separation and individuality – of which the latter are appreciated in our culture. Men are subjects, and women are not. Because women are not seen as equal subjects, they represent a mixture of extreme power (mother) and powerlessness (women) for men. Women are associated with the loss of self, and men see that the dependency of women can cause that to them, too. Thus men may have an immense need to control women and make them submissive, and women want to be recognised by men, even through submission. Only other men can recognise men in the way that can be defined as recognition by an equal subject. (Benjamin 1988, 171, 173, 181, 195; Chodorow 1989, 42, 110-111.)

I see Atwood's protagonists as selves in relation to others. Their thoughts and actions are influenced by their relationships. They are in constant negotiation, even struggle, with another person, who may be an internalised person from the past, or a close person from the present life who also, of course, is an internalised figure in the character's mind. This other person appears suffocating and powerful: she or he threatens the protagonist's individuality and separateness, her own will and self-control. These others are parents, other caretakers, friends, lovers, spouses, co-workers et cetera.

In Atwood's novels, the heterosexual romance and love are portrayed as hunting, eating and owning. There often are characters, who are depicted as hunters and prowlers, and they have victims, whom they try to "eat". Often characters are both hunters and victims, suggesting that the scene of heterosexual desire is complex, and possibly harmful for both genders.

The male characters in Atwood's fiction are related to the idea of men as the desired recognisers, but distant and incomprehensible, and usually unable to give the needed recognition. Hengen sees Atwood's male characters representing "regressive narcissism": inner void, desperation and artificiality (Hengen 1993, 17, 25, 53). The female protagonists see them usually as distant, strange, unpredictable, and ominously threatening, but intriguing and attractive, too. The male characters may seem easy-going and friendly on the surface, but beneath their first appearance they have threatening qualities (at least in the minds of the protagonists). Or they may seem like ruthless hunters, but they end up as both pathetic and comic victims. The female protagonist is often confused whether the man in question is an aggressive predator or not, and sometimes she changes her mind constantly: at first she decides that the man is good, but immediately after this she sees him as a ruthless hunter and devourer.

This very Gothic idea of secret evil in men carries resemblance to the old fairy-tale of the Bluebeard, and accordingly this motif in Atwood's fiction has been called the Bluebeard motif (Grace 1984, 246; Melley 1996, 83; Nilsen 1994, 129; Hengen 1993, 53; Duncker 1992, 156; Reynolds and Noakes 2002, 7; Wilson 1989, passim; see also Pyrhönen 2004, passim). Atwood herself is very conscious of this fairy-tale and she tells that her favourite reading as a child was stories by the Grimm brothers, and she has written a collection of short stories called *The Bluebeard's Egg and Other Stories* (see e.g. Atwood in Hammond 1992, 115).

There are several versions of the tale of the Bluebeard. In one version of the story, a young woman marries an older man and moves to his castle. The husband gives her keys to all of the rooms but one, and forbids her to go in there. The wife, of course, cannot resist the temptation and finds the tortured and dead bodies of the earlier wives. The Bluebeard threatens to kill her, but the woman runs away. In some tales her brothers help her, in some her mother.[29]

In the short story "Bluebeard's Egg" from Atwood's 1983 collection *The Bluebeard's Egg and Other Stories*, protagonist Sally is affectionate and condescending towards her husband Ed. She feels superior to him and treats him slightly like a child, somebody who does not understand as much as she does. When Sally sees her husband's hand on her best friend's bottom in a party at their home, everything changes. She is not sure how to read this sign and starts suspecting that everything in her husband is false and an act. This pattern is iterated in Atwood's fiction: a female protagonist feels in control of the relationship and somewhat more up to things than her boyfriend or husband, and suddenly finds out that this is not the case and becomes slowly horrified when also other things seem to confirm this new notion. The man she thought was as innocent as an egg is a complex person himself, with deep and unknown layers.

This fairytale and motif concentrate on politics of gender and marriage, and echoes the Gothic genre. As Reynolds and Noakes note, "Atwood is interested in this particular fairy tale, because it says so much about men and women (…) curiosity and control" (Reynolds and Noakes 2002, 8). To make this issue between genders more complex Atwood's female protagonists are very subjective in their stories. They are often the sole narrators or at the focus of the narrative, the observers and storytellers. Are they reliable or unreliable? Both arguments are supported by the text. I believe that this is intentional and tells of the world inside Atwood's fiction and outside it: there are no easy answers. (See also the chapter Dialogic Theory and Feminist Writing.)

In Atwood's novels, the female protagonists often mask their desire (for love or power) as care taking. They may present their desire and will to possess as giving and being unselfish although the truth maybe the reverse. This motif is often visible in the images of healing and caretaking. The image of a nurse, seemingly innocent and giving but hungry underneath, reappears in the novels.

In the following, I will briefly introduce psychoanalytic thoughts of healthy/whole self versus divided self, and the concept "poisonous pedagogy".[30]

1.5.4 The Divided Self

> Children believe that everything bad that happens is somehow their fault (…) but they also believe in happy endings, despite all evidence to the contrary. (BA, 138).
>
> This can only be because they have been rehearsed by us already, over and over, in silence and darkness; in such silence, such darkness, that we are ignorant of them ourselves. Blind but sure-footed, we step forward as if into a remembered dance. (BA, 321.)

A healthy self is able to see the others as they are and to communicate with them. She can also see and assess situations clearly. A healthy person can form meaningful relationships with other people. She can act as she wants, to be spontaneous, and her behaviour is not only a reaction to the other's behaviour. She can share opinions or disagree, engage with people without having a feeling that her individual being is threatened. She feels real and authentic.[31]

When a person encounters a traumatising – unbearable – situation, as a child or an adult, the unconscious mind represses it or at least denies the full implications of the juncture. The repression and denial are crucial to the person in order for her to survive. The person stores the painful happenings in her body and in her unconscious mind. The consequences of the trauma – flashbacks and other reiterative symptoms like low self esteem, obsessing et cetera – are called post-traumatic stress disorder. (E.g. Miller 1996, 12, 20, 56; see also Ferenczi 1985, 296; Freud 1985, 248, 250-251.)

Trauma can cause a division of one's self: when a person suffers from a divided self, she has two selves, a false self and the true self. If the person is for instance not accepted as a child, she must hide her true self and she lets the

false self take over and handle the relationships with other people. (Laing 1971, 61, 71-72; Winnicott 1960, 142-143; Miller 1996, 62; Chodorow 1989, 106. See also Ferenczi 1985, 296; Benjamin 1988, 53.)

In a life of a person with denial, repression and divided self, the painful scene is repeatedly brought to the present life. It may look different and the actors are different, but the same elements are present. This is restaging or re-enacting – a need for reiteration. (Miller 1986, 16, 25; Miller 1998; Miller 1996, 26-27, 56; Laing 1971, 63. See also Winnicott 1960, 142; Chodorow 1989, 46-47.)

Although I believe that there is often an element of restaging in our adult relationships, I also believe that adult encounters can make a difference and be different. I do not think that the need for reiterating certain patterns is compulsory and unavoidable. Our behaviour and relationships, in Pearce's words, "mutate into new, culturally sensitive forms" (Pearce 1997, 21).

When a person suffers from a divided self, she cannot have direct access with real happenings or real people around her. The false self colours everything she experiences and sees – reality becomes distorted. There is no possibility for meaningful and fruitful relationships. The communication in a relationship may work efficiently for a while, but it is basically "an empty happening", where the subjects are false and objectified. (Laing 1971, 73-74; Winnicott 1960, 142-143; Miller 1996, 62-63.)

Alice Miller's term "poisonous pedagogy" describes the common pattern of parenting in Western societies. She defines the term as "the kind of parenting and education aimed at breaking a child's will and making that child into an obedient subject by means of overt or covert coercion, manipulation, and emotional blackmail". The rearing of a child may include emotional, physical or sexual abuse. In the scene of poisonous pedagogy, a child is not allowed to see how badly she is being treated, and actually her protective mechanisms deny her the ability to see and recognise the abuse. (Miller 2001, ix; Miller 1986, 29, 88-89; Miller 1986b, 13, 21-22; see also Benjamin 1988, 212-214; DeSalvo 1991, passim.)[32]

Miller argues that some people have been starving all their life in spite of their parents' constant care, which concentrates on the surface of things: feeding, sleeping et cetera. Their hunger comes from not being nourished mentally. (Miller 1986, 403.) In a reminiscent way Benjamin asserts that the common pattern of parenting results in the infant's experience of not being nourished and being alone responsible for taking care of oneself. She is not "truly being "fed", getting nourishment from outside". (Benjamin 1988, 47.)

In painful situations food may become an important issue. Our adult way of eating can sometimes symbolise our early and later childhood's interaction with our caretakers. Sometimes a grown person sees the people around her in a distorted light. All relationships are grounded in the child's need: who will nourish me enough? Who will give me everything I need? I see this relevant to some illustrations of the motif of food, eating, and hunger in Atwood's novels.

Margaret Atwood has asserted that "our society encourages people to [exhibit predatory behaviour]" (Atwood in Twigg 1992, 121). This proposes that thinking of the other as a consumable object, which might satisfy one's hunger,

is not only an individual problem, but deeply imbedded in our culture. The division of self happens inside of a person, but is also a societal question. In my opinion, the idea of the divided self can be connected with the idea of gender polarity. When one's self splits into two separate entities, also the world appears polarised. And vice versa, when the culture is polarised, one's mind will split easier.[33]

Atwood's protagonists suffer from difficult relationships as children and adults. There is abuse coming from their parents, other caretakers and/or other children. The marriage of the parents is often portrayed as a trap, where the adults are unhappily stuck, and often a parent runs away from the unhappy union. Many Atwood's protagonists are self-destructive and suicidal. This behaviour is linked to the protagonists' pasts, which they have not come to terms with. In the present, the burdens of yesterday and today may become too heavy to bear, and that is why the protagonists sometimes make extreme efforts to escape.

The division of self can be permanent, but it can also heal, at least partially (e.g. Laing 1971, 61). Often in Atwood's novels, there are scenes where the protagonist is portrayed having a new connection with her body and mind, her past and present – her false and true selves.

In the following parts of this dissertation, I will explore Atwood's ten novels in their own chapters. In the first, "*The Edible Woman:* (In)Edibility of a Marriage", I analyse the novel's portrayal of the protagonist Marian MacAlpin's problems with eating. The motif of food is motivated by her situation in life. Her engagement and the future changes in her life cause symptoms that can be called anorexia nervosa, and in terms of symbolic hunger her vision of the world is divided into hunters and victims. The chapter also discusses images of cake and food remains as symbols of deeper, even unconscious and threatening issues in Marian's life.

The second chapter "*Surfacing*: Frozen Hunger" turns to Atwood's second novel *Surfacing*. The nameless protagonist has the most deeply divided self of all the ten novels' main characters. At first she has no problems with eating or making food. On the contrary, this appears to be the one area she is in control of. Her feelings towards food begin with numbness, but gradually change. The novel's motif of food is connected with power, and the protagonist's repressed memories and their gradual surfacing. This chapter explores the representations of neediness and numbness in characters and sees their relationships as painful struggles.

I explore Atwood's third novel in a chapter called "*Lady Oracle*: Love and Eating". In the novel, the motif of food is most explicit in the portrayal of protagonist Joan's childhood hunger and struggle with her mother. Joan's symptoms suggest compulsive eating. The mother – daughter interaction creates a symbolic hunger in Joan, which manifests and revises itself in her adulthood relationships. Food is tied to various feelings, such as love and comfort.

In "*Life Before Man*: Food and Family", I argue that all three main characters have a specific attitude towards food and eating. Elizabeth eats

compulsively, Nate controls and takes care of others' eating, and Lesje does not eat much. The protagonists are going through a change, and images of food underline and illustrate this. In my opinion, the characters restage and struggle in their lives and feel threatened by a female, motherly force. I also explore an iterative image of a nurse and nursing in *Life Before Man*. The characters desire a new life and another, healing person.

In "*Bodily Harm*: The (Sexual) Politics of Food, Eating, and Hunger", the motif of food is connected to the protagonist Rennie's illness, and to the ominous atmosphere of her life in Canada and on a Caribbean island where she travels to to write a story. Food's essential importance is repeated in the novel, and it becomes more essential than ever when Rennie is put in prison for suspicion of being a spy.

In the chapter "*The Handmaid's Tale*: Forbidden and Transgressive Hungers", I study food as an illustration of protagonist Offred's present situation in the religious and authoritarian regime of Gilead. She is not deprived of food, on the contrary, but she cannot appease her hunger with what she wants. Thinking of the desired foodstuffs represents freedom, nostalgia and even rebellion. I examine the ambiguous images of victims and tormentors in the novel. The characters are mixtures of both; even the cruellest man has soft spots and almost convincing arguments for his behaviour. I also explore *The Handmaid Tale*'s strong images of symbolic hunger.

In "*Cat's Eye*: Food, Eating, and Misery", I discuss how the food motif largely concentrates on Elaine's childhood. Elaine's true, authentic self is in a painful trap. The torment she suffers in the hands of other children makes her split, but the roots for this are deeper. The chapter analyses food in connection to child Elaine's feelings of misery. Cordelia, Elaine's long lost friend is a constant presence in Elaine's mind and the novel consists of Elaine's efforts to reconcile and negotiate with that ghost.

In the chapter "*The Robber Bride*: Three Little Hungers and the Vampire", I examine the three protagonists' – Tony's, Charis' and Roz's – different attitudes towards food, as well as their concrete and symbolic hungers. Zenia, their friend and enemy, is their internalised monster, a woman who can do anything. I explore the representation of Zenia as the three women's projection. In addition to this, the novel includes images of nursing and healing. As usual in Atwood's novels, care taking is an ambivalent thing: its other side is greed and hunger.

In my examination of Atwood's ninth novel, "*Alias Grace*: Hidden Hungers", I explore the power struggle between Grace and the other protagonist, doctor Simon Jordan. In addition to this, I study how in the novel's present time Grace's hunger is in many ways controlled and restricted. Simon Jordan has enough to eat, but he is hungry for recognition, in his public and private life. This hunger is climaxed in his violent relationship with his landlady.

The Blind Assassin's protagonist Iris is eighty-three years old in the novel's present time, and the motif of food is often connected with her painful past. In the chapter "*The Blind Assassin*: Eating, Compliance, and Resistance", I study

the motif of concrete and symbolic food in Iris's autobiography and in the embedded novel, which is a namesake of *The Blind Assassin*. Iris and her sister Laura are repeatedly portrayed as victims and their hungers are subdued and manipulated. However, they find their ways of resisting this smothering.

2 *THE EDIBLE WOMAN*: (IN)EDIBILITY OF A MARRIAGE

In Atwood's first novel *The Edible Woman* (1969), the protagonist, 26-year-old Marian MacAlpin, gets engaged with her boyfriend, practicing lawyer Peter Wollander, stops eating, ends the engagement and starts eating again. Kathryn VanSpanckeren sees the novel as "an inverted Cinderella story in which the poor working girl flees from the wealthy prince charming; or an inverted Sleeping Beauty, who wakes up when the prince is at safe distance" (VanSpanckeren 1987, 4).

The Edible Woman consists of three parts: in the first part Marian gets engaged. The second part tells of Marian's life as an engaged bride-to-be-married. In the third and shortest part Marian is single again.

In my opinion, *The Edible Woman*'s subject could be a question: it asks what the possibilities are for ambitious and educated young women in the early 1960s Toronto – and for all women. It answers the question by discussing female roles and identities. The novel's theme, I think, is the problems and restrictions that women face. Atwood sees that Marian's options are limited, at the beginning and at the end of the novel: "[A] career going nowhere (…) marriage as an exit from it" (Atwood 1979, 2).

The novel's motifs include food, both on the metaphorical and concrete level, symbolic hunting (sexuality and marriage), marriage and commitment and their influence on women, the exchange of women, consumerism, motherhood and pregnancy.

Atwood sees the novel as "protofeminist" (Atwood 1979, 2), because she wrote it in 1965, before the second wave of feminism reached its full force. She admits reading "Betty Friedan and Simone de Beauvoir behing locked doors" (ibid.), and the influence of these feminist classics is visible in the novel's thematics. Friedan's account of the paralysis and the deep unhappiness of the North-American housewife can be seen as an intertextual link to Marian's mixed feelings of marriage. Beauvoir's analysis of women as always the less valuable others of men, and her conception of the reproduction as one of the biggest hindrances to women's transcendence does have intertextual

connections to Marian's panicky feelings and thoughts about marriage, pregnancy and children. The motif of being a housewife and Marian's fear of it are illustrated in the character of Marian's friend Clara. In the character of Marian's room mate Ainsley the woman's possibility for single parenting in the 1960s Toronto is explored.

Atwood herself has called the novel a parody of comedy of manners, an "anticomedy". Atwood has also admitted thinking about symbolic cannibalism during the time of writing. For instance the edible cake decorations such as the bride and the groom were a source of wonder to her at the time: what do they actually mean? (Atwood 1979, 1.)

In the traditional 1800th and 1900th century romantic novel female and male characters fall in love and have to fight obstacles in order to get married and to get the approval of the community. This pattern is reversed in *The Edible Woman*. As Atwood comments on in an interview:

> In your standard 18th century comedy you have a young couple faced with difficulty in the form of somebody who embodies the restrictive forces of society and they trick or overcome this difficulty and end up getting married. The same thing happens in *The Edible Woman* except the wrong person gets married. (…) In a standard comedy, [Peter] would be the defiant hero. As it is, he and the restrictive society are blended into one, and the comedy solution would be a tragic solution for Marian. (Atwood in Gibson 1992, 12.)

As a form, parody can either mockingly rewrite an intertext, be it a specific text or a genre, or it can criticize contemporary societies and values – or it can do both of these (Dentith 2000, 9). As Atwood's comments on *The Edible Woman* above show, her goal has been to rewrite the traditional courtship novel, and also to pay critical attention to contemporary society's practices and images of symbolic cannibalism. Atwood's parody, then, is twofold.

The Edible Woman's narration is character bound: Marian is the narrator and the main character of the story (the experiencing character is a younger version of the narrator). Importantly, the narration changes during the novel.

In the first part, retrospective narrator Marian tells of the happenings during a period of couple of days, from Tuesday to Sunday, which is the Labour Day. "How did I get engaged?" could be the title of this part. Marian is also the internal focalisor of the chapter, and the story is filtrated through her perspective. In the first part's last chapter, which consists of three pages, the narrator states: "So here I am" (EW, 101). The tense changes from past into present tense. Marian speculates on the happenings of the last days and on how her situation has changed during this time. She tries to rationalise the engagement and denies that her sudden kissing with a stranger in a Laundromat had any meaning to her. She thinks: "Of course I was more involved with Peter (…) than I wanted to admit" (EW, 102). Marian plans and imagines their future together and thinks that everything will fall into its place, she will even start cleaning when they are married. She ends the chapter with the thought that she "must get organized. I have a lot to do", but before that she feels "like being on a rubber raft, drifting" (EW, 103). The chapter includes

many good intentions and efforts to convince herself and the reader that the engagement was a right solution. But when the novel progresses, the reader learns that she has done none of the things she planned to and her feelings of drifting and being like a hunted rabbit increase and intensify. At the end of the first part Marian as the narrator uses the present tense, but there is no return to the present tense after that, which might suggest that parts two and three are just products the narrator's imagination, her nightmare.

In the second part, the focalisor is still Marian, now in the third person. The focalisation stays internal, Marian's thoughts are described. In the third part, which is only five pages long and thus notably shorter than the other two parts, Marian comments: "I was thinking of myself in the first person singular again" (EW, 278). This suggests that the narrator has been Marian all the time, but during the engagement she had distanced her former self into the third person narration. The cancellation of the wedding and the engagement changes the narration and perspective.

There is a large amount of critical writing on *The Edible Woman*. In a chapter titled "*The Edible Woman*'s Refusal to Consent to Femininity", Bouson analyses Atwood's critique of romantic script, Marian's victimisation, and the novel's "female revenge fantasies", which in part counterbalance Marian's position (Bouson 1993, 17). Mycak examines the novel with a concentration on the motif of "[t]he split subject as [an] agent of exogamous exchange". She sees that the novel is mainly a critical commentary of society's "dynamics of circulation, consumption, and commodification, and relations of marriage, sex and signification". (Mycak 1996, 47.) Howell reads *The Edible Woman* as "a subversive novel", and explores the deconstruction of myths of femininity. According to Howell, the novel is in intense dialogue with Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, but Atwood's writes beyond Friedan's politics with her "power of laughter". (Howells 1996, 38-39.)

In *The Edible Woman*, the motif of hunger, food and eating, symbolic and concrete, is very explicit. When in most of her novels the food motif is an undercurrent, in her first novel food has a strong foothold in the thematic focus.[34] That is why my chapter on *The Edible Woman* is slightly longer than other chapters. The food motif is motivated by Marian's situation. Her hunger, symbolic and concrete, is excessive in a restrictive society. The motif is coloured by the protagonist's desire to be more than her limited feminine role options allow. The effort to fit in and its impossibility are present in Marian's problems with eating, which has been called anorexia nervosa. When Marian feels hunted and faced with too large and impossible choices about her life, it affects her view of the world outside of her: everybody is a hunter or hunted, gorger or starving.

I start my reading with an exploration of Marian's symptoms with eating. In the first two chapters, "The Revolting Food" and "The Literary Anorexia Nervosa", I study how some food becomes revolting and disgusting to Marian and how she identifies with food. In "The Disgusting Kitchen" I look at how not only food, but her kitchen, too, appear as frightening and full of ominous information. "The Hunters" and its subchapter "The Nurse" examine the motif

of symbolic hunger in the relationships of the novel. In the chapter "The Edible Bride" I read Marian's feeling of victimisation and the important motif of cake in the novel, and contemplate on the novel's ending.

2.1 The Revolting Food

The Edible Woman begins like a retrospective illness memory work: "I know I was all right on Friday when I got up" (EW, 11). Narrator Marian is retracing the tracks that led her to her engagement. This implies that the engagement has been a powerful force in her life, something that has changed everything, and this argument continues throughout the novel. This way of starting the novel, if we follow Pearce's thoughts on feminist writing, turns the reader into an ally of the narrator, or gives the reader a possibility for this (Pearce 1997, 39). The style is intimate and confessional, Marian is about to tell that she was all right before, but then something happened. As the story progresses, it becomes clear that the "ideal" reader is feminist or at least inclined to understand Marian's situation as a predicament. This situation, of course, could be seen as at least partially a happy one: she is getting married. But to the feminist reader, Marian's confusion in this situation is more understandable. She would like to progress in her career, but this seems impossible for a young woman of her time, and the only way out of it is marriage, which means that she cannot work anymore, at least full time and seriously. It appears that she cannot have both.[35]

Food is present already on the first page, where Marian takes care of her hangoverish roommate Ainsley's eating in a way reminiscent of taking care of a child, refills Ainsley's glass and mixes an alka-seltzer to her juice. Hunger is present throughout the novel, starting from the very beginning: while taking care of Ainsley, time flies and Marian cannot eat as much as she would have wanted. She is hungry right after breakfast and buys "a package of peanuts" (EW, 16), thinks of the lunch all morning and plans her dinner during the day. Immediately in her workplace, she is asked to taste canned rice puddings with different flavours, and she feels like eating again: "my stomach could use the extra breakfast" (EW, 18).

After this hungry beginning Marian gets engaged and her attitude towards food changes. More than a hungry woman, she becomes a starving woman: she is still hungry but cannot eat. For instance: "She had been dying to go for lunch, she had been starving, and now she wasn't even hungry" (EW, 112). Food appears as a displaced desire: she wants it, but cannot enjoy it, because what she really wants is something else.

After the engagement, her fiancé Peter decides what they eat and drink in restaurants: "It got rid of the vacillation she had found herself displaying when confronted with a menu: she never knew what she wanted to have" (EW, 147).

Marian starts having symptoms that can be called anorexia nervosa with some reserve. Atwood scholars see that Marian's inability to eat is due to her

engagement and, in a larger scale, due to women's oppressed position (Adams 1990, 129; Waugh 1989, 184). As Sceats points out, "she becomes unable to swallow, or stomach, the facts and implications of her situation" (Sceats 2000, 96; see also Brain 1995, 299). The novel can correctly be interpreted this way, and Marian's own desire to own and possess marriage and Peter are also worthy of notice.

Parker states, "[h]er non-eating is a physical expression of her powerlessness and, at the same time, a protest against that powerlessness" (Parker 1995, 350; see also Nicholson 1987, 40). It is important to notice that this "protest" is not voluntary and Marian repeatedly says that it is not what she wants. Sceats writes that Marian's "body is given its own, subversive, voice" (Sceats 2000, 95).

In feminist object-relations terms, sexual difference is seen in binary oppositions. Man and father represent positive aspects such as desire, power and action. He is the subject who "is an I". Women's submission to this ideal figure come from the desire to be recognised by the powerful other and to break out of the false self. (Benjamin 1988, 82-83, 88.) Peter, of course, represents a way out of the life that Marian leads. He will be wealthy and can offer Marian a more carefree life in the economic sense. He would be, and already is, the agent of this relationship and the gender polarity system can give Marian only the opposite position: the non-agent, living through him.

Marian's problems with eating start after the engagement, in a fancy restaurant where she dines with Peter. Lupton points out that dining out can be seen as an important means to express oneself. Wealthy people distinguish themselves from the crowd by dining in restaurants and making "right" choices concerning food and wine. (Lupton 1996, 98.) This is evident in *The Edible Woman*. When Marian and Peter dine in restaurants, they publicly perform a heterosexual relationship of two young and successful persons. Marian's complications and thoughts during this performance suggest that she cannot comply with the act Peter is offering to or forcing on her.

Before and during the dinner, the couple are talking about "the proper education of children" (EW, 147). Marian thinks that although Peter is talking "theoretically", in reality "it was their own future children they were really discussing" (ibid.). In this discussion, Marian finds out that they do not share the same values regarding child rearing. Peter's talk tells her that he supports child beating (in Miller's terms, poisonous pedagogy) and through that, other patriarchal violence.

Marian feels ravenously hungry when she gets her rare steak, but eating the meat proves to be difficult. She is absorbed in her thoughts, a chain of associations, during which she watches Peter cut his steak and eat it. Marian's thoughts go from child rearing to what Peter waits and wants from a wife. She also thinks other examples of "accepted" male violence she has encountered during the day: how the Moose Beer commercial, which has been the topic in her work, hides the bloodiness of hunting and fishing, and the newspaper article she had read, where a man shot people in random from a upstairs window.

Marian tries to convince herself that Peter "wasn't himself today" (EW, 149). Their discussion might lead to Marian's understanding that Peter's words and opinions suggest their incompatibility, but instead it leads to repression of this issue, and the horror is displaced onto the steak, Peter's current "victim":

> Watching him operating on the steak like that, carving a straight slice and then dividing it into neat cubes, made her think of the diagram of the planned cow at the front of one of her cookbooks (…) She looked down at her own half-eaten steak and suddenly saw it as a hunk of muscle. (…) Part of a real cow that once moved and ate and was killed, knocked on the head (…) like someone waiting for a streetcar. (…) most of the time you never thought about it. In the supermarket they had it all pre-packaged in cellophane (…) it was made clean, official. 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. (EW, 151-152.)

Waiting for a streetcar is an activity that Marian does daily. The diagram of the cow compares to "easy-to-follow diagrams" of the marriage manuals Marian amusedly thinks Peter reads in order to find out how she works. In partially repressed way Marian identifies with the meat, identifying herself with the beef Peter cuts and devours, as she identifies with the rabbit of his later hunting story. As Peter's bride, she too is about to be "ruled and measured" (EW, 151) like the cow, and eaten. In her thoughts masculinity represents violence, and because she is not male, she is one their victims.[36]

After Peter finishes his dish and Marian is unable to do the same, Peter remarks: "A good meal always makes you feel a little more human" (EW, 151), showing that something that made Marian feel abject feelings makes Peter feel better and more human. Being human is seen analogous to cruelty and brutal exploitation of other mammals. There is no guarantee that Peter would not think of Marian in same terms too, as he thinks of child beating or animal eating. Using and marrying her makes him a more powerful human being, as Mycak points out (Mycak 1996, 58-59, 65). Marian tries to convince herself that it is all right to eat her steak, "Everyone eats cows, it's natural" (EW, 152) but she cannot, the abject identification is too strong. This could be compared to common heterosexist views of matrimony: everyone does it, it is expected and natural – these are the common arguments. Peter eats up Marian's steak too, which suggests that he is very hungry and does not think of the ethics of marriage, child rearing or meat eating.

There are several places, where the narrative suggests that the engagement changes Marian's subjectivity and identity. It appears as a traumatising event, but with ironic and comic tones. In the morning after the engagement, Marian thinks: "my mind was at first as empty as though someone had scooped out the inside of my skull like a cantaloupe and left me only the rind to think with" (EW, 83). This image sounds degrading and amusing, but it also suggests a painful division of the self. Marian's inner self, her true self has been taken away and there is only the false outer self left.

In the morning after the proposal, Peter asks when she wants them to get married, and Marian feels that she is no longer what she used to be:

> My first impulse was to answer, with the evasive flippancy I'd always used before when he'd asked me serious questions about myself, "What about Groundhog Day?" But instead I heard a soft flannelly voice I barely recognized, saying, "I'd rather have you decide that. I'd rather leave the big decisions up to you." I was astounded at myself. (…) The funny thing was I really meant it. (EW, 90.)

It is argued, then, that after the engagement Marian assumes a new role, that of a passive fiancée, who does not even want to suggest a wedding date, because she wants the man to decide. The engagement means a change in Marian's behaviour and independency. This surprises Marian: she seems to have no mind or desire of her own anymore. It is as if the bridal role would give her no choice, or the choice to be without a voice of her own. Marian is bewildered by her behaviour, but does not or is unable to change it. On the contrary, she appears to be satisfied with it. Marian's admittance of having used "evasive flippancy" when Peter has been talking seriously, tells that Peter's view of her is only an act she has played, that he cannot know anything real of her. It also tells of a lack of trust and intimacy from Marian's part, and suggests, once again, that their marriage is not a very good idea.

In terms of the false self theory, the change in Marian is depicted as a division of mind: there is a person who talks to Peter, and whose behaviour is surprising and strange to her commenting self. Her true self is trapped behind this compliant self, who takes care of the interaction with Peter.

Marian's thoughts and behaviour suggest that women do take part in their objectification and deprivation. In part Marian is a willing "beef": her submission is voluntary. As Sceats argues, the novel arises the question of self-consumption (Sceats 2000, 99; Melley 1996, 85). How much does Marian herself have to do with her position as submissive bride? Very much, although the society has its powerful tools working on the situation, too.

In the context of the feminist object-relations theory, Benjamin states that women's submission springs from women's fear of being alone and separate from others. Men deny women's subjectivity, but women also let that happen willingly in hope of being recognised. Benjamin says, "In submission, even the fulfilment of desire is made to appear as the expression of the other's will" (Benjamin 1988, 79). This can be seen happening in *The Edible Woman*.

After the change in her attitude towards steak Marian notices that she cannot eat many other products, either. Step by step, the items that remind Marian of a human body become inedible and abject to her. They seem to be reminders of her own bodily existence and her identity and position as a bride – for instance chicken is also out of the list, because it reminds her too much of "an arm with goose bumps" (EW, 153). It appears that food is too similar to herself, to her body: she is an edible like the foodstuffs she detests.

Marian's decreasing consuming possibilities echo the engagement: If Marian is about to get married she cannot consume relationships in the same way as a single woman.

In the day after the engagement Marian's conscious mind is trying to convince her that marriage is a good thing and Peter is the one she wants:

> [M]y actions were really more sensible than I thought at the time. It was my subconscious getting ahead of my conscious self, and the subconscious has its own logic. The way I went about doing things may have been a little inconsistent with my true personality, but are the results that inconsistent? The decision was a little sudden, but now I've had time to think about it I realize it is actually a very good step to take. (…) life isn't run by principles but by adjustments. As Peter says, you can't continue to run around indefinitely; people who aren't married get funny in the middle age, embittered or addled or something (EW, 101-102.)

Marian's reasons for marrying Peter have nothing to do with love or the desire to be a wife. She tries to justify the engagement and marriage by prejudices and traditions. In spite of this rationalisation her behaviour shows quite the opposite: her fear of Peter, her obsessing of his real identity, and her secret affair with the English graduate student Duncan tell another story. She often feels Peter is a stranger, but thinks that her thoughts are ridiculous.

In the same way as she thinks that her "subconscious" got a grip of her during the night they got engaged, one can see that it is the same thing that makes her stop eating. Waugh argues that in *The Edible Woman*, and elsewhere, the "[f]emale protest can only be through the body itself", there is no possibility for voicing it out otherwise (Waugh 1989, 180).

As in the meat-eating scene in the restaurant, Marian's realisations of the inedibility of an object usually include thoughts of Peter and the marriage. When Marian prepares food for guests – Peter and her friends, the Bates family – she is nervous of the evening, because Peter does not approve of Bates's (normal) messy family life, such as dirty nappies. When she prepares the food, a carrot starts to possess qualities of a living thing:

> 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, but it doesn't die right away, it keeps on living, right now it's still alive…. She thought she felt it twist in her hands. (EW, 178).

Even a carrot is alive and a victim of ruthless people, who are insensitive of its feelings and unable to hear its "scream". This sound echoes Marian's own hidden voice and knowledge of her problematic situation as a bride. The rebellious stomach is a persistent voice, but it is not heard by others.

Marian is afraid of what is in the food and vitamin pills, what is hidden in the harmless looking paste – implying that she is also afraid of what is under Peter's neat surface and what is the reality of their marriage, beneath the white and pink image. As she thinks: "they could mash up any old thing and stick it in there [hot dogs and other meat products]" (EW, 177).

In the novel, the canned rice pudding is a symbol of artificiality of food and eating habits. The product is repeated and it is an edible Marian can eat much longer than meat or eggs. It is also connected with her thoughts of the future wedding:

> Her mother and her aunts of course had been interested in the wedding dress and the invitations and things like that. At the moment [in the supermarket] listening to the electronic violins and hesitating between two flavours of canned rice pudding –

> she had not reservations about eating that, it tasted so synthetic – she couldn't remember what they had all decided. (EW, 174.)

The synthetic nature of the pudding suggests that it is safe: it does not threaten Marian's denial, it does not remind her of anything real. The pudding is an artificial imitation of a dessert – and her wedding an artificial imitation, a performance of the false and compliant self.

To the feminist reader, the forgetting of wedding plans appears both surprising and comic. In the context of feminist object-relations theory, the bridal position of Marian can be seen as a suggestion of the submissive female position, and she is still reluctant to enter it. But another part of her is already there, and this part makes the arrangements or is dominant when they are made. This submissive part, however, is not present when Marian is alone and doing her own actions, like here, in making up her mind about the groceries. This scene also suggests that food and wedding are exclusive forces in Marian's life: when she chooses food, when she is in the position of the eater, she cannot remember the wedding.

In the chapter before the novel's climax, Peter's "final party" as a bachelor and the cake scene, Marian cannot eat even the canned rice pudding anymore: "all at once she had poured the cream over it her eyes had seen it as a collection of small cocoons. Cocoons with miniature living creatures inside" (EW, 203).

Cocoons imply a fear of change: after all, cocoons contain someone hibernating, someone who is about to go through a metamorphosis and become something else – an image reminiscent of being a bride who becomes a wife, or of fears and feelings inside a bride that might prevent the marriage. In the same chapter Marian thinks: "[S]he only wanted to know what she was becoming, what direction she was taking, so she could be prepared. It was waking up in the morning one day and finding she had already changed without being aware of it that she dreaded" (EW, 206). The image of cocoons suggests that the "subconscious" force inside of Marian reminds her of its presence and its unidentified threat to Marian.

When Marian's eating problems increase, she is afraid of their effects on her wedding and marriage:

> [S]he was afraid to tell Peter: he might think she was some kind of freak, or neurotic. Naturally he would have second thoughts about getting married; he might say they should postpone the wedding until she got over it. (…) What she would do after they were married and she couldn't conceal it from him any longer, she couldn't imagine. Perhaps they could have separate meals. (EW, 203-204.)

Marian can talk of her problem to Duncan, and her friends Clara and Ainsley, but not to Peter, which shows lack of intimacy and trust. She is afraid that if she told Peter he would not want to marry her, and she does want to have – consume and digest – this marriage. The thought of having separate meals suggests that her problems with communication and eating would continue after they would be married. In traditional and heterosexist thinking, separate meals can be seen as a failure. As Lupton writes, the shared and satisfying

family meal is considered a sign of the condition of the marriage and the family's capability to be functional and civilized (Lupton 1996, 37-39; see also Jokinen 1997, 104).

How does this literary symptom and motif relate to the illness anorexia nervosa? It seems that *The Edible Woman* appears to be in dialogue with the theory of anorexia, long before the illness became a topic of discussion.[37]

2.2 The Literary Anorexia Nervosa

Anorexia nervosa is an eating disorder, where the person (usually female) sees her body in a distorted way. She sees her body overweight when it is not. She diets obsessively, and sometimes refuses to eat anything. Anorexia may lead to death. Literally anorexia means "loss of appetite", which is misleading (e.g. Orbach 1986, 13). Anorectic person is hungry, but denies her hunger.

Many feminists think that anorexia nervosa can be connected with women's subordinate position in society, their otherness. In the Western culture, the thin body equals purity, intelligence and control. Sometimes the effort to lose weight can be the only way to feel empowered and in charge of one's own life. This way of thinking is visible in the Western life today, and its extreme form is seen in anorexia nervosa. The need to control one's weight can heighten and become obsessive in a situation in which the individual feels that she has too many possibilities in life and problems in deciding what she wants or what is expected from her. (Bordo 1995, 146, 148-149; Caskey 1986, 181; Lupton 1996, 16; see also Lappalainen 2006, 136-155.) An attempt to lose weight can also be an effort to diminish feelings and the experiences and sentiments that having a body causes (Levens 1995, 2).

According to Anne Puuronen, "anorexia is constructed in relation to the cultural requirements for being an "ideal citizen" and the contemporary social world" (Puuronen 2004, 11). She sees this eating order as a logical continuum for the discourses of healthy eating. Anorexic, in a way, reaches the goal of healthy eating, but it is meant to be unachievable. By "winning" others in healthy eating, she disturbs the order and logic, which states that the thin body is desirable, but the anorexic body is sick and grotesque. (Puuronen 2001.)

Some see that the anorexic is in a battle in herself: her mind is punishing and changing her body (Caskey 1986, 175-177, 180, 183). Here one can see a connection with the theory of false self and the division of self, which argues that in the division of self the person may divide herself into mind and body, and she usually identifies with the mind. She can feel that her body is separate and strange, and she can have negative feelings towards it. (Laing 1971, 57, 128-130, 152-153; Winnicott 1960, 142, 146-148.) From this, one could argue that in anorexia nervosa the true self is filled with hatred, which it directs to her body. In women this split between mind and body is often a usual and culturally approved of thing. Women are raised to see their bodies from outside, to be

critical towards their bodies and always willing to improve and change them (e.g. Orbach 1986, 36, 47-48).

There are similarities with the theory of anorexia nervosa and *The Edible Woman*'s Marian's fictional life.

One way of seeing anorexia nervosa and other eating disorders is to see them as a criticism towards the nourishment one has had as a child and as an adult. Non-eating is a way of saying that I did not have and I still do not have the mental and physical nourishment I need. (Orbach 1998, 32; Miller 2001, 20-23; see also Lappalainen 2006, 152.) In this way, Marian indeed is an anorexic: she is hungry, but there is not enough choice. Her life and society do not offer her the nourishment she needs and hungers for. Like anorexic's, Marian's behaviour is at the same time compliance and rebellion (Orbach 1986, 24).[38]

As Orbach among others has argued, anorexia nervosa, like other eating disorders, can be a response to a difficult position in a masculine world (Orbach 1986, 27-29). Marian's situation at work and her thoughts of her future career echo this argument. She has entered the world of masculine competition and feels that the situation is not what she wanted. She uses a food image to portray the company's structure: "The company is layered like an ice-cream sandwich, with three floors: the upper crust, the lower crust and our department, they gooey layer in the middle" (EW, 19). The crusts are the men, executives and psychologists above, and below the men with machines that handle the information. The image suggests that Marian's relationship with food is time consuming and even obsessive: everything is seen through hunger and food. The image also describes Marian's position in the company and in the society: she cannot get up from the soft middle. There are no possibilities of promotion or being with the educated men, and the men appear to be in charge of everything interesting and worthy. This gendered structure is repeated in the novel: men are the ones with the careers and women have jobs only as a temporary means of killing time, while they are looking for a husband or when their children have grown up.

In the world, which The Edible Woman describes, career is not supposed to be women's passion, or at least "normal" heterosexual, child-wanting women's passion. Marian is constantly worried about whether or not she is normal. Normalness (or being an ideal citizen) seems to be her goal and the requirement for marriage – a quality she must possess in order to be married with Peter. When Marian tries to achieve this "normalness", she cannot eat anymore.

The anorexic desires to have pure and boyish body – and not to come a mature and full female, to own a full female body (Bordo 1995, 155; Levens 1995, 2). This can be seen as an attempt to avoid the always-possible grotesqueness of adult female body (in the misogynist culture), which Mary Russo discusses (Russo 1994, 213). Some critics argue that Marian stops eating in order to be pure and clean, a classical body, and to stop the digestion, which may feel filthy and upsetting (MacLulich 1988, 190; Melley 1996, 85; Ellmann 1993, 44, 105-106).

The novel suggests that Marian considers male body better than female: it is smooth and strong, without female contours. She desires a classical, clean and proper body. She has mixed feelings, even loathing towards pregnancy, motherhood and full female bodies. At her work place's Christmas party, Marian is afraid of losing her identity and becoming similar to or one with her colleagues, whom she sees as grotesque, even provoking abjection in her: "[S]he felt suffocated by this thick sargasso-sea of femininity" (EW, 167). She feels disgusted and desires Peter to save her from the women. As a future husband he represents separation from other women, he stands for subjectivity and recognition. But, simultaneously, he also represents the same threat for Marian than these women do: being a housewife, eternally hungry.[39]

According to Susan Bordo, the anorexic equals the role of "the angel of the house" with weakness and mental laziness.[40] This weakness is connected to the idea of femininity as eternal hunger and something all devouring. (Bordo 1995, 161.) Marian's pregnant friend Clara's body repels her and she attaches images of over-eating to pregnancy. Marian's not eating can, of course, be seen as a statement against marriage and the housewife's role, which, according to Friedan, did cause the housewife's disease, mental stagnation and despair, in North American women in the 1950s and the 60s (Friedan 1967, passim).

But although there are similarities with the illness anorexia nervosa and Marian's behaviour and situation, the differences are pressing. As Sceats says, Marian "has a (…) symbolic form of anorexia, [which,] though it is inconvenient and manifests one or two of the usual symptoms, causes her no actual harm" (Sceats 2000, 98). Waugh sees Marian's non-eating as "the parodic strategy of the anorectic" (Waugh 1989, 183). The novel's style is light and ironic, suggesting that the character's anorexia should not be taken one-dimensionally.

This literary symptom is never called as anorexia nervosa. Marian does not want to stop eating. She does not hate her body and she does not want to be thinner (see also Howells 1996, 46). She does not think of herself fat. Marian does not lose weight and she eats everything she can eat, in the end "a lot of noodles" (EW, 221). Non-eating, at any phase, does not make her feel satisfied and smug. On the contrary: it makes her feel desperate.[41]

Marian can be seen as someone who attempts to avoid resolutions and painful growing. She tries to avoid confrontations and difficult situations repeatedly. This is an anorexic element, but it is also present in every woman's life in patriarchy. Growing can be experienced as positive, but one should also be critical of the issue and discourses on female growing. One should concentrate on what is meant by the concept, because it can sometimes mean complying with the patriarchal order (e.g. Orbach 1986, 24-25).

In the context of interpersonal psychoanalytic feminism, Gilligan argues that women try to live without hurting others. They think that self-assertion is painful to others, and they often avoid confrontation and choosing and are uncertain of their own power and abilities. However, they may notice that sometimes there is no way of not hurting. Women also always see themselves in relation to others and their identity can be intertwined and fused with

intimacy. They value contact and are often afraid of separation. (Gilligan 1983, 42, 68-69, 165.)

In this kind of context ending an engagement is very problematic for a woman. This avoidance of hurting can be seen underneath Marian's problems of confrontation. The identity of a bride-to-be vanishes when the engagement is broken, and in a world where marriage and a husband like Peter are supposed to be every woman's goals, the solution to end the relationship is seemingly absurd. But is also necessary for Marian in order for her to survive – at least she feels that way. This explains panicky scenes, which are often *in excess* and thus often enjoyably comic, in *The Edible Woman*: the question is of conflict between being loyal to oneself and being loved (or married) by others.

The Edible Woman's narrative structure does suggest confirmation to the issue of the division of self. In terms of false self theory, Laing argues that division of the self may cause changes of the pronoun when one speaks of oneself. The speech or narration is divided like the self: it is possible that sometimes the false self's talk is interrupted by true self's words (this happens especially in mental disorders). (Laing 1971, 188-189.)

The longest section of the novel, part two, is narrated in third person. After the first part, where Marian is the agent of narrating, Marian becomes she. In the short third and last part, she comments on this change: "Now that I was thinking of myself in the first person singular again I found my own situation much more interesting than [Duncan's]" (EW, 278). The narrator says that she was always the narrator but in the second part, during the engagement, she was unable to speak of herself in the first person. This suggests that during the engagement she feels like an object and after it she is a subject again (see also Cooke 2004, 48-49). This change in narrative voice is typical for Atwood's novels. Changes can be rapid: even on one page the first person narrator becomes the third person: the subject of the narration becomes the object of the narration (e.g. S, 8, LBM, 3 and BH, 11).

According to Ellen Peel, this "alternating narration" is important in the feminist sense. This change in style can be seen as a tool of feminist aesthetics: it represents the uncomfortable feeling a woman has of herself as a subject and an object. (Peel 1989, 107-109.) If we turn to narratological theory, Bal says that alternation in narration can point to a "broken sense of self" (Bal 1997, 83; see also Bouson 1993, 21).

As a narrator and a protagonist, Marian can be portrayed as a victim (see also Stein 1999, e.g. 7). She is telling a story, with a comic tone, of traumatising things that have happened to her. There is a threat hanging above her: the frightening Peter and possible starvation because of her increasing inability to eat. The alternation between the first and the third person narrating confirms this sense of threat. Will Marian be able to tell her story? What will happen to her? The change in her narrator position, the decrease of power, suggests decreasing subjectivity (see Bal 1997, 53).

The third person narration is useful in distancing and irony. It may also bring credibility to the story, because first person narrators are often less

trustworthy. However, in *The Edible Woman*, the issue of credibility is ironically undermined: Marian notes that she did the narrating all the time.

In the scene of interpersonal psychoanalytic feminism, Gilligan notes (when discussing Margaret Drabble's novel *The Waterfall*) that the first person voice may sound selfish and thus undesirable to a woman (Gilligan 1983, 150). This view can be connected to *The Edible Woman*. To Marian, the first person narration is indeed related to issues of selfishness and self-assertion. When she is I again, she is interested in herself, instead of being self-sacrificing.[42]

2.3 The Disgusting Kitchen

The Second Sex and *The Feminine Mystique* give a gloomy picture of the housewife's life. This role awaits Marian if she marries Peter. Beauvoir and Friedan see that marriage suppresses women. Friedan argues that a middle class home was, for a North American woman in the 1950s and the 60s, a sort of comfortable concentration camp. It was harmful for women and their children. The housewife's restricted role made women frustrated and unhappy, and even physically ill. Becoming a housewife often meant giving up one's own agency and subjectivity. To Beauvoir, household work is a stone of Sisyphus – a never ending and hopeless task. (Friedan 1967, 15-16, 277-278; Beauvoir 1980, 253-255.)[43]

In the light of these arguments, kitchen is understandably a threatening place to Marian. It represents future entrapment, depression and frustration. To Marian, kitchen symbolises the submissive position.

Marian and Ainsley's shared flat's kitchen becomes a place of confused and disgusted feelings to Marian. In the traditional heterosexist thinking, kitchen is the woman's place. Kitchen can sometimes be a prison to a woman, which is visible, for instance, in phrases like "between the fist and the stove". Contrary to this, kitchen can also be place where a woman can be in charge and fulfil her possible feminine desire to care by nourishing and cooking – depending on the perspective. To Marian kitchen is not a comfortable place. At first, the messy kitchen feels just uncomfortable, but as the novel progresses, the kitchen symbolises threatening knowledge and raises horror in Marian. This horror is comic and serious; it is Gothic fear of one's own home. The portrayal of her horror includes an enjoyable element of excess.

Ainsley and Marian stop cleaning the kitchen after Marian's engagement:

> [S]he knew she was going to leave the dishes unwashed in the sink, which meant Ainsley would leave hers, and they would go on like that until they had used up all the dishes. Then they would start washing the top plate when they needed one and the others would sit there undisturbed. And the refrigerator: not only did it need defrosting, but its shelves were getting cluttered up with odds and ends, scraps of food in little jars, things in tinfoil and brown paper bags…. (…) She hoped that whatever was going on in there wouldn't spread too quickly to the rest of the house,

> at least not down the stairs. Maybe she would be married before it became epidemic (EW, 180-181.)

The dishes and leftovers are reminiscent of an infectious disease. Marian is not going to clean the kitchen; she only wants to run away from it to her marriage, which, ironically, probably would just mean bigger messes for Marian to clean up. In her future housewife role cleaning and housekeeping are her main tasks. Rightly, Sceats observes that rotting food symbolises "dysfunction" in Atwood's novels (Sceats 2000, 105).

To the feminist reader with feminist sensitivity and feminist knowledge (see Pearce 1997, 72-74), the kitchen and household work are a significant issue. Feminists have always paid attention to the burden of housework, which women take care of, even when they work full time outside their homes. Feminist writers have brought up how this private arrangement is actually a public agreement, although often a silenced one. (See e.g. Jokinen 2005.)

The portrayal of the kitchen appears as feminist deconstruction: the two women do not want to clean it; there is no inherent skill or desire in them to keep the kitchen clean. Marian and Ainsley are in a power struggle concerning cleaning – which is usual in families. One has to learn how to clean and wash, it is not a born female quality. There are women who hate domestic chores. Women are not "angels of the house" by nature.

As food becomes revolting to Marian, because it is possibly alive, also the mould on food scraps gains subjectivity, which she considers as strong as her own. In the night of Peter's final party, Marian is hungry but cannot eat anything in their fridge, because everything is rotten: the remains smell and include mould. There are no clean dishes. The kitchen sink is equally disgusting, containing "grey slippery-looking growth" and "a skin of brown" (EW, 216) on the surfaces of the tableware. Marian

> did not want to disturb anything for fear of discovering what was going on out of sight: heaven only knew what further botulisms might be festering underneath. "Disgraceful," she said. She had a sudden urge to make a clean sweep, to turn the taps full on and squirt everything with liquid detergent (…) but then she paused. Perhaps the mould had as much right to life as she had. (EW, 216-217.)

Marian's comment "Disgraceful" shows that she knows that this is not the proper kitchen sink of a proper woman. Indeed, this does not look at all of like the kitchens in the magazines (and Marian admires the superficial images portrayed in them). She wants to clean the mess up but does not, implying that the cleaning would demand strength she does not have – again an image that might be used for her overall situation. She ought to stay put, think, and clean up the mess, but she does not.

According to Mary Douglas, dirt is an insult to order and cleaning is usually seen as a positive action (Douglas 2000, 47). In this context, the dirt of Marian's kitchen implies the part of Marian's personality which does not want to get married and become a housewife. This hidden mess shows that Marian is outside the proper wife material. The dirt is transgression and marks Marian as

unfit for the role as Peter's wife. This mess could be rebellion – at least "subconscious"– against the female role and future housewife role. Marian's (and Ainsley's) rebellion argues that there is something wrong with the women's magazines' and advertisements' order and cleanliness: they hide a lot of work and power struggles.

Peter's refrigerator is "white and spotless and arranged" (EW, 230), a total contrast to Marian's messy and dirty fridge – maybe even reminiscent of a morgue or an operating room, suggesting again their incompatibility.

The day after Peter's final party and Marian's night with Duncan she cannot eat anything anymore, which suggests that the escape from the party and being with Duncan are not the real solution to her problem. Total inability to eat is dangerous and Marian is "almost whimpering with self-pity" (EW, 257). When Duncan wants to go home and leave her alone, Marian is desperate and afraid of her kitchen: "What was living, hidden and repulsive, down there among the plates and dirty glasses? She couldn't go back" (EW, 257). This suggests that she sees something horrifying in the mess or some secret knowledge that she wants to hide from. The messy kitchen includes information Marian is afraid of, and cleaning it might give her a revelation and a reason to change her life.

According to Julia Kristeva, disgusted feelings towards food are the most common form of abjection and food remnants are one of the most powerful cause of abjection. The leftovers are ambiguous and composite: once edible and delicious, now rancid and possibly dangerous. (Kristeva 1982, 76, 207.) The ordinary food and abject food scraps make Marian feel vulnerable and insecure of her subjectivity.

There is an element of degradation, too, in the portrayal of the leftovers: the protagonist identifies with something so banal and everyday as rotting food, not with something noble or beautiful like a tree, flower or an animal, or a portrait as in Oscar Wilde's *The Portrait of Dorian Gray*. Comparisons to food may often include an element of degradation, as *The Robber Bride*'s Tony notes while watching action movies and the heroes' insults to their victims: "*You're toast, you're fried, you're steak, you're dead meat*. It's odd how many of them have to do with food, as if being reduced to nutrients is the final indignity" (RB, 38, italics original).

Marian does not only have problems with keeping her kitchen clean, but her cooking is also not what would be expected of a proper wife of a layer, who "is rising (…) like a balloon" (EW, 57) in the labour market. If she is alone, she eats frozen TV-dinners, and tends to use ready-made products when she cooks for Peter. She argues that she likes to cook, but the food she prepares is "the kind you boil for three minutes in the plastic packages" (EW, 63), which does not sound like cooking but heating and serving ready-made meal.

Peter is not satisfied with Marian's food. Inspired by jealousy, he says, "why can't you ever *cook* anything" (EW, 63, italics original) and stops eating the dish. This appears to be a clear sign of their incompatibility as partners in a traditional marriage – good cooking is often considered one of the most important qualities in a housewife. As Lupton notes, "femininity involves cooking for others, offering food as love". Frozen meals can be seen as

masculine in this context, implying Marian's unsuitability for the role of a wife. (Lupton 1996, 39, 108-109.)

Peter's behaviour – nagging at Marian about her cooking – suggests aggression and lack of manners in intimate relationships (in public places his manners are impeccable). Indeed, Lupton notes that displeasing food is a usual excuse for a husband to start abusing his wife mentally and physically (see e.g. Lupton 1996, 61-63). Like a patient mother or a careful wife, Marian does not argue back. When Peter complains of the wedding of his close friend, Marian comforts him with a dessert, "stroking his hair while he ate his ice-cream" (EW, 64). This image implies a relationship between a mother and a child, not two adults. Marian has no equal space of her own – her desire is not as important as his. She reacts to Peter's moods and wishes and does not act according to her own feelings. In terms of feminist object-relations theory, in these nourishing situations Marian has already taken the submissive/depressive position of a wife, and indeed Peter has taken the omnipotent, tantrum possessive position.

2.4 The Hunters

> The dark intent marksman with his aiming eye had been there all the time, hidden by the other layers, waiting for her at the dead centre: a homicidal maniac with a lethal weapon in his hands. (EW, 246.)

A large gendered structure in *The Edible Woman* is that male characters avoid commitment and female characters pursue marriage or children or both. Men are after sex, women something beyond that. Everybody hunts, but women and men hunt in different ways. Male predatory behaviour is more transparent and visible than female. Women are preying, but in a more hidden and seemingly passive manner. They aim at attracting men and thus getting a grip of them. The relationships in *The Edible Woman* are all about strategy and shooting: repeatedly Marian does not want to "give (…) ammunition" (EW, 120) to anybody, usually to Peter or Ainsley, by doing something that would decrease her power in the relationship.

In terms of feminist object relations, violent words like catch and hunt, used in *The Edible Woman* to describe human relationship, tell of a world of inequality and a system of gender polarity, where is no space for true recognition.

From the very beginning of *The Edible Woman*, Marian's boyfriend and husband-to-be Peter is portrayed through negative comments. In the context of feminist reading and writing, this portrayal of Peter with a highly critical and distanced tone can be suggestive of a feminist writer's allying with the feminist or female reader. It presupposes a reader who is critical of misogynistic masculinity and traditional gender roles. The fact that such misogynist male hunter characters as Peter and Len are described in such a negative light and given such a limited space in the narrative, and always seen through suspicious

and critical eyes (of Marian), shows that *The Edible Woman* aligns itself with feminist tradition, and its narrator and author are speaking to a feminist audience. (This ironic distance can also cause friction in feminist readers, if one wants to male and female characters to be equally "whole".)

Theories of psychological development emphasise separation, and Gilligan argues that "models for a healthy life cycle" are men who seem distant in their relationships". Men emphasise separation as self-defining and empowering and women stress connection and networks, which create communities. (Gilligan 1983, 154, 156.) In Peter's character, masculine strength and separation from the feminine and women are clearly visible. The idea of only other men being able to give men recognition is also present in his character.

Peter is a strict meat eater, whose "taste ran towards steak and roast beef: he did not care for peculiar things like sweetbreads, and he didn't like fish at all" (EW, 147). Food can be essential in constructing one's gendered and sexual identity. Meat is considered male food, a mark of strength and power. Fish is softer and more feminine food, not so reminiscent of human flesh. Rejecting the "peculiar things" can be an effort to separate one's self from things that are commonly negatively charged, such as femininity and homosexuality. (E.g. Lupton 1996, 28,104-108; Pöysä 2001; Koistinen 2001.)

Peter lives in a building under full renovation work and the house is ominously like a Gothic castle of horrors. The portrayal of the building is reminiscent of a ruined castle where a cruel bluebeard figure hides, and Marian is her ignorant future bride victim, trying to find her way in a castle into a (forbidden?) room. Peter takes a lot of showers, likes washing himself clean of something – an image of a bluebeard washing the bloodstains of him comes to the feminist reader's mind. According to Marian, Peter "smelled of soap all the time" (EW, 61), which suggests an unreal figure, a paper doll, or somebody who tries to hide his real smell. Ainsley calls Peter's friends "the soap men" (EW, 176), connecting them to sterile soap opera figures, giving an impression of superficial and unreal, but human like dummies. Peter's bedroom includes "a good-sized sheepskin on the floor" and "collection of weapons: two rifles, a pistol, and several wicked-looking knives" (EW, 59) and cameras, which Marian also sees as weapons during the novel. The presence of guns and knives in the bedroom underline the possible violence of the character.

Peter is depicted as a stranger to Marian. He is a mystery to her, something she is trying to solve. She sees him as someone having secrets and having many disguises – like a Bluebeard. She appears to be obsessed by his true self and has found only several surfaces, as if peeling an onion. One of the illustrations of Peter's mysteriousness to Marian is in the image of "the Underwear Man", which is a sort of an urban legend at Marian's work place. Marian's colleagues are perked up and disturbed by this character and stories around him. The Underwear Man is a comical caricature, present in the story only in narratives told by women at Marian's office: a man who calls women disguising himself as Seymour Surveys interviewer and asks women questions of their underwear. At first, the women accept the questions, but gradually his

questions become too "personal" (EW, 116) and women hang up and complain of it to the company. Marian thinks of the man with an ironic and a comic twist, sees him as a victim of advertisements that promise easily available women, but do not fulfill the promise. After her comic speculation, she has a revelation:

> Maybe it was really Peter. (…) Perhaps this was his true self, the core of his personality, the central Peter who had been occupying her mind more and more lately. (…) hidden under the surface, under the other surfaces, the secret identity which in spite of her many guesses and attempts (…) she was aware she had still not uncovered (EW, 118.)

Marian does not know Peter at all and she is about to marry him. He is a surface or several deceptive surfaces. According to Ainsley, Peter is "nicely packaged" (EW, 146), but there may not be anything else beside the package. To the feminist reader, this is disturbing. The protagonist is going to marry a man, whom she barely knows. The things that are connected to Peter, his rudeness, desire to hunt, guns, knives, soap and so on, create an image of a frightening character, who does not promise a good future for the protagonist. This disturbance can also be the implicated reader's frustration of being unable to convince her textual other (Pearce 1997, 24-25), here the protagonist, that she should not marry him.

In addition to all predatory attributes and images attached to Peter, there are moments when he is portrayed in the light of victimisation. Significantly, Peter's feelings are not narrated in his own words, in direct speech, as, for instance, in a dialogue, but through Marian's narration, which has an ironic and critical, even a mocking edge.

Peter feels that his friends are all trapped, one by one, by marriage:

> "God," he said, "poor Trigger. He looked terrible. How could he let himself be taken in like that?" He continued in a disjointed monologue in which Trigger was made to sound like the last of the Mohicans, noble and free, the last of the dinosaurs, destroyed by fate and lesser species, and the last of the dodos, too dumb to get away. Then he attacked the bride, accusing her of being predatory and malicious and of sucking poor Trigger into the domestic void (making me picture her as a vacuum-cleaner) (EW, 64.)

Trigger's name, importantly, suggests aiming and shooting, as most things connected with Peter. Marian's portrayal of Peter's feelings is ridiculing and *in excess*, making Peter look ludicrous, not pitiable. Marriage, a commonplace and often happy event that has taken place probably after Trigger's own proposal, is compared to genocide, extinction of a species, and a cruel hunting of a dumb animal. Marian degrades his anxiety of his identity. Of course, Peter's worry is stereotypical and misogynist – he is acting as if his friends would have nothing to say about their life and their girlfriends would be "designing siren[s]" (EW, 27).

Marian's silence of her own real thoughts reveals, once again, that their relationship is not honest and equal. On the contrary: although they both are twenty six year old, Marian appears as an adult and Peter as a whimpering

child (though it is important to remember that Marian as the narrator controls the story).

In the feminist object-relation context, Benjamin, for example, writes that in the Oedipal scenario the identification with women is denied for a male child and it is seen as dangerous to one's individuality. The mother must be renounced and the boy must turn to his father, who equals the preferable qualities such as development and individuality. As an adult, the man may feel that the woman possesses desire in her attractiveness. The woman represents "the dangerous, regressive siren". The man feels that in order to defend himself from being engulfed he has to master and conquer her. (Benjamin 1988, 159, 163-164.) This can be seen as the context of Peter's feelings and situation, which Marian depicts.

Another character, who is portrayed as both a predator and a victim, is Marian's friend Leonard Slank. His character differs from Peter in his underlined gradual victimisation and regression during the novel. Peter, because of his proximity to Marian and her interests as narrator, is much less of a victim.

Len is first introduced in *The Edible Woman* by Clara as someone "horrible with women, sort of a seducer of young girls" (EW, 33). Len's hunger goes for under-aged girls, preferably under seventeen. He is all for relationships that are not serious and do not suggest commitment. Marian thinks that Len and Peter feel brotherhood against women. When they first meet Len's first words after formalities make Peter forget his suspicious feelings towards a possible rival:

> [Y]ou've got to watch these women when they start pursuing you. They're always after you to *marry* them. You've got to hit and run. Get them before they get you and then get out. (EW, 66, italics original.)

Immediately after this, Len reveals his "brilliantly-polished white teeth" (EW, 66), suggesting hunger and hunting. Len's language could describe robbery or even killing, driving over somebody with a car. Violent images show a violent idea of the world of sexual difference: a war between women and men. Women are for using and throwing away, disposable. Marriage is a trap to men by women; something that women want from men but men should not give them. Women can be dangerous and they should not be allowed to have things their way, or the result will be dissatisfying to the men.

This echoes the feminist object relations-theory. According to Benjamin, a complex and complementary struggle is common in relationships: "one gives, the other refuses to accept; one pursues, the other loses interest; one criticizes, the other feels annihilated" (Benjamin 1988, 65). This power struggle is clear in Len and Marian's roommate Ainsley's relationship.

For the feminist reader, Len's character represents a traditional misogynist view in which women are seen in two opposite positions only: the holy mother/Madonna and the whore. He idolises the mother figures like Clara, but would not want to be with women who are of age and is revolted by the idea of becoming a father. The novel's feminist alignment is visible in the treatment of

Len's character: he is portrayed as neurotic and falsely and ridiculously prejudiced. He is treated with irony and distancing.

Len is portrayed as a typical bluebeard figure, but his character is reversed into a victim of a female hunter Ainsley, which signals that *The Edible Woman* is feminist fiction. Len and Ainsley want each other, but they want different things and try to hide what they want – this brings dramatic conflict, irony and comedy to the text. Len is portrayed as a very patient hunter, who uses women and then tosses them away. He thinks he is the hunter in the relationship with Ainsley, and is especially careful with his strategy with her. During *The Edible Woman*, Len's identity as a hunter gradually dissolves.

The ironic distance from the narrator Marian is also present in the portrayal of Ainsley, who is determined to have a baby, because "it fulfills your deepest femininity" (EW, 41). Her justifications for her hunger make Marian think about advertisements of hair-dryers and of scientific theories like anthropology – a comic incongruence.[44] Indeed, Ainsley's desire is repeatedly presented with the language of a pamphlet, coloured with psychoanalysis, feminism and medical science. Ainsley's opinions might also be from a magazine specialised in maternity issues with pseudo-scientific articles teaching people how to live, producing certain identities or ways to behave. Marian's ironic commenting adds a comic element to Ainsley's character's portrayal: Ainsley finds her speeches intellectually and morally superior, but Marian connects them with things like war and cattle-breeding, thus mocking and belittling Ainsley's discourse.

Ainsley is a (partially feminist) soldier in the war of the sexes, and wants to have her own, very specific piece of cake on her own conditions. She wants to be a single mother in the 1960s Toronto. Her hunger and desire to have a baby is stronger than her fear of the prejudices of other people, including Marian. Ironically Ainsley does not like babies and when Clara's baby pees on her lap, she gives it away in a very displeased manner.

Ainsley decides to try to seduce Marian's friend Len, after she has heard of his fear of commitment and interest in young girls. She starts her own hunt by masking herself into Len's supposed dream target, "A young girl" (EW, 66). Marian does not recognise Ainsley, but Peter does immediately know who Ainsley is, which suggests that Ainsley is now dressed up for male desire. She is unrecognisable to Marian, because she has hidden everything that she can reveal in the company of a female friend. Later the same night, when they are alone, Peter compliments Ainsley's behaviour to Marian when he blames Marian's behaviour that night, which creates irony: when Ainsley was herself Peter did not like her, but when she acts a role of a shy and silent schoolgirl Peter finds her acceptable. To the feminist reader, this suggests that to Peter and Len women are not equal and have the position of an object. The women should act in a way that men want them to, in a way that Marian sees Ainsley adopting the same night: "her little-girls-should-be-seen-and-not-heard act, the safest course to follow" (EW, 75).

Marian sees Ainsley as

> contemplating her own reflection (…) She registered neither pleasure nor boredom; her inert patience was that of a pitcher-plant in a swamp with its hollow bulbous leaves half-filled with water, waiting for some insect to be attracted, drowned and digested. (EW, 75.)

According to Marian, Ainsley is a meat eating plant that passively and patiently waits for a victim who would be attracted by her looks. She is a catch and a bait that looks innocent and unconscious of her attractiveness, but underneath she is hungry and hunting. Elsewhere in the novel, her hair around the crying and miserable Len, is a "web" (EW, 160) in Marian's eyes, suggesting that Ainsley is a spider spinning her net around her victim.

Ainsley and Len want the same thing, to have sex, but cannot let the other one know what they want, because it would destroy the motivation and the desire that drive them forward.

In the context of feminist object-relations, Benjamin argues that only by "remaining desirable yet unattainable, untouched and unconquered, and ultimately dangerous" a woman can represent recognition to man (Benjamin 1988, 171). This is what Ainsley is after, and she knows that when she stops being pure and distant to Len, her desirability in his eyes – in other words, her (only) power – vanishes.

To Marian Ainsley's strategy to get Len impregnate her is "bird-liming, or spearing fish by lantern" (EW, 70) – powerful images that suggest that Len is Ainsley's victim and that her tools are superior and maybe exaggerated if one considers the target. When Len finds out that Ainsley is pregnant, he is miserable:

> Len groaned. (…) "God, I feel just sick about it," he said. (…) She's such a little *girl*, Marian, I mean most women you'd feel what the hell, they probably deserved it, rotten bitches anyway, not that anything like that has ever happened to me before. But she's so *young*. (…) Of course I won't deny that I'd been angling for her, but, well, I wasn't expecting it, I mean I wasn't ready, I mean I would have been a lot more careful. What a mess. What'm I going to *do*? (EW, 156, italics original.)

Len's behaviour is reminiscent of the stereotype from the 19th or early 20th century novel, in which a maid of a manor has gotten into trouble. The roles are reversed: now Len is the maiden in distress and Ainsley the careless survivor. In his mind, Len is a victim of a designating remorseless siren. Len tries to get Marian to persuade Ainsley to have an abortion. When Marian tells him that Ainsley wants to have, and has all along wanted to have a baby, he is confused. Comically, he cannot understand that somebody would want that: "Nobody *wants* to get pregnant. Nobody would deliberately do a thing like that!" (EW, 157, italics original).

Len is ridiculed: he cannot understand a thing that is common knowledge. Len is portrayed as horrified, shuddering and his voice high and distraught. To him, being married or a father is an impossibility and birth is abject, something that horrifies and unsettles him and threatens his mental health: "Birth.

Fedundity. Gestation. Don't you realize what that will do to me? It's obscene, that horrible oozy" (EW, 159). His fears are *in excess* and thus partially comic. The irony's edge (see Hutcheon 1995, passim) cuts on his naïve and neurotic thoughts with the help of Marian's belittling and ridiculing comments.

In the context of feminist object relations Len's behaviour implies a breakdown of mastery. In the Oedipal scenario the desirable woman must be conquered and used on the man's own terms and conditions. As Benjamin argues, the master is always in danger of becoming "the object he consumes" (Benjamin 1988, 57). Here the female power, the lure of the siren and the mother behind it, are more powerful than the effort at mastery. The pregnancy and birth remind Len of the mother and her power.

In Peter's final party, Len is a wreck, his face "the flat whitish-grey colour of uncooked piecrust and oddly bloated" (EW, 235), suggesting that he is an edible, probably gone bad. According to Clara, he is "in piss-poor shape" (EW, 234) and has moved to live with the Bates family to get away from his home, in which he is afraid of being alone. Len is portrayed as someone regressed into the state of a child: he plays with Clara's children's toys. He has withdrawn from all adult responsibilities, such as having a home of his own, taking care of his eating or going to work. The news about Ainsley being married does not make him feel better. He has transformed from an adult male predator, a classic womaniser figure, into a toddler. This can be read as comic, because Len is a distant character for readers, distanced and a caricature from the very beginning, so the readers, especially the feminist readers, do not probably identify or sympathise with him. Although Len's words are often presented in direct speech, his words and behaviour are commented on and often filtrated through the retrospective narrator, Marian's view.

In the feminist object-relations context Len's fate echoes a breakdown in the Oedipal scene. When, in a way, Len becomes a woman – is used like a woman – he loses his subjectivity, individuality and authority.

Len and Ainsley are both cruel hunters and their collision does not end well: Ainsley gets what she wants with some compromises, but Len's identity as a hunter and his whole subjectivity suffer. The fact that Ainsley ends up better suggests *The Edible Woman*'s feminist alignment.

During the narrative, Ainsley gives up all her principles and at the end she gets married with the womb worshipper Fisher Smythe, Duncan's eccentric roommate. They even go to the Niagara Falls for their honeymoon, which is a very traditional and conventional place for honeymooners. This indicates, with irony, that Ainsley's unconventional plans did not succeed even though a lot of speculation and plotting was carried out. Indeed, Ainsley has the fate Marian was supposed to have, although she held very anti-marriage opinions (see also e.g. Cooke 2004, 47; Bouson 1993, 31).

If we turn to the Bakhtinian concept of polyphony (of dialogic theory which I use through Pearce) we can see that the different voices of Ainsley and Len bring polyphony to the novel. This polyphony, however, is controlled by Marian's status as the narrator.

Although Marian does not approve of Ainsley's strategy of masquerade and deceive, her own ways are reminiscent. Marian's strategy in luring Peter is to pretend she is not as ambitious and intelligent as she is, which is shown in an embedded narrative, a memory of their first meeting:

> We had met at a garden party following my graduation; he was a friend of a friend, and we had eaten ice-cream in the shade together. He had been quite formal and had asked me what I planned to do. I had talked about a career, making it sound much less vague than it was in my own mind, and he told me later that it was my aura of independence and common sense he had liked: he saw as the kind of girl who wouldn't try to take over his life. He had recently had an unpleasant experience with what he called "the other kind". (…) Of course I had to adjust to his moods, but that's true of any man, and his were too obvious to cause much difficulty. (EW, 61.)

When Marian belittles her independence and her desire for autonomous independence through career, he finds her independent – the irony is clear, its edge cutting on gender roles and dating games (about irony's edge, see Hutcheon 1995, passim.). It is suggested that if Marian had told him the truth, he would not have liked it. She can lure a man like Peter by being untruthful and she decides to do so. The last sentence, "Of course I had to adjust to his moods, but that's true of any man", is an example of Atwood's alignment with feminist tradition. The narrative does not say, "that's true in any relationship, both sides have to adjust", but that *women* have to do it.

Marian wants to possess Peter, or more exactly she desires the image of a perfect couple of the advertisements and magazines. When they have dinner in a restaurant, she feels "proud ownership" (EW, 146). After the engagement Marian feels that she is Peter's possession, like a new car. Importantly, also she feels that she owns Peter now, that she, too, has made a possibly good deal: "I could feel the stirrings of the proprietary instinct. So this object, then, belonged to *me*" (EW, 90, italics original). So not only Peter, but also Marian, is the hungry hunter who sees the other as commodity (see also Mycak 1996, 62).[45]

2.4.1 The Nurse

The image of the nurse is repeated in *The Edible Woman*. It is connected with Marian, who at times disguises her hunger as helping and healing or is worried about other people's well-being even when there is no need for it. She often feels that people call her for rescue, for instance Clara and Duncan, but the intensity of their need is her own making.

Marian's desire is often hidden into seeming self-sacrifice. Underneath the self-sacrifice is "the wish to take control" (Bouson 1993, 29). In the scene of feminist object-relations theory, Benjamin writes that a "girl's sense of self is shaped by the realization that her mother's source of power resides in her self-sacrifice" (Benjamin 1988, 79). In the context of interpersonal psychoanalytic feminism, Gilligan argues that for women care is the priority, but in their minds real adult power is contrasted to care taking (Gilligan 1983, 97). Taking care of others is power over others, but it can be negative power, not power of an adult

subject. Focussing on others and their needs is also a way of distracting oneself from one's own needs and hungers, which are not met with.

In *The Edible Woman*, the image of the nurse is often connected – through Marian – to Duncan. Duncan represents not only untraditional masculinity, in total contrast to Peter, but also, as a graduate student of English, the desire for learning, language and literature. His life style is bohemian and artistic. His living arrangement, two eccentric roommates represents something totally different from Marian's background and future as Peter's wife. Although Duncan can also seem as career oriented, his career is typically humanist, usually not sought for as a way to fortune and upper middleclass status, as Peter's career as lawyer. The motivation behind humanist career tends to be different: learning and knowledge are priorities. Marian's desire for Duncan can be seen as symbolic hunger for the values he stands for: untraditional gender roles, work careers for both women and men, love for arts, writing and reading, free style of life. Duncan and his friends' family arrangement represents a world where a messy home and kitchen is not a transgression and the household chores are not necessarily female burden.[46]

When Marian and Duncan repeatedly kiss and later go further, as a narrator Marian always tries to explain it away. When she wants to touch him, she claims that her mind is not willing to do so but her hand is rebellious: "Its will seemed independent of her own: surely she herself wanted nothing of the kind" (EW, 125). According to Marian, it is always "animal magnetism" or a lapse of reason; it has never to do with her desire. This suggests that in the same way as with her eating, her "subconscious [is] getting ahead of my conscious self, and the subconscious has its own logic" (EW, 101).

It seems that Marian is trying to convince herself and the readers that she does not want Duncan, that she is a good girl after all. Her involvement with Duncan is a transgression of Marian's arrangement with Peter. The engagement presents, in psychoanalytic terms, Father's law. Marian's desire towards Duncan is set outside the proper and the acceptable, and it is bound to be conflictual and even inspeakable.

To the feminist reader, Marian's "confused" desire also points out the conflicting demands that are imposed on young women in the 1960s Toronto. Marriage, successful husband, children and being a housewife are presented as the most desirable things that a girl can have, but there are also women's own desires for career and independence. As Friedan notes, the ideal of the wife of the suburban areas was beautiful, educated (but not too much), committed to her husband and her children. After the wedding, the educated woman's life changes enormously: from studying and working to home. (E.g. Friedan 1967, 12-13.) Marian's thoughts imply a desire to go back to university life, and back to the era of learning and studying. When she sees the university buildings, she feels "jealous of them. She would have liked them to have vanished when she left" (EW, 170). The work she has in the market survey company is not what she dreams of her life, and neither, as she at least "subconsciously" fears, is marriage.

When Marian takes the position of a "matronly" (EW, 190) nurse who is only helping Duncan when she sleeps with him, she can make herself look like a self-sacrificing good doer instead of promiscuous fiancée. Duncan's attitude is also an extraordinary plot for sleeping with Marian. After sex, Duncan says that he had merely been a part of Marian's fantasy of being a benefactor and his guide to adult sexuality. Marian has been fooled – thus her good intentions are reversed and ridiculed. The image she has of herself as a heroic nurse crumbles, as happens with image she has of herself as a bride. These roles are deceptive and even oppressive, but luring to women, suggests *The Edible Woman*.

2.5 The Edible Bride

In the context of interpersonal psychoanalytic feminism, Gilligan's study shows that women often use the images of drifting when they depict a situation where "selfishness and responsibility" collide. Gilligan notes that when this portrayal at first stands for an escape from responsibility, it also suggests that by avoiding the confrontation the situation gets trickier and the confrontation comes later and can be more difficult than it would have been if the situation had been dealt with earlier. (Gilligan 1983, 143.) This is happening to Marian's character. She feels that she is "floating, letting the current hold her up" (EW, 115) to the day of her marriage. She does not remember the date, guessing it is "in late March?" (ibid.).

Feelings of dissolvement are repeatedly connected to Marian. She feels "like moving underwater (EW, 29), "as though I was enclosed in a layer of moist dough" (EW, 37) and she dreams that "my feet beginning to dissolve, like melting jelly" (EW, 43). Her character is portrayed through images of breaking up, vanishing, softening, and changing shape. Her feet, strong and able, which she describes as "agile" (EW, 63) at the beginning, are jelly in her dream, a soft and shaky edible without form.

These images, in my opinion, suggest that Marian's identity and subjectivity are changing. Something is soon coming out of the hibernating cocoon. This can also imply that she is at the brink of a breakdown: she repeatedly feels that she is "dangerously close to some edge" (EW, 171).

The day of Peter's final party as a bachelor, Marian takes a bath and when she thinks her landlady, "the lady down below" is behind the door her body feels strange and dissolving. She puts on the engagement ring, "seeing the hard circle for a moment as a protective talisman that would help keep her together" (EW, 218). Feelings of despair take control over her: "she was afraid of losing her shape, spreading out, not being able to contain herself any longer" (EW, 219). The ring represents her future marriage and through this, male power and subjectivity. It stands for submissive position as a wife, but it does not contain seeing her as she is.

In the terms of false self theory, this despair and fear of uncontrolled behaviour implies a conflict in the system of division of self. The true self's pain and fears are triggered and exposed, the false self is momentarily unable to control it. (Laing 1971, 99, 119.) The compliant fiancée version of Marian, which the ring stands for, is crumbling, and the rebellious other is trying to surface. This rebellious one would "talk a lot, (…) tell everybody, (…) cry" (EW, 219).

Marian's division is underlined by an image of her two dolls. They are her childhood toys, which she meant to throw away after the engagement night but did not. Marian sees them as parts of herself:

> She saw herself in the mirror between them for an instant as though she was inside them, inside both of them at once, looking out: herself, a vague damp form in a rumpled dressing-gown, not quite focussed, the blonde eyes noting the arrangement of her hair, her bitten fingernails, the dark one looking deeper, at something she could not quite see, the two overlapping images drawing further and further away from each other (…) By the strength of their separate visions they were trying to pull her apart. (EW, 219.)

The blond sees only Marian's appearance, but the dark one sees inside of her, better than Marian herself. Two opposing forces struggle in her: one knows the truth and another is just a husk, interested in surfaces only. The dark doll represents Marian's "subconscious" knowledge that this engagement and marriage are not for her, and the blond doll represents the compliant false self, the submissive/depressive position of the woman in the gender polarity context.

Cake is an important motif in *The Edible Woman*. Marian uses cakes as symbols and tests in order to avoid speaking herself, or to be lied to. The cakes are an effort to go beyond language, to find the "truth" without the interfering human voice, through rituals and symbols.[47]

After Marian has escaped from Peter's party and slept with Duncan, it is time to decide whether the engagement will continue or not. She wants to know what to do next and she feels she needs "a test" (EW, 267), which would give her the answer without words and talk. Baking the cake is a pleasurable event to her. It is, at the same time, an act of both submission and rebellion. As Waugh observes, it "*undermines* the role of women as servers and women as consumables, just as it appears to *confirm* it" (Waugh 1989, 180, italics original).

The cake can be seen as a substitute for the wedding cake that was expected to be in Marian and Peter's wedding. Wedding cake, of course, is reminiscent of the bride: the white colour and decorations repeat her dress and her virginity and inexperience, or so the tradition goes (e.g. Lupton 1996, 105). Marian's cake, however, does not represent virginity and is not white. Marian's cake differs radically from the traditional wedding cake. It does not suggest, but underlines the edible's similarity between the women and shows her not in white, but in pink, implying more frivolity, seduction, and sin than virginity. The cake is a symbol of a real woman, not some ethereal picture of a bride. The cake is a redo of Marian herself the night before, in Peter's party: she had a red dress and a complex hairdo. In that assemble she felt like "a callgirl" (EW, 210).

Marian talks to her creation:

> You look delicious (…) Very appetizing. And that's what will happen to you; that's what you get for being food. (…) She felt a certain pity for her creature but she was powerless now to do anything about it. Her fate had been decided. (EW, 270.)

The cake and Marian in masquerade are delicious edibles, made for other people's pleasure, not their own. The cake and Marian get what they deserve, for being consumable objects. The fate of a cake and a bride are "decided" upon, determined beforehand. They will be consumed and eaten.

When Peter arrives, angrily demanding for an explanation for Marian's disappearance from his party, she surprises him with her behaviour. She is self-asserting and active, confident, distant, and polite. But in her mind she also doubts her behaviour:

> Marian had a swift vision of her own monumental silliness, of how infantile and undignified she would seem in the eyes of any rational observer. What kind of game did she think she was playing? But that wasn't the point, she told herself nervously (…) Though if Peter found her silly she would believe it, she would accept his version of herself, he would laugh and they would sit down and have a quiet cup of tea. (EW, 270.)

To a feminist reader, this internal dialogue is clearly gendered and power-inscribed. The sentence "What kind of game did she think she was playing?" is reminiscent of a patriarchal voice, father's reprimand for a girl to accept the rules she has been given. The "rational observer" who would find her silly is a masculine critic, the misogynist law of the father. In spite of her rebellion, part of her is ready to accept Peter's, or the rational observer's "version of herself". This could imply that if Peter would be ready to accept her as she is, with her doubts and fears concerning matrimony and him, symbolised in the cake, she would be ready to continue the relationship. Or it could suggest that she would take the submissive role if he would admit that her feelings and hunches are right.

When Peter is in the living room waiting for Marian's surprise, the cake, she watches him, and her feelings and thoughts concerning him are in turmoil. Although Peter looks like "a normal human being" (EW, 271), it is not comforting. As in the steak-eating scene, Marian connects him with an anonymous gunman, who shoots strangers. Peter is a murderer, who looks, "in the afternoon" (ibid.), like a nice guy. Marian's fears of and thoughts on Peter are *in excess*, and even more so are her rapid changes of perception of him. This, of course, creates a comic effect and can also undermine the feminist reading of the novel. The question arises whether she is right about Peter or not? The novel ironically distances the reader, at times, from Marian's perceptions with this excessive colouring. But this estrangement and exaggeration reveal underlying truths, too (see also Melley 1996, passim.).

When Marian offers the cake to Peter her words show that she does think herself as an edible victim of him:

> She (…) [was] bearing the platter in front of her, carefully and with reverence, as though she was carrying something sacred in procession, an icon or the crown on a cushion in a play. (…)
> "You've been trying to destroy me, haven't you," she said. "You've been trying to assimilate me. But I've made you a substitute, something you'll like much better. This is what you really wanted all along, isn't it? (EW, 271.)

Marian accuses Peter for efforts of destruction and assimilation, arguing that he does not want her but a woman like the cake, "its face doll-like and vacant" (EW, 270), similar to Marian's vision of Ainsley dressed up as a school girl. The situation is also ironic and mocking, not only serious: the offering is just a cake, not a human body or a heart. Peter's reaction, "alarm" (EW, 271) and leaving can be read in two ways: either he thinks Marian is insane or he thinks that she has a point. The third way to read this would be that Peter thinks both.

After Peter leaves, Marian starts hungering for the cake and eats it without problems. Breaking the engagement makes Marian able to eat again. Waugh observes: by her act Marian "has registered a *voluntary* and *intentional* protest which releases her body from its *involuntary* rejection of food" (Waugh 1989, 181, italics original). Marian feels that the cake is "only a cake" (EW, 272), which suggests that food stops symbolising things for her. The chapter and part two end with a violent cutting of the cake: "She plunged her fork into the carcass, neatly severing the body from the head" (EW, 273). This suggests that Marian is a merciless devourer again, no longer a running rabbit, but it may also mean that her mind is still separate from her body, as it has been during her eating problems.

Some critics have seen the baking and eating of the cake as healing and liberating and that Ainsley's reaction is right: Marian is saying no to the rigid form of femininity and even curing "her culturally split-off female self" (e.g. Onley 1988, 74; Bromberg; 1988, 18; McLay 1981, 131; Parker 1995, 350).[48] However, the element of violence and splitting is still strongly present. As Lecker notes, the eating of the cake makes Marian "into a mixture of [a] consumer and [the] consumed" (Lecker 1981, 181; also Waugh 1989, 180).

Ten pages later, on the last pages of the novel when Marian is again a first person focalisor, Duncan makes all Marian's– and the reader's –perceptions intricate:

> "That's ridiculous," [Duncan] said gravely. "Peter wasn't trying to destroy you. That's just something you made up. Actually you were trying to destroy him. (…) But the real truth is that it wasn't Peter at all. It was me. I was trying to destroy you. (…) Maybe Peter was trying to destroy me, or maybe I was trying to destroy him, or we were both trying to destroy each other (…) What does it matter, you're back to so–called reality, you're a consumer. (EW, 280-281.)

Marian's conviction of her version of happenings is undermined. She has "a sinking feeling" and gives "a nervous laugh" (ibid.) when she listens to Duncan's interpretations of the situation. Duncan's decoding of the events suggests several options and makes straightforward interpretations problematic or even impossible (see also Howells 1996, 54). Marian can be seen as a hunter who was trying to catch Peter into matrimony by acting something she was not,

attracting him by false masquerade and performance. Duncan has possibly been trying to seduce Marian and confuse her about her marital plans, maybe break up her engagement and then leave her.

In the context of feminist object-relations theory, Duncan's reading of him and Peter in battle echoes gender polarity and the impossibility of women to be recognisers of men. Marian has merely been a token between two men; a possession that both men wanted to own. In this setting, the male desire is central and the woman is only a tool.

According to Duncan, Marian's ability to consume is the priority: "you're back to so called reality, you're a consumer" (EW, 281). This reality is "so called", but it is better than the one in which Marian is not eating. It is important to Marian's health and future that she can eat again, but being a consumer means much more than eating. It means that Marian is able to consume relationships and be a consumable object. Marian is in the consuming world again, but it is not straightforwardly a positive thing.

The novel ends with Duncan's hunger, eating, desire and speech, which might mean that, after all, Marian is not as independent as she feels after her engagement. She is feeding somebody else again and watching him eat – like she did with Peter. Duncan eats up the cake in the shape of woman and says, "It was delicious" (EW, 281), which are the last words of the novel. Peter cannot eat a cake that Marian offers as a symbol of herself, but Duncan has no hesitations: he does not even comment on its shape.

The ending of the novel has divided Atwood scholars. Some conclude that she has not progressed at all and ends up like she started (e.g. Piercy 1988, 55; Adams 1990, 131). It is true that the last words are said by Duncan, not Marian. Duncan's eating may even imply that he is going to eat her next. This view is also supported by the fact that Marian's first person singular lasts only for less than five pages.

Others have argued that Marian does change and progress during the novel (e.g. Nilsen 1994, 130; Mycak 1996, 68). It is true that she gets her voice back, stops seeing Peter, eats a steak hungrily and without problems, takes hold of the apartment gone wild and has plans for her future.

Some critics, myself included, feel that is important to consider both of these possibilities (e.g. Sceats 2000, 99; Howells 1996, 54; Lecker 1981, 178-179). The ambivalence of the ending can be seen as an essential part of the novel. Indeed, although Marian eats again, is a happy consumer and cleans up the messy apartment, her situation is not fully clear, as the windows suggest: "I was thinking it was going to be curious to be able to see out of them again. It bothered me that there was still some dirt on the outside I couldn't reach: soot and rainstreaks" (EW, 278). Also the refrigerator is not totally clean and ready for a new life: "the thick covering of ice (…) was hard as a rock" (EW, 277). Duncan comes and she has to interrupt cleaning – this might suggest that there would be more work to be done in order for Marian to see the situation more clearly.

One of the things that add to or cause this confusion about the novel's ending, in my opinion, is the lack of return to a similar addressee to the one at

the end of the first part. In it, Marian ponders over her position and lets the reader be her ally in her views with future in a more profound way than at the end. In part one, the beginning sentence "I know I was all right on Friday when I got up" and the rationalising last chapter's beginning "So here I am" address and include the reader more intensely. In the last part, maybe just because of its shortness, this kind of intimacy and feeling of allying does not return. The last part differs from the first part's ending by being mainly a dialogue between Marian and Duncan, when at the end of first part Marian speaks to the reader and to herself, but not to others.

Novel's ending may suggest that Marian is able to more dialogic behaviour and to have contacts with others. But it is important to notice that her words and convictions are undermined by masculine other, Duncan.

In terms of the dialogic theory, the ending of *The Edible Woman* and the different views, which Marian and Duncan present of the happenings, can be seen as marks of a dialogic/polyphonic text. Because of this polyphony the feminist reader is unable to have just one interpretation of the novel and be totally comfortable with it. Of course the different readings are not equal to the feminist reader, but they exist and are underlined by the strategy of polyphony.

I have felt intense engagement as an implicated reader with Marian. I first read *The Edible Woman* when I was twenty-two or twenty-three. It intrigued me so much that I decided to write my Master's thesis on the novel. Its mixture of horror and comic appealed to me strongly; I found it hilarious. I could not understand how some of my friends did not finish the novel because it did not speak to them at all.

But I also found the novel and its happenings slightly frightening, because I felt that I was very close to the protagonist's situation. I was going to graduate in a couple of years, from a subject (Comparative Literature) that certainly did not guarantee me a job or economic security. I was also, like Marian, hungry for experiences in life and love. I was in a relationship, which was about to come to its turning point. When I now read the novel, I find it more comic than frightening. I am no more too close to it, but at times I feel discomforting familiarity. It affected my life and my choices and my view of my life. Or maybe I just got some resonance, feedback and support, which I needed. Maybe the novel affected me, or I merely projected my own life into it.

From *The Edible Woman*'s strong food motif we turn to *Surfacing*'s undercurrent of food. At first sight the two protagonists of these novels appear to have very different views on food. *Surfacing*'s nameless protagonist has no difficulties in eating and preparing food, but during the novel she starts to have slightly similar regulations concerning food to those of Marian. The style of the novels, however, differs dramatically, as we shall see.

3 *SURFACING*: FROZEN HUNGER

In Atwood's second novel *Surfacing* (1972), a nameless protagonist returns to her small childhood home island in the Quebec bushes in Northern Canada because her father is missing. She is in her mid-twenties, an illustrator of children's books, and travels with her boyfriend Joe and a married couple, Anna and David.[49] When they are supposed to leave the island, after not finding her father, she decides to stay and hides until the others leave. Left alone, she performs a sort of shamanist ritual and encounters the spirits of her parents. On the last page she thinks of going back to town and living with Joe, but she does not act.

According to Atwood, the genre of *Surfacing* is a Jamesian "ghost story", which means that "the ghost that one sees is in fact a fragment of one's own self which has split off" (Atwood in Gibson 1992, 12, 18). Atwood has also called it, in her non-fiction book *Strange Things*, as a representative of the "woman-in-the-woods novel", which according to her, is a Canadian genre (Atwood 1995, 115).

Surfacing is often listed as one of the most important (feminist) novels of the seventies. It has become a feminist textbook example novel: it is analysed in, for example, *Feminist Readings/Feminists reading* (Mills et al. 1989). In the book, Spaull examines *Surfacing* through Elaine Showalter's gynocritical perspective, and Pearce and Mills study the novel with a Marxist-feminist emphasis.[50] A common way of reading *Surfacing* is to see it as a quest, a woman's descent to the underworld. For instance, Rigney and Stein analyse the novel's quest motif (Rigney 1978, 93; Stein 1999, 41-42). Bouson situates the novel in the scene of the 1970s cultural feminism, and analyses the issues of language, madness and rage. She argues, "*Surfacing* does self-consciously evoke a world of myth and mysticism. But it also undercuts its own romantic feminism through its troubling depictions of female madness and rage" (Bouson 1993, 40).

From the beginning *Surfacing* is coloured with the protagonist's anxiety, detachment and alienation. She appears depressed, confused and in search for "redemption" which always seems to be "elsewhere" (S, 126). Rigney sees the

protagonist of *Surfacing* as a representation of (along her other study characters) "schizophrenic (…) quasi-religious figures, saints or savants, questing for some form of truth" (Rigney 1978, 12). As a narrator and protagonist, like Marian in *The Edible Woman*, *Surfacing*'s nameless main character can be portrayed as a victim. Something terrible has happened to her, we sense it from the beginning, and this trauma threatens her sanity and safety. She finds other people menacing, and behaves sometimes recklessly, for instance dives dangerously in the lake. Stein sees the protagonist as a trickster, who weaves stories of her past, and her stories have caged her (Stein 1999, 42).

One of the novel's motifs is abortion. In the seventies, when the abortion discussion was strongly present in North-America and all over the Western countries during the second wave of feminism, *Surfacing* did give a multifaceted picture of the issue, which did also annoy some feminists.

Surfacing does have lot in common with the cultural feminism of the seventies. The denial of medicalisation of the female body and the desire to be in peace with animals and nature are present in the novel. However, the protagonist does not find a safe haven from the nature and there is no sisterhood. In the end she thinks of going back to town, which implies that separatism is not an option for her.[51]

Surfacing's subject could be a woman's journey into herself, her past, and to her childhood surroundings. Its theme, in my opinion, is a deep division inside a person. *Surfacing* explores how traumas influence one's life, and what is traumatised life. Important aspect of this theme is the protagonist's gender, the fact that she is a woman. *Surfacing*'s motifs include motherhood, its options and possibilities in patriarchy, and the children's problematic relationship to parents and their mental legacy. Another visible element of the novel is the preservation of Canadian bush and Canada in general from the cultural colonialisation by the USA. The novel also questions heterosexual relationships and all human relationships. Is equality and true recognition between human beings possible in the present time and society? In addition, language is an important motif in the novel. The protagonist is very suspicious of language as a means of communication.[52]

Surfacing's narration is character bound: the nameless narrator is also the story's protagonist (the protagonist is the narrator's younger self). The narrator-protagonist is the focalisor and the focalisation is internal. This internalisation is very extreme and the text is at times mainly stream of consciousness.

As *The Edible Woman*, *Surfacing* consists of three parts. The first and the last are narrated in the present tense, the middle one in the past tense. Present tense suggests intense presence; the reader is sucked into the happenings. It underlines the feeling that everything is happening now and the narrator's retrospect is short: the timely distance between the experiencing character and the narrator is brief. The sentences often appear confused, and the clauses of a sentence seem disconnected, as one can see immediately in the novel's first two sentences:

> I can't believe I'm on this road again, twisting along past the lake where the white birches are dying, the disease is spreading up from the south, and I notice they now have sea-planes for hire. But this is still near the city limits; we didn't go through, it's swelled enough to have a bypass, that's success. (S, 1.)

The sentences do not seem logically connected and they are not easily understandable. For instance, why the second sentence starts with the "but", what is its connection to the first sentence? How do the birch disease and sea-planes relate to each other? (In the large context of the novel one can see that this disease from the south means more than birch problems, so they are, in a way, connected, but at the beginning of the novel this information is not available.) The language is noticeably suggestive of a confused mind that makes at least seemingly irrational and eccentric connections, or a person whose stream of consciousness has a strong "poetic sensibility". (See also Mills 1995, 36.) As Stein writes:

> She strings together independent clauses with almost no oordinating or subordinating linkage. Consequently, all observations have equal weight, and causality is seldom indicated. (…) Because she lacks a coherent sense of self, she takes in information but does not integrate it into her experience. The stylistic discontinuities reflect her emotional fragmentation and displacement. (Stein 1999, 53.)

All narrators can lie, and Atwood's first person narrators often do. In *Surfacing* the issue of unreliable narrator is strongly present.

Unlike in *The Edible Woman*, *Surfacing*'s motif of food and eating is an undercurrent. Symbolic hunger is vividly present in the novel, and it is motivated by the protagonist's problematic past and the denial of this past, which has caused a division in the protagonist mind and self.

In "The Self Cut in Two – The Nameless Protagonist" I read the protagonist's deep dividedness, which I consider more profound than Atwood's other protagonists' splits. "Food and Numbness" examines the images of concrete food in *Surfacing*. In chapters "The Desperate Struggle – Anna and David" and "The Needy Male – Joe" I will discuss the protagonist and Joe's relationship, and Anna and David's relationship. In both, the other is mostly a projection and true recognition seems impossible. In "The Ritual" I discuss the protagonist's behaviour's ambiguous nature at the novel's ending.

3.1 The Self Cut in Two – The Nameless Protagonist

In my opinion *Surfacing*, like other Atwood's novels, aligns with the feminist tradition. There is a female narrator, the motif of abortion, the critique of heterosexual relationships, and discussions on issues such as makeup and the pill.

In my opinion, the narrator's unreliability and the distortion of her vision complicate the feminist interpretation. Of course it is important that this

division and numbness is a part of the *female* character, but at times I feel at loss as a feminist reader. "Is she crazy or is she right" comes to my mind more often than I would like it to. The disarray of sentences, the wild associations and rapid changes of opinion make it difficult to make a reading. Her perceptions of her surroundings and other characters change constantly.

The narrator's unreliability is, of course, a difficult issue and it is often not easy to say whether or not the narrator is reliable or unreliable. However, usually the unreliable narrator has some of the following traits: limited knowledge, partiality, and a problematic set of values. In the eyes of the reader, very young age and mental instability may decrease narrator's credibility. (See e.g. Rimmon-Kenan 1991, 127-131.)

In *Surfacing*, the narrator-protagonist alters her past. She claims that her brother has drowned, although it is not true (first she tells that he did drown, then that he almost drowned, then that this incident did not occur). She claims that she has been married and has had a child, but that she left the child in the care of her husband after their divorce, when in truth she has had an affair with a married man and had an abortion, in part pressured by her lover, who was her teacher.

Throughout the novel, to me as a feminist reader, there is a strong sense of the narrator's partiality and problematic set of values. Everything she sees is divided into good and bad: this is visible in her violent division between the city and the bush, and Canada and the USA. Everybody around her is either a victim or a hunter. She is certain that she is being lied to, that the others plot against her. Although this is typical of all of Atwood's novels' protagonists, in *Surfacing* this is particularly forceful, *in excess*.

Surfacing's protagonist speaks repeatedly of feelings of division and doubleness. Atwood scholars have examined this division often and many have seen it as a trait not only in the mind and body of the protagonist, but also in the country she lives in, Canada (e.g. Rigney 1978, 100). Especially Canadian critics have emphasised the importance of nationalism in the novel, but for instance American scholars have concentrated on the book's feminism (see e.g. Stein 1999, 50). Following the American stream, I see *Surfacing* firstly and foremost as "a woman's quest" and secondly as a negotiation of national identity (see also Stein 1999, 51). I explore *Surfacing* as a story of an individual woman, not a depiction of national conflicts.[53]

The allusions to division and falseness reiterate in the novel. At the beginning of the novel the protagonist remembers how Anna read her palm and said: ""Do you have a twin? I said No. "Are you positive (…) because some of your lines are double."" (S, 2).

The discourse of division and falseness is used not only to describe the protagonist, but in her narrative everything around her is coloured by it. At the beginning, she sees "a cherub with a part of the face missing. It looks like an imitation but it may be real" (S, 6). When she goes to the local shop, she remembers from her childhood the shopkeeper, who had only one arm. The candies she bought from the lady were "like the toes of saints or the cut-off pieces of early martyrs, the eyes on the place, the severed breasts" (S, 21). The

bar they visit is "an imitation of other places (…) which are themselves imitations" (S, 21).

Like in other Atwood's novels, the protagonist is tracing back time to see what has caused the present situation. As *The Edible Woman*'s Marian, she knows there was a time she was doing fine, but something traumatising happened:

> I must have been all right then; but after that I'd allowed myself to be cut in two. (…) The other half, the one locked away, was the only one that could live; I was the wrong half, detached, terminal. I was nothing but a head, or no, something minor like a severed thumb; numb. (S, 102.)

The protagonist feels that she is double; there is two of her. The other one is incapable of living and the possible survivor is trapped and hidden. She is not a human, only a small and inconsequential part of a body: a thumb.

In terms of theory of the false self, the protagonist desires and misses her true self and feels that it can survive, but she is unable to release it from its cage. There is a sense of deep neediness and suppressed hunger after disappointments.

Often in *Surfacing*, the memories start surfacing in the protagonist's mind and she takes a conscious effort to suppress them:

> Nothing is the same, I don't know the way any more. I slide my tongue around the ice cream, trying to concentrate on it (…) but I'm starting to shake (…) I'll start crying, that would be horrible, none of them would know what to do and neither would I. 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. I'm all right. (S, 6-7.)

In the above quotation, the ice cream is a sign of pain and confusion. Usually ice cream is eaten for pleasure, it is connected with warm and sunny summer days. It is a luxury product and usually eaten in a relaxed atmosphere and it can be seen representing indulgence. In the advertisements, ice cream is connected with women and pleasure: women often escape to privacy to eat their cones with lust. There are often sexual connotations in these eating scenes. In *Surfacing*, the ice-cream scene presents revolt and extreme fear, suggesting abjection or mental breakdown: she is afraid of losing her borders and being devoured by another reality.

In terms of the theory of the false self, this scene with ice cream can be seen as a painful flashback, where her repressed feelings from her past surface. It seems as if she would get in contact with her true self for a minute and feel her pain, but then the false self takes control again.

The narration gradually reveals that the protagonist's division is caused by conflicts in her adult life (and to a lesser extent, in her childhood) and especially by her abortion, which she sees as mainly involuntary. She has cut off her feelings concerning and during the abortion. This trauma has caused that the protagonist's symbolic hunger, in the positive sense, is smothered: she does not feel, hunger, or want.

If we turn to the context of interpersonal psychoanalytic feminism, we can see that this elimination of feelings appears to be a common defence mechanism for women whose abortion decision is problematic. A young woman called Ellen, an interviewee in Gilligan's study of abortion decision, describes her strategy to go through the operation in the following way:

> Probably what I will do is I will cut off my feelings, and when they will return or what would happen to them after that, I don't know. So that I don't feel anything at all, and I would probably just be very cold and go through it very coldly. The more you do that to yourself, the more difficult it becomes to love again or to trust again or to feel again. (Gilligan 1983, 90.)

This portrayal is very close to *Surfacing*'s protagonist's narration: coldness, and difficulties in trusting, loving, and feeling.

At the beginning she argues and believes that she has given birth and that the child lives with her father. But her thoughts and descriptions of the childbirth and her child are odd and suspicious:

> [T]hey shut you into a hospital, they shave the hair off you and tie your hands down and they don't let you see, they don't want you to understand, they want you to believe it's their power, not yours. (…) you might as well be a dead pig (…) they bend over you, technicians, mechanics, butchers, students clumsy or sniggering practicing on your body, they take the baby out with a fork like a pickle out of a pickle jar. (S, 74.)

To the feminist reader, this portrayal argues that there can sometimes be unappreciative, even violent methods in hospitals concerning the childbirth. But the style, the long sentences and the words used to describe the happening are *in excess* and thus suspicious. For instance, all this pain is "for nothing", which suggests that there is no baby. The moment of seeing the baby for the first time is never portrayed, and there is nothing positive about the childbirth.

As a depiction of abortion, it denies the fact that she has herself chosen to have it. She denies her responsibility and blames everyone else: her partner and the medical staff. She sees herself as powerless, a butchered animal, and her former partner as evil and treacherous. It is true that he has been her senior, her teacher and a man with a wife and a family, and thus in a position of power in comparison to her. However, the images of him are straightforwardly negative, suggesting that she projects the responsibility of the relationship and the abortion solely to him, denying any responsibility on her part.

In the context of interpersonal psychoanalytic feminism, Gilligan sees that pregnancy can, for some women, become "the ultimate test of commitment (…) a way of testing the truth, making the baby an ally in the search for male support and protection or, that failing, a companion victim of male rejection" (Gilligan 1983, 72). This can, in part, be seen happening in *Surfacing*. The pregnancy is a test of his caring of her, and he fails and she does not want to see him anymore after the abortion.

There are scenes towards the end of *Surfacing*, where, in terms of the theory of the division of self, the protagonist's division into two separate

entities begins to oscillate. At least in part her two parts become connected and the other, the hidden one, needs not to be denied anymore.

When the protagonist is looking for the underwater rock paintings that her father had found and drawn to paper (she took the drawings at first to be doodling of a madman, a proof that he had become insane), she dives. In the water she sees something that reminds her of the dead body of her father. The dive and the connection with the water and what is under the surface shakes the protagonist and fills her with horror. At this point, the protagonist has a climactic epiphany. The aborted fetus has been the source of her prevailing vision and concentration on trapped things such as frogs. The painfulness of the understanding that the child was not born had to be denied: she "couldn't accept it, that mutilation, ruin I'd made, I needed a different version"(S, 137). In terms of the theory of the false self, she leaves or denies the part that suffers and feels pain of the end of the affair and the loss of the foetus.

In spite of her partial acknowledgment of her own responsibility in the epiphany scene the protagonist continues to blame her lover for the events:

> 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 (…) I could have said no but I didn't; that made me one of them too, a killer. (…) the slaughter, the murder (S, 138-139.)

In addition to blaming her lover, she starts seeing herself as a killer too, not only as a victim. In my opinion, the text does not suggest harmonious forgiveness towards one's old possible mistakes. Words like slaughter and murder, and calling herself a killer imply anger and hatred towards the happenings and herself, not reconciliation.

3.2 Food and Numbness

Even though the protagonist is portrayed as confused and numb, even "delusional" (Bouson 1993, 50), she is the one who feeds the others. She buys groceries alone, fishes, picks berries and prepares food for the others. She has excellent survival skills in nature. These qualities and this behaviour suggest capability and strength, although her narrative is confused and obsessive. It seems that she is perfectly able to cope in nature and in possibly lonely chores like cooking, but her relationships and communication skills are problematic.

The contrast between the protagonist's certain practical behaviour and the manic way of narrating and processing information suggests, in terms of dialogic theory, polyphony in her character. Even though her story is chaotic and at times fake, she copes better than the others.

In the context of the theory of the division of self we can see that false self is compliant and can appear as well functional to the outsider. This ability to perform certain routine tasks can, however, be just an imitation, not the true

self's behaviour. (Winnicott 1960, 146; Laing 1971, 91.) In *Surfacing*, the protagonist's false self is very competent and able to take care of herself in a place like isolated island, in a way that seems almost automatic. Although she supplies and prepares food she does not report being hungry before the end's ritual. This suggests that her eating is also automatic, robotic, and her hunger is stunted and suffocated.

Unlike the protagonist, her companions Joe, David and Anna are incompetent in these surroundings. The men, however, cannot admit their flaws. They both pretend that they can do everything right.

This combination of clumsiness and pride is repeated in the novel. Anna says that her husband David "thinks he is a great white hunter" (S, 23). David does pretend to be a skilful man of outdoors, but he is not. The protagonist helps him to fish and without her help he would not get any draft. This suggests, like *The Edible Woman* that men want to be traditional hunters, who take care of their tribe, but they are alienated from those skills and this leaves them with defiance; a will to show they still can.

Time after time, the protagonist has to be like a kindergarten teacher to the others: "After lunch they all sat around expectantly, as though waiting for me to dole out the crayons and plasticine or regimenting the sing-song, tell them what to play" (S, 78). On a canoe trip with Joe, she has problems with keeping the course, "because Joe didn't know how to steer; also he wouldn't admit it, which made it harder" (S, 79).

Repeatedly the protagonist and Anna do things for Joe and David, but the men insist that women are incompetent. For instance, Joe is adamant that women cannot use their camera. This implies (feminist) irony from the narrator: she mocks male behaviour and attitude towards women.

Surfacing's protagonist connects eating with ethical questions. According to her, people usually eat wrong. The narrator appears to concur the slogan "you are what you eat". This ethical code – what humans should eat – changes constantly during the novel. Her way of making these rules concerning food and changing them is *in excess*. At times, she thinks that people should eat only those edibles they can themselves find in the forest, and occasionally she thinks that people should eat only ready made products, canned tin food like baked beans. At times it is natural that people hunt and fish, but sometimes it is forbidden and cruel.

The protagonist's initial lack of empathy for herself or others is illustrated in her way of using frogs as bait for fish:

> Behind me I can hear the tick tock of the frog hopping up and hitting its muzzle against the jar lid. (…) I take out the little frog, the ultimate solution, and hook it on securely while it squeaks. Other people always did that for me.
> "God you're cold-blooded," Anna says. The frog goes down through the water, kicking like a man swimming. (S, 57-58.)

The frog is compared to a human, and elsewhere in the novel, the protagonist's body is compared to fish. Images of frogs are repeated in the novel. The protagonist, her aborted foetus (and herself as a foetus), her brother, and

humans in general are compared to frogs. In this context, using frogs as baits is cruel, even symbolic cannibalism. Fishing is portrayed as a violent activity. Worms and frogs have no value of their own, just as instruments for satisfying human hunger. The sentence "Other people always did that for me" could be read in two ways: either, simply meaning that others did put the bait on her hook, or that other people have hurt her like she hurts the frog. In my opinion, fishing triggers the painful and unprocessed memory her of abortion.

Also Elaine in *Cat's Eye* sees the frog like a human, again "a person swimming" (CE, 265). Like *Surfacing*'s protagonist, Elaine has no sympathy for the frog – probably *because* it does look like a human. In the Biology course, she cuts open Cordealia's frog and worm, in addition to her own. The protagonists are related in their detachment and lack of feelings for themselves or others. They cannot feel for their victim, the frog, because feeling sorry for the one to be cut open is impossible without breakdown, without the understanding that also the cutter feels gutted. In terms of the false self theory, the false self does the operation, without feeling, and the true self and her feelings are trapped inside.

Gradually the protagonist begins to see fishing too cruel:

> [N]eckless headbody, the fish is whole, I couldn't any more, I had no right to. We didn't need it, our proper food was tin cans. We were committing this act, violation, for sport or amusement or pleasure, recreation they call it, these were no longer the right reasons. (…) While they admired David's murder, cadaver, I took the bottle with the frogs in it out of the tackle box and unscrewed the top; they slipped into the water, green with black leopard spots and gold eyes, rescued. (S, 114.)

Not unlike Marian in *The Edible Woman*, the protagonist understands that what they have been doing is unnecessary and cruel towards another living being. The protagonist sees fish as wholesome in comparison to humans: it does not have a neck, which would separate the body and the mind. This separateness is, according to the narrator, the main problem of human beings. She feels that the neck gives people a false illusion that their bodies are not the same as their minds and that they can live without their body.

In the terms of the division of the self, the false self's rationalisation does not respect nature or anything around it, it sees everything as distorted and threatening, something that has to be controlled or destroyed. The protagonist thinks, "logic is a wall, I built it, on the other side is terror" (S, 168). Her logic is a construction, which she has built in order to keep the terror encased and in control.

At one point, the protagonist sees food and nature as an offering from Christ. But the human division into the head and body makes it impossible to honour this gift:

> The animals die that we may live, they are substitute people, hunters in the fall killing the deer, that is Christ also. And we eat them, out of cans or otherwise; we are eaters of death, dead Christ-flesh resurrecting inside us, granting us life. Canned Spam, canned Jesus, even the plants must be Jesus. But we refuse to worship; the body worships with blood and muscle but the thing in the knob head will not, wills not, the head is greedy, it consumes but does not give thanks. (S, 134.)

According to the protagonist, people ought to worship nature and respect the food it gives to them. This does not happen because of human state of division: the head is a greedy consumer and wants more than the body needs. The protagonist feels that people should worship life and nature, but instead they worship and eat death. According to her, Jesus is the symbol of death and guilt; nature is the symbol of life and the cycle of life, thus we should rather worship nature than Christ.

3.3 The Needy Male – Joe

Surfacing's narrator-protagonist's portrayal of the other characters seems often unreliable. The reader is not sure what to believe. The protagonist sees Anna as "my best friend, my best woman friend; I've known her two months" (S, 4). This suggests lack of personal history and long-term relationships. It alludes to detachment from people. Later she comments on her companions as follows: "My friends' pasts are vague to me and to each other also, any of us could have amnesia for years and the others wouldn't notice" (S, 24). Their mutual strangeness, from her perspective, is constantly brought up in the novel. But there is no evidence, no guarantee that others would agree with the protagonist about her statements.

At the beginning, the protagonist narrates:

> "Any news?" Joe asks, in a neutral mumble that signals he'd prefer if I kept from showing any reaction, no matter what has happened.
> "No," I say, "Nothing different." Voice level, calm. Perhaps that
> was what he liked about me, there must have been something, though I can't reconstruct our first meeting, now I can: it was in a store, I was buying some new brushes and a spray tin of a fixative. He said Do you live around here and we went to the corner for a coffee, except I had a 7-up instead. What impressed him at the time, he even mentioned it later, cool he called it, was the way I took my clothes and put them on again later very smoothly as if I were feeling no emotion. But I really wasn't. (S, 22.)

The protagonist assumes that Joe wants her to keep "cool" and that is what he is attracted to in her. Nevertheless, Joe's question of any news on her father can also be read as a sign of interest in her well being and honest worry about her father, not a demand of showing no reaction. Significantly she cannot at first recall their first meeting, which suggests that her memory is not good or/and Joe is not a very important person in her life. To the feminist reader and the implicated reader, her way of having sex with a near stranger and being so indifferent of their relationship is disturbing.

In the eyes of the narrator-protagonist, Joe is a combination of elements: he is described as a victim and a hunter. She sees him as needy of protection and preservation, like an endangered animal. She compares him to animals and nature – for example, moss, stone and log – which suggests that the protagonist thinks of him in positive terms. Joe's bodily hair is often stressed, suggesting

animal fur. For the protagonist, animals are innocent victims of people. At the beginning of the novel, she describes Joe:

> 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 species one 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. (S, 2.)

Joe is animal threatened by extinction and he is beautiful, but defiant, insane and reminiscent of a coin in the USA. The first two suggest, in the protagonist's set of values, good things, but the latter attributes are more complex. She hates Americans and this comparison links Joe to them, although loosely.

The protagonist's opinion of Joe is not very flattering:

> Everything I value about him seems to be physical: the rest is either unknown, disagreeable or ridiculous. I don't care much for his temperament, which alternates between surliness and gloom, or for the overgrown pots he throws so skilfully on the wheel and then mutilates (…) Nobody else admires them either (…) Perhaps it is not only his body I like, perhaps it is his failure; that also has a kind of purity. (S, 51.)

Why on earth are you with this man then? – the implicated reader wants to ask the protagonist. To the feminist reader this way of thinking of one's partner suggests an extreme masculine misogynist (or here misanthropist) way of thinking (see also Bouson 1993, 46-47): that the partner is just a body, necessary in order to have sex available any time and that the professional failure keeps this partner in the place which the protagonist wants to keep him in.

In feminist object-relations context, Joe is just a tool and a pawn to her, not a subject and an agent that could give her recognition. This reversal of gender roles can also be seen as an ironic wink from the narrator: women can use men too, the roles can be reversed.

The protagonist sees Joe not only as a threatened animal or an attractive body, but also as an unpredictable victimiser. This mixture of extremely different images connected to Joe undermines the narrator-protagonist's credibility and enforces the conception of her unreliability. She feels that he wants to own and possess her: "he thinks he has won, act of his flesh a rope noosed around my neck, leash, he will lead me back to the city and tie me to fences, doorknobs" (S, 157). The violent images suggest that she feels that Joe wants to imprison her, treat her like a dog, even kill her.

In the context of the feminist object-relations theory, Benjamin sees that the natural human need to be recognised often becomes a power struggle. In the present system where gender polarity rules women are not subjects. In the scene of distorted recognition, a person may feel that being with someone else is surrendering to this other, losing one's self. (Benjamin 1988, 28.)

In terms of the theory of false self, Laing asserts that if a person's self is not secure enough, she feels that relationships threaten her. Intimacy feels like destruction of one's own self; she feels that her options are either dissolving into the other or isolation. (Laing 1971, 37-39.) This can be seen happening in

Surfacing: the protagonist feels that an intimate relationship, where one is really emotionally present threatens to devour and destroy her. She thinks Joe is easiest to like when he is asleep: "Perhaps that was the only time there could be anything like love, when he was asleep, demanding nothing" (S, 118).

Joe's direct speech, for example "Have it your way (…) you always do" (S, 103) tells of his perception of the relationship. It seems that he suffers a lot because of her inability to feel and her cold behaviour towards him, which implies that he is, in a way, a hurting victim of her behaviour. Joe hungers for commitment from the protagonist. He repeatedly demands to know whether or not the protagonist loves him and would marry him, but she is evasive and unresponsive. She wants a boyfriend who is two-dimensional, because with this kind of a person there is no panic, no fear. Joe's hunger and talk remind her of her former failed relationship and the abortion.

Although in some of her thoughts of Joe he is a man who wants to oppress her, she also sees Joe masochistically addicted to her neglect and coldness. She admits not being present in their relationship, just being a shell who cannot satisfy the other's desire for recognition and meaningful interaction: "I fed him unlimited supplies of nothing" (S, 78).

It can be seen that Joe is "pathologically narcissistic", as Hengen argues (Hengen 1993, 56). He can demand recognition, submission and denial of self from his female partner. All these images of Joe, however, can also be seen as excessive visions of a very unreliable narrator, and thus one can think that the protagonist is crazy and right – the narration is polyphonic.

3.4 The Desperate Struggle – Anna and David

Surfacing's protagonist sees her friends Anna and David repeatedly as false, persons with surfaces and imitations only. David (and to a lesser extent, Anna) is connected to cartoon characters, caricatures, advertisements et cetera. The protagonist sees David as

> an imposter, a pastiche, layers of political handbills, pages from magazines, *affiches*, verbs and nouns glued on to him and shredding away, the original surface littered with fragments and tatters. (…) he didn't know what language to use, he'd forgotten his own, he had to copy. Second-hand American was spreading over him in patches, like mange or lichen. He was infested, garbled, and I couldn't help him: it would take such time to heal, unearth him, scrape down to where he was true. (S, 146.)

David's exterior is reminiscent of *The Edible Woman*'s Marian's artificial, "papery" roles of a bride and a nurse, in which there is a robot-like "metal surface beneath" (EW, 244). In terms of the theory of the division of self, David is a reactive and imitative false self. His true self is deeply covered by the false exterior, and to the protagonist his possibility for healing and becoming a whole self are very scarce. He is eaten up by the capitalist and commercial society.

The protagonist repeatedly pays attention to Anna's makeup and appearance and their suggestion of falseness. In the following quotation, they are planning to leave the island and Anna is doing her makeup for the city:

> [S]he takes a round gilt compact with violets on the cover. She opens it, unclosing her other self, and runs her fingertip around the corners of her mouth, left one, right one; then she unswivels a pink stick and dots her cheeks and blends them, changing her shape, performing the only magic left to her. (…) a seamed and folded imitation of a magazine picture that is itself an imitation of a woman who is also an imitation, the original nowhere (…) captive princess in someone's head. She is locked in, she isn't allowed to eat or shit or cry or give birth, nothing goes in, nothing comes out. (S, 159.)

In the eyes of the protagonist the makeup on Anna's face is a "façade" (S, 127) and "slabbed down over her face like a visor" (S, 157). These words imply that the makeup is a protection, a shield on Anna's face. It hides something beneath this cover. When Anna opens her small mirror she is "unclosing her other self"; with a makeup pencil she is "changing her shape". Anna makes herself into a different person with makeup. The real Anna is nowhere to be seen when this makeup is on. It protects her, but it also makes her real self invisible. According to the protagonist there is "the machine" that eats people, makes them false, "half dead" (S, 159-160), like Anna and David.

The protagonist's thoughts of Anna and her looks broaden into a speculation of the image of the "Woman" in Western commercial context. To the feminist reader this quotation argues that there are no real women in these magazine's images of Woman, which is the patriarchy's narrow space for women. This woman's colours are "as red as blood as black as ebony" (S, 159), implying the Snow White, a fairy tale. Her borders are closed; there is no exchange of bodily fluids, and she cannot produce life. She is an object of the others' hungers, without a hunger of her own.

After this speculation the protagonist decides to destroy David and Joe's amateur film called *Random Samples* they have been shooting during their trip. In her opinion the film contains violence towards Anna, because David forced her to be naked in the film. This forced nudity implies that she is male gaze's victim. The protagonist tries to set Anna free: "hundreds of tiny naked annas no longer bottled and shelved" (S, 160). But her effort to release Anna does not work: her face is still "enamel" (ibid.), which implies a doll face. Her mask, her makeup eats her individual personality, and this, according to the protagonist, happens to other women, too, in this context. This echoes *The Edible Woman*'s Marian's anxious feelings of being trapped into feminine masquerade (see also Bouson 1993, 44).

After Anna and Joe have had sex and David's attempt to seduce the protagonist has failed, she watches the married couple and speculates on their relationship: "[Anna] was desperate, her body her only weapon and she was fighting for her life, he was her life, her life was the fight: she was fighting him because if she ever surrendered the balance of power would be broken and he would go elsewhere" (S, 147-148). According to the protagonist, Anna is in a cruel battle with her husband. Anna cannot lose David: he is her life. In this

pattern, she is nothing on her own; she has no subjectivity or power. They are pawns in a game, which is motivated by symbolic hunger.

In terms of feminist object-relations theory, in this relationship there are two positions, the dominant and the submissive. There is no possibility for true recognition.

Anna sees David as all-powerful, as if he was her parent and she a child:

> God (…) what'm I going to do? I forgot my makeup, he'll kill me." (…) He wants me to look like a young chick all the time, if I don't he gets mad. (…) He's got this little set of rules. If I break one of them I get punished, except he keeps changing them so I'm never sure. (…) He likes to make me cry because he can't do it himself. (…) He watches me all the time, he waits for excuses. Then either he won't screw at all or he slams it in so hard it hurts. (…) he says I have a mind like a soap opera, he says I invent it. (S, 116.)

Anna's portrayal of David's behaviour towards her implies sadomasochistic tendencies. In the context of feminist object-relations, Benjamin sees that in erotic domination a man is defending himself from what seems like the mother's power: "The repudiated maternal body persists as the object to be done to and violated, to be separated from, to have power over, to denigrate" (Benjamin 1988, 77). Anna's body is a battlefield for them both. David comments repeatedly on Anna's body with an insulting tone and remarks how the protagonist's body pleases him.

Anna says to the protagonist, "if he grabs you or anything it won't have much to do with you, it's all about me" (S, 93). According to Anna's interpretation, in their power play other people are just tokens and the real relationship is between them.

In a typical Atwoodian manner, David's interpretation of the marriage is different from Anna's. When the protagonist asks why David forced Anna to pose naked for the *Random Samples*, he defends himself:

> "You don't know what she does to me," he said with a slight whine. "She asks for it, she makes me do it." His voice turned crafty. "She goes with other men, she thinks she can get away with it, but she's too dumb, every time I find out (…) she's trying to cut my balls off." His eyes were sad rather than hostile, as though he had once believed better of her. (S, 131.)

Words like "crafty" imply that the protagonist is suspicious of David's words. However, Anna does sleep with Joe later, thus David is not totally wrong. David's direct speech oscillates the interpretation that Anna would straightforwardly be David's victim. In feminist object-relations terms, Anna is rather a collaborator in their compulsive mutual struggle.

When the protagonist suggests that Anna would leave or divorce David, Anna says: "Sometimes I think he'd like me to die (…) I have dreams about it" (S, 117.) Anna's thought of David wanting her to die appear as thoughts of a suffering child seeking for recognition, or a battered wife in an abusive relationship. In the context of feminist object-relations, Benjamin sees that

> Submission (…) is often motivated by the fear of separation and abandonment; masochism reflects the inability to express one's own desire and agency. (…) In erotic submission, fear of the master's power takes the place of the deeper fear — of the separation that feels like death. (Benjamin 1988, 79.)

In *Surfacing*, on some level of her mind, Anna connects leaving David with death, and sees that David's violence implies his desire to destroy her. Separation equals death in Anna's mind, because without David she is not recognised, she has no subjectivity or agency apart from this submissive position.

The narrator's reliability can be questioned in her description of Anna and David. There is polyphony; it is difficult to do a straightforward reading.

3.5 The Ritual

At the end of *Surfacing* the protagonist hides from her companions who are leaving the island. The novel has been described as "a woman's trip to the underworld" and "a woman's dive into her mind" (see e.g. Ovaska 1994, 148). Indeed, the protagonist stays alone in order to have contact with her dead parents, with herself, her memories and her surroundings. The protagonist's behaviour at the end of the novel is reminiscent of a ritual, especially, as Stein notes, of the "Native American spirit quest" (Stein 1999, 56).

The protagonist thinks: "I am by myself; this is what I wanted, to stay here alone. From any rational point of view I am absurd; but there are no longer any rational points of view" (S, 163). Other people stand for rationality, and when she is alone she can abandon the others' views.

Surfacing's protagonist's parents are lost to her and she feels that she is lost from them. The novel can be seen as her effort to reconnect with herself and her parents (her mother has died years ago and during the novel she finds out that also her father has died). During "the ritual" she negotiates her perception of and relationship with her parents.

In the context of feminist object-relations theory, "the ritual" that *Surfacing*'s protagonist goes through can be seen as a healthy destruction of parents. This destruction enables one to grow over the idealisation of parents and makes space for a healthier relationship (in mind or/and reality) (Benjamin 1988, 212-214). From the beginning's idealisation of her childhood and parents she grows to see them as ordinary people, flawed and hurt in their own ways.

Before the ritual, after the epiphany-like scene of diving, she saw the "new" knowledge of her past as a gift, a legacy from her father or his spirit, but she desires to see her mother's spirit too. The protagonist's father, who admired philosophers and their thoughts of humans, represents rationality, the mind and knowledge: the law of the father. Her mother stands for a different set of values and she stays to find her message, her legacy.

After the others leave, the protagonist's eating becomes haphazard. There are no timetables, clock or taking care of others to guide her. When she notices hunger she goes to the garden and starts to cry:

> Hunger is there in me, a contained whimper. (…) I start to pull up the onions and the carrots.
> I'm crying finally, it's the first time, I watch myself doing it: I'm crouching down beside the lettuces, flowers finished now, gone to seed, my breath knots, my body tightens against it; the water fills my mouth, fish taste. But I'm not mourning, I'm accusing them, *Why did you*? They chose it, they had control over their death, they decided it was time to leave and they left, they set up this barrier. They didn't consider how I would feel, who would take care of me. (…) They're here now (S, 166-167.)

The garden is a symbol of the protagonist's parents' perseverance on the island. The land was not fertile, but they did not give up: they made huge efforts in order to make the vegetables grow. The garden is connected to her mother in particular, a feminine space: the mother used to do most of the gardening. She appears to be bitter towards her parents for not being omnipotent and for not always being there for her. She wants to confront them and to let them know her feelings; there is a demand for recognition and reconciliation.

During the ritual, her behaviour and eating is restricted by rules and regulations that come to her by intuition, and that change constantly. Sometimes she feels that there is a power that orders and enables her to do things, and sometimes it is gone. At first she eats in the cabin, whatever remains of the groceries she has bought from the village shop, but after her third significant swim in the novel her thoughts change:

> When I am clean I come up out of the lake, leaving my false body floated on the surface (…) I have become hungry. The food in the cabin is forbidden, I'm not allowed to go back into that cage, wooden rectangle. Also tin cans and jars are forbidden; they are glass and metal. (…) I eat the green peas out of their shells and the raw yellow beans, I scrape the carrots from the earth with my fingers, I will wash them in the lake first. There is one late strawberry, I find it among the matted weeds and suckers. Red foods, heart colour, they are the best kind, they are sacred; then yellow, then blue; green foods are mixed from blue and yellow. (…) At the sunset I devour the washed carrots, taking them from the grass where I've concealed them, and a part of cabbage. The outhouse is forbidden so I leave my dung, droppings, on the ground and kick earth over. All animals with dens do that. (S, 172.)

When her companions were on the island, she did not report being hungry. Now she is hungry, which suggests that the numbness has decreased. The water is portrayed "multilingual" (ibid.), thus it is an element outside the language, which the protagonist has found so problematic. She leaves her "false body" in the water, suggesting that she is now true and authentic.

The circle of allowed foods is narrowed down gradually: edible items once allowed become forbidden, in a way reminiscent of *The Edible Woman*'s Marian's symptoms. Parker asserts that the protagonist cannot eat processed food because "[s]uch food is contaminated (…) by patriarchal ideology" (Parker 1995, 351). Indeed, it appears as if the protagonist is trying to leave all societal rules behind. She does not sleep in the cabin or use the outhouse anymore. This

suggests a desire to become one with the animals. It appears that the protagonist, after her disappointments with people, city, and consumerism, wants to identify with the animals and nature, which she sees as worthy.

But there are hierarchies after all: for instances red food is better than blue. As Joonas Säntti notes, the effort to abolish all the rules does not succeed (see Säntti 2005). The protagonist is left with new rules – now not given by the society, but by her own swift changing mind.

An unidentified group comes to look for her, but she manages to hide from them. After their visit she thinks of living without food in the future, of becoming a non-consumer:

> I haven't had time to be hungry and even now the hunger is detached from me, it does not insist; I must be getting used to it, soon I will be able to go without food altogether. (S, 180.)

Not eating would, of course, mean death. It appears that by resisting food she tries to resist being a consumer, the identification with people and being one of them. The same evening she eats "nothing but I lie down on the rocks and drink from the lake" (S, 182), and falls asleep and dreams of her parents.

In the morning she feels different:

> I know they have gone finally, back into the earth, the air, the water, wherever they were when I summoned them. The rules are over. (…) I'm not hungry any more but I trudge back to the cabin and climb through the window again and open a tin of yellow beans. To prefer life, I owe them that. (…) In any case I can't stay here forever, there isn't enough food. (S, 182-183.)

During the ritual she has seen visions of her parents, first her mother and then her father or "the thing you meet when you've stayed here too long alone" (S, 181). She is at peace with her parents now, has mourned for them. She understands that her idea of them has been mostly a projection. Her vision and understanding expand: from the beginning's narrow perception to a more "whole" picture, which includes her parents' own symbolic hungers.

She has also gone deep enough in mourning for her aborted foetus. She is not hungry, for food or for visions, but she eats because she owes that to "them", this probably meaning her parents. She has won hunger, which was earlier in the ritual strong, "loose in me" (S, 173), which suggests that she may not desire or need anything anymore, that she is satisfied. Her desire and struggle have seized to be desperate. She appears to understand that her ritual journey is over. She wants to be strong and leave the island with the help of food: " tomorrow, when I've eaten and I'm strong enough" (S, 183).

In her non-fiction book on Canadian literature, *Survival*, which was published the same year as *Surfacing*, Atwood outlines four "basic victim positions". She sees these as characteristic for Canada and Canadian literature. These victim positions are:

> *Position One: To deny the fact that you are a victim. (…)*
> *Position Two: To acknowledge the fact that you are a victim, but to explain this as an act of Fate, the Will of God, the dictates of Biology (in the case of women, for instance), the necessity decreed by History, or Economics, or the Unconscious, or any other large general powerful idea. (…)*
> *Position Three: To acknowledge the fact that you are a victim but to refuse to accept the assumption that the role is inevitable. (…)*
> *Position Four: To be a creative non-victim.* (Atwood 1972, 36-38, italics original.)

These positions have often been used in interpreting Atwood's own production and as one can see, they are related to her fiction (see e.g. Rigney 1987). In the context of these victim positions, it appears that at the end of the novel the protagonist of *Surfacing* is somewhere in between positions three and four. She decides to "refuse to be a victim" (S, 185) and to leave behind the notion that she is powerless, because it is not true.

On the last page of the novel Joe returns to the island and tries to find the protagonist. She watches Joe from her hiding place:

> [A] mediator, an ambassador, offering me something: captivity in any of its forms, a new freedom?
> I watch him, my love for him useless as a third eye or a possibility. If I go with him we will have to talk (…) For us it's necessary, the intercession of words; and we will probably fail (…) But he isn't an American, I can see that now; he isn't anything, he is only half-formed, and for that reason I trust him.
> To trust is to let go. I tense forward, towards the demands and questions, though my feet do not move yet. (S, 186.)

The protagonist is uncertain of what Joe represents to her. Being with him might mean imprisonment, but it can also mean a positive change in her life. She does not know. In this quotation she speaks of feeling love towards him although earlier the word felt impossible. This suggests that there has been some positive change during the novel. She sees Joe offering hope, because he is "half-formed" and not American. The "machine", which turns people into Americans, has not got him yet.[54]

The last sentences of the novel are:

> He [Joe] calls for me again, balancing on the dock which is neither land nor water, hands on hips, head thrown back and eyes scanning. His voice is annoyed: he won't wait much longer. But right now he waits.
> The lake is quiet, the trees surrounding me, asking and giving nothing. (S, 186.)

Joe's half-formed nature is enforced by his position on "neither land nor water". The nature surrounding her is "asking and giving nothing", contrary to Joe, who has repeatedly demanded a declaration of love from her. With great significance, she does not move.

For implicated and feminist reader(s), this ending has been a problem. Interestingly, when I have read some papers of students and my own earlier writing, I have noticed that there is a tendency to write beyond the ending: to see and remember that the protagonist goes with Joe, that she leaves the island. The ambivalence of her immobility seems to be too much for the emotionally engaged reader.

Many feminist scholars have seen the novel's ending as positive. For instance, Rigney claims, "To the protagonist belongs the ultimate sanity: the knowledge that woman can descend, and return – sane, whole, victorious" (Rigney 1978, 115; see also Quartermaine 1994; Kadrmas 1987, 86). Others, including myself, find the ending more complex (e.g. Stein 1999, 56; Bouson 1993, 58-60; Howells 1996, 32). Atwood herself sees that there is a tendency for readers to see the ending in an overtly positive light: "I think that people have overestimated the amount to which the protagonist in *Surfacing* really has developed in understanding" (Atwood in Struthers 1992, 66).

The typical Atwoodian multiplicity, or in the context of Bakhtinian theory of dialogic, polyphony, works here. In addition to the reading of the novel as serious quest to the underground, one can see some irony and even parody in the novel, as for instance Stein and Lecker, and I do. As Stein writes, "perhaps Atwood is caricaturing the quest" (Stein 1999, 55-57). This feeling of irony, to me, comes from continuous images *in excess*, which do still appear on the last page of the novel: she still speaks of Americans and does not know what Joe really stands for. It appears that the ritual fails, or succeeds in part only. The narrator's unreliability adds to this feeling of irony: it seems as if there would be a wink from the author – do not take this too seriously.

There are also deeply tragic qualities in *Surfacing*, in addition to the reading of the novel as a heroic female journey beyond the masculine order, or to the reading of the novel as a story including parody and irony. As Bouson puts it, the novel introduces female "self in desperate need of rescue" (Bouson 1993, 58).

I see this ambiguity as an essential part of *Surfacing* and Atwood's other novels. Their open endings and multiple possibilities of interpretation are of great importance. The polyphony makes it difficult or impossible to see only one reading as justifiable.

As an implicated reader, I have felt frustration with *Surfacing*. With other novels I have had more possibilities for pleasure and identification. While reading *Surfacing*, I feel again and again unable to find a place where the text would really speak to me. It seems to evade dialogue with me, because of the protagonist's self-absorbedness. Also Bouson notes that *Surfacing* can "evoke (…) feelings of bewilderment and anxiety" (Bouson 1993, 54, see also 57).

In terms of feminist reading, which I, in this context, see intertwined with implicated reading, I often feel that I fail to be hailed or interpellated as an ideal reader of this text (see Mills 1995, e.g. 68-69, 75-78). It makes me think whether the Canadian national reading might prove to be more fruitful. On the other hand it might not: this text has spoken to women and feminists around the world, without their knowledge of Canada's specific political issues.

As an implicated reader (and a feminist reader), the novel's ending disturbs me. Although it is open like other novels, I find it too open for my comfort as an implicated reader. There is no guarantee that the protagonist will survive, will leave the island, or cope on the island. She is left with less denial and confusion than at the beginning, but into a place and state that I see indicating emptiness and loneliness.

Another implicated reader's feeling could be, in the case of *Surfacing*, jealousy, because other readers have such and intense relationship with it. But when this relationship stays partly undeveloped between me as an implicated reader and *Surfacing*, the jealousy is not an issue. With *Surfacing*, I do not feel jealousy, only confusion. Because of my relationship with the book, I find it sometimes surprising that this novel is so loved and studied.

While *Surfacing*'s food motif is an undercurrent, the next novel we explore, *Lady Oracle*, has a strong food motif. The protagonist Joan overeats and has several emotions invested in food. Again the style changes. From *Surfacing*'s bleak ghost story we turn to *Lady Oracle*'s parody of the Gothic.

4 *LADY ORACLE:* LOVE AND EATING

Atwood wanted her third novel *Lady Oracle* (1976) to be "all tangents", after writing the terser *Surfacing* (Rosenberg 1984, 112; see also Fee 1993, 23). The comic novel starts when Canadian Joan Foster resides in a small town in Italy, Torremoto, remembers her life and tries to write. She is a poet, and her alias Louisa K. Delacourt writes Gothic romances. Joan has framed a suicide in order to get away from a heated situation: distanced husband Arthur, two obsessed former lovers, and anonymous blackmailing stalker. Joan is a protagonist who gets herself into trouble one after the other, but she also sees herself as "an escape artist", suggesting that she can also get away from the problems, in one way or other.[55]

Lady Oracle's subject is a female writer's life and its predicaments. Joan's story into a writer and beyond is narrated in the style of a *Bildungsroman* and *Kűnstlerroman*.[56] *Lady Oracle*'s theme, in my opinion, could be that the novel scrutinises and criticises Western society's problematic gender politics, which is brought up through the Gothic genre. As Stein argues, *Lady Oracle* "both parodies and exploits the features of the Gothic tradition" (Stein 1999, 57). This is a strong undercurrent in all Atwood's novels, but in *Lady Oracle* the issue is at its most explicit.

Many critics have examined the elements and rewriting of the Gothic genre in the novel. Susan McKinstry calls *Lady Oracle* "a parodic Gothic bildungsroman" (McKinstry 1987). Becker sees that Atwood's rewriting of the Gothic is done "with ironic double-voice that allows for self-reflexivity and an implicit critique". Lady Oracle is "neo-gothic" with grim humour. (Becker 1999, 152-153.)

Gothic is a genre, which emerged at the end of the 18th century. It has always been considered a female and feminine form of writing, and a genre beyond realism. Classic Gothic writing includes, for example, the following works: Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), Emily Brontë's *The Wuthering Heights* (1847), and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847). The classic works often dealt with feminist issues and even served feminist purposes. As Becker writes in her study *Gothic Forms of*

Feminine Fictions (1999), the Gothic "has, throughout its history, strongly challenged established notions of femininity (…) [and it] has always been provocation and rebellion against order, control and the powers of restrictive ideologies" (Becker 1999, 4.)

Gothic stories narrate tales of horror, especially "domestic horror, family horror" (Becker 1999, 4 and passim; see also Rojola 2000, passim; Pyrhönen 2004, passim). The main characters include "maiden in distress", a young woman who has problems with courtship and romance, and ominous, frightening, and grotesque characters. One of the Gothic scene's essential elements is a castle, or a reminiscent building: a house that seems to have a life of its own; not benevolent or comforting, but threatening. The genre includes supernatural aspects, such as ghosts.

Atwood comments that she was interested in and puzzled by women's longing for the Gothic stories, and sees her novel as an "anti-Gothic":

> I think in an anti-Gothic what you're doing is examining the perils of Gothic thinking (…) you have a scenario in your head which involves certain roles – the dark, experienced man, who is possibly evil and possibly good, the rescuer, the mad wife, and so on – and that as you go to real life, you tend to cast real people in these roles as Joan does. Then when you find out that the real people don't fit in these two-dimensional roles, you can either discard the roles and try to deal with the real person or discard the real person. (Atwood in Struthers 1992, 64.)

As we know, parody can be twofold: it can criticise a particular text or genre, and it can also scrutinise the contemporary society (Dentith 2000, 9). As we can see from Atwood's own words, her intention has been to do both: to discuss with the genre and its influence on women, and the society's problematic values.

Lady Oracle's narration is character-bound. The narrator is the same person as the focalisor, and the focalisation is internal (and in the first person mode). From Torremoto, Joan narrates her life from her early childhood on. Especially foundational for Joan's life is her conflict-ridden relationship with her mother. Although the child Joan is in a tragic situation, the style of the childhood narration is not gloomy. The retrospective narrator comments on the young character with comic and ironic tones.

As a narrator and protagonist, Joan is a victim, but to a lesser extent than in the two earlier novels. She has suffered and relates her story. Stein sees her as "Atwood's first self-conscious trickster figure, a woman who delights in spinning stories, but finds herself caught in the plots she fabricates" (Stein 1999, 42).

In a somewhat similar way as in *Surfacing*, *Lady Oracle*'s protagonist has created a fictional past. She never tells her husband or her other adult intimates that she was a fat child or what kind of relationship she had with her mother. Unlike *Surfacing*'s protagonist, Joan shares the truth of her past with the reader from the very beginning. She tells us things that she is too afraid to share with her friends, lovers, and her husband. She is allying with us, making us the hearers of her most private memories and thoughts. This allying, of course,

suggests that the novel inscribes itself to feminist writing and tradition (Pearce 1997, 39, 67).

The theme and motifs of *Lady Oracle* increases the alignment with feminist writing and female and feminist tradition: motifs such as the mother-daughter relationship, compulsive eating, fat female body, the Gothic and heterosexual relations from the female perspective indeed assume a feminist and female reader, or at least make her into one of the preferred ones. The intonation, the style in which these matters are written about is especially important here (Pearce 1997, 72-74). Although the style is sometimes mocking, the narrator herself experiences these things, is bodily present. In addition to the comedy, there are tender and tragic tones.

The novel deals with multiple identities and transformations in life, as the mere back of Virago's paperback edition tells us: "From fat girl to thin, from red hair to mud brown, from London to Toronto, from Polish count to radical husband, from writer of romances to distinguished poet". "Ordinary" woman's life and Woman's cultural narratives are discussed, counterpoised and questioned in the novel: Joan is a wife, a lover, a writer of both "trash" and high art, and a cult icon, and there are several representations of Woman in the novel, including Gothic characters and women's positions and fates in fiction and media.

In *Lady Oracle*, there are embedded narratives, which can be seen as mirror-texts of the main narrative: the embedded narratives have an element or several in common with the main story (See Bal 1997, 58). In addition to *Stalked by Love*, Joan/Louisa's script in progress, there are two short extracts of her books, *Escape from Love* and *Love, My Ransom*, and parts of Joan's "high art" poetry collection, namesake of the novel, *Lady Oracle*, which is described by the publisher's representative as "a mixture of Kahlil Gibran and Rod McKuen" (LO, 225).[57]

Like all Atwood's novels, *Lady Oracle* has gained wide critical attention. Margery Fee's monograph "*The Fat Lady Dances: Margaret Atwood's Lady Oracle*" situates the novel into its contexts and makes interesting interpretations. For example, Fee analyses arguments for and against the novel being "a Roman à Clef" of the Canadian cultural circles, and decides that although there are elements of it, it is not a key novel (Fee 1993, 30-35). Bouson explores the novel's "devastatingly effective oppositional strategy as it appropriates and intervenes in the formulas and formats of traditional Gothic romance fiction" (Bouson 1993, 64). Mycak reads the novel through the psychoanalytic concept of death drive, and examines the mother-daughter bond with an interest in its ambivalent "issues of separation and symbiosis" (Mycak 1996, 71, 73). Lindsey Tucker examines *Lady Oracle* from the point of view of female mobility and stability, free movement and fixed being. According to her, literary motifs of mazes and mirrors describe women's difficulties of separating from their mothers. (Tucker 1994, 6, 10.)[58]

As in *The Edible Woman*, *Lady Oracle*'s food motif is explicit. It is not only an undercurrent of the narrative.

In "The Triangle of Mother, Daughter and Food" I discuss the problematic relationship between the teenager Joan and her mother. Joan is a compulsive, rebellious eater and her mother says that she should be thin. This of course reflects the society's values but I argue that in addition, it also tells of deeper, even unconscious wishes and struggles. In "Food and Romance: Loving and Eating – Loving Eating" I analyse Joan's relationships with men, and how they often are coloured with food. With her husband there are a different set of food rules than with her lovers. In "The Gothic Seduction", I read Joan's hunger for Gothic. In the chapter, I also discuss the novel's ending, which problematises the union that the reader and the narrator have created.

4.1 The Triangle of Mother, Daughter and Food

In *Lady Oracle*, Joan seeks something beyond nutrition from food and eating. The uncontrollable drinking and eating seem to imply that the protagonist does not feel like being in control of her life. Parker points out that the "absence of power in her life is mirrored by her lack of control around food" (Parker 1995, 351). One can also see that Joan is after love and comfort.

In my opinion, *Lady Oracle* is in dialogue with the feminist view of compulsive eating disorders. It has possibly even influenced critics (e.g. Susie Orbach's *Fat is a Feminist Issue*, 1998, which represents feminist object-relations theoretical approach to eating disorders, discusses *Lady Oracle*).

In the context of feminist (psychologically aligned) criticism, several scholars argue that women eat because their emotional needs are not met. One may be looking for refuge, comfort and peace, or warmth and joy from food. Or one tries to suppress negative thoughts and feelings, such as anger, shame or bitterness. (E.g. Orbach, 1998, 17; Johansson 2001, 56, 59, 63.) Orbach crystallises: "She turns to eating in the search for love, comfort, warmth and support – for that indefinable something that seems never to be there" (Orbach 1998, 32). Eating makes you feel full and satisfied, at least for a while. If you fail to get this feeling of repletion elsewhere in your life, you may turn to food.

Psychoanalytic theory sees that women's problems with food in childhood and adulthood often derive from interaction and communication with others, and from women's problematic situation in society. Usually the early interaction with one's mother is mainly negotiation about eating and feeding. According to psychoanalytic theory, this background is often visible in later eating disorders. Orbach writes: "The daughter's feeding of herself can become a symbolic response to both the physical and emotional deprivation she suffered as a child, an expression of her fraught intimacy with her mother" (Orbach 1998, 32). Children need mental and physical nourishment, but, according to psychoanalysts, are often left mentally starving (Miller 1986, 403; see also Benjamin 1988, 47).

Joan's depiction of her childhood situation, the absent father and the abusive mother, confirms that she was not mentally "fed". Her childhood is portrayed lengthily in *Lady Oracle*, for the first time in Atwood's novels. From this novel on, Atwood's concentration on childhood becomes common.

According to Joan, her mother wants Joan to be thin and she is not:

> [T]his [not being thin] was one of the many things for which my mother never quite forgave me. At first I was merely plump; in the earliest snapshots (…) I was trying to get something into my mouth: a toy, a hand, a bottle. (…) I failed to lose what is usually referred to as baby fat. When I reached the age of six the pictures stopped abruptly. This must have been when my mother gave up on me (…) She had decided I would not do.
> I became aware of this fairly soon. (LO, 43.)

The retrospective narrator, adult Joan, sees that her mother wanted her child to have certain physical qualities. Here thinness equals approval. Joan sees her mother as a person, who wants to mould her daughter:

> Our relationship was professionalized early. She was to be the manager, the creator, the agent; I was to be the product. I suppose one of the most important things she wanted from me was gratitude. She wanted me to do well, but she wanted to be responsible for it. (…) If she'd ever decided what she really wanted to do and had gone out and done it, she wouldn't have seen me as a reproach to her, the embodiment of her own failure and depression, a huge edgeless cloud of inchoate matter which refused to be shaped into anything for which she could get a prize. (LO, 67.)

Joan's mother is one of the many unhappy and displaced mothers of Atwood's fiction. She is lonely, unhappy and hungry in her marriage, trying to make her unsatisfying life enjoyable through her daughter. Her own childhood in a strictly religious family has not been happy, and after her transgressions (such as marrying against her family's wishes) she is alienated from her siblings, parents, and background. In her desire to have a meaningful life through her daughter the mother appears to be symbolically cannibalising her.

In the context of feminist object-relations theory, Chodorow argues that in our Western culture a woman's sense of self is often tied to her children's success in life (Chodorow 1989, 42). In this light women's hunger and obsession with their children is understandable.

When Joan is thirteen their relationship has become a struggle, although in part unconscious one:

> I was eating steadily, doggedly, stubbornly, anything I could get. The war between myself and my mother was on in earnest; the disputed territory was my body. I didn't quite know this though I sensed it in a hazy way; but I reacted to the diet booklets (…) to the bribes of dresses she would give me if I would reduce (…) to her cutting remarks about my size, to her pleas about my health (…) with another Mars Bar or a double helping of french fries. I swelled visibly, relentlessly before her very eyes, I rose like dough, my body advanced inch by inch towards her across the dining-room table, in this at least I was undefeated. (LO, 69-70.)

Joan's mother wants her to be thin, so she will be heavy – or so it seems. Atwood scholars have often seen Joan's eating as way of resistance towards

oppressive society, her mother, and women's role (e.g. Waugh 1989; 186-187; Stein 1999, 57; Tucker 1994, 38; Sceats 2000, 101; Nicholson 1987, 40; Mycak 1996, 103; Bouson 1993, 67). According to Parker, "[e]ating empowers Joan" (Parker 1995, 351).

Orbach argues that fat may feel like the only thing a dominating mother cannot take away from her daughter. Being overweight can make one feel powerful, on a conscious or a hidden level. She may feel that by becoming thin she will lose her self. (Orbach 1998, 33, 41, 54; Noble 1987, 119.)

Overeating and being overweight can be a means for resisting society. As a child, you try to resist the power of your parents by eating. As an adult, you may protest against patriarchal society, against other women and men. Overeating may offer pleasure and it can be active rebellion. (Orbach 1998, 17, 22-23; Johansson 2001, 42; Epstein 1987, 29; Noble 1987, 131; Lupton 1996, 14.)

In front of her mother Joan finds her weight positive, but in front of others, like her father, she is ashamed of her body:

> [T]hey saw my obesity as an unfortunate handicap (…) rather than the refutation, the victory it was (…) It was only in relation to my mother that I derived a morose pleasure from my weight; in relation to everyone else, including my father, it made me miserable. But I couldn't stop. (LO, 74.)

In relation to her mother, Joan's body and eating are meaningful to her. Her father and the other people represent the society and the people outside the mother-daughter bond. Joan emphasises that her overeating is compulsive, it happens without her will.

In a society that (problematically) admires thinness, being overweight creates feelings of shame and guilt. As several scholars state, an overweight body can be a source of anxiety and shame, as any body that is not within the idealized norms of the classical body.[59] Lupton writes that "[a]n overweight body speaks of gluttony, lack of self-discipline, hedonism, self-indulgence" which all are despised qualities. Overweight people are considered to be out of control, lacking in self-control, morally weak and having difficulties in learning new things. The proper body is a symbol for desired qualities like beauty, sexual attractiveness, self-control, success, and independence. (Lupton 1996, 16; Johansson 2001, 96; Harjunen 2000, 45-46; Harjunen 2002, 84-85.) As Joan remarks: "nobody regarded being fat as a misfortune (…) it was viewed simply as a disgusting failure of will" (LO, 90).

The misogynist society is often present in the conversations between the mother and the daughter. Joan's outlook is tied to conversations about men marriage. Even a psychiatrist asks her, "Don't you want to get married?" (LO, 83). This suggests that overweight women are unable to get the status of a heterosexual bride, which appears to be the ultimate goal in the society of Joan's childhood, the middle class Toronto in the 1950s (and often still is). As Orbach states, the issue of being overweight or thin mainly has to do with women's control over their own sexuality. Concentration on definitions for a proper body turns women away from their own, potential power. (Orbach 1998, 61.)

In *Lady Oracle*, some of the confrontations between the mother and the daughter have to do with clothing. Clothing, of course, is a very important element of gender roles and gender performances, and one of Atwood oeuvre's iterative motifs (see e.g. Stein 2003). Joan's mother wants her to wear clothes made for mature figure in order to make her look smaller. Joan does the opposite: "I sought out clothes of a peculiar and offensive hideousness, violently colored, horizontally striped (…) I wasn't going to let myself be diminished, neutralized" (LO, 87-88).

With the rules learnt at the schoolyard, Joan thinks she has won when her mother cries after one of these "fashion show[s] in reverse" (LO, 71). She refuses to comply with the narrow position of the accepted female body. But this victory is naturally dubious: Joan does not feel like the winner. Joan is trying to make the situation look like it was her own decision, but the context argues against it: "[S]urely I was behaving like this not because of anything she had done but because I wanted to" (LO, 88). The word "surely" suggests that there is a doubt and the reader and narrator herself have to be convinced of the idea.

Although Joan's eating has usually been read as rebellion against her mother and society, there is also another side to this interaction. In some, maybe unconscious way, Joan is answering to her mother's needs. Joan's mother's need for their conflict becomes especially visible when Joan starts an extreme low calorie diet. This is inspired by her late aunt's will, which promises Joan money if she reduces. Her mother, it appears, does not want Joan to be thin, after all. When Joan reduces, her mother is "distraught and uncertain", even "frantic" (LO, 123), starts drinking and tries to make Joan eat more. Joan understands that her mother has always wanted her to overeat: "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" (ibid.).

Although Joan has stated that she has eaten to resistance to her mother, it is revealed that she has been also fulfilling her mother's conscious or unconscious wishes by overeating and being overweight.

In terms of the false self theory, Joan's eating can be seen as the false self's attempt to please the mother, to fulfil the mother's needs. As Laing and Winnicott note, the false self is compelled to attest other people's perception of her. False self does not only submit, it can also behave badly – according to the context. (Laing 1971, 91; Winnicott 1960, 146-147.)

Orbach argues that by eating compulsively

> the daughter may be trying to reject the mother's role while at the same time reproaching the mother for inadequate nurturing: or she may be attempting to retain a sense of identity with her mother. (Orbach 1998, 32. Orbach does mention *Lady Oracle* in her discussion.)

Overeating occurs not only in order to fight against the mother, but in a complex way to keep in contact with the mother, to embrace her and what she very much represents in our culture: food and nourishment.

When Joan rejects the pattern of compulsive eating, she also rejects the bond between her and her mother. By reducing she is saying no to her mother: as a thinner dieter Joan loses her relationship with her mother. Orbach states that when a girl or a woman starts making individual choices concerning her eating, she feels that she is rejecting her mother. It is a conflict between individuality and dependence and love for the mother. (Orbach 1998, 32.)

In *Lady Oracle*, the mother does not approve of Joan's independence and becomes violent. When Joan tells that she has lost almost enough weight in order to collect the inheritance, and plans to leave the parents' house, her mother attacks Joan: "[S]he took a paring knife (…) and stuck it into my arm (…) It went through my sweater, pricked the flesh, then bounced out and fell to the floor" (LO, 124). After the stabbing, they both pretend that nothing happened, and Joan makes them tea. She leaves home the same night.

In the context of the feminist object-relations and theory on eating disorders, Joan's mother's extreme behaviour comes more understandable. From the mother's point of view Joan is giving up their relationship. In a way, by her independence she is destroying her mother who feels that she has no subjectivity left if the daughter leaves her. To Joan the mother stands for suffocating power and loss of self, and to her mother Joan's independence represents loss of subjectivity.

Even after her death Joan's mother haunts her. Joan sees visions of her and dreams of her. In terms of the feminist object-relations, it appears that Joan is not able to separate from her mother; she is unable to "healthily destruct" the mother's power.

In *Lady Oracle*'s portrayal of Joan's childhood there are two perspectives: first, the child's strong intertwined feelings of love and hatred towards the mother. Second, the adult retrospective narrator, who sees her mother as a victim, too, not only her earlier self. As an adult retrospective narrator, Joan sees the childhood situation in a multifaceted light: she understands the position of her parents, which complicates her identification with her childhood self. To the experiencing child her mother is a hateful monster, but Joan's narrator voice is sympathetic, at least in part, to her parents and other adults. It is possible to see that Joan's unhappy, trapped mother is a monster using her daughter to fulfil her own needs. One could also argue that the conflict is the mother's sincere effort to make her daughter acceptable in society. In dialogic terms, there is polyphony: different opinions and viewpoints.

There is also a lot of irony and humour in the depiction of the mother–daughter relationship. The images of food are often *in excess*. The issue of compulsive eating is repeated and exaggerated, and the characters and their behaviour are degraded. Joan's mother's methods of making her daughter smaller in size are grotesque, comic, and ridiculous: for example, the mother glazes a cake with laxative.

Although the issue of fat female body is discussed with sympathetic tone, there is also an element of doubt: what exactly is the politics of the fat body in *Lady Oracle*? Joan is a thin retrospective narrator, who often sees her former fat body as grotesque.

Joan acknowledges that it is difficult, in Western culture, to see or describe fat (female) people in a tragic or a noble tone. For the outside observers, the fat body almost-always brings comedy and degradation to the scene. When Joan thinks of her humiliating ballet experience as a seven-year-old, she knows that the fat body makes it ridiculous in the eyes of most people: "[T]he image is simply too ludicrous. But if I described myself as charming and skinny, they would find the whole thing pathetic and grossly unfair" (LO, 52).

The narrator's thoughts of her fat body's appearance in front of others may explain the style of the novel. Was the tragicomedy the only possible way to narrate (and for the author to write) about the experiences of a fat woman?

The fat has been a part of Joan, and in a way still is, in her mind. However, it is not embraced or accepted in the novel. This ambiguity points to the problematic position of the fat (female) body in our society. To the implicated reader the novel's ambivalence of the issue feels sometimes uncomfortable, and I sometimes wish that Joan would feel at home in her body, fat and thin. To the feminist reader, nonetheless, this portrayal stands for the critique of the rigid regulations concerning the female body, and the women's confusion and ambivalence in front of them.[60]

4.2 Food and Romance: Loving and Eating – Loving Eating

In *Lady Oracle*, food is often used to degrade the romantic scenes: to make them look comic and ridiculous. This strategy, I think, intentionally underlines the difference between the novel's "real" world and Joan/Louisa's writings' Gothic world.

The main story of *Lady Oracle* is full of food and eating. However, the Gothic romantic novels Joan writes under the pseudonym Louisa K. Delacourt lack this aspect. The message seems to be that in the world of real romance (which can only exist on the pages of a story) there is no room for the banalities of life. The characters do not cook and they are not hungry for ordinary food. Here, lack of food is a tool for stressing the contrast between the real world of the frame story and the unreal world of the embedded narratives.[61]

There is only one scene in *Stalked by Love*, in which Charlotte eats something. There are no dinners, breakfasts or brunches, as one might expect in a rich house, only this one scene of scarce eating. She is having tea with the housekeeper Mrs. Ryerson and eats one scone with butter. Charlotte is worried, but presence of Mrs. Ryerson gives her some comfort: in Charlotte's new posting, she is the only one who has been nice to her and trustworthy. Charlotte "licked her fingers fastidiously" (LO, 187). With the word fastidious, she is judged to be picky and choosy, but on the other hand, licking one's fingers is a rather sensual act, a cat-like gesture. It might mean pleasure, or self-comfort, or hunger and greed. In *Love, My Ransom* the protagonist Penelope is forced to drink "some liquid from an exotic flask" (LO, 218) in order to get her into a

trance. Here the drink is a tool of the plot and a description of Penelope's situation: her body and mind are manipulated.

Although there is scarce amount of food scenes in Joan's Gothic writing, in her "real" life's romantic involvements food is *in excess*.

The first man who wants to marry the teenager Joan works with her in a restaurant called "Bite-A-Bit", which serves for example hot dogs, hamburgers and roast beef. Food is an important element in Joan's relationship with her first lover, the Polish Count Paul, and food is very important in the depiction of the dating, proposal and marriage of Joan and Arthur. Food is also used to portray Joan's relationship with her lover Royal Porcupine (alias Chuck Brewster).

When Joan first meets her first lover, The Polish Count Paul (originally Tadeo), they go to a restaurant: "He steered me (…) into a restaurant called (…) The Golden Egg, and brought me some tea and a black-currant tart, slightly squashed" (LO, 146). The meal can be interpreted as a symbol of their relationship. He is over-patronizing, does not bother asking what she wants and brings her a second quality pie. Not unlike the tart, also their affair is second rate.

In order to know more of him Joan searches through Paul's kitchen cupboards, which

> were well-organized; tinned goods prevailed, with some utilitarian dried soups and a package of water biscuits. The foods were of two kinds, bare necessities and exotica: squid (…) and some seal meat (…) the refrigerator (…) was spotless and almost empty (LO, 152-153.)

This list of foods does tell a lot of Paul's character. On one hand, he is stingy and has strict routines. On the other hand, his life has exotic colouring that the squid and the seal meat tell of: he is a refugee, a count, a romance author under female pseudonym Mavis Quilp, and he owns a gun. His cupboards and refrigerator are tidy; almost unnaturally tidy in comparison to Atwoodian protagonists'. Paul's ways of housekeeping are very close to *The Edible Woman's* Peter's – the cleanliness of kitchen and fridge is important to Bluebeard figures in Atwood's novels.

When Paul reappears in Joan's life after she has gotten married with Arthur, they meet for a lunch and the menu is described in detail. The menu is closely tied to the dialogue, for instance: "I am pleased I have discovered you," Paul said, as we sipped our lemon soup" (…) We talked about that (…) during the moussaka" (LO, 279-280). The foods Paul and Joan have, such as baklava and moussaka are not the kind Joan usually eats. This food symbolises that Paul is offering her a different life — he wants to run away with her.

The scene of Arthur's marriage proposal is described as unromantic as possible:

> We were sitting on a Queen's Park bench, eating take-out hamburgers and drinking milk shakes.
> "I have a good idea," Arthur said. "Why don't we get married?" I said nothing. I couldn't think of any reasons why not. Arthur could, though, and he proceeded to analyse them: neither of us had much money, we were probably too young and

> unsettled to make such a serious commitment, we didn't know each other very well. But to all these objections he had the answers. (…) I chewed the rest of my hamburger and swallowed it thoughtfully; then I slurped up the rest of my milk shake. Now or never was the time for courage, I thought. I longed to marry Arthur (LO, 197.)

The scene has none of the qualities of the proposal scenes of the Costume Gothic novels Joan/Louisa writes: passionate feelings, a kneeling man in agony, tears of happiness, kisses of fulfilment and joy. The contrast between the entertaining romantic fiction and the novel's reality is drastically underlined. The fast food makes the scene comic. One does almost expect Joan to burp of satisfaction.

The scene and Arthur stress the practical sides of marriage, such as money. This, of course, is very anti-Gothic. As Bouson writes, in *Lady Oracle* "Atwood deliberately debunks the romantic ideal through her comic descriptions of the mundane world of married life" (Bouson 1993, 63).

When the wedding date comes closer, Joan is afraid that Arthur will find out the truth of her past:

> Under the strain I started to eat extra helpings of English muffins covered with butter, loaves of bread and honey, banana splits, doughnuts, and secondhand cookies from Kresge's. Though these indulgences were not obvious to Arthur, I was gaining weight; the only thing that saved me from bloating up like a drowned corpse was the wedding date itself, and even so, I'd gained thirteen pounds by the time it arrived. I could just barely get my zipper up. (LO, 199.)

Joan would like to tell Arthur the truth of her past, but is repeatedly unable to do so. She has recourse in overeating, an old habit. Joan feels guilty of her secrets and the lies she has told Arthur about it. These lies have been very innocent in the eyes of the reader: for instance, Joan claimed to have been a cheerleader, instead of her true position of a fat outsider. So her fear is *in excess* and thus comic, but also tragic.

From a psychological point of view, food can numb the pain of not being able to be your true self. One can concentrate on overeating and the guilt it brings along instead of the painful and shameful memories. (E.g. Epstein 1987, 29.)

Overeating could also be interpreted as a fear of marriage and commitment. Eating has meant rebellion to Joan in relation to her mother, and maybe this eating has rebellious elements, too. Maybe, on some level, she does not want to fit into the dress and thus the role of the bride. Joan feels shame for not being honest to her fiancé, and her over-eating suggests anger, resistance and maybe even conflicting feelings about issues of sexuality: marriage, of course, is an institution containing and producing sexual discourses (see e.g. Veijola ja Jokinen, 2001, 19-20). By overeating one may desire to keep unwanted sexual attention away – in Joan's case, this may suggest her husband's interest or the other men's, latter being thought to be improper after commitment such as marriage. Her eating may imply anger towards women's limited possibilities to express their sexuality. (Orbach 1998, e.g. 66-70.) Overeating can also suggest

that Joan is not satisfied with the practical, cheap and unromantic way of their engagement and wedding.

Food does not lose its importance in the marriage of Joan and Arthur:

> I then discovered to my dismay that Arthur expected me to cook, actually cook, out of raw ingredients such as flour and lard. I'd never cooked in my life. My mother had cooked, I had eaten, those were our roles; she would never let me in the kitchen when she was cooking (…) But for Arthur's sake I would try anything, though cooking wasn't as simple as I'd thought. (…) Arthur didn't like eating in restaurants. He seemed to prefer my inedible food: the Swiss fondue which would turn to lymph and balls of chewing gum from too much a heat (…) the roast chickens which bled when cut (…) I seldom wept over these failures, as to me they were not failures but successes, they were secret triumphs over the notion of food itself. I wanted to prove that I didn't really care about it. (…) though he criticized my cooking, he always ate it, and he resented its absence. (LO, 209.)

Joan does the cooking and Arthur the commenting, which suggests a traditional gendered pattern. Joan is not happy about Arthur's expectations, but she wants to please him. She would like to eat simple ready-made meals or go to the restaurants, but Arthur does not want this. To the feminist reader, it seems possible that the character's feelings of cooking propose resistance to the image of the proper wife who ought to be a perfect cook. She appears to be fighting against the overbearing importance of food in (their) life and against her role as a wife.

According to Joan, Arthur expects her to cook poorly. If her performance does not cheer Arthur up during his seasons of depression, Joan feels miserable: "I was not a good woman" (LO, 212). To the feminist reader this is a comic reversal of the traditional image of a happy and functional married couple. Here "a good woman" does not make delicious balanced meals, but "inedible food" (LO, 209).

Joan's relationship with Arthur is reminiscent of the scenes with Joan's mother: food is power, but in a different way. As Joan understood that her mother always left delicious edibles around to tempt her, in a reminiscent way, her husband Arthur buys alcohol to the house. According to Joan, he does hope that "something exciting would happen" (LO, 22). She feels that Arthur enjoys her drinking and commenting on how she should drink less – like her mother said she wanted her to eat less, but the truth was the opposite. In terms of the psychological theory, this implies a restaging of Joan's relationship with her mother. The tempting and the disapproval are still present.

These quotations from Joan's married life, as *Lady Oracle* in general, include comic and tragic voices. The comedy comes from behaviour and attitudes that are surprising and incongruous if compared to the conventional image of wifehood and marriage. The tragedy is associated with dishonesty and struggle, as well as lack of recognition and appreciation.

Not only Joan's marriage, but also her extramarital affair is coloured by the characters' eating habits. When Joan meets the Royal Porcupine, her future lover, she ponders whether to make love to him or not when they eat fast food:

> "Where are we going?" I asked (…)
> "My place," he said.
> "I'm hungry," I said evasively.
> So we went to Mr. Zums on Bloor Street, where I had a Zumburger with the works and the Royal Porcupine had a chocolate milk shake. I paid – he didn't have any money – and we debated the pros and cons of going back to his place. (LO, 241-242.)

Unlike in a literary romance written by Joan's pseudonym, the possible beginning of the affair is not discussed or decided on during a candle light dinner. The food is very prosaic, even aggressively banal. It is Joan who pays for their food, he does not have any money – the situation's contrast to romantic narrative is underlined.

When together, Joan and Royal Porcupine always eat fast food. After making love they "go to the Kentucky Fried Chicken place on the corner and order a bucket and two cokes" (LO, 255). He cannot afford proper restaurants, so they go to "the cheapest place in town to have lunch, as you could get two hot dogs and an orange drink for a dollar" (LO, 254). Joan wants to have the affair "light" (LO, 254), and this lightness is symbolised in the easy availability of their food. In Joan's marriage, fast food is not accepted. According to Arthur, food from Kentucky Fried Chicken is "American crap" (LO, 274).

Later the affair seizes to be light and starts to get heavy. The Royal Porcupine, or Chuck Brewster, as he is revealed to be, starts making demands: he wants to live together, share breakfasts. Joan wants the old pattern: ""Let's go out for some Kentucky Fried," I said, wiping my nose. But he wasn't hungry" (LO, 268). For Joan, food is an important part of their relationship. In this pattern she does not have to cook or eat healthily. She can spread out and act improperly.

4.3 The Gothic Seduction

The relationships of *Lady Oracle* echo the Gothic imagery. A larger gendered structure is that all men, in Joan's view, underneath their surface, are possible killers. They may seem charming and nice, but in truth they are strangers, of whom one can never know. They may become a threat anytime. (See also Stein 1999, 57, 60.) The only "nice man" in the novel is Joan's friend Sam, whom she is not interested in as a partner. This suggests that Joan needs men whom she finds unpredictable and threatening: she does not find nice men attractive. Also, the female characters are portrayed in a negative light: they are self-righteous tormentors like Joan's mother or her bullying girl scouts peer Marlene. Even the most likeable female character, Aunt Lou, is a stranger after all: her testament perplexes Joan and makes her doubt her perception of her aunt. Other people are unpredictable, or predictable only in that they, at some point, will evidently turn against Joan.

The ambiguous male nature is reproduced in all the important male characters: Joan's father, the Count Paul, her husband Arthur, and her lover

Royal Porcupine. As Stein notes, all Joan's three lovers' names suggest royalty and nobility, but "none turn out to be the prince she hopes to find" (Stein 1999, 61).

Just before Joan fakes her suicide, Count Paul appears and represents a way of escaping from her present life. This time, she resists her hunger to be "saved" by a man. She understands that her feelings of falling in love have been her own projections, not equal recognition of the other: "I'd polished them with my love and expected them to shine, brightly enough to return my own reflection, enhanced and sparkling" (LO, 282). Joan has wanted to see herself in the others. She has not given them or herself whole subjectivity. She has recognised others in a distorted way and her own self-image has been twisted, defined wrongly.

Joan is repeatedly depicted as a comic victim of the Gothic romance script and the Gothic ambience:

> I longed for the simplicity of that world, where happiness was possible and wounds were only ritual ones. Why had I been closed out from that impossible white paradise where love was as final as death, and banished to this other place where everything changed and shifted? (LO, 284.)

The fictive world of romance is more simple and easier to understand, foresee and handle than the real world. In the world of romance script, "love is as final as death", which suggests that in romance woman's life ends in marriage or the consummation of love, at least symbolically (see e.g. DuPlessis 1985, passim). After that she is supposed to live happily ever after. A woman who is influenced by this script may feel confused after this etape: what is she supposed to do now? What is she supposed to think or do when she notices that she is not happy all the time, after all? This, to the feminist reader, signals criticism towards the Gothic and romance: the fiction gives a false image. Women must live after the marriage, and there are real problems that ought to be handled and discussed. Romance ends and the real life begins at some point, *Lady Oracle* seems to suggest.

According to Joan, women desire the Gothic and romance into their lives:

> [They] wanted their men to be strong, lustful, passionate and exciting, with hard rapacious mouths, but also tender and worshipful. They wanted men in mysterious cloaks who would rescue them from balconies, but they also wanted meaningful in-depth relationships and total openness. (…) They wanted multiple orgasms, they wanted the earth to move, but they also wanted help with the dishes. (LO, 215-216.)

To the feminist reader, Joan's perceptions tell about female symbolic hunger, of what they desire from men. This desire is complex and problematic, and influenced by feminism and the romantic narrative, especially the Gothic. Women want to have equal companionship in the "real world", but, in addition, they want to feel that they are living in a constant passionate romance. *Lady Oracle* is saying, I think, that these two hungers cannot be consummated at the same time. The real world does not consist of never-ending and overwhelming love affairs.

While romance, passion, and desire are *in excess* in Joan's Gothic writings, in her own life the matters of love and sex are not reminiscent of this. Often they are in total contrast with her written fiction. All experiences Joan has of love and sex appear to be coloured with comic and banal elements. As Fee remarks, "romance turns into farce" (Fee 1993, 54).

Joan sees her Gothic novels as a "necessity" for her readers, like food or medicine. It is a way of escaping, as "painkillers" that "could be taken in capsule forms, quickly and discreetly" (LO, 35). The romance eases women's anxiety and unhappiness, is a drug which makes them feel more satisfied with their lives. To the feminist reader, this signals that romantic fiction can depoliticise important gendered issues, make them look private and romantic (see also Fee 1993, 17).

Lady Oracle tells us that the Gothic and romance are very seductive to women, in spite of our possible (feminist) awareness of their falseness. As Pearce says, even we feminists may forget our politics when we fall in love. In addition to our falling in love with people, we are often attracted to textual romances:

> [A]lthough I *know* romantic love to be an ideology determined by a complex web of narrative and cultural conventions, I also know that I have been very effectively interpellated by them, and a good deal of my reader-activity depends upon my actively colluding in their (re)production. (Pearce 1997, 161, 184, italics original.)

There can be a clash between feminist awareness and desire. In *Lady Oracle*, Joan thinks of her fantasy of the Fat Lady in the ballet dress:

> I knew how Arthur would analyze this fantasy. What a shame, he'd say, how destructive to me were the attitudes of society, forcing me into a mold of femininity that I could never fit. Stuffing me into those ridiculous pink tights, those spangles, those outmoded, cramping ballet slippers. How much better for me if I'd been accepted for what I was and had learned to accept myself too. Very true, very right, very pious. But it's still not so simple. I wanted those things, that fluffy skirt, that glittering tiara. I liked them. (LO, 103.)

In the above quotation, Arthur stands for feminist/humanist, educated analysing voice. As Joan notes, that voice has a point, but the matter is more complex. There is, in dialogic terms, polyphony. Women's desire, in implicated readings and in real life, can often be in constant negotiation and dialogue with (for instance feminist) knowledge and awareness.[62]

Towards the end of *Lady Oracle*, there are several changes in Joan's perceptions and habits.

Joan imagines that the Fat Lady comes into her body (and into Joan's Gothic script's in progress protagonist Felicia):

> Below me (…) a creature composed of all the flesh that used to be mine and which must have gone somewhere. (…) It was the Fat Lady. She rose into the air and descended on me as I lay stretched out in the chair. For a moment she hovered around me like ectoplasm, like a gelatin shell, my ghost, my angel; then she settled and I was absorbed into her. Within my former body, I gasped for air. (LO, 320-321.)

There is unison of separate entities, which suggests a profound change in Joan's life: her two bodies, two states of minds, two worlds, real and Gothic unite. After this experience, Joan sees a vision of her mother:

> She'd never really let go of me because I had never let her go. It had been she standing behind me in the mirror (…) She needed her freedom also; she had been my reflection too long. (…) My mother was a vortex, a dark vacuum, I would never be able to make her happy. Or anyone else. Maybe it was time for me to stop trying. (LO, 329-330.)

The above quotation suggests that Joan has succeeded in (at least in part) healthy destruction of her internalised ghosts, her parents and especially her mother. In terms of the feminist object-relations, there is a beginning of a separation, a giving up of the too intense embeddedness in her (internal) relationship with mother.

After all her epiphanies and experiences, Joan cannot comply with the Gothic romance script. As also Stein argues, the Gothic has been a restaging of her childhood situation: an abused and imprisoned girl (Joan), the threatening and abusive female/mother figure (her mother) and the mysterious male/father figure (her father) (Stein 1999, 60; see also Howells 1993, 72).

Joan understands that she is unable to end the romance novel *Stalked by Love* with the pattern she is familiar with. She cannot kill the wife Felicia and let her husband Redmond have the young and beautiful Charlotte as the Gothic script would demand. She identifies too much with Felicia, although "[s]ympathy for Felicia was out of the question, it was against the rules" (LO, 319). Charlotte may be the given heroine of the Gothic romance script, but she is too proper, too inhuman, and too papery: "I was getting tired of Charlotte (…) I wanted her to (…) have menstrual cramps, sweat, burp, fart" (LO, 319). In short, Joan wants Charlotte to be human. The narrative's focalisation changes: at first the focalisation concentrates on Charlotte, at the end on Felicia. Felicia becomes Joan's alter ego.

One can also see that Joan's reluctance to kill off the wife is due to to the figure of wife representing her own mother. With the Gothic script, she has been able to negotiate with her mother and her powerful presence in her life, and keep it in her life even after the mother's death.

Joan decides to change her genre to science fiction, which suggests that she wants to write different stories of sexual difference and gender roles, compared to ones the narrow Gothic pattern allows her to. She moves from past to future.

Although Joan has decided to leave the Gothic writing behind, she has also found a new stranger, the newspaper man, to fall in love with – so one can not be sure whether or not she has profoundly changed and really got rid of the seductive Gothic pattern (see also Howells 1996, 76).

In the last chapter of *Lady Oracle*, we meet Joan telling about her present situation and future plans in present tense. She reveals that she has told her life story to the reporter, who found her hiding in Torremoto: "I talked too much (…) I guess it will make a pretty weird story (…) the odd thing is that I didn't

tell any lies. Well, not very many" (LO, 344). The narrative authority is reversed: we thought we have read Joan's own private account of her life, but it turns out that what we have read may be co-authored by a stranger – and there have been lies.

Stein writes about the ending: "Has the journalist gained control of Joan's narrative, or has she retained control, shaping the story to suit her own purposes?" (Stein 1999, 62). This reversal shakes the foundation of the relationship, which the feminist reader and the implicated reader have created with the novel and Joan. The tone of allying changes, we readers are winked at. We have allied with a woman narrator, who gives us a confessional and painful story, but the end problematises our ally. On the other hand, this kind of unexpected turn of events suits the comic tone of the novel, and to the feminist reader it tells how difficult it is for a woman to be in total charge of her story, or of language.

My implication with Joan is more light and enjoyable than with for instance *The Edible Woman*'s Marian's. Joan's life and problems are so *in excess* that it does not come too close. In spite of this problematic ending, I as an implicated reader find the ending satisfying. Joan's "progress" is more advanced than *The Edible Woman*'s Marian's or *Surfacing*'s nameless protagonist's. Although there is a strange man again, whom Joan may take her chances with, her situation is less threatening. Her attitude is comic and practical. The last words of *Lady Oracle* are "I don't think I'll ever be a very tidy person" (LO, 345). There is more positivity than in *Surfacing*, and the words are Joan's, unlike in *The Edible Woman*, where a male character has the last words.

From *Lady Oracle*'s compulsive eating and comedy we turn to *Life Before Man*'s dark realism and representation of food as a symbol of dysfunctional family and relationships.

5 *LIFE BEFORE MAN*: FOOD AND FAMILY

Atwood's fourth novel *Life Before Man* (1979) aligns itself to the realist tradition, and is a dark depiction of intimate relationships. Its theme, in my opinion, is crises in relationships and within one's self. The novel houses a range of contemporary motifs such as free marriage, divorce and stepfamily, and can be seen as a comment on the sexual revolution of the sixties and its aftermath. The free marriage of museum project designer Elizabeth and ex-lawyer, toy maker Nate Schoenhof does not work and ends up in divorce. The motif of the recomposed family arises in the relationship of Nate and Elizabeth's co-worker, palaeontologist Lesje Green. Divorce and stepfamily were also actual matters in Atwood's own personal life in the 1970s. In addition to these up to date issues, the novel uses imagery of the ancient and the lost: through the character of Lesje and her profession comes a motif of the dinosaurs.

All three characters are at a turning point of their lives: Elizabeth's and Nate's marriage has come to its end, Lesje falls in love for the first time in her life and finds less and less solace in her fantasy world. Nate is struggling with his finances and with his career; Elizabeth's past haunts her, and Lesje has a conflicting background. During the novel Lesje and Nate fall in love, Elizabeth and Nate separate, Nate moves in with Lesje and Elizabeth stays with the two daughters. They all have problems with commitment in intimate relationships and they have problematic relationships with their relatives.[63]

Life Before Man's chapters begin with a date and the name of the person, whose life is being narrated. The novel starts on October 1976, after Elizabeth's lover Chris Beecham has committed suicide, and ends in August 1978, when Lesje suspects that she is pregnant to Nate. There is also one chapter about the past (August 1975), an embedded narrative, which takes place when Chris was still alive and had a relationship with Elizabeth. The novel contains five parts and is narrated in present tense. In addition to this, the last chapters of each protagonist have sentences in the future tense, which focus on what they expect from their future.

Unlike in Atwood's earlier novels, *Life Before Man*'s narrator is external, not one of the characters. Although the three protagonists have almost equal amount of space, Elizabeth can be seen as the main protagonist, because her

perspective starts and ends the novel. When the narrating with other characters is in third person, in Elizabeth's chapters the pronoun alternates between the third and the first (being mainly in third person). Elizabeth's "I" begins the novel.

In dialogic terms this narrative structure, which shows more than one character's views, is more polyphonic than in Atwood's earlier novels.

For the first time in Atwood's novels one of the main characters is male. Nate is a very kind and caring man, unlike other men in Atwood's novels. The portrayal of Nate's character can be seen as a representative of Atwood's opinion of men expressed in an interview:

> I don't think that all men are the same, any more than I think all women are the same. And there is such a thing as an intelligent, cultivated, well-read, and sensitive man. (Atwood in Brans 1992, 145.)

Nate's character stands for these attributes. He is a positive male figure: sensitive, intelligent and caring.

Life Before Man clearly aligns itself with feminist tradition and addresses a feminist and female reader. Although one of the main characters is male, to the feminist reader he is a man that many feminists would approve of: takes care of the children and home, is devoted to his daughters, and is not abusive or threatening to women. One could argue that there are "feminine" traits in Nate's character. He can be seen as a "post-feminist" man, a man who understands feminist issues and women's conflicts, and is struggling to find his own role in the changed world.

Another new feature is Lesje's (and Chris's) ethnic origin. Lesje is not the typical Anglo-Saxon woman of Atwood's novels: she has Polish, Lithuanian and Ukrainian roots.

Life Before Man is the least discussed novel by Atwood (e.g. McCombs 1991, xvii; Stein 1999, 66). In my opinion, this may be because of its alignment with the realist tradition. Critics have explored the issue of genre of the novel. Keefer sees the novel as "a minimalist form of naturalism" (Keefer 1994, 157). Stein sees *Life Before Man* as a work, which usurps the tradition of realism, but also intentionally problematises it. There is a conversation between realism and mythical intertexts. (Stein 1999, xii.)

Mycak reads *Life Before Man* through Lacan's concept of imaginary, concentrating on Lesje's character's fantasies of dinosaurs. Lesje's imagination gives drastic counter images to the novel's usual concentration on the everyday. (Mycak 1996, 123-125.) Bouson analyses *Life Before Man*'s rebellion against the traditional romance script and the gendered representations of aggression, power and rage (Bouson 1993, 87-107).

In *Life Before Man*, the food motif is an undercurrent. It is often connected with a dysfunction in communication and relationships. The feelings of being displaced colour the novel. Symbolic hunger is usually motivated by a desire to save oneself from this dysfunction and to start a new life.

In the following, I will read the protagonists' eating as an illustration of their feelings, situation and personalities. In "An Omnivore– Elizabeth" and "Aunt Muriel – "the old reptile" I look at Elizabeth's character's concrete and symbolic hungers. "The Grilling Martyr – Nate" analyses Nate's character, and "The Timid Herbivore – Lesje" concentrates on Lesje. They are all different eaters: Lesje a nibbler, Elizabeth a gorger and Nate a carer for the others' appetites. In "The Hungry Men: William and Chris" I explore the symbolic hungers of minor male characters in the novel. "The Healing Nurse" reads the element of nursing and healing in the novel.

5.1 The Omnivore – Elizabeth

The Halloween pumpkins around the Schoenhof house at the beginning of *The Life Before Man* are marks of a change: pumpkins represent, as Lupton states, a change in the season (Lupton 1996, 25). And indeed, things have changed in this household and continue to do so. Elizabeth's affair with Chris and his suicide have broken the family's rules and equilibrium. Chris's death traumatises Elizabeth and Nate, and affects the whole family. This deep change is shown, in part, through food and eating.

The contents of the family's refrigerator are portrayed – as usual in Atwood's novels:

> Nate goes to the kitchen, opens the refrigerator and pokes through it. It's like rummaging through a drawer of jumbled clothes. Leftovers in jars, bean sprouts gone bad, spinach in a plastic bag starting to decay, giving off that smell of decomposing lawn. No use expecting Elizabeth to clean it. (LBM, 7).

The filthy fridge and rotting food remains can be seen as a description of the Schoenhof family: they are going from the proper to the improper; their façade is collapsing. Parker writes: "The leftover *boeuf Bourguinon* destined for the garbage can symbolizes (…) the decayed condition of Elizabeth and Nate's marriage" (Parker 1995, 353; see also Sceats 2000, 105). Nate's narrative mentions that Elizabeth used to clean the fridge, but has stopped doing it now. She also used to buy the groceries, so if Nate cooked the supplies were pleasantly already there. The familiar gendered pattern of the family life is rotting as the food remains.

The rotten pieces of food are one of the things that can cause abjection; actually the food scraps are a more powerful cause of abject than other food (Kristeva 1982, 76; Kristeva 1993, 207). They remind us of death and birth, things we do not want to think about and what are disturbing to us, working on the level of subconscious: "the dripping spinach (…) oozes green liquid" (LBM, 7).

Although the family is falling apart, the parents try to play a content couple in front of their children. When Nate is preparing dinner his daughter comes to the kitchen:

> "What's for dinner?" (…) [Janet] asks, adding "Dad," as if to remind him who he is. Nate finds this question suddenly so mournful that for a moment he can't answer. It's a question from former times, the olden days. His eyes blur. He wants to drop the casserole on the floor and pick her up, hug her, but instead he closes the oven door gently.
> "Macaroni and cheese," he says.
> "Yum," she says, her voice remote, guarded, giving a careful imitation of pleasure. "With tomato sauce?"
> "No," he says, "there wasn't any." (…)
> "Is mum resting?" she says.
> "Yes (…) I took her a cup of tea." (…) "Well," Janet says in the voice of a small adult, "I'll be seeing you soon!" (LBM, 9.)

There is anxious tiptoeing around the mother's grief and her depressed behaviour. When the parents are unable to be responsible adults, the older daughter tries to act responsibly and adult-like. The quotation echoes falseness, acting and hiding. Janet's voice is a cheerful unauthentic performance, and there are things they "both know (…) to avoid" (ibid.).

In the context of the false self theory, there is no room for Janet's true self. There is a possibility for an imitation only: the false self's adoptive behaviour. Nate's feelings and thoughts suggest that there is symbolic hunger for the lost family life.

Elizabeth "used to cook, very well too" (LBM, 5), but at the novel's present time cooking has lost its meaning to her. Something just happens outside of her, and seemingly independent of her. It seems to be irrelevant which "things harden" or "become softer" (ibid.), it just happens. Cooking is not interesting and neither is living or what happens around her.

Elizabeth feels that the kitchen has changed: "It's no longer familiar, it's no longer the kind of place in which sensible advice can be followed" (LBM, 29). One could think that Elizabeth projects her own feelings to the kitchen, from inside to outside: her home has become strange, maybe even an enemy to her. With projecting the situation may feel easier to handle: it is the kitchen that is odd, not me. The strangeness of the familiar can also mean that nothing is the same; Chris's death has changed everything. It has replaced reason and routine with sorrow, shock, and abject (the death is very violent, Chris shoots himself with a shotgun). Kitchen, the place of practicality and reason has become irrational.

Elizabeth's hunger appears to be stunted because of her traumatic experience and loss. There seems to be an immense symbolic hunger, but no actual concrete hunger.

Elizabeth's eating and the way she sees food have changed:

> It goes on. But when she thinks about food she doesn't see the bright colors, red, green, orange, featured in the *Gourmet Cookbook*. Instead she sees the food as illustrations from those magazine articles that show how much fat there is in your breakfast. Dead white eggs, white strips of bacon, white butter. Chickens, roasts and steaks modeled from bland lard. That's what all food tastes like to her now. (LBM, 5.)

This quotation suggests an alienated view of food. In Elizabeth's mind, food is not something for satisfying your hunger pangs, but just fat. Bland lard is a

rather charged image: lard and fat are usually seen as dangerous and disgusting in societies that value thinness. The image represents something that might make you vomit and thus cause abjection: feelings of revolt and disgust (Kristeva 1982, 2, 4).

Although food does not tempt Elizabeth, she does not stop eating: "Nevertheless she eats, she overeats, weighting herself down" (LBM, 5). Parker sees that Elizabeth's hefty eating represents her powerfulness (Parker 1995, 352). One can also argue that her intentional overeating eating implies alienation from oneself. Elizabeth imagines herself as a cracked egg, being sucked outside of her shell, and overeating perhaps makes her feel less weak and vulnerable.

Elisabeth thinks that she will be hungry later, for both food and pleasure and the eating now is "servicing her body, like servicing a car" (LBM, 77). She prefers eating too much to too little, because she knows that it is dangerous not to eat. To her food is like to her like gasoline to car: something that keeps it going, but does not bring any pleasure. It is a compulsory maintenance procedure.

Food is present in Elizabeth's social life, too, not only in her family life and solitary grief. Food and manners are a power play ground for her, through which she tries to control and manipulate other people. She controls Nate's affair and relationship with Martha (which takes place outside the novel's present time and is thus told in embedded narratives) by taking her out to eat and discuss their situation:

> Once, in the days of Martha's ascendancy, when Elizabeth thought she might be a real threat, she'd gone to considerable trouble to make sure they met for these lunches in good restaurants, where Elizabeth could demonstrate her own knowledge of the superior menu and get Martha slightly bombed on cocktails and wine. Martha doesn't hold her liquor very well and Elizabeth has found this useful. (LBM, 138-139.)

Elizabeth enjoys the power of knowing that Martha gets drunk easily and she stays sober. She wants to show Martha that she is familiar with the complex menus and how to behave in fancy restaurants. After Nate and Martha's affair is over, she does not care anymore: Museum's cafeteria is good enough for their meetings. This particular place is Elizabeth's territory: she knows everyone and Martha is the outsider. Elizabeth sees the situation as war, in which Nate is her property and Martha's advances must be controlled. When Martha does not insist on paying her half anymore, but lets Elizabeth pay, Elizabeth feels like a winner.

In her mind, Elizabeth is in total control and Martha a childlike puppet of hers, but in a typical Atwoodian reversal Martha's own words in dialogue show otherwise: "I never understood at first why you were so nice to me (…) But then I figured it out. You wanted to *supervise* us. Like some kind of playground organizer. Make sure it didn't go too far" (LBM, 139, italics original).[64]

Another battleground of power is the quadruple Elizabeth – Nate – Lesje – William. When Elizabeth finds out about Nate's attraction to Lesje, she starts to

have lunches with Lesje's boyfriend William and even sleeps with him. Elizabeth wants to win, to be the powerful one, who is always a step ahead of the others and has all the strings in her hands. By sleeping with William, Elizabeth wants equilibrium of power, although when William is concerned, she is not sure whether Lesje is "worth defeating" (LBM, 173).

When Elizabeth suspects that Nate and Lesje are having a love affair, she invites Lesje and William to a dinner at Elizabeth and Nate's home. Lesje is "paralysed by apprehension" (LBM, 146) and cannot eat almost anything. Elizabeth aims possessive comments about Nate at Lesje and shows Lesje that he is her property. Elizabeth starts parlour games that make Lesje feel miserable and she ends up crying in the bathroom. It seems that Elizabeth wants to control everything around her and does not see others as equal subjects (see also Parker 1995, 353).

While Nate is a positive "feminine" male character, Elizabeth has the qualities of the (Atwoodian) negative male in the novel. In terms of the feminist object-relations theory, she makes efforts at being a distant master whom others must submit to. She cannot be in a relationship with equality and true recognition. As many male characters in Atwood's novels, Elizabeth emphasises separation over connection, manipulation over co-operation; she is a female Bluebeard figure.

In Nate's narrative, Elizabeth is "something to be endured, like a snowstorm; morally neutral" (LBM, 237). He thinks Elizabeth is something he and Lesje have to understand; they are the ones to compromise, bend and suffer. Lesje sees the cannibal side of Elizabeth more clearly and with less sympathy.

Elizabeth's adult desire for mastery can be seen to echo her memories of her childhood, which will be discussed next.

5.1.1 Aunt Muriel – "the old reptile"

Two of the main characters of *Life Before Man*, Elizabeth and Nate, are in a struggle with an internalised and powerful other, which they find suffocating for their individual self and growing. Especially visible this is in Elizabeth's relationship with her foster aunt, and in a lesser extent, in Nate's relationship with his mother.

Elizabeth's desire to control people around her and their relationships can be seen as a restaging if one thinks of the her childhood. As Bouson notes, the novel indeed invites psychological interpretation with its emphasis on Elizabeth's past and its connections with her present (Bouson 1993, 91).

Life Before Man's Aunt Muriel, Elizabeth's foster mother, is a good example of the Atwoodian monstrous older female relative (other reminiscent figures include *The Edible Woman*'s lady down below and Iris's sister-in-law Winifred in *The Blind Assassin*).

Aunt Muriel is a cannibal in Elizabeth's eyes:

> Auntie Muriel is both the spider and the fly, the sucker-out of life juice and the empty husk. Once she was just the spider and Uncle Teddy was the fly, but ever since Uncle Teddy's death Auntie Muriel has taken over both roles. Elizabeth isn't even all that sure Uncle Teddy is really dead. Auntie Muriel probably has him in a trunk somewhere in the attic (…) paralyzed but still alive. She goes up there for a little nip now and then. (LBM, 111.)

According to Elizabeth, Aunt Muriel is a cannibal, a Dracula-like figure who sucks the living force out of other people. The image is tragicomic. It is sad that Muriel is now the eaten one, both the cannibal and her victim. But Elizabeth's views of her aunt are *in excess*: reminiscent of a b-class horror movie or an amusing cartoon. In a very Atwoodian shift, immediately after these strong images comes a reversal: "Elizabeth knows her view of Auntie Muriel is exaggerated and uncharitable. Such ogres don't exist. Nevertheless, there is Auntie Muriel" (LBM, 111). This reversal says: "I do not really literally think so, but that is my perception and experience of her, my personal truth". This method gives us a rough image and softens it slightly afterwards, but the image is left in our minds, because of its strength.

Elizabeth thinks she has been Aunt Muriel's victim (in a very Gothic style), but has got away from her and lives her life without her. The feeling of powerlessness still returns in her present relationship with her aunt. In Elizabeth's eyes, her aunt Muriel is an all-powerful mother figure whom nobody can control or resist: "[W]hen she's with Auntie Muriel she is still part child. Part prisoner, part orphan, part cripple, part insane; Auntie Muriel the implacable wardress" (LBM, 115). In terms of the feminist object–relation theory, Elizabeth's struggle with her aunt can be seen as an effort to find her own individual subjectivity; an effort to differentiate.

Elizabeth's mother is incapable of taking care of herself or her children and their father leaves them. Elizabeth has to take responsibility of her mother, her sister and herself. Her mother is like a helpless child, dependent on others, and Elizabeth has to be the adult and the parent. For example, she buys food and tries to persuade her mother to eat. When Elizabeth and her sister move to Aunt Muriel, she is again unable to be herself or a child: she has to protect herself and her sister, and her mother (from their aunt's insults).

In the context of the feminist object-relations theory, Benjamin argues that when children are not able to identify with their mothers, internally or externally, they feel helpless and this feeling must be suppressed: they feel a strong need to control everything and be totally independent from others. (Benjamin 1988, 174.) Elizabeth has to be strong to survive: "she herself now has the backbone of a rhinoceros" (LBM, 129).

Aunt Muriel denies child Elizabeth and her sister, among other things, the celebration of Halloween and eating sweets. Elizabeth acts with caution and silent hatred under this authority, but her sister Caroline is more vulnerable and prone to mental problems like their mother, and Caroline often makes "a spectacle of herself" (LBM, 79). Elizabeth "wants only one thing: escape" (LBM, 170). Her sister Caroline's way of escaping is mental breakdown and mental illness; Elizabeth tries affairs with boys and dreams of leaving the house.

In terms of the false self theory, Elizabeth creates a false self in front of her aunt, which protects her, but Caroline is not as strong.

In the novel's present time, the painful memories from Elizabeth's childhood and youth sometimes surface. When Elizabeth is in a café with Lesje's boyfriend William, whom she is about to sleep with in order to get even with Nate and Lesje, the event reminds her of another, reminiscent situation from her teenage years:

> In front of her is a waffle with a scoop of vanilla ice cream melting on it, and on top of the ice cream is a tentacled formation of partially congealed cinnamon-colored syrup. (…) She cuts off a piece of waffle with her fork, lifts it. Then she puts it back on her plate. She remembers why this is something she can no longer eat.
>
> It's May, Elizabeth is coming to life again. Two weeks ago her mother finally died (…) She wants only one thing: escape. (…) Elizabeth picks up a boy in a drugstore. It isn't the first time, but it's the first time since her mother's death (…) They drive around for a while, then go to Fran's for a waffle. Food is always part of it. She wants to let go of the dead hand she's still holding. (LBM, 168-171.)[65]

To Elizabeth, a waffle in a cafe is a triggering edible: an object that takes you back to your past. Elizabeth loses her virginity in the above scene. She wants to rebel against Aunt Muriel, without letting her know it, and to move on from mourning her mother's death. When Elizabeth goes home, expecting to see a furious aunt because she is late, she finds her beloved and protected sister Caroline "no longer in her body" (LBM, 173), laying on the floor, unconscious. Caroline has had a mental breakdown and is committed to an institution.

For Elizabeth, the waffle is a symbol of something that cannot be digested. It represents something disgusting, fragmenting, and abject – her mother's death, her feelings of entrapment, blood and pain of the intercourse, and her guilt after finding Caroline's fate.

Towards the end of the novel Aunt Muriel is hospitalised and dying, and Elizabeth goes to see her. Elizabeth's feelings are in conflict:

> To Elizabeth's horror, Auntie Muriel is beginning to cry. Tears seep from her puckered eyes; a reversal of nature, a bleeding statue, a miracle. Elizabeth watches, remote. She ought to be rejoicing. (…) But Elizabeth does not rejoice. (…) Elizabeth hates Auntie Muriel. She has always hated her and she always will hate her. She will not forgive her. (…) Nevertheless, this is not Auntie Muriel. The Auntie Muriel of Elizabeth's childhood has melted, leaving in her place this husk (…) Elizabeth wants to get up out of the visitor's chair and walk, run from the room, leaving her there alone. She deserves it. Nevertheless, she leans forward and takes Auntie Muriel's blinded hands. (LBM, 273-274.)

The dying aunt's words shake Elizabeth's firm beliefs: the aunt has not been straightforwardly bad and Elizabeth's mother has not been straightforwardly a victim. In spite of this new information, Elizabeth finds it hard to give up her conviction of Auntie Muriel. Her evilness is "an old vow, an axiom" (LBM, 273.)

In front of Elizabeth's disbelieving eyes, Aunt Muriel becomes human, a weak old woman, different creature from the cruel foster mother. The internal,

old monster was real and still is in Elizabeth's mind, but the woman in front of her is not, anymore, the same.

The representation of Aunt Muriel is *in excess*. Her powers and badness are exaggerated and thus the images include irony, but there is also, as Bouson asserts, implication of concern: there are aggressors, whose vampiristic and cannibal hungers make others their victims (Bouson 1993, 103).

5.2 The Grilling Martyr – Nate

Nate cares about and serves others with food; it is often his way of showing concern and love. At the beginning of the novel, Nate brings cups of tea to depressed Elizabeth. The feelings and motives around this are ambiguous: a cup of tea means comfort, of course, but through this activity he can also check on his wife, control her behaviour

Nate is the one who makes food to their two daughters when Elizabeth lies in bed, and he is annoyed when it is not appreciated in the way he would want it to be. So, cooking is left to Nate, an untraditional solution from the gender perspective. Parker sees this as a suggestion of his powerlessness (Parker 1995, 352), which does have grounds in the text. I would also emphasise another angle: does not nurturing and taking care of the others' eating also include power?

For the feminist reader, this reversal of gender roles signals also Atwood's typical way of reversing and oscillating the rigid system of gender polarity. As Sceats says, Nate "is something like a good man", caring for others' hunger and nourishment, even Elizabeth's lover Chris's (Sceats 2000, 106; Parker 1995, 352).

In his first chapter, Nate decides to compose something from the scarce supplies available at home:

> He'll have to make macaroni and cheese again, which is all right since the kids love it. Elizabeth will not love it but she will eat it, she'll wolf it down absently as if it's the last thing on her mind, smiling like a slowly grilling martyr, staring past him at the wall. (LBM, 7.)

Pleasing the children is a high priority in Nate's mind. The image of a grilling martyr is ambiguous: on one hand, martyr is a noble figure, but on the other, grilling suggests she is like a roast: dead meat, edible. The "grilling martyr" is maybe even more appropriate for describing Nate than Elizabeth: he is suffering and in conflict between desire and responsibility. During the novel's time span, Nate is in the process of planning large changes in his life: he is slowly realizing that he wants to move out and misses his children already; that he does not want to continue with their marriage; that he is in love with Lesje; that his self-employment, making wooden toys, does not make his living and he has to go back to the law firm he once left with firm faith of never returning. All

these things distress and depress him, and he often feels like a sufferer – a grilling martyr.

Nate has trouble in decision-making. He is trying not to hurt others, but finds that increasingly difficult and in conflict with his own desire. In the context of the interpersonal psychoanalytic feminism, according to Gilligan's study, women often value themselves for their ability to care. They even confuse their identity with intimacy. Their main goal is often not to hurt others. But they are often forced to notice in difficult situations that there is "no way not to hurt". (Gilligan 1983, 17, 159, 165.) Atwood's female protagonists often experience this conflict. This issue is also a dilemma for Nate. For the feminist reader, this appears as an ironic reversal: men are not so uncaring as one might think. Family and connection can be essential for them, too. Nate is not the kind of man introduced in Gilligan's study, the male model of development theories: a man who values hierarchies and wishes to be on the top (Gilligan 1983, 62).

In the eyes of the feminist reader, it appears that with a character like Nate Atwood wants to give a different picture of gendered world than in her earlier novels. *Life Before Man* underlines that the polarised gender difference is false and harmful, and that individuals do not necessarily fit into rigid sexist categories. In *Life Before Man*, unlike in other Atwood's novels, the controlling masculine character is female, the main character Elizabeth. In my opinion, this gender pattern makes the novel's dialogic polyphony different from Atwood's other novels. The issues of gender and feminism are more polyphonic, or at least polyphonic in a different way when there is a positive male character, and an external narrator instead of an unreliable one.

When Nate thinks of leaving Elizabeth and the children and living with Lesje, he feels that he will hurt everyone, and there will be "slivers in his murderous hands" (LBM, 75). He feels guilty, "a wolflike monster" (LBM, 125) because he wants things for himself, outside his nuclear family.

Living separated from the children is immensely painful for Nate: "He has been separated; he is separate. Dismembered. He is no longer a member" (LBM, 236). Repeatedly, he experiences himself as a wooden toy, an artificial man made of separate pieces.

In his relationship with Lesje, Nate desires for true recognition and a positive change in his life. But, in terms of interpersonal psychoanalytic feminism, he feels too connected with his family to be independent and happy without them. In a feminine way, Nate's priorities are connection and care, in such an amount that they are suffocating and restricting. The contradiction between responsibility and desire appears to be paralysing to Nate. Even his daydream of living on a deserted island with Lesje includes a hut farther down on the beach, where Elizabeth and the children live.

Nate comforts himself and suppresses his guilt with beer, scotch and cigarettes. When he thinks of giving up on Lesje in order not to hurt anybody, he has to "comfort himself with popcorn and a cigarette, substitutes for the double Scotch" (LBM, 76), unavailable at the moment. To the feminist reader, Nate's comfort eating signals gender reversal. The intertwining of feelings and food is commonly thought to be a female trait, although Nate's longing for

alcohol seems more masculine. In the eyes of the feminist reader, in spite of addict's actual gender, addictions can be seen feminine in their apparent weakness and neediness.

Some food items signal Nate's feelings towards Elizabeth and the nature of their relationship. Nate has problems with remembering what it was like to have good times with Elizabeth. All he can remember is the omelettes he made for her, which Elizabeth called "love food" (LBM, 157). In the novel's present day, there is no love food between them, just the scrambled eggs on a Sunday morning, when he still lets himself believe in the illusion of a functional and happy family (but importantly only in future tense): "it will seem even to him as though nothing is about to happen" (LBM, 158). The former love food is broken into a messy scramble.

When Nate married Elizabeth, he stopped eating liver because of Elizabeth: "the smell of liver makes her sick" (LBM, 191). When he is about to move out and move in with Lesje, he starts making himself liver and onions noisily in the kitchen around midnight, knowing that Elizabeth cannot stand it. He wants to avoid making a decision himself; he wants Elizabeth to ask him to leave. He wants her to take the responsibility of throwing him out so he does not have to tell the family that he is leaving. As Sceats argues, Atwood's novels food motif often includes the issue of responsibility of one's own life (Sceats 2000, 4, 9). The liver is Nate's symbolic attempt to prove his individualism and rebellion against Elizabeth.

Nate's feelings of inadequacy as an adult echo his memories of his childhood. As usual with Atwood's female protagonists, also Nate did not have a father: he died in the Second World War. Nate tried to live up to the image he had created of his father, whom he saw as a war hero. On his sixteenth birthday his mother reveals that his father never actually fought in the war, but died of hepatitis before reaching the frontline. Nate understands that he has been struggling to win his mother's love and approval in the shadow of an insurmountable opponent. The absence of a realistic father figure made him see his father in fantastic proportions.

Nate has perceived his mother as a saint, whose life is dedicated to charity, such as helping the war veterans. He has always felt inadequate and selfish in comparison to his mother's work as a benefactor. At the end of the novel, Nate realises that his mother's efforts in beneficence have actually been selfish. She has done humanitarian work in order to survive her husband's death and her fate as a single parent. Her care of the world, then, is not simply self-sacrificial, but a complex web, which includes also selfishness and a feeling of emptiness. This is an eye opening epiphany for Nate, after which he runs like a little boy on the yard. Nate has a partial reconciliation with his mother: the internal mother becomes a human.

In an effort to differentiate from his mother, Nate has denied his own desire to help and make a contribution to the society, maybe through politics. In the second to last chapter of Nate's narrative, he substitutes his mother as a name and money collector on the street, to fight injustice. He is feeling slightly uncomfortable, but admits that "maybe he is [his mother's son]" (LBM, 298). In

the last chapter Nate feels hopeful and, at least in part, in peace with his inner monsters.

5.3 The Timid Herbivore – Lesje

Lesje spends a large amount of her time in her imaginary world, the time of dinosaurs:

> Lesje is wondering in prehistory. (…) Lesje crouches in the topmost frond-cluster of one of these trees, watching through binoculars, blissful, uninvolved. None of the dinosaurs takes the slightest interest in her. If they happen to see or smell her, they will not notice her. She is something so totally alien to them that they will not be able to focus on her. (…) It's the next best thing to being invisible. (…) In prehistory there are no men, no other human beings, unless it's the occasional lone watcher like herself (…) minding his own business. (…) Men placed dinosaurs, true, in her head as in geological time; but thinking about men has become too unrewarding. (LBM, 10-11.)

This daydream introduces Lesje's character to the readers. The quotation makes it evident that Lesje prefers a world without human entanglements. In her fantasies, there are no connections and relationships, and nobody is interested in her. She is "invisible" and "alien". Mycak notes that Lesje's descents to her imaginary world can be seen as regressions to her unconscious (Mycak 1996, 127-129). Lesje indeed "knows she's regressing" (LBM, 11).

The fantasies of dinosaurs do not come only when Lesje is alone, but when she is in interaction with people, too. She is living in two worlds, of which the fantasy world is secret. The imaginary country of dinosaurs can be seen as Lesje's survival strategy in the world, deriving from her childhood: "This is a daydream left over from her childhood and early adolescence" (LBM, 11).

When Lesje and her boyfriend William are having coffee, Lesje thinks of their future together:

> She's noticed recently that she's no longer waiting for William to propose her. (…) William, she now sees, finds her impossibly exotic. True, he loves her, in a way. (…) This is the crux: William does not want to have a child by her. (…) An Albertosaurus, or — the name Lesje prefers — a Gorgosaurus, pushes through the north wall of the Colonnade [café] (…) balancing on its powerful hind legs, its dwarfed front legs with their razor claws held in close to its chest. In a minute William Wasp and Lesje Litvak will be two lumps of gristle. The Gorgosaurus wants, wants. It's a stomach on legs, it would swallow the world if it could. (…) Here's a problem for you, William, Lesje thinks. Solve this. (LBM, 21-22.)

The dinosaur symbolises Lesje's aggression, her desire not to be patronized and held by William "as a trophy and as a testimony to his own wide-mindedness" (LBM, 21). In the image of the hungry dinosaur, she is expressing her desire, aggression and their problems. The name "Gorgosaurus" includes a word close to word gorge, and indeed, it is described as wanting, "a stomach on legs, it

would swallow the world if it could". The dinosaur suggests that Lesje desires to devour the world, to live and experience beyond her life with William.

On the other hand, the image of immense symbolic hunger is split from Lesje herself. To Sceats Lesje's "friendly objectivity", detachment from the image, suggests that Lesje is "dissociating herself from desire" (Sceats 2000, 104). Lesje is not capable of action and confrontation, but asks for her fantasy creature to solve her problems with its brutal methods. This would make it possible to avoid painful scenes. If the dinosaur was real, they would be eaten and there would be no problems to solve, no decisions to make, nobody to hurt: it would be a saving grace from difficult decisions and confrontations. Bouson rightly points out that Lesje character is charged with "overt passivity and covert aggression and anger" (Bouson 1993, 96).

When Elizabeth and Nate are often concerned with food and cooking, Lesje seems to live with as little food as possible. Her usual nourishment is coffee. Lesje "sees herself as a timorous person, a herbivore" (LBM, 11). She is afraid of being irritating in the eyes of the others. Contrary to her idea of herself as a modest eater, she "thinks her teeth as too large for her face; they make her look skeletal, hungry" (LBM, 12).

Lesje is repeatedly worried that other people observe her teeth and thinks that she should hide them. When Lesje and Nate meet alone for the first time, she shows modesty and secretiveness: she orders the cheapest food on the menu, grilled cheese sandwich, tries to hide her teeth, and eats only small bites – as if to hide her desire and hunger, herself. When Nate does not make love to her in a motel room afterwards, but instead gives a long monologue, Lesje is puzzled and certain that it is her teeth that put him off.

Teeth can be a mark of desire, attack or defence. Parker argues that teeth, in their relation to eating, suggest power (Parker 1995, 360). It appears that Lesje does not want to look hungry; she does not want others to know she has an appetite, either for food or human relationships. But her feelings of having too hungry teeth and mouth suggest that her symbolic, hidden hunger is large.

In Atwood's novels food is often used to illustrate feelings of displacement. The concept "displaced person" is repeated in the novels (see e.g. Stein 1999, 116). It means, of course, a refugee, an immigrant, but it also portrays people who do not feel at home where they are, who feel like outsiders. Lesje is one of these Atwoodian characters that see themselves as displaced persons.

Polish, Lithuanian and Ukrainian food is strange to Lesje, although her roots are in these cultures. Her Christmas dinner with her parents is filled with ambivalence: the Jewish father should have Hanukkah instead of Christmas, and her Ukrainian mother's rituals would be different if she would be where she left from and married someone else. They compromise and try to adapt to the Canadian life style, and eat only Canadian foods at protestant Canadian Christmas time.

Her parents' loss of their roots and feelings of strangeness and falseness in Canada leave their mark on their daughter. When Lesje has dinner with her parents, she hears "the sound (…) from childhood, a hollow sound, like a cave

where there might be an echo" (LBM, 183). Her parents are not present; Lesje is alone in the cave where the only sound is an echo, of her own voice or somebody else's.

The word echo can allude to Lesje's parents' sincere effort to fit in: they echo the Canadian life style, and their own background, but nothing authentic is present. The quotation also suggests immense loneliness and hunger for meaningful interaction in her childhood.

After William rapes Lesje and they separate, she goes to have a dinner in her parents' home. She is hungry and she wants to have a proper meal. Her life has changed: in addition to the events with William, she has moved to a rotting row house apartment, and she wants Nate to move in with her. Lesje wants comfort, solace, and good food, but has no words to tell it and she finds it impossible to narrate anything to her parents. There is no proper and acclaimed narrative of breaking up shared life; rape and starting an affair with a married man, at least to Lesje's parents who have not approved of Lesje's living with William.

It is also clear that there would be no comfort beside the tough roast beef and Yorkshire pudding, which Lesje "wolfs":

> Lesje's mother wants Lesje to be happy, and if Lesje isn't happy she wants her to appear happy. Lesje's happiness is her mother's justification. Lesje has known this forever and is well practiced at appearing, if not happy, at least stolidly content. (…) She wants instead to cry, and she wants her mother to put her arms around her and console her. (…) But her mother, encased as she is, would never be able to mourn with Lesje. (LBM, 187.)

In terms of the false self theory, Lesje's true, authentic self cannot be present in this kind of staging. Her mother's needs and symbolic hungers are more important to them both. Like the Christmas dinner, this dinner is also a symbol of Lesje's childhood's family: there is a silence about the important things and there is no space for Lesje's true self.

After Lesje moves out from her shared flat with William, she is described eating much more, even "ravenously" (LBM, 186). The hungry eating symbols her internal, symbolic hunger, which is not satisfied. Her work is not enough for her anymore, she needs more, she wants Nate. She feels "she's losing weight and that the house is gaining it" (LBM, 199) and her mother says she is "thin" (LBM, 186).

When Nate finally moves in, he starts controlling Lesje's eating habits:

> Nate is making her eat better. He brought some cooking pots with him and he usually cooks dinner, then he supervises while she eats. It disturbs him if she doesn't finish. The food he cooks is probably quite good, certainly better than she could do, and she's ashamed to admit that she lusts at least once in a while for a package of Betty Crocker Noodles Romanoff. (…) In this way, as in many others, she cannot seem to avoid being inappropriate. (LBM, 230-231.)

To the feminist reader, the word "supervise" describes a patronizing attitude Nate has towards Lesje. She feels "inappropriate" in this family pattern of eating, and "in many others," too. This family food pattern is changing Lesje's

old habits, and it seems that her voice is suppressed in the process as the children and Elizabeth's voices, needs and wants get louder in her life. She is not seen, her desire is not seen or heard. As Parker sees it, Lesje is "powerless" with Nate (Parker 1995, 352).[66]

But Lesje is also complying to the situation willingly. In terms of the false self theory, her behaviour does suggest a restaging of her childhood family's pattern, where she also was invisible. In the context of feminist object-relation theory, Lesje's compliance signals female submission in the hope of being recognised by the powerful male other. There is a desire that the other will make everything better.

At the end of *Life Before Man*, Lesje rebels against her submissive position. She is fed up with Elizabeth's and the children's priority in Nate's life and with the compromises she is forced to make. After a fight with Nate she is beside herself, not at all the cool observer:

> On the spur of the moment she'd decided to kill herself. She was amazed by this decision; she'd never considered anything remotely like it before. (…) But at last she could see why Chris did it: it was this anger and the other thing, much worse, the fear of being nothing. (…) If children were the key, if having them was the only way she could stop being invisible, then she would goddamn well have some herself. (LBM, 285.)

Lesje is hungry and wants to act upon it. She wants power to herself, too, and sees pregnancy and a child as her tools for achieving that goal. She does not want to be invisible anymore; she does not want to be nothing. Lesje is not taking refuge in the dinosaurs and the fantasy anymore. In the context of the feminist object-relations theory, motherhood can sometimes be the only way for women to gain subjectivity (e.g. Chodorow 1989, 6-7, Benjamin 1994, 83).

Critics have disagreed on the issue of Lesje's pregnancy: some see it as "a creative act", and some "potentially destructive". For some, both implications are valid. (See e.g. Bouson 1993, 106-107.)

On one hand, it is possible to see the pregnancy as risky for Lesje in the 1970s Toronto. She thinks that she will have to quit her work, which she is so passionate about, maybe for good. There is no guarantee of financial security or Nate's commitment.

On the other hand, Lesje's pregnancy changes her vision of herself. She understands that she has power, though limited, over her life. In the last chapter with Lesje's perspective, she thinks that Elizabeth does not frighten her anymore and they should try to get along: "Someday they may be grandmothers. It occurs to her, a new idea, that this tension between the two of them is a difficulty for the children" (LBM, 301). She does not want to repeat the pattern of her childhood, in which her grandmothers did not stand each other.

5.4 The Hungry Men – William and Chris

Elizabeth's lover Chris and Lesje's boyfriend William are portrayed as violent and hungry figures.

In the context of the feminist object-relations theory, Elizabeth and Chris's affair is a good example of a heterosexual relationship, in which, in Benjamin's words, "the search for recognition can become a power struggle (…) assertion becomes aggression" (Benjamin 1988, 28). Although the novel's beginning portrays Elizabeth mainly as Chris's victim, the power play in their relationship has been intricate and complex. Elizabeth and Chris have both been struggling in their relationship and in a way Chris's death is an answer to it, a part of the power game. Nate's ex-lover Martha comments on Chris's death by saying: "She finally got him?" (LBM, 26).

Elizabeth thinks of Chris:

> [Y]ou don't want me ever to get out. You always knew I wanted to get out. But at the same time we were conspirators, we knew things about each other no one else will ever know. In some ways I trusted you more than I've ever trusted anyone.
>
> I have to go now, she says. He's twisting a length of her hair, twisting and untwisting it. (…) she can taste (…) blood from a bitten lip, she no longer knows whose. (…) She doesn't want to say *the children* because it will make him angry. (…) his fingers sliding now over her chin and throat, as if he's deaf, as if he can no longer hear her. (LBM, 17, italics original.)

The blood implies violent desire and death. His silence and the movements of his hands are threatening, suggesting strangling. He is portrayed as someone wanting to own Elizabeth; to keep her as his prisoner. He does not want to acknowledge the facts of her life, her other life: the daughters and husband.

Elizabeth "hates it when anyone has power over her" (LBM, 15), and Chris is using power: "Backing her against the door, his arms clamping around her (…) I won't let you go yet" (ibid.). All this suggests erotic domination. Chris is offering Elizabeth the position of submission and tries to keep the mastery to himself; he tries to keep her in the relationship, but she is never fully committed. In many ways, Elizabeth's feelings and thoughts of Chris echo her relationship with Aunt Muriel, who also exerted power over her and who also made Elizabeth feel like a prisoner. To Elizabeth, also Chris stands for indifferentiation and submission to the other's power.

Elizabeth does not accept the role of submission and give the mastery and subjectivity to Chris. During the relationship, the power shifts:

> She had what he wanted, power over a certain part of the world: she knew how to behave, what fork to use (…) He wanted that power. (…) She had that power and she'd let him see it and touch it. She let him see he was deficient and she promised, what? A transformation (…) knighthood. Then she'd stepped back (…) Leaving him naked. (…) I treated him the way men treat women. (LBM, 153.)

Chris is hungry and needs Elizabeth. Chris comes from a mixed ethnic background and working class, while Elizabeth is white upper middle class. She represents power and the desired status for him. Elizabeth wants him and takes him on her conditions, eats him up and leaves him. He wants to marry her and live with her, but she does not want him.

In terms of feminist object-relations, Chris desires to be recognised by Elizabeth, who after the beginning becomes the one with power to see the other. This struggle for recognition does interest Elizabeth for a while, but when she quits the pattern, Chris is destroyed. When Elizabeth denies her recognition from Chris, he loses his self. Elizabeth sees Chris's suicide as an insult, the last effort to be present and visible in Elizabeth's life: "You wanted to make damn good and sure I'd never be able to turn over in bed again without feeling that body beside me" (LBM, 3).

Just before Chris's suicide, he comes to beg Nate to persuade Elizabeth to marry him. Even though the situation is absurd, Nate identifies with Chris and feels sorry for him. Chris's obsession and "bludgeoned" (LBM, 226) looks are illustrated in his smell: Nate thinks that Chris's odour reminds him of "faintly rotting meat" (ibid.) The comparison symbolises Chris's weakness and powerlessness, and hints to his suicide. Nate is afraid of his strength and threatening appearance, but when Elizabeth appears and commands Chris to leave the house, Chris goes, submissively. Chris is a wreck without Elizabeth, obsessed with the idea that he cannot live without her. In the context of feminist object-relations, Elizabeth holds the position of mastery "by remaining desirable yet unattainable, untouched and unconquered" (Benjamin 1988, 171).

In the eyes of the feminist reader, Atwood is in dialogue with feminist theories. With the power play between the characters of Elizabeth and Chris, and with her other writing, she argues that the world and relationships are more polyphonic than gender polarity system wants us to believe them to be.

Another violent man in *Life Before Man* is Lesje's boyfriend William. From the very first moment on, the portrayal of William is coloured by Lesje's indifferent, slightly hostile attitude. At the beginning, seen by Lesje, he is seemingly innocent and his only fault is that his background has made him prejudiced. During the novel this is reversed: William becomes a Bluebeard character in her eyes. After Elizabeth tells him that Lesje and Nate are having an affair he becomes violent and rapes Lesje. She, appalled and hurt, thinks: "This is frightening; he's hurting her on purpose. Maybe he's always wanted to do this but never had the excuse" (LBM, 178).

In the context of the feminist object-relations theory William's rape is an attempt to take back Lesje's body from the other man, to own her again, and an effort to have a declaration of dependency from Lesje. William can also attempt to be recognised by the other man by using Lesje's body as a message, a battlefield between them. It can also be an effort to make Lesje recognise his importance.

Lesje does not approve of violence and domination, and neither was she committed to the relationship seriously; rather she is relieved of the end of the relationship and surprised at William's commitment. She admits that William's

original innocence may well be her own creation: "possibly she made it up" (LBM, 188). The image of William was her projection and William himself was strange to her. Thus her speculation of William's reserved feelings for her can have been false, just as his thoughts of his character as incapable of violence. This polyphony makes Lesje's depiction of William unreliable.

5.5 The Healing Nurse

As often in Atwood's novels, *Life Before Man* includes a motif of the characters' desire to be nursed and cured by a powerful, healing other. In the context of feminist object-relations theory, the desire for true recognition tempts one to see the other as an all-powerful healer, a miracle maker that will turn everything into something better.

At the beginning of their relationship Nate sees Elizabeth as a nurse-like figure, a self-sacrificing saviour, as "a Madonna in a shrine, shedding a quiet light (…) holding a lamp in her hand like Florence Nightingale" (LBM, 41.) In the novel's today, this image and their marriage are ruined and now he sees Elizabeth as "[t]he lady with the axe" (ibid.).

Lesje replaces the image of his saviour. He sees her as "the bearer of healing wisdom, swathed in veils. He would fall to his knees, dissolve" (LBM, 63). Lesje is "unattainable, shining like a crescent moon" (LBM, 122). Nate appears to be desperately needy for love and for women to give him what he needs. He desires someone to save him, because he cannot save himself. He puts women on a pedestal, which does not give them much space as erroneous human beings. Nate sees Lesje as an exotic flower, "some strange plant" (LBM, 63), which suggests that he sees her as exotic as Lesje thinks William sees her. Exotic and romanticised, offering something new, an escape route? It appears that he is not interested in knowing her true self: he is only interested in his own image of her. He is in love with something that Lesje represents to him. In terms of feminist object-relations, Nate is hungry for being recognised, but he is not willing to give true recognition in return.

Life Before Man (and *The Edible Woman*) argues that this romantisation of the other is by no means only a male flaw. Also women willingly see themselves as healers and nurses with miraculous powers in their heterosexual relationships.

When Lesje falls in love with Nate, she is described thinking of herself in terms of nursing after hearing that Nate has got the flu: "Lesje walks to the rescue in her gum-soled snowboots, a nurse hurrying over frozen Siberia, driven on by love. She will put her hand on his forehead and miraculously he will revive" (LBM, 159). Lesje fantasises about herself as a gifted healer, who saves her lover from serious illness. This image is clearly from a romance narrative, reminiscent of the nurse novels that *Lady Oracle*'s count Paul writes. The sentence, which follows the above quotation, is an ironic reversal: "By the

time she reaches his front steps and stamps her way up them her nose is running" (ibid.). A runny nose slightly ridicules the noble thoughts before. It appears that the narrator is critical of her characters' unrealistic but understandable dreams of salvation.

The last chapters of *Life Before Man* leave room for interpretation. The protagonists are left to think what will happen next. These sentences, in future tense, are different for each character. Elizabeth thinks of going to a supermarket in order to buy groceries for dinner for herself and the children. Nate waits for Lesje, hoping that she will be happy to see him, yet unsure of this. Lesje is about to tell Nate that she is pregnant, not knowing how he will react.

In Nate's last chapter he thinks, "In any case, they will go home" (LBM, 306), which suggests that he will accept Lesje's coming information of her pregnancy. But we do not know what happens. We know that because of his financial problems he does not want more children, but we also know how much he loves his children.

The last chapter's focalisor is Elizabeth, who is going through the museum's exhibition on China, which she in part organises. She suddenly realises that she is single; she has no lover or a husband. More than Nate and Lesje, Elizabeth is shown symbolically hungry for connection and adult relationships. The last words of the novel show this: "China does not exist. Nevertheless she longs to be there" (LBM, 309).

To me as an implicated reader, the structure and the narrative decisions of the novel make my relationship with *Life Before Man* different compared to Atwood's other novels. Because the narrator is external and there are several main characters whose perspectives alternate, I notice that I do not invest myself emotionally with just one character, as usual. With every change of focalisation my empathy and interest change. When reading a chapter on Elizabeth I identify with her, and the same with Nate and Lesje. What engages me as an implicated reader is more than a single character. It is, I think, the novel's "cycle of disaster and recovery". (Pearce 1997, 16.)

To me, *Life Before Man* is first and foremost a tragedy of a family, or to be more exact, several families (Nate and Elizabeth's, Lesje and William's, and all of their childhood families) and other intimate relationships. Accordingly, the ending of the story is not overtly happy or optimistic. But it is much more positive than its beginning, and it leaves this implicated reader feeling somewhat purified and (gloomily) hopeful.

From *Life Before Man*'s dark realism and family tied food motif, we go to *Bodily Harm*, in which Atwood uses the thriller genre. The food motif in *Bodily Harm*, as we shall see, concentrates on illness, violence and power, and on the dysfunction of countries and international relations.

6 *BODILY HARM*: THE (SEXUAL) POLITICS OF FOOD, EATING,AND HUNGER

Bodily Harm (1981) is seen as Atwood's most political novel (see e.g. McCombs 1991, xvii; Stein 1999, 71; Irvine 1993, 99). Indeed, it contains strong criticism towards male violence and power relations. It discusses the female body and violence towards it – violent pornography, rape, abuse, and murder. These are, of course, some of the issues, which the second wave feminists raised and discussed. There were a lot of influential feminist studies in the seventies on these topics: Susan Brownmiller's *Against Our Will, Men, Women and Rape*, Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex*, and Adrianne Rich's *Of Woman Born*, to mention a few. Also the so-called French feminism with for example Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray started to become visible and internationally read.

The subject of *Bodily Harm*, in my opinion, is violence on several levels: private, public and universal. This violence is intertwined with alienation and division. The novel's theme is violence's effects on society and people – on women in particular. In *Bodily Harm*, the men and women are most pointedly two different (enemy) camps with different goals and methods. The gendered pattern of the novel tells us that men are violent, in the protagonist Renata (Rennie) Wilford's cellmate Lora's words, "[b]ecause they can" (BH, 280). There is no real specific reason for the people in power to hurt the less powerful: abusive behaviour appears to be a trait of (male) human nature.

In addition to her worldview of genders as binary oppositions, Rennie does not have close female friends either, or any other close people in her life. She appears to be an alienated woman per se: alienated from her body, her background and her childhood family, other people, and her surroundings.

For the first time in her oeuvre, Atwood explores the motif of illness. Rennie's breast cancer is a disease that affects a huge number of women. Novel's thematic focus, violence, can be seen as a disease too, a national and universal disease.

In *Bodily Harm*, Atwood's interest in post-colonialism and her involvement in organisations such as Amnesty international are visible. The novel raises a

number of questions: What is the relationship between the so-called rich and poor countries? What is the responsibility of the West for its Others? What should we do about issues such as mass murders, torture, and repression of dissident voices in countries in turmoil? Like in *Life Before Man*, but with a different emphasis, the issues of colour – being white – and nationality are *Bodily Harm*'s motifs. Because *Bodily Harm*'s protagonist is now an "other" among the people she in Canada sees as "the others", the question cannot help rising.

In *Bodily Harm*, Atwood is using the thriller genre and putting a female protagonist in its centre. According to Atwood, *Bodily Harm* is an "anti-thriller". Stein sees that the novel "stretches the boundaries of the detective thriller" (Stein 1999, xii). Again, Atwood is using a fantasy fiction to negotiate the gendered world.

As one can conclude from the above, the novel's alignment with feminist tradition is visible. The intertextual connections and motifs and themes are in dialogue with feminist and female topics and discussions. The extra-literary context and intonation suggest that the novel allies with feminists and sees women as its primary readers (see Pearce 1997, 72-74).

Rennie is a Canadian journalist who writes light life style articles, and is a convalescent from breast cancer operation. After the tragic and upsetting events in her life Rennie wants to get away and goes to a Caribbean island St. Antoine in order to write a travel story. During her stay on the island she gets mixed up with a local uprising and ends up in a jail with her new acquaintance Lora.

Bodily Harm consists of six parts and the novel's narration is in part character-bound, in part external. The novel starts with the sentence "[t]his is how I got here": the protagonist is going through her former life and the events that got her to the present situation. This beginning shows that the retrospective narrator is the protagonist Rennie herself and that the focalisation is internal: Rennie's feelings and thoughts are described. The pronoun, however, changes: the narration is mostly in third person form, and the returns to the first person mode are shorter. Rennie's stay on the island and her confinement in the prison cell are narrated in the present tense and her former life in Toronto is narrated in the past tense. In addition to Rennie's narrative, her cellmate Lora narrates some episodes of her past life.

Rennie's story includes several traumatising situations and events. This is visible in the novel's narration: there are rapid alternations. The text and the memories come in bits and pieces: the narrative rushes between the present time and several embedded narratives from the past. Also, the constant change of the pronoun suggests problems in telling the story, as if, in Bal's words, "the subject cannot shape a story out of [memories]" (Bal 1997, 147), or at least has trouble doing so.

Unlike with *Life Before Man*, the critical interest towards *Bodily Harm* has been notable, as usual with Atwood's writing. Lorna Irvine's monograph *Collecting Clues. Margaret Atwood's* Bodily Harm makes a detailed reading of the novel and introduces different interpretation possibilities. She praises the novel's structure: she sees it as the most intricate and refined of Atwood's

novels. (Irvine 1993, passim.) Bouson examines *Bodily Harm*'s representation of the powerful, punishing male gaze, and its brutal and violent sexual politics. She sees that the novel is "a warning about the backlash against feminism", which was visible in the 1980s cultural atmosphere (Bouson 1993, 111). Mycak analyses the novel through Kristeva's formulations of signification, space and abjection. According to her, Rennie does "negotiate space, signification, position, and subjectivity" and finds a new way of being at the end. (Mycak 1996, 149-150, 178.)

In *Bodily Harm*, the food motif is an undercurrent. It is an issue of politics in a more profound sense than in Atwood's other novels. It even becomes a symbol of freedom. In the novel, the concrete images of food are tied to politics and inequality between people and nations. Some concrete images of food illustrate and symbolise Rennie's illness, and the ominous threat that colours the novel. The symbolic hunger seems to be motivated by Rennie's life, which appears detached and alienated from anything real, anything beneath the surface. It is related to Rennie's situation as a cancer convalescent, too.

In "The Background: Griswold" I explore Rennie's childhood, the values and hungers she attaches to it. "The Importance of Food" reads the novel's motif of concrete food. In "Cruel and Violent Ambassadors: The Rope Men" I look at the four important men in Rennie's life, and their connection to threat and violence. The last chapter on *Bodily Harm*, "A Subversive" concentrates on the novel's ending: Rennie's change and fate.

6.1 The Background – Griswold

Like other Atwood protagonists, Rennie has a problematic past and traumatising childhood, which she has not been able to forget or process. She has tried to distance herself from her childhood and background, the religious village of Griswold. To her, it is

> something that can't be seen but is nevertheless there, full of gritty old rocks and buried stumps, worms, and bones; nothing you'd want to go into. Those who'd lately been clamouring for roots have never seen a root up close (…) Mostly she tries to avoid thinking about Griswold at all. Griswold, she hopes, is merely something she defines herself against (…) Though it's not always so easy to get rid of Griswold. (…) she knew what Griswold would (…) say (…) This is what happens to women like you. (…) you deserve it. (…) In Griswold everyone deserves the worst. (BH, 18.)

For Rennie, the name of the place, Griswold, has become a symbol for her painful past and everything she does not want to be. She tells jokes of Griswold, mocks the place in order to diminish its power in her mind. But in difficult situations her past comes to haunt and torment her. She is tormented by an internalised other, which is crystallised in the word Griswold.

The context of poisonous pedagogy is strongly present in Rennie's childhood memories:

> One of the first things I can remember, says Rennie, is standing in my grandmother's bedroom. (…) everything is very clean, and I'm cold. I know I've done something wrong, but I can't remember what. I'm crying, I'm holding my grandmother around both legs (…) I feel as if I'm holding on to the edge of something, safety, if I let go I'll fall, I want forgiveness, but she's prying my hands away finger by finger. She's smiling; she was proud of the fact that she never lost her temper.
> I know I will be shut in the cellar by myself (…) I'm crying because I'm afraid, I can't stop, and even if I hadn't done anything wrong I'd still be put down there, for making a noise, for crying.
> *Laugh and the world laughs with you*, said my grandmother. *Cry and you cry alone*. (BH, 53, italics original.)

As a child, Rennie is dependent on her grandmother and at her mercy. In the context of feminist object-relations, the grandmother stands for suffocating, negative female power that has to be fought against in order for one to feel like a differentiated subject.

The smiling abuser, Rennie's grandmother, echoes Kristeva's thoughts of the abject. One of the causes of abjection is "a hatred that smiles" (Kristeva 1982, 4). In the light of contemporary child rearing, this appears as a cruel and exaggerated discipline. This has, however, been a common method of education and has not altogether vanished. Miller argues that the traditional education advises the caretakers

> to break the child's will as early on as possible, to fight against her obstinacy and keep the child in constant feelings of her guilt and inferiority. The child is never allowed to notice that the adult can be wrong and make mistakes. The parent has to hide all the inadequacy she has and present her as a divine authority. (Miller 1986, 296, translation from Finnish JL.)

According to Miller, covert or overt abuse, like ignorance or disrespect makes the child feel shame and exposure. She feels, from very early on, that love and hatred are synonymous. She equals love with the abuse she gets. As Miller crystallises, "Many people are unable to think that there could be love without pain, sacrifice and fear of abuse". (Miller 1986, 222, 345, 350-351, translation from Finnish JL.)

To the feminist reader, the sexist and oppressive phrase "little girls should be seen, not heard" illustrates Rennie's childhood. The grandmother's education and the better manners of Griswold are gendered in nature. In Griswold, girls and women are always in the danger of becoming grotesque and despicable in the eyes of the others (see Russo 1994 and 1995). But other possibilities in life appear infinite for boys and very limited for girls. What is allowed for boys is terrible in a girl: "Little boys say *Can I*, says Rennie's grandmother. Little girls are more polite. They say *May I*" (BH, 126, italics original).

Rennie has a mother, but she is under her own mother's control, "practically a saint" (BH, 58) in the eyes of Rennie and the others. Even as an adult she is unable to rebel with more than stifled giggles with her sisters in the kitchen. Although Rennie says she "admired" (ibid.) her mother, her mother does not seem to be an ideal parent: Rennie "learned to conceal cuts and scrapes, since her mother seemed to regard such things not as accidents but as

acts Rennie committed on purpose to complicate her mother's life" (BH, 82). Rennie does not want to tell her mother of the breast cancer because she is certain that she will see it as "Rennie's fault (…) something you brought upon yourself" (ibid.).

Rennie's father, as usual in Atwood's oeuvre, is absent. He is a war veteran and has left them shortly after Rennie was born, lives in Toronto and visits them only at Christmas. Adults claim that his absence is merely due to his work, but he is actually remarried. When Rennie sees him as an adult, he says that Rennie looks like her mother, and "that was the end of him" (BH, 110), which suggests that Rennie cannot stand being identified with her mother.

In the context of feminist object-relations, Rennie's mother represents negative things to her. Benjamin sees that "femininity and motherhood as we know them have been tainted with submission, self-abnegation, and helplessness", which does not mean that women would not use power as mothers (Benjamin 1988, 80). It appears that in order to be an individual, Rennie feels she must set a firm boundary between her and her mother, and even the role of a mother: "I didn't want to be trapped, like my mother (…) I didn't want to have a family or be anyone's mother, ever" (BH, 58).

Griswold is the background for Rennie's symbolic and concrete hungers, which I will discuss next.

6.2 The Importance of Food

> "I understand you're a journalist," he says. He's nervous.
> "I just do food," says Rennie, to make him feel better. (…)
> "What could be more important?" he says politely. (BH, 189-190.)

As above, the importance of food is underlined in several parts of the novel (see also Parker 1995, 353). According to Irvine, Atwood had considered "a Peruvian proverb, "what you are willing to swallow depends on how hungry you are" as a pretext for the novel (Irvine 1993, 31). This phrase echoes in the novel's motif of food, eating, and hunger.

In *Bodily Harm*, Rennie is forced to see beyond the surface and her own limited knowledge, also concerning the issue of food.

When the others give Rennie the role of political reporter, she tries to escape this responsibility by saying that it is only banal things she is interested in:

> I do lifestyles (…) what people wear, what they eat (…) says Rennie, as lightly as she can.
> "You might say that I also am concerned with lifestyles," [doctor Minnow] says. "It is our duty, to be concerned with lifestyles. What the people eat, what they wear, this is what I want you to write about.
> He's got her. (BH, 136.)

The novel states that the most important thing is food and eating. What people eat tells us how they are situated in the world. What people eat in a specific place tells us about this place: how wealthy or poor it is, where it is, how the society and the government works. Minnow explains to Rennie that culture is not the first priority in a poor country: "You can't eat the culture" (BH, 130).[67]

In contrast to Canada, the food on the island is scarce and often not enjoyable. The only time there is an abundance of food – "bowls of salad, platters of roast beef, lime pies, chocolate cakes (…) as much as you can eat" (BH, 151) – it is for wealthy tourists. Paul, a rich drug and gun dealer who Rennie has an affair with, takes her there. He gets even eggs, which are a real luxury on the island – a mark of his power and "connections" (BH, 221), as he puts it. People with power eat well, people with less power eat badly if at all, asserts the novel: ""I eat well, so I must have power," says Paul, grinning" (BH, 241).

When Rennie and Paul discuss the problems in the sugar production in the island, Rennie dismisses the question by saying that sugar is not good for you. Paul comments: "That depends on what else you have to eat" (BH, 223). Rennie's opinion is elitist and derives from her Canadian background, where food is in plenty and it is possible to divide it into good and bad. In poor countries one eats what is available, there is no choice as in wealthy countries.

Doctor Minnow narrates:

> When we had our hurricane, the sweet Canadians donated a thousand tins of ham (…) for the refugees (…) The refugees never see this ham (…) most likely they never eat ham in their lives (…) The ham turn up, surprise, at the Independence Day banquet (…) For the leading citizens only. (BH, 29.)

Ham is a symbol of Canadian charity givers' naivety and ignorance. When "the sweet Canadians", as Minnow mockingly calls them, try to help the developing countries, they fail because of the local government's corruption. But by helping, the developed countries' citizens gain a good conscience.

In terms of the false self theory, Rennie's survival strategy is detachment. Her life is spinning stories, funny and witty articles of "[s]urfaces" (BH, 26) such as what is the hip length of the skirt. She writes "[n]othing political" (BH, 16). She cannot experience the things and happenings; she must distance herself from them by making them into texts in her head and on paper. She cannot stop it; it is an obsession. A direct connection to the world is missing: "Rennie wishes she could stop reviewing the food and just eat it" (BH, 62). Everything can be made into a story and distanced. When Rennie is about to vomit, she thinks: ""Throwing Up In The Sun," (…) everything's raw material, you just have to know how to work it in" (BH, 98-99).

At the beginning, Rennie tries to distance her illness, too, with her common methods: "[S]he could do a piece on it. "Cancer, The Coming Thing." (…) How about "The Cutoff Point"? (BH, 27). But she finds this distancing increasingly difficult. Although her malignant tumour was removed totally, and she is in remission, the illness can re-appear. In the hospital, Rennie thinks

"We'll get back to normal, she told herself, though she could not remember any longer what *normal* had been like" (BH, 35, italics original).

Rennie's tumour and cancer are often connected with imagery of food. The food terminology makes the abstract concrete, the strange and frightening slightly more familiar. A nurse says to Rennie, "you're lucky, they say there's none anywhere else, some of them are full of it, they cut it out and it just pops up somewhere else. Rennie thought of toasters" (BH, 34). The image of the toaster makes the idea of the cancer spreading and reappearing distant. In a similar vein, when Rennie wants to know how much of her breast was taken off in the operation and her doctor Daniel Luoma says "About a quarter", Rennie answers, "You make it sound like a pie" (BH, 34).

The scar on her breast is "a diseased fruit" (BH, 60) in her dream. Rennie sees the "evil" cells inside of her "working away in her with furious energy, like yeast" (BH, 100). She imagines the tumour eating her from the inside, her being the edible, the victim: "I dream I'm full of white maggots eating away at me from the inside" (BH, 83).

The element of decay is repeated in the novel and connected to Rennie's fear of death and her body's unpredictability. When Jake visits her in the hospital, bringing her "champagne and pâté" (BH, 35), she feels she smells of rancid cheese: something outdated and rotting. In St. Antoine, she checks her not-operated breast and there is a taste of "rotting meat" (BH, 49) in her mouth.

During her stay on the island, Rennie is often portrayed not feeling hungry. When she would like to eat something there is nothing to eat, or she loses the feeling of hunger because of the oddness of the situation or the Caribbean heat. There is usually something wrong with the food she eats. She does not get the things she would like to and the food is often rancid. Even though she is on a Caribbean island, there is no fresh fruit in her hotel – a symbol of corruption and the state of the island.

Dining in Rennie's hotel is "a trial rather than a meal" (BH, 41). The hotel food is repeatedly portrayed as inedible or at least tasteless: "This is the kind of food you eat only when very hungry" (BH, 43). A dessert "appears to be made of sweetened chalk" (BH, 45). Teabag looks like "a dead mouse" (BH, 138). There are no proper menus, only a card, "since there's no choice" (BH, 42), which suggests island's poverty, but also something about Rennie and her feelings. One of her breakfasts tastes "like a winter foot, like a cellar, like damp wool" (BH, 123). This equates her present food with her childhood's situation being put in her grandmother's cellar, which made her hate "the smell of damp mittens" (BH, 54). Rennie feels like a helpless child again; punished for something she could not help doing.

Rennie drinks alcohol a lot – piña coladas – and is often described as slightly drunk. She also smokes marihuana on several occasions. As Irvine writes, "portrayed as confused, disoriented, slightly drugged, or drunk, Rennie may see nothing clearly at all" (Irvine 1993, 42). This, of course, points out that Rennie's testimony as a narrator a protagonist can be seen as unreliable. It suggests dialogic polyphony: the narrator's view is compromised and the text suggests that her view may be inaccurate.

After the revolution starts, Rennie hears the dreadful news that all flights have been cancelled and she cannot get out of the island. The frightening information is softened with images of food, which evokes familiarity and comfort. The unpleasant hotelkeeper has "an avocado-green shirtwaist" and Rennie thinks of the place as "the Sunset Inn, home of beige gravy" (BH, 261) – images that bring distance, softness and even humour to the scene.

In the prison cell, Rennie longs for a hotel room and the reality she has got used to in Canada: "Popcorn is what she needs" (BH, 269). Popcorn is a symbol of the peaceful and calm political environment in Canada; of middle-class life and wealth; of the security of one's own country and the easy-going atmosphere of a place she knows best.

The thought of refrigerators and the familiar products in them back home in Canada comforts Rennie: "She thinks about refrigerators, cool and white, stocked with the usual things: bottles, cartons of milk, packets, coffee beans (…) eggs lined up quietly in their shells" (BH, 273). The refrigerator is a symbol of safety, of everything in its own proper place. In it everything is peaceful and predictable, unlike in Rennie's prison cell. During the novel, then, her vision of her life in Canada as something so terrifying that she had to leave it, changes. The radical imprisonment makes her understand that life in Canada was not hell, not from her present perspective.

Rennie daydreams of and whispers the names of desired food items, "Colonel Sanders chicken, McDonald's hamburgers, doughnuts (…) potato chips, candy bars (…) raisins" (BH, 280). Parker notes, rightly, that food becomes an unconscious metaphor of freedom to Rennie (Parker 1995, 354).

As Sceats has noted, during the imprisonment Rennie becomes dependent on the daily rice and the noises included in the happening, like a dog in Pavlov's test (Sceats 2000, 109-110). She daydreams of food and feels strong hunger in prison, much stronger than before. She suffers of the lack of food, but she also hungers for freedom, safety and home – desire to get away from the "improper" place and grotesque self, monstrous because of dirt and hunger. On the symbolic level her immense hunger can also suggest her arising political responsibility.

6.3 Cruel and Violent Ambassadors – The Rope Men

> There's no good guys and bad guys, nothing you can count on, none of it's permanent any more, there's a lot of improvisation. (…) There's only people with power and people without power. Sometimes they change places, that's all. (Paul in BH, 240.)

"Rope Quartet" was *Bodily Harm*'s working title, suggesting that all four men in Rennie's life – the rope man, Jake, Daniel and Paul – are fruits from one tree (see Stein 1999, 74). The gendered pattern of *Bodily Harm* argues that every man is a possible rope man in disguise, an abuser and an attacker in sheep's clothing.

Bodily Harm starts with a scene in which Rennie tells us of an incident that happened to her in Toronto. She is coming home and finds policemen in her flat, telling her that she had been lucky: a man with a rope had been in her apartment waiting for her to come back, possibly aiming at raping and killing her. The intruder had left the rope on her bed, and Rennie starts calling him "the rope man" in her head. The police appear to be eager to blame her for the intruder's visit:

> He was just waiting for you, the younger one [the police] said behind me. (…) He smiled down at me, watching my face, almost delighted (…) If you knew what was walking around loose out there you'd never go out. You close the curtains in the bathroom when you take a shower? (…) You close the curtains when you get dressed at night? (…) You have men over here a lot? Different men? (BH, 13-14.)

Wanting to prove her innocence, Rennie opens her shirt and shows the men her scarred, operated on breast. The behaviour of the police seems absurd and violent to the feminist reader, but sadly familiar in the context of misogynist practices. The scene suggests that women are thought to be guilty, partially to blame for the abuse and violence.

Also Rennie herself seems to think that she has somehow invited the man to her apartment. According to her, there had been "a vacuum" in her life after her boyfriend Jake had moved out and "[m]aybe the man with the rope hadn't so much broken into her apartment as been sucked in" (BH, 39). The intruder's twisted symbolic hunger to hurt is transformed: something in *her* life has wanted to consume a man, has invited this man in. For the feminist reader, it seems that Rennie takes the burden of guilt as women often do: they are considered to be responsible for sexuality, and not only of their own, but male sexuality too. This eagerness to take the blame does not only suggest common gendered values and education, but also Rennie's background in Griswold.

The idea that someone has been in her house disturbs Rennie, and especially the fact that he has been rummaging around in her kitchen:

> He made himself a cup of Ovaltine. (…) There was a cup on the table, half full of something light brown. I felt sick: someone I didn't know had been in my kitchen, opening my refrigerator and my cupboards, humming to himself maybe, as if he lived there; as if he was an intimate. (BH, 13.)

The seeming coolness and familiar behaviour of the intruder are scary and make Rennie sick. In writing of abjection, Kristeva argues that it can be caused by "the ambiguous, the composite", such as "the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a saviour" (Kristeva 1982, 4). In *Bodily Harm*, the failed molester is an ambiguous figure: a possible rapist and murderer who acts like a friend or a lover, patiently waiting for Rennie in her kitchen.

Rennie thinks of making the rope man into an anecdote "told at lunch, with the strawberry flan" (BH, 39). She cannot, however, diminish the man into a story and just the side dish of a lunch, she is too afraid to do that. She is also worried that people might think of her as "a man-hater" (BH, 40), if she told them what had happened. To the feminist reader, this seems like a very radical

feminist comment: telling the truth makes you a woman who hates men. This points at a typical gendered pattern of our culture: the (female) victim is often blamed, for instance in rape cases.

Rennie cannot stop thinking about the intruder. She is clearly traumatised by this incident: Rennie is paralysed and numb, but at the same time she becomes scared and suspicious. Her life changes. For example, she does not care whether her dishes will ever be washed: "It gets easier and easier, dishes in the sink for two weeks, three weeks, only a little mould on them, she hardly even feels guilty any more; one of these days it may be permanent" (BH, 16).

Visibility is a key issue to Rennie's character throughout *Bodily Harm*. The issue of seeing and being seen is highlighted in the novel with a pretext from John Berger's book *Ways of Seeing*: "A man's presence suggests what he is capable of doing to you or for you. By contrast, a woman's presence… defines what can and cannot be done to her". The quotation underlines the power difference between genders and argues that men are the subjects and women the objects (see also Sceats 2000, 107).

In the context of false self theory, we are all in need of recognition. But visibility can also feel very dangerous; one's worst enemy if one tries to hide and protect one's true self. Visibility and invisibility are two-edged swords: they are both threats and assertions. (Laing 1971, 103, 106, 119.) This duplicity of visibility is evident in Rennie's case.

In St. Antoine Rennie is at first relieved: "she knows nobody (…) nobody knows her. In a way she's invisible. In a way she's safe" (BH, 39). She feels that invisibility is an armour, a camouflage, and protection against other people. She cannot understand people's desire to tell their story to her when they find out she is a journalist: "Why do they think that being in a magazine will make them more valid than they are? Why do they want to be *seen*?" (BH, 89, italics original). Rennie sees the celebrities as embarrassingly hungry and this hunger, in her eyes, makes them vulnerable and pathetic: "throat bared to the knife; an offering, an exposure" (BH, 26).

In the eyes of the feminist reader, Rennie's relationship with her boyfriend Jake is portrayed to be violent and unequal from the very beginning. Jake's symbolic hunger is overt and silences Rennie, and her symbolic hunger is more covert and less visible. They have separated in the novel's present time, so the affair is portrayed in embedded narratives.

Jake represents success in the urban capitalist world; he is a company owner before turning thirty years old. When Rennie first meets Jake while doing an article on successful young men, her photographer says Jake is "[a] prick (…) Women can't tell (…) Or maybe they can (…) they prefer guys who treat them like shit" (BH, 103). This tells of a world where women cannot acknowledge abusive behaviour, or are (un)consciously drawn towards it.

In the context of feminist object-relations, following Benjamin, these abusive men can be seen representing mastery, subjectivity and recognition to women, and women feel that by submitting to them they become recognised by this powerful other.

Jake is "a packager" (BH, 103), a designer by profession and extends his skills to his private life. Jake wants to do a makeover to Rennie, wants to decide what she wears and how she looks like. He decides on everything; she is not heard or seen in this relationship. When they move in together, Jake decorates the house, and puts posters with naked and tied up women on their walls.

Jake's sexual fantasies are abusive:

> Jake liked to pin her hands down, he liked to hold her so she couldn't move. He liked that, he liked thinking of sex as something he could win at. Sometimes he really hurt her, once he put his arm across her throat and she really did stop breathing. Danger turns you on, he said. Admit it. It was a game, they both knew that. He would never do it if it was real, if she really was (…) whatever it was he wanted her to pretend. So she didn't have to be afraid of him. (BH, 207.)

To the feminist reader, it appears that the above quotation actually repeats Jake's words, not Rennie's thoughts. The word "he" is repeated: he liked, he really hurt et cetera. Also phrases like "he said", "he liked thinking" rule, but "she said", "she thought" are missing. Rennie is an object here, not a subject; the done-to, not doer.

There are very few differences between Jake and the rope man, except the fact that Rennie lives with Jake, but the rope man is a stranger. They both like being the active, surprising, and scaring women: "[Jake]'d hide in closets and spring out at her, pretending to be a lurker" (BH, 27). Rennie thinks of the rope man as "the sight of one of his [Jake's] playful fantasies walking around out there, growling and on all fours" (BH, 236).

After Rennie and her friend Jocasta go for a display of pornographic equipment and violent pornographic videos at a police station, she starts feeling used and wants Jake to cut down his aggressive sexual behaviour:

> She had trouble dismissing it as a game. She now felt that in some way that had never been spelled out between them he thought of her as the enemy. Please don't do that any more, she said. (…) Lately I feel I'm being used, though not by you exactly. (BH, 211-212.)

Bodily Harm suggests that Rennie is right in thinking that Jake is using her, exploiting her, but proving it is difficult for her. Jake is adamant in his notions of their sex life: "He knew the difference between a game and the real thing, he said (…) She was the confused one" (BH, 236).

To the feminist reader Rennie's character illustrates women's uncomfortable and ambiguous feelings and attitudes towards pornography. It may feel intriguing, but because the power relations are so imbalanced, – in violent pornography, in particular – it can cause feelings of discomfort, and even disgust (see e.g. Bordo 1994, 273-276).

Rennie's eating, as their sex life, is under his command. During the relationship, he decides what they buy and what they eat. Rennie finds some of the ingredients and edibles disgusting, such as "rank and horrible cheeses" but "he insisted she had to try" (BH, 235).

Although the symbolic hunger to change the other is pointedly a male quality in *Bodily Harm*, there are also exceptions to this in the novel. Rennie and her friend Jocasta play a reminiscent game: When they see a man in the street, they think, "If this man were yours, how would you do him over?" (BH, 44). Rennie sees this as "a rude game" (ibid.), and it remains only between these two women. Rennie thinks of this makeover game also in relation with her island acquaintances Paul and Lora, but does not say anything. Even though Rennie does not say her thoughts aloud, her thoughts suggest that women, too, have violent symbolic hunger to change other people and do not accept them as they are. Although Rennie does not feel comfortable with Jake's efforts to do her over, she plays the same game herself. As her articles show, she, too, is a "packager" (BH, 103) like Jake, a person who wants to manoeuvre other people's clothing and appearance (see also Stein 1999, 74).

In dialogic terms, this suggests polyphony in *Bodily Harm*. As a whole, the novel is not as polyphonic as most of Atwood's novels, but gives a more monologic, radical feminist story of the gendered world. Having said this, it is important to remember that Rennie is not a reliable narrator: her vision of the world is partial, traumatised, and her values can be seen as problematic.

In *Bodily Harm*, the common Atwoodian motif of the nurse is connected with a male character for the first time. Instead of seeing herself as a healer and miracle maker to a man, as many other Atwood's protagonists do, Rennie desires to be healed, especially by her doctor Daniel Luoma, who did her breast surgery.

When Rennie wakes up after the anaesthesia, she understands that she had been thinking that she would not wake up, that she would die on the operating table. The first thing she sees is Daniel, who is touching her hand. In this context, Daniel appears as her saviour and she falls in love with him. This makes Rennie feel stupid: "It wasn't only inappropriate, it was ridiculous" (BH, 33). In Rennie's mind falling in love with your doctor is reserved to "women in the soaps, women in nurse novels" (ibid.) and she does not want to be a part of that group. Rennie feels that her hunger should be for other kinds of men, because of her age and qualities: she "could not stand being guilty of such a banality" (ibid.).

Rennie thinks that Daniel has power because he has seen her "on the table unconscious as a slit fish" (BH, 80), and he has seen inside of her, something she herself has not. She finds Daniel as a kind, responsible and gentle man, but also powerful in relation to her. She thinks that Daniel will continue to see inside of her, know what she is, and what she wants when she herself does not. This, of course, is unrealistic desire, a childlike wish. A doctor, and especially a surgeon, can be seen as even more powerful than men usually are: he has the skills and the right to open up another person's body and save her life.[68]

To the feminist reader, Daniel represents a positive male character in Atwood's novels, a responsible and a kind man, reminiscent of *Life Before Man*'s Nate. Although Atwood has included Daniel to the four rope men in the novel, in my opinion he is a far more positive character than the other three. Rennie has a sudden vision on a failed date, that "Daniel was a lot like Griswold, not as

it was but as it would like to be" (BH, 196). Daniel stands for qualities that a religious community should and would like to represent, such as private and social responsibility, empathy and non-violent communication.

Rennie is attracted to Daniel although (or because) the situation is hopeless: Daniel is committed to his work and family. She sees herself as a cake, ready to give herself to him fully, but he does not want all of her because of his situation as a person married with children: "She might be the icing on his cake but she sure as hell wasn't the cake" (BH, 155).

Rennie wants Daniel to help her, to save her, but she is disappointed after understanding that Daniel is hungry for her too: "[H]e 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" (BH, 238).

In terms of feminist object-relations, Rennie has been in search for a distant, self-sufficient master who would give her recognition and fill her life, and by his presence would make her more whole and less vulnerable. When he turns out to be a needy and hungry human, she feels let down.

In addition to Rennie's symbolic hunger to be saved by Daniel, she also hungers to have power over him. Rennie's symbolic hunger for Daniel is coloured by violence and desire to own and possess. Her desire towards the partially reluctant Daniel is depicted in a reminiscent language of Jake's desire towards Rennie, which felt threatening to her. Rennie "wanted to see him lying with his eyes closed, she wanted to see him and not be seen (…) she wanted to open him up" (BH, 195-196). With Daniel, she wants to be in control.

It seems that in *Bodily Harm* all desire is potentially abusive and destructive.

During her stay on the island, Rennie meets American Paul, and starts an affair with him. Paul is a powerful and mysterious businessman, who claims to have been agronomist, working for the US government, for instance in Vietnam during the war. Later, it is revealed that Paul is a seller, who sells anything, for instance guns. As with Daniel, a caricature from romantic fiction is used to describe Rennie's relationship to Paul: "She knows she's fallen right into the biggest cliché in the book, a no-hooks, no-strings vacation romance with a mysterious stranger" (BH, 222). Rennie sees and criticises the clichés of romantic fiction, but goes for them anyway. Again, as with Daniel, Rennie sees herself above the other people and their belief in cheap fiction's love: "As long as she doesn't fall in love (…) it would be unacceptable" (BH, 222-223). She seems to want these things; she is hungry for them, although she finds them stupid. In the context of the false self theory, Rennie is using contempt as a protective tool to hide her own hunger.

Because of her illness, Rennie feels cut off from sexuality: "[I]t is something lost (…) severed from her" (BH, 49). Having sex with Paul is depicted as a healing experience for Rennie: "She's open now, she's been opened, she's been drawn back down, she enters her body again" (BH, 204.) The quotation suggests cure for her division between her body and mind, and at least partial healing of her traumas, especially the illness related ones. But

there are also darker connotations to this scene: "been opened" above has suggested force and abuse in the novel.

In my opinion, Paul is a sinister and an ambiguous figure. When Rennie is staying with Paul on the island she thinks him as a stranger with no face, a relation of the rope man: "someone is touching her neck. Paul. A faceless stranger" (BH, 233).

To the feminist and implicated readers this is very disturbing: the protagonist is having an affair with a man whom she sees as a possible torturer, killer, and does not leave, on the contrary, feels like having a *romance* with him. The feminist reader sees this as a critique towards the romantic fiction, suggesting it is sometimes irresponsible and even violent to women (see also Bouson 1993, 122-123).

Towards the end of the novel, Rennie's cynical attitude towards love is clearly revealed to be a defence and armour. She wanted love from Paul, although she tried to convince herself that she did not. When he makes it clear that she should not expect more than casual sex from him, she is disappointed. She is shown to be a victim of the romantic narrative, in spite of all her criticism, expertise behaviour, and the armour of being just a tourist, with "her options open" (BH, 227). Rennie has been hoping and struggling for love and true recognition after all, under her protective shield of pessimism and sarcasm: "She's trying again. She should know better" (BH, 241).

In *Bodily Harm*, the repeated gendered pattern is that men are powerful and violent, although they may not appear so at first, and women try to cope with this, in the best ways they can. Male symbolic hunger is for violence and power, not for connection and love. Male desire is different. When the revolution starts, Rennie thinks of Paul: "He's younger, alive in a way he hasn't been before. He loves it (…). That's why we get into these messes: because they love it" (BH, 256).[69]

6.4 A Subversive

During the novel, as usual in Atwood's fiction, Rennie has several life changing experiences. In the prison, Rennie is forced to see things and she is now unable to distance herself from them. She has to witness violence and feels abjection: "She has been turned inside out, there's no longer a *here* and a *there*. Rennie understands for the first time that this is not necessarily a place she will get out of, ever" (BH, 290, italics original). The horror of violence turns her world upside down. Shecannot know where her borders are, and the fear of death, dismemberment and fragmentation overwhelm her.

Rennie thinks that now she knows who and what the rope man is. In the novel, the rope man is a symbol of violence between people and inside people. Anybody can be the rope man, and anybody can become a rope man given the circumstances and a chance, the novel argues: "She's afraid of men and it's

simple, it's rational, she's afraid of men because men are frightening" (BH, 290). As Bouson writes, there is "anxiety about male power and violence (…) in the narrative's repeated descriptions of the bodily and psychic harm done to women" (Bouson 1993, 112).

The novel suggests that there is an unspeakable amount of violence against women (and men), but sometimes women's own perceptions and willingness to co-operate in harmful relationships – which can be seen to result from division of the self and traumatising situations – do increase the harm done.

The rope man is inside of Rennie, too: "he's only a shadow, anonymous, familiar, with silver eyes that twin and reflect her own" (BH, 287). He is her projection, her mirror image: he symbolises her own potential for aggression and destruction (see also Bouson 1993, 128-129).

Immediately after feeling abjection, Rennie encourages Lora and herself to eat: "We need to eat" (BH, 290), which suggests that her realisation does not freeze her. Instead, it forces her to act and defend herself: "She is not exempt. Nobody is exempt from anything" (ibid.).

Another moment of epiphany occurs when the guards are cruelly beating and kicking Lora in front of Rennie. Lora is compared to an animal and an edible – "a worm that's been cut in half" (BH, 293), and afterwards Lora's "mouth looks like a piece of fruit that's been run over by a car, pulp" (BH, 298). Seeing this makes Rennie terrified of seeing: "She doesn't want to see, she has to see, why isn't someone covering her eyes?" (BH, 293). This suggests that Rennie is struggling between a child's hope that somebody else would control her vision, somebody would save her from seeing violence, and the adult's realisation that she cannot always decide what she witnesses and there is nobody protecting her. Importantly, Rennie thinks, "I should tell someone" (BH, 297), which implies new responsibility.

After the beating, the novel goes back in time, to Rennie's teenage years. It seems that the helplessness of the present time takes her back to a feeling of helplessness in the early years of her life:

> I can't find my hands, [grandmother] says. She holds out her arms to Rennie, helplessly, her hands hanging loose at the ends of them.
> Rennie cannot bear to be touched by those groping hands, which seem to her like the hands of a blind person, a half-wit, a leper. She puts her own hands behind her and backs away (…) [grandmother] starts to cry, screwing up her eyes like a child (BH, 297.)

The abusive grandmother has become incapable and child-like. The roles have turned, now the Rennie is the capable one. She cannot touch her grandmother, but her mother arrives and takes hold of her grandmother's hands and tells her: "Here they are" (BH, 298).

There are clear similarities with Rennie's childhood entrapment and the incarceration in a cellar, and the novel's present time's imprisonment on the island. The idea of Rennie staying in her cell suggests a circular plot: as Bouson puts it, Rennie "ends where she began (…) condemned in (…) the cultural – and

literary – role of victim" (Bouson 1993, 121). However, although there are similar feelings of terror and powerlessness, now resistance and adult power emerge, too (see also Mycak 1996, 170).

From this adolescent memory, the time swifts back to the prison cell and Rennie touches badly beaten, maybe dying Lora:

> She's holding Lora's left hand (…) nothing is moving, and yet she knows she is pulling on the hand, as hard as she can (…) Lora is on the other side of it and she has to pull her through (…) this is the hardest thing she's ever done. (BH, 299.)

Rennie wants to distance herself from the scene, not to touch and be involved, but she cannot. She is involved. Lora's fate is left unresolved: Rennie thinks she hears Lora's voice, but the text leaves this open: "Or was that real?" (ibid.).

Hand imagery has an important role in the novel (e.g. Kirtz 1987, 1998; Stein 1999, 73). The issue is brought up repeatedly: what hands can or cannot do, what they should do, and how they abuse. When Rennie's grandmother is putting her into the cellar, Rennie is trying to keep the connection with her grandmother by holding on to her, but she forces her fingers to let go. Jake likes to keep her hands violently on their place when they have sex. Daniel's hands are skilful doctor's operating hands, and he connects to her in a way that people usually cannot, beyond the surface, by operating on her (which can also be seen as a partially violent act). When Rennie wakes up after the operation and Daniel touches her hand, she thinks that Daniel's hands saved her life and are pulling her back to life. During the novel, Rennie dreams that she has lost her hands and is helpless without them. This suggests that Rennie is unable to touch others, to have connection with the world (see also Irvine 1993, 38).

Hands can hurt and heal, and they – in the novel's world – seem to hurt more than heal. Atwood has commented on the thematic of hands in her production in the following way:

> Hands are quite important to me. The hand to me is an extension of the brain. (…) The brain is also in your body. (…) And the brain is certainly in the hands. It's *one* of the connection points [between self and other]. (Atwood in Lyons 1992, 229, italics original.)

Kirtz quotes Atwood's speech, where she says "Hands are what you kill with. They are also what you use for curing. Hands are instrumental in how we relate to one another" (Atwood in Kirtz 1987, 118).

In *Bodily Harm*, hands suggest connection and desire for recognition by the other, and also giving recognition to the other.

Rennie's traumatic experiences change her life. The protagonist's name, Renata, means re-birth, which confirms that she is born again during the story. Surface, which once promised safety, becomes untrustworthy: "she no longer trusts surfaces" (BH, 48). Writing witty and slightly mean stories becomes at first difficult and then impossible. In a similar way, her code of not being political, not making statements, and not being involved changes during her stay on St. Antoine and Ste. Agathe. As doctor Minnow says, on the islands

"[e]veryone is in politics" (BH, 124). Without her will, even Rennie becomes involved in politics on the island and is imprisoned because of political reasons.

Bodily Harm is narrated from inside the prison; prison is "here" (BH, 11). It is not stated whether or not Rennie gets out of the island or not, but the narrative forms imply that she stays in the penitentiary. Although her release from the prison and her flight back to Canada are described, they are written in the future tense, which implies that it may just be her fantasy before she dies in the prison.

In the airplane Rennie imagines herself becoming politically active and writing what she sees instead of mere surfaces: for the first time in her life she does not invent the title immediately. Now Rennie is "a subversive. She was not one once, but now she is. A reporter" (BH, 300-301).

At the end of the novel, Rennie feels another hand in her hand, suggesting Lora's hand, companionship, solidarity and friendship. She thinks the feeling "will always be there now" (BH, 300). In a way, Rennie is saved from the loneliness of the cellar of her childhood by a similar cell, where she found friendship, everlasting hands holding hers. She is no longer a child locked in the basement, crying alone, but an adult with a life of her own. Her symbolic hunger has changed, from a child's desperation to the adult action.

The ending of *Bodily Harm*, and thus the whole novel, has been interpreted in various ways. Often critics tend to see that the novel is narrated from the prison and Rennie stays there, because her return is narrated in future tense. Other critics think that Rennie narrates the story from Canada, after she has escaped from the island. (See e.g. Stein 1999, 76, 78; Bouson 1993, 132.) Differing from these interpretations, in her original and interesting reading, Irvine suggests that the whole novel is narrated from the hospital, after Rennie's surgery, and thus the experiences on the islands are reflections and hallucinations (Irvine 1993, 96-99). Nevertheless, because of the narrative solution of the change in tempus, I am inclined to see that the novel is narrated from the prison, and one of the possibilities is that Rennie does not get away from there. The future tense hopes and suggests, but does not confirm. The last words invite several interpretations:

> She will never be rescued. She has already been rescued. She is not exempt. Instead she is lucky, suddenly, finally, she's overflowing with luck, it's this luck holding her up. (BH, 301.)

As with *Surfacing*, I think that one of the reasons why I and other readers are inclined to think that Rennie is saved from the island and becomes the human rights activist journalist, the "subversive" in Toronto, is our emotional implication. We want her to be saved because of our emotional investment: the thought of her staying and maybe dying in the filthy cell is unbearable.

To the feminist reader the ending is a highly political statement of such global problems as political and economic imbalance, lack of human rights, torture, and incarceration without trials.

As an implicated reader, I found my "significant other" in the text mostly to be Rennie, and the tragic events of her life, especially her childhood and her life in Toronto, and her illness. However, I do not find Rennie easy to identify with. I did want to invest in her emotionally, and did many times, but there is friction, which, I think, is caused by her detachment. She takes risks and is careless of her own safety. She gets involved with men who are untrustworthy and even frightening. She appears to dislike everybody. Although there are points of identification, there is indeed no feeling of desire to be this person (which can be the author's and the narrator's intentional point).

From the thriller on a Caribbean island we turn to dystopian setting in the USA. Unlike in *Bodily Harm*, *The Handmaid's Tale*'s protagonist does not lack food, but she has problems with eating and being hungry. Both protagonists are symbolically hungry for love and recognition, for a saviour who would make their life better.

7 THE HANDMAID'S TALE: FORBIDDEN AND TRANSGRESSIVE HUNGERS

The Handmaid's Tale (1985) has won several prizes and is Atwood's most studied text (e.g. McCombs 1991, xx-xxii). The novel was Atwood's first best-seller in the USA, and has received notorious attention there: some schools and religious groups have banned the book.

At the same time, *The Handmaid's Tale* is and is not an exception in Atwood's oeuvre. It could be classified as dystopia, a negative utopia, and it tells of an alternative future (or present), and could also be called science fiction. In spite of this difference in genre compared to Atwood's other novels, there are familiar motifs: violent sexual difference, complicated power relationships between people, and communication's failure or extreme difficulty. The meat in hooks is not just a metaphor as in other novels; here the bodies are actually hanging on the wall.

As pointed out earlier, female authors and especially feminist authors often find genres such as Gothic and science fiction fruitful. Science fiction, as Sarah Lefanu puts it, gives the authors "freedom (…) from the constraints of realism" and gives them a new space in which to negotiate and criticise gendered practices (Lefanu 1988, 5). According to her,

> Women's dystopias foreground (…) the denial of women's sexual autonomy. They show women trapped by their sex, by their femaleness, and reduced from subjecthood to function. The dystopian tradition (…) draws on and extrapolates from contemporary political forces, and in particular the expression of class and gender hierarchies. (Lefanu 1988, 71, 75.)

The Handmaid's Tale can be seen as a logical follow-up to its precedent *Bodily Harm*. While *Bodily Harm* describes a revolution on a Caribbean Island, *The Handmaid's Tale* tells us what happened after a religious uprising in the USA. It gloomily pictures what could happen if the religious extremist groups would seize the power and rule the society. As all dystopic writing, the novel can be seen as a warning: we still have time to prevent this, but you must understand that the danger is already here. Lefanu sees that *The Handmaid's Tale* is inspired by the increased amount of moral and religious conservatism in the 1980s USA

(Lefanu 1988, 73).[70] The novel's theme, in my opinion, is to warn people of how dangerous it is to emphasise that genders are polarised and their roles exclusive. It tells us that totalitarian system is harmful to us all, but in particular to women.

To the feminist reader, *The Handmaid's Tale*'s alignment with female and feminist tradition is clear. It is in dialogue with discourses of extreme feminism (e.g. separatism) and extreme patriarchalism, and finds both potentially dangerous. The novel discusses genders, their relationships, and their roles and possibilities; it argues that feminists need to take the backlash against feminism seriously (see also Bouson 1993, 135).

The Handmaid's Tale's milieu is a strictly religious society called Gilead, established after a revolution in Maine, USA. Its centre is Boston. The birth rates have collapsed and fertile women are valuable. The novel starts when the nameless thirty-three-year-old protagonist (called Offred, named after her Commander's given name Fred) – a handmaid – has been five weeks in her third position, her third house. This house is her last possibility to succeed in her given duty and justification to live: getting pregnant by her Commander.[71]

In Gilead, a handmaid comes to a house where a married couple cannot have children, and has regular ceremonial sex with her Commander, while his wife is present. If a handmaid becomes pregnant and gives birth, she will give the child to the married couple and leave the place. She is a sort of forced surrogate mother. By making all second marriages and common law marriages illegal, the regime has a large amount of women to be used as handmaids.

The Handmaid's Tale is the only Atwood's novel situated in the USA. It appears that Atwood is suggesting that this kind of religious revolution is more likely to happen in the USA than in Canada.

The novel has three main narrative lines: first, the present day in Gilead, second, Offred's past before the religious revolution, and third, the time after the revolution, when she is violently separated from her family and put into an education centre for women with fertile ovaries (The Rachel and Leah Centre, or the Red Centre, as the women themselves call the place because of its dominant colour). *The Handmaid's Tale* describes Offred's daily activities and her memories from her past: her recollections of her mother, husband and daughter, whose fates are unknown to her. After the revolution, she, her husband Luke and their five-year-old daughter try to escape to Canada, but fail. Their daughter is given to some family with status in Gilead, and her husband is probably dead.

The Handmaid's Tale consists of fifteen parts. Their names are repetitive, prosaic and declatory, such as "Night", "Shopping", "Nap". The narration is character bound and the protagonist is a retrospective narrator. She is also the focalisor and the focalisation is internal. In the first chapter, the focalisor is all the women in the women's training centre, The Red Centre, and the pronoun used in narration is "we". After this the pronoun becomes singular, but the plural is used once in a while, showing the narrator's alliance with the other handmaids. This "we" suggests that in her narrative the narrator is trying to capture a fate of a group of women, not just herself. She is depicting a society

and a large group in this society. This "we" is a means to address the reader, too. It invites especially female readers to read the story, and implies that the narrative is a depiction of what could happen to "us".

Offred's traumatic and violent situation is visible in her narrative. The alternations in the narrative are quick: within one page we travel through several lines of time and narratives. In one of her several addresses to her reader, Offred narrates: "I'm sorry there is so much pain in this story. I'm sorry it's in fragments, like a body caught in crossfire or pulled apart by force. But there is nothing I can do to change it" (HMT, 279).

The novel's ending somewhat changes the interpretation of the protagonist as the narrator in charge of her story. *The Handmaid's Tale* ends with an epilogue called "Historical Notes on *The Handmaid's Tale*", a transcript of a University Conference, "the Twelfth Symposium on Gileadean Studies" from year 2195. The main part of the epilogue consists of Professor Pieixoto's lecture "Problems of Authentication in Reference to *The Handmaid's Tale*". The lecture gives overall information of Gilead, and surprises the readers: the professor claims that the novel is a reconstruction of thirty recorded cassette tapes of speech, found by accident, edited and named by him and his colleague. Thus *The Handmaid's Tale* can be seen as a novel of letters: not written letters but spoken letters. The story of the tapes is from the late 1980s or the early 1990s. In the light of the epilogue, we see that there is an external narrator, who has brought the handmaid's narrative to our attention, and reveals himself at the end.

Indeed, *The Handmaid's Tale* is the most studied Atwood novel. There are monographs and anthologies of articles, which concentrate on the novel. In addition to this, there is a large amount of articles and academic seminar papers that analyse *The Handmaid's Tale*. Bouson concentrates on the novel's representation of patriarchal culture and its misogyny and female survival strategies in this predicament. According to her, Atwood is "[r]elentlessly exposing the misogyny underlying present-day culture (…) critique of the sexual degradation an violence to which women are subjected" (Bouson 1993, 139). Howells analyses Offred's storytelling as a means of escape and transgression, using Cixous's thoughts of writing in the feminine. Howells sees that through her narrating, the protagonist is able to find her self and even her "own Medusa laughter" (Howells 1996, 139). Cooke reads *The Handmaid's Tale* as a satire and explores the novel's satire's targets (Cooke 2004, 114, 134-135).

The novel was made into a Hollywood film production in 1990, starring Natasha Richardson. It was directed by Volker Schlöndorff, and Harold Pinter dramatised the novel with Atwood's help. There are several writers who discuss and analyse the film and the differences between the novel and film (see e.g. Stein 1999, 78-79; Cooper 1995; Kirtz 1996; Willmott 1995.) The film is much less complex and multifaceted than the novel. In a usual Hollywood way, the radical novel is sugar coated and watered down.[72]

The food motif in *The Handmaid's Tale* is an undercurrent, which is motivated by the protagonist's deep symbolic hunger. She is not physically hungry, but mentally she is starving. In the context of the repressive society,

Offred's dreams of food suggest rebellion and transgression. The daily and the banal are potentially powerful in Gilead. The oppressive community enforces symbolic hunger: desire to be what one wants, to have rights and own things. Offred has a strong desire to be loved and recognised by another person.

The chapter "Hunger and Eating in Gilead" concentrates on the novel's motif of concrete and symbolic eating. In "The Hungry Women" I explore the novel's female characters' desires and needs. In "The Ambivalent Men" I analyse the male characters of *The Handmaid's Tale*: the protagonist's husband Luke, Offred's "owner" the Commander, and her lover Nick. "Hunger and Love" studies Offred's symbolic hunger, which is potentially powerful and transgressive in the Gilead, and the novel's ending.

7.1 Hunger and Eating in Gilead

> I have enough daily bread, so I won't waste time on that. It isn't the main problem. The problem is getting it down without choking on it. (HMT, 204.)

To Offred time in Gilead is "heavy as fried food" (HMT, 279). Handmaid's food is boring, repetitive and rationed, because the state of Gilead is in war. An orange is an unexpected delight, only rarely available in the store's selection. Her diet denies pleasure and indulgence; like her whole life in Gilead it gives no room for her desire. Thus her meals and dietary habits are a symbol of her position and her possibilities. The exceptions to her diet occur during the Birth Day, when handmaids get sandwiches and spiked juice, and in summer, when Offred and her shopping partner Ofglen eat strawberries abundantly.

Offred's food is nutritionally balanced and healthy: She is made into "a worthy vessel" (HMT, 75) for pregnancy. She is not allowed to cook herself, and if she does not finish her portions it will be reported and she might be punished. Coffee, alcohol and cigarettes are forbidden for the handmaids because of their status as possible mothers. Offred yearns for cigarettes, which are a symbol of pleasure and desire.

The protagonist longs to make food and to chat in the kitchen with other women. These things are denied; the only thing she can or has to do with food is to buy it from the store on her daily walk. Longing for making food is also yearning to touch:

> I would help Rita to make the bread, sinking my hands into that soft resistant warmth which is so much like flesh. I hunger to touch something, other than cloth or wood. I hunger to commit the act of touch. (HMT, 21.)

The bread dough represents the freedom of the time before revolution. The smell of yeast makes the protagonist feel nostalgia. It makes her think of motherhood and the power to have a kitchen of one's own where to do what one wants. Kitchen represents also friendship and company. She is forced to eat alone in her room, and she hungers for talk and "gossip" (HMT, 21).

Red meat is rare in Gilead and people mostly eat white meat. Even the Commanders do not get meat every day. Red meat can be seen as a symbol of masculinity, and lack of it might suggest that even the men in high positions are not fully satisfied with the order of Gilead.

Handmaids are not allowed to have any cosmetics such as lotions or makeup, because they are seen as "vanities" (HMT, 107). Although it is forbidden, Offred steals butter and uses it to moisturise her facial skin. Butter is a sign of her defiance and rebellion: with it, she has a say over her body (see also Parker 1995, 355; Sceats 2000, 113). As she points out, it is a shared secret between the handmaids: "As long as we do this (…) we can believe that we will some day get out" (HMT, 107). It makes her "smell like an old cheese" (ibid.) and she notes that it will go rancid on her skin – this symbolises the ambivalence of this activity and hope. The pronoun "we" implies that the butter stands for the handmaids' communal resistance towards Gilead, their stubborn belief that there is a future without the tyranny.

Although there are numerous symbols of Offred's resistance, there are also moments that decrease Offred's desire to rebel. While watching her morning eggs, she thinks:

> It's a barren landscape, yet perfect; it's the sort of desert the saints went into, so their minds would not be distracted by profusion. I think that this is what God must look like: an egg. The life of the moon may not be on the surface, but inside.
> The egg is glowing now, as if it had an energy of its own. To look at the egg gives me intense pleasure. (…) Women used to carry such eggs between their breasts, to incubate them. That would have felt good.
> The minimalist life. Pleasure is an egg. (HMT, 120.)

The protagonist compares the egg to the moon, god and to a saint's place of meditation, her hermitage. She connects the egg with pleasure of hatching, being pregnant. The egg becomes a symbol for the whole universe: its creator, its planets and birth. The egg means contemplation and peace to Offred, a wish to be happy and content. She finds this pleasure dangerous: she is afraid she will get used to the situation, and stops remembering the past and planning for a different future. The egg and the pleasure it gives threatens her defiance and rebellion, and offers slavery and stability.

The handmaid educator Aunt Lydia tells the women in the Red Centre that there is "[f]reedom to and freedom from" (HMT, 34), and in Gilead women have "freedom from" instead of the earlier "freedom to". Now women are "protected" (ibid.) from certain types of sexual harassment, for instance the influence of pornography. The protagonist has "freedom" from junk food and bad habits, but it does not make her happy (see also Sceats 2000, 111).

For Offred the unhealthy food represents happiness and control over her life. When the protagonist remembers the time before the revolution, the "freedom to", food is part of her memories. She knows that the food and drink were "bad for me, no doubt" (HMT, 61), but it was part of her freedom and pleasure (see also Sceats 2000, 111).

In one of her embedded narratives of her past, Offred narrates how her friend Myra did a university paper on date rape and to the protagonist it sounds like a trendy food: "Date rape, I said. You're so trendy. It sounds like some kind of dessert. *Date Rapé*" (HMT, 48). The quotation's casual way of speaking of sexual violence represents the women's past before the change in the sexual atmosphere. The connection between food and rape decreases the painful reality of actual rape, but it also suggests that date rape is as an usual event as a dessert, something that follows after the meal paid by one's companion. It is not an unheard of assumption that heterosexual men may think that sex is something women give in return for a dinner in a restaurant. Women in Gilead have "freedom from" this.

In "The Historical Notes", the novel's epilogue, which discusses the practices of Gilead from a safe distance of over two hundred years, professor Pieixoto notes that the Aunts were named after

> commercial products available to women in the immediate pre-Gilead period, and thus familiar and reassuring to them – the names of cosmetic lines, cake mixes, frozen desserts, and even medicinal remedies (…) It was a brilliant stroke (HMT, 321).

As the lecturer states, the names of edibles and other especially female things like cosmetics, give women the feeling of safety and familiarity: something remains after the huge change in their lives. The names may give comfort without women's conscious acknowledgement. On the other hand, the meanings of these names change and they become signs of cruelty, stubborn fundamentalism and crazed religiousness. The handmaid educator Aunt Helena used to work for Weight Watchers before the revolution, which suggests that her moulding of female bodies into compliant and acceptable continues in a reminiscent form (see also Stein 1999, 81-82).

When, years later, Offred sees Aunt Lydia in an execution ceremony, "the Particicution ceremony", she thinks: "Hatred fills my mouth like spit" (HMT, 286) and feels hungry. This may suggest an unconscious connection between the Aunt and eating. Hatred is an oral feeling, suggesting rage and desire to devour Aunt Lydia, to consume and destroy her. Parker sees that the mouth, "the site of ingestion of both food and feelings" is a centre of emotions to Atwood's protagonists (Parker 1995, 359). Here, it is so.

7.2 Hungry Women

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Offred is in inner struggle with her past's intimate people: her mother, her husband Luke, and her friend Moira.

The protagonist's mother represents, at least in part, the opposite values to Gilead's patriarchal order. She was a radical feminist, who by choice became a single mother at the age of thirty-seven. Her opinions are often angry towards

men: "A man is just a woman's strategy for making other women (…) there's something missing in them, even the nice ones" (HMT, 130-131). She considers her daughter and her traditional heterosexual lifestyle wrong: "[Y]ou're just a backlash" (HMT, 131). The mother is bitter because her feminist battles are not appreciated, and the daughter's generation takes the benefits the earlier generation fought for as granted, as trivial.

In a way, there are also similarities between the protagonist's mother and Gilead's regime. Both are fiercely against pornography: the mother took part in magazine burnings. They both see genders as polarised and at war. Offred sees that Gilead is partially the making of women like her mother, women who insisted on separate women's culture (see also Sceats 2000, 113). She speaks to her mother in her mind: "You wanted a women's culture. Well, now there is one. It isn't what you meant, but it exists" (HMT, 137). It seems that *The Handmaid's Tale* warns us about separatism and emphasis on differences between genders: we should consider what we share, what we have in common, too, not only our differences.

This difference between the radical single feminist woman and the compliant heterosexual married woman is repeated in the protagonist and her relationship with her friend Moira. Moira is strong, independent, and lesbian, and the protagonist finds her behaviour and actions admirable but also frightening. Moira's opinions are very close to those of the protagonist's mother.

Moira escapes from the Red Centre, and becomes a legend, a symbol for freedom, and hope for the handmaids:

> Moira was out there somewhere. She was at large, or dead. (…) The thought of what she would do expanded till it filled the room. (…) Moira had power now, she'd been set loose, she'd set herself loose. (…) I think we found this frightening.
> Moira was like an elevator with open sides. She made us dizzy. Already we were losing the taste of freedom, already we were finding these walls secure. (…) Nevertheless Moira was our fantasy. We hugged her to us, she was with us in secret, a giggle; she was lava beneath the crust of daily life. In the light of Moira, the Aunts were less fearsome and more absurd. (HMT, 143.)

The handmaids hunger being like Moira, but are too afraid to act like her. Moira represents the different way of coping from Offred in all the novel's narrative lines. Moira is the rebellious and Offred the compliant one. In Gilead, Moira becomes a prostitute in the brothel, because she will not yield to the regular rules.

The Commander's wife represents a total contrast to the values that Offred's mother stands for in the novel. When, before Gilead, Offred's mother is a radical feminist who supports female separatism, the Commander's wife is a preacher and a hymn singer called Serena Joy on a religious television channel. Through Offred's eyes Serena Joy is portrayed as both a victim and a slightly monstrous person.

When the protagonist comes to the house, she desires the Commander's wife to be "an older sister, a motherly figure, someone who would understand

and protect me" (HMT, 26). This hunger for an understanding adult who would make her life better is in vain.

Serena Joy is trapped, and the protagonist realises that it is the wife's own doing in a complex way: a woman, who used to be a religious preacher and demand publicly that women should stay at home, is miserable when it happens for real and to her. Now Serena Joy

> doesn't make any speeches any more. She has become speechless. She stays in her home, but it doesn't seem to agree with her. How furious she must be, now that she's been taken at her word. (HMT, 56.)

Serena Joy has been a part of the religious uprising that created Gilead. When seeing Offred for the first time, she says, "As for my husband (…) he's just that. My husband. (…) It's one of the things we fought for" (HMT, 26). In the character of Serena Joy, the novel shows that even religious uprisings that have women as planners, do not necessarily serve women's interests or benefit them. Serena Joy has been given public voice when she wanted women to stay at home, but when it happens it happens to her also, and she is silenced and trapped. She hungers for a child by Offred, and is willing to break laws and regulations for that. If Offred would get a child, Serena Joy would have her desired offspring and get rid of the handmaid in her house for good.

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Offred's symbolic hunger is transgression against Gilead, against the handmaid's oppressed position.

Offred feels that her tattoo in the ankle, her handmaid code is "a Braille [the Commander] can read, a cattlebrand. It means ownership" (HMT, 266). Thus the Commander is her owner, the one who has tattooed and marked her as his property. There is no space for her true self in Gilead's official practices: she is a compliant false self. When Offred prepares herself for the Ceremony night – where the Commander will have intercourse with her while his wife is present, and preceded by a prayer which the entire household (the driver Nick and two Marthas) attends – she thinks of herself as a product: "My self is a thing I must now compose, as one composes a speech. What I must present is a made thing, not something born" (HMT, 76). She needs to have "armour" and to "steel myself" (HMT, 168).

The ambiguous images of desire and being desired, being an object and putting one's self on display, are iterative in the novel. Before the Ceremony the protagonist feels "washed, brushed, fed, like a prize pig" (HMT, 79). It is an image of a victim, but it is also ironic in its banality and strong vividness. She even hopes to have a pig ball, which pigs play with. The image of a woman as a pig with a huge prize bow on her neck is close to grotesque, carnival and reminiscent of a cartoon strip. The protagonist also compares herself to bread, after she has buttered her face: "Buttered, I lie on my single bed, like a piece of toast" (HMT, 108). The image is again a mixture of victimisation and self-irony. On the other hand she is an edible, somebody's easy breakfast, but on the other hand the butter is a mark of her cunningness and strength, and her pleasure.

Offred sometimes enjoys her role as an object of desire and excitement, and looks at the Guardian's eyes at the passport checkpoint:

> It's an event, a small defiance of rule, so small as to be undetectable, but such moments are the rewards I hold out for myself, like the candy I hoarded, as a child (…) Such moments are possibilities, tiny peepholes. (…) I know they are watching, these two men who aren't yet permitted to touch women. They touch with their eyes instead and I move my hips a little (…) I enjoy the power, power of a dog bone, passive but there. (HMT, 31-32.)

These moments are precious to Offred, her "tiny peepholes" to another world. The sexual tension and flirtation are mutinous and deeply pleasurable: she compares them to candy she stored as a child. She sees herself as passive on the surface, active beneath, a catch for these men, trying to cause a reaction of desire in them. She hungers for them to want her. Their desire is her power, one of the few powers left to her, and thus one of her limited chances of changing her present life. As Parker observes, here Offred uses power inside the oppressive power that controls her (Parker 1995, 365).

In terms of the feminist object-relations theory, the men in Gilead hold the power to recognise women, and the only way women can achieve this power of giving recognition to another is to be "desirable" and "unattainable" (Benjamin 1988, 171).

The handmaids desire becoming pregnant. When Janine, or Ofwarren is pregnant, she enjoys showing herself, knowing how others hunger for her state:

> She's a magic presence to us, an object of envy and desire, we covet her. She's a flag on a hilltop, showing us what can still be done: we too can be saved. (…) She's come to display herself. She's glowing, rosy, she's enjoying every minute of this. (…) her partner, who beside her looks spindly, shrunken; as we all do. The pregnant woman's belly is like a huge fruit. (HMT, 36-37.)

The protagonist sees the threat around Janine: "Jealousy could get her, it's happened before" (HMT, 36). Frustrated and envious women may hurt the pregnant one, wanting to deny the other what they hunger for themselves. Often the handmaids have problems in giving up their children, and may fight for them fiercely.

Janine's pregnancy does not end happily. There is a triumphant celebration after the birth, but later people find out that the baby did not survive. When Offred sees Janine after the incident, her "face is white and peaked, as if the juice is being sucked out of her" (HMT, 226). Janine has been the most willing student of the Red Centre and a compliant handmaid, and her two pregnancies have resulted in two "shredders" or "Unbab[ies]" (HMT, 226, 122). Janine's example implies that Gilead is bound to collapse: the system does not work even with such an overtly compliant person as Janine, who is ever eager to please and to do everything right.

7.3 The Ambivalent Men

As usual in Atwood's novels, *The Handmaid's Tale*'s protagonist sees all men mysterious: "Who knows what they do, on their own or with other men? (…) Who can tell what they really are? Under their daily-ness" (HMT, 238).

Her Commander is portrayed as a hunter figure, a Bluebeard who has a "studied pose (…) some old come-on from a glossy men's mag" (HMT, 147) and a "forbidden room" (HMT, 148) full of books. He is repeatedly connected with popular images, such as advertisements, paintings and fairytales. These images suggest that he is an example, a representative of the power. He is also somewhat artificial, an imitation of a certain kind of masculinity.

Offred notes of her Commander: "Is there no end to his disguises, of benevolence?" (HMT, 98). She knows he is not good after all; a man of his power in Gilead cannot be, but his surface is pleasing and ordinary. She has examined him closely and "he's given no evidence, of softness" (HMT, 99) – his true character is ambivalent, unknown, and maybe incomprehensible to her.

When the Commander is first introduced in the book, the protagonist sees him possibly coming from her room. He has been in an area that is restricted from him, and her head is full of questions and guessing: "Something has been shown to me, but what is it? (…) the flag of an unknown country (…) it could mean attack, it could mean parley, it could mean the edge of something, a territory" (HMT, 59). The Commander is a man of power, an unknown person who may be an enemy or an ally.

Handmaids are denied reading and words: even the shop signs and the tokens for food are represented as pictures. This deprivation of words is painful for the protagonist and she hungers for letters and writing. The Commander's right to read is compared to eating a steak: "He's like a man, toying with a steak, behind a restaurant window, pretending not to see the eyes watching him from hungry darkness" (HMT, 99). The Commander has the power and the wealth to be the one with the steak and to eat it in the front of the others, who are hungry, dying for the steak.

In their secret and forbidden meetings the Commander wants to play Scrabble with her. Writing and letters are a power in Gilead and in his room he gives her the possibility to play with words, which she finds "kinky in the extreme" (HMT, 163). Words and writing are a source of immense pleasure to Offred. She connects the wordplay with the pleasures of food of the lost days: café au lait, brioche, absinthe, shrimps (HMT, 164). As Sceats notes, the Scrabble reminds Offred of liberty and the freedom of choice (Sceats 2000, 112-113). To Offred, the counters of the game are peppermint candies, and letter c tastes like lime.

When the Commander lets her read magazines and books in his room, she feels like gloating food:

> I read quickly, voraciously, almost skimming, trying to get as much into my head as possible before the next long starvation. If it were eating it would be the gluttony of the famished (HMT, 194.)

Letters and words are delicious edibles and she eats them hungrily after having starved. This strengthens her and makes her feel more powerful. She wants to discuss with the Commander, she starts wanting to know about things again.

They both are testing for their boundaries with the other: how far can I go? In terms of the false self theory, this can be seen as longing for the experience of being seen, and breaking out of the false self. The Commander's character appears to want to be seen by his handmaid in a different light than before: he too needs her recognition; he is needy for her.

In terms of the feminist object-relations, the Commander represents power and recognition to Offred. He is a possibility to become a subject, but his promise is full of danger. Offred is envious of his power, especially of his power over the letters, words and texts: "The pen between my fingers is sensuous, alive almost, I can feel its power, the power of words it contains. Pen Is Envy, Aunt Lydia would say (…) I envy the Commander his pen" (HMT, 196). To the feminist reader, this is a feminist allusion to Freudian concept of penis envy: to Offred, the pen represents phallic power over the others, but also the individual lonely pleasure of writing (see also e.g. Bouson's 1993, 148, analysis of this scene).

As Benjamin argues, in the traditional Oedipal scenario "[d]esire in woman (…) appears as envy – perhaps only as envy". And indeed, how could there not be envy, when women are treated as an inferior sex and not granted subjectivity? (Benjamin 1988, 89.)

Offred also laughs at the Commanders: "There's something powerful in the whispering of obscenities (…) delightful, (…) naughty, secretive, forbidden, thrilling (…) It deflates them" (HMT, 234). This ridiculing is the handmaids' power, rebellion in whispers and thoughts. Through their laughter the Commander's position is comically reversed, his power taken off him. (See also Howells's 1996, 136-139, reading of Offred's "Medusa laughter".)

In the protagonist's memories, the novel's embedded narratives, her husband Luke, too, is ambiguous.

Although she misses Luke, she also remembers negative things of him. When she, because of the revolution, loses her job and her own money and everything is transferred to her husband, she feels that Luke does not mind the situation as much as she thinks he ought to:

> You don't know what it's like, I said. I feel as if somebody cut off my feet. (…) I couldn't put my arms around him. (…) I guess you get all my money, I said. (…) I thought, already he's starting to patronize me. Then I thought, already you're starting to get paranoid. (…) Luke wanted me to make love. Why didn't I want to? (…) It occurred to me that he shouldn't be saying *we*, since nothing that I knew of had been taken away from him.
> We still have each other, I said. It was true. Then why did I sound, even to myself, so indifferent? (…) something had shifted, some balance. I felt shrunken (…) He doesn't mind at all. Maybe he even likes it. We are not each other's, any more. Instead, I am his.

> Unworthy, unjust, untrue. But that is what happened.
> So Luke (…) Was I right? Because we never talked about it (…) I was afraid to. I couldn't afford to lose you. (HMT, 188, 191-192, italics original.)

The narrator's expression "Luke wanted me to make love" stresses singularity and distance. Luke wants her to make love, instead of for instance "Luke wanted to make love", or "Luke wanted us to make love". The shift in power makes the protagonist feel numb and dependent, and dependence makes her feel that she is not entitled to question her husband.

To the feminist reader, the protagonist's suspicions allude that men may feel that their dominance is a natural state of affairs, and sometimes even more a fulfilling situation than equality with women. The protagonist does stress that this is her thought, and possibly even "paranoid". She is saying that the reader can think of her as crazy or right or both, which creates dialogic polyphony. Luke's thoughts are not narrated.

The house's driver Nick, who is one of the Guardians, a sort of police, becomes the object of Offred's symbolic hunger. When she is walking around the house in the middle of the night, which is of course forbidden, she bumps into him: "I want to reach up, taste his skin, he makes me hungry. (…) It's so good, to be touched by someone, to be felt so greedily, to feel so greedy" (HMT, 109-110). Nick can be seen as a representative of power and subjectivity, desirable and unobtainable for the handmaids. Offred narrates: "I make of him an idol, a cardboard cutout" (HMT, 282). She feels that he is not a proper, round character in her mind and in her life, just a satisfier of her hunger – and conversely definitely not "just", but everything she needs. He remains a mystery to her, although she desires his recognition: "I tell him my real name, and feel that therefore I am known" (HMT, 282).

Like all Atwood's first person narrators, Offred acknowledges her deficiencies as a narrator. There are things she does not know, for instance the fates of Luke or her daughter, so she imagines and invents them. At times she is keen to alter the truth so it would be less hurtful and embarrassing, but she also painstakingly corrects the falsely coloured passages. Offred repeatedly says, "this is a reconstruction" (HMT, 150).

This is visible in her relationship with Nick and her narratives of their encounters. Offred is at times apologetic of her behaviour and the nature of her narrative:

> I wish this story were different. I wish it were more civilized. I wish it showed me in a better light (…) I am coming to a part you will not like at all, because in it I did not behave well, but I will try nonetheless to leave nothing out. After all you've been through, you deserve what I have left, which is not much but includes the truth. (…) I went back to Nick. Time after time, on my own, without Serena knowing. It wasn't called for, there was no excuse. I did not do it for him, but for my self entirely. (…) I told you it was bad. (HMT, 279-280.)

In this quotation, the extratextual and intratextual addressees are both talked to. If one thinks of the style, the intended reader might be her husband, or her daughter, but it can also be anyone, for instance the other handmaids of Gilead.

She does not find the addressee totally sympathetic; she is pleading for understanding because of her circumstances. "After all you've been through" can allude to fellow sufferers, but also to the readers and their reading of the novel.

As an implicated reader, I wish to give her the knowledge that I pardon her, that I do not mind a bit, that I understand her behaviour, but as part of the implicated reading process, I am addressed but I cannot address the text and the character that is my significant other in the text. I am left to "wander" as a "ghostly reader". (Pearce 1997, 24-25.)

Offred's feelings of embarrassment and shame for her involvement with Nick make her tell several versions of their first arranged private meeting:

> His mouth is on me, his hands, I can't wait and he's moving, already, love, it's been so long, I'm alive in my skin, again, arms around him, falling and water softly everywhere, never-ending. (…) I made that up. It didn't happen that way. Here is what happened. (…) It didn't happen that way either. I'm not sure how it happened; not exactly. All I can hope for is a reconstruction: the way love feels is always only approximate. (…) I would like to be ignorant. Then I would not know how ignorant I was. (HMT, 274-275.)

Guilt and pleasure are in conflict in the above scene. Offred's conflicting emotions and the problematic, illegal situation colour her narration. Her first story tells us about a passionate, wordless encounter, the second narrates more cynical, reserved attitudes especially from Nick's side, the third tells us how Offred is unable to forget Serena Joy, the planner of the event, and her husband Luke during her time with Nick. The third is the most guilt-ridden. In all, she is hungry for being touched and recognised. The first version shows a healing process, during which the protagonist feels whole and alive after a long time of feeling divided and false.

Stressing the scene by telling it thrice suggests that the event is pivotal in Offred's life. This is a climax, from which on her life changes dramatically.

7.4 Hunger and Love

As usual in Atwood's novels, *The Handmaid's Tale*'s ending is open and leaves room for interpretation and speculation. There are actually two endings: the ending of Offred's story, and the epilogue.

At the end of Offred's narrative, things get heated up in Offred's life and her household. She is certain that she is pregnant to Nick, and does not want to give the baby to Commander and Serena Joy. Offred's friend, subversive handmaid Ofglen dies, probably hangs herself because her treason has been revealed. Serena Joy finds out that Offred and her Commander have had secret meetings. Offred waits in her room for what will happen next, contemplating on suicide. Not only the Gilead and its death punishments threaten her life, but her own desire to die, to be "safe" (HMT, 223), too. Thoughts of suicide have

coloured narrator's story since the beginning of the novel: death is represented as a way to escape the abuse, to be one's own self again.

In her room, she hears the secret police Eyes' car arriving. The reader knows that Ofglen killed herself when hearing the same sound, and the reader is alarmed: will Offred do the same thing?

Nick comes to her, says this is an effort to save her, that she should go with them, trust them, and him. In last sentences, Offred ponders what to do, should she trust him or not:

> The van waits in the driveway, its double doors stand open. The two of them, one on either side now, take me by the elbows to help me in. Whether this is my end or a new beginning I have not way of knowing: I have given myself over into the hands of strangers, because it can't be helped.
> And so I step up, into the darkness within; or else the light. (HMT, 307.)

The van can suggest death: maybe Offred will be executed in front of the other handmaids. It can suggest life: maybe these people are here to save her. If this is the case, then Nick saves her: love saves her from Ofglen's fate. We, like Offred on her way to the van, have no way of knowing.

The critics have often discussed *The Handmaid's Tale*'s feminist politics. Some see that the novel undermines feminism because Offred finds a love affair more important than the handmaid underground group, which Ofglen's character represents (see e.g. Stein 1999, 81). Indeed, Offred does not want to be politically active, but prefers her private bliss to active rebellion and risky commitment.

On the other hand, according to the seventies feminist slogan, private is political. Offred's revolution starts from herself: she becomes more whole and a more defiant person through her love affair and pregnancy. To her, there is a private, singular, but radical revolution, which forces her to act, or at least to ask for help from the others. As Stein writes, Offred does rebel against Gilead through her body and sexuality, and by telling her tale (Stein 1999, 85). Like *Bodily Harm*'s Rennie, also Offred becomes a subversive.

An intense yearning, desire for recognition and sexual fulfilment (in the largest sense) is present in the novel from the very first page. It appears that *The Handmaid's Tale* argues that desire, and human need to be desired and recognised are more powerful than any regulations or laws, or authoritarian regimes.

One of the suggestions of the novel's ending is that desire, hunger for love and parenthood are priorities for people, and drive over Gilead.

Pearce sees that *The Handmaid's Tale* addresses a female reader, as, in her opinion, most feminist writing of today does. This strategy of address engages us as feminist and implicated readers. In many instances, Offred speculates on her narrative and her control over it, and her control over her life:

> I would like to believe this is a story I'm telling. I need to believe it. I must believe it. Those who can believe that such stories are only stories have a better chance.
> If it's a story I'm telling, then I have control over the ending. Then there will be an ending, to the story, and real life will come after it. I can pick up where I left off.

> It isn't a story I'm telling.
> It's also a story I'm telling, in my head, as I go along. (…) You don't tell a story only to yourself. There's always someone else. Even when there is no one.
> A story is like a letter. *Dear You*, I'll say. Just you, without a name. Attaching a name attaches *you* to the world of fact, which is riskier, more hazardous: who knows what the changes are out there, of survival, yours? (…) *You* can mean thousands.
> I'm not in any immediate danger, I'll say to you.
> I'll pretend you can hear me.
> But it's no good, because I know you can't. (HMT, 49-50, italics original.)

Offred's poignant, repeated discussion to and of "you" points not only to the extratextual readers, but also to intratextual ones. For instance, she can be addressing her story to her daughter, or to her husband Luke, or to her friend Moira, or to the "we" in the first chapter, the handmaids. By narrating, Offred creates life for her addressee: "I tell, therefore you are" (HMT, 279).

According to Pearce, we as readers of *The Handmaid's Tale* are

> Brought within the action of the text, into the dangerous future Offred inhabits, we (…) are cautioned about our own slim chances of survival. By joining with Offred and reciprocating her interlocutory need of us, we too risk punishment and death: a risk (…) which may also be read as an ironic metaphor for what it always means to accept our positioning as feminist (that is, politically conscious and committed) as opposed to 'merely' female reader. (Pearce 1997, 69.)

In my opinion, for an implicated reader, Offred's fear of not being heard, of her story remaining untold and unread, is painful. Even though the text addresses us, it does not see us. We cannot change its "tragic structure of feeling" by making ourselves visible.

The epilogue confuses the allied reader, and creates polyphony. The epilogue, "Historical Notes on *The Handmaid's Tale*", is a speech by professor James Darcy Pieixoto from Cambridge University, England, in "Twelth Symposium on Gileadean Studies" in year 2195. In his lecture, Pieixoto tells how he has found the material, the tapes, and what conclusions he has drawn on them. He and his colleague have concluded that the recordings are a reconstruction from the time Offred had already got out of her post in the Commander's house. Pieixoto tells us that he and his colleague have arranged the narrative in the order they find logical, since there is no knowledge of the chronological sequence of the tapes.

In the epilogue, the narrator changes from the internal to the external. Although the handmaid was the narrator of her own story, there is also an external narrator who has made her story into a text and has included the epilogue. To the feminist and implicated readers, this suggests violating the woman's own, very important experience, which the reader has shared. In her autobiography, we, the readers, are addressed as a distant, probably non-existent reader, who may never hear her. We read an intimate confessional autobiography, and ally with her as a confidential hearer of her private thoughts. Then we are suddenly addressed as listeners of an academic lecture, which is a totally different situation: we are listening to something public, polemic, and argumentative.

The epilogue reveals that the Gilead is history and safely distanced, only an interesting period to study, which to the reader is a surprise, even a shocking detachment, and a cruelly ironic, confusing reversal: we have read a moving story, identified with the protagonist, and now academic people are doubting her story, doubting her existence: even laughing at her experiences (there are several reports of "*Laughter*" in parenthesis). For the feminist reader, this sudden change in the novel is deeply gendered: the protagonist who suffers is a woman, and she allies with other women (the handmaids), and with feminist readers. But the lecturer is male and the academic scene of authoritarian lecturing with witty and sovereign lecturer who is rather sceptic and dismissive of *our* protagonist's fate, can be seen marked as masculine in its coldness, distance and irony. As Howells points out, the story moves from "'herstory' to 'history'" (Howells 1996, 146). Cooke remarks that professor Pieixoto is not sensitive to or interested in feminist issues or women's rights, which are present in Offred's (her)story (Cooke 2004, 129). The epilogue suggests that the societies following Gilead are misogynist, too.

On the other hand, the epilogue also gives important and interesting information on how the state of Gilead was born, and of its cultural and historical context. For the feminist reader, it appears as a worthy contextualisation and an effort to understand totalitarian regime. The epilogue tells us that Offred's narrative's time was Gilead's early period, and was followed by the middle and the late periods. So Offred is a representative of a much bigger group of women than one could have concluded from her narrative alone. The speech shows the handmaid arrangement as a larger social phenomenon than Offred's own narrative, and illustrates other tragic fates, which Offred was of course unaware of. For the implicated reader, Pieixoto's lecture gives the important information that Offred did survive, at least for a while.

The epilogue and the whole book end with the words "Are there any questions?" (HMT, 324). We do not hear what the audience might say after the lecture. This question is also ironic: it is probable that the reader is full of questions but there is no one to answer them (see also Cooke 2004, 125).

From *The Handmaid's Tale*'s dystopia, denied pleasures, and forced healthy eating, we turn to *Cat's Eye*'s fictional autobiography of a woman artist. The novel's food motif is coloured by the protagonist Elaine's past and her feelings of depression and misery.

8 *CAT'S EYE:* FOOD, EATING, AND MISERY

Cat's Eye (1988) is a fictional autobiography. Even though already the book's information page warns readers not to confuse the events or opinions with the author of the book, *Cat's Eye* is commonly considered the most autobiographical novel by Atwood (e.g. Cooke 1998; Stein 1999, 87; Davidson 1997, 14). It includes many familiar features, already present especially in *Surfacing,* like the protagonist's early years without proper school because of the biologist father's field trips, her uncomfortable relationships with other girls, the ambivalent feelings of being in girl scouts, fear of the odd men in the ravine et cetera. In many ways, the sorrowful and anxious way of narrating is reminiscent of *Surfacing*'s style, which creates an image that this story might be what happened afterwards to the protagonist of Atwood's second novel.

Cat's Eye is a portrait of an artist, a *Bildungsroman* and *Kunstlerroman* of a painter. The protagonist is Elaine Risley, a successful painter in her fifties, who returns to Toronto to have a retrospective after living several years in Vancouver, which to her is "as far away from Toronto as I could get without drowning" (CE, 14). Toronto is a city of her childhood, youth and early adulthood, and the memories attached to it are painful. Elaine cannot stop thinking of her former friend Cordelia, whom she hates, and longs to see. Cordelia was her childhood friend and enemy, who does not appear in the novel's present time. She is only there in Elaine's embedded narratives of her past. Cordelia is mostly a ghost, a demon internalised in Elaine's mind.[73] The novel stresses relationships between girls and women much more poignantly than Atwood's earlier novels. *Cat's Eye* concentrates on the (abusive) power issues in women's relationships. In my opinion, the novel's theme is the intense grip of the past: how traumatic experiences in childhood can keep haunting us for the rest of our lives.

The novel contains fifteen parts, which are named after Elaine's paintings that are tied to her biography, especially to her painful memories. The parts begin with the narrative present, Toronto in the 1980s, but turn quickly to Elaine's past. There are three narrative lines: first, the present, second, the past, and third, Elaine's paintings and dreams (see also Banerjee 1990, 513, 518). The

narrative present consists only of a couple of days, but the embedded narratives extend over Elaine's whole life, her fifty decades.

Although Elaine as a narrator does comment on her former self, *Cat's Eye*'s retrospective narrator is not ironic or warmly mocking towards her former self. The narrator's present self and former self share gloominess and desperation. There is not much distance between the narrator and her character (unlike in, for example, *Lady Oracle*). *Cat's Eye* is narrated in the present tense and the focalisation is internal, Elaine is the first person narrator and her earlier self is the first person character.

The narrator is telling a very private story to us: hidden and embarrassing. Sense of loss, sorrow, and painful nostalgia colour the novel. There is, again, a threat around the narrator and her character, her own former self. Elaine's depressive moods and regular hints at death and suicide create and atmosphere of uncertainty: what will happen to her? The narrator's insistence and emphasis on her past suggest again a traumatised narrator. In *Cat's Eye*, the time spent in the past is larger than the amount narrated of the present, and the alternations are not as sudden as in, for instance, *Bodily Harm* and *The Handmaid's Tale*. The memory sequences in *Cat's Eye* are longer, not so much in "bits and pieces" (Bal 1997, 147) as in the former novels.

Cat's Eye begins with a speculation of the nature of time, and time is an important motif in the novel (see also e.g. Davidson 1997, 34-35). Time and its dimensions are problematised by Elaine's brother in their childhood, and these issues continue to trouble and intrigue Elaine in her adulthood.[74] Elaine thinks that one can look back on one's life "down through it, like water. (…) Nothing goes away" (CE, 3).

One of the important and iterative issues in the novel is aging, especially aging from a female perspective during a time when culture and market celebrates youthfulness. This motif is new in Atwood's oeuvre, but from this novel on it starts being more visible, especially so in *The Blind Assassin*.

In my opinion, the motifs like female aging, women as artists, and girls' problematic relationships link the novel to the feminist and female alignment.

The novel's name *Cat's Eye* alludes to a beautiful marble Elaine has. The blue eye is her treasure, suggesting that in her marble she has something of her own, which is often of essential importance to abused children (Miller 1986, 175). It can be seen as a recognising eye, and Elaine sees in it "the eyes of aliens from a distant planet" (CE, 67), which can allude to a hope that there will be another, better place somewhere. As a child, Elaine sees the marble as a protective talisman against the abuse. As an adult, when her mother is dying, Elaine finds the marble and narrates: "I look into it, and see my life entire" (CE, 420). This suggests that the marble is a container of her pain and her hidden memories.

As almost all Atwood's novels, *Cat's Eye* has enjoyed great critical interest. Arnold E. Davidson's monograph *Seeing in the Dark: Margaret Atwood's Cat's Eye* gives a detailed analysis of the novel. It illuminates the contexts, intertexts and the critical reception of the novel. In her biography on Atwood, Cooke analyses the autobiographical elements of *Cat's Eye*. Also Stein discusses the connection

between the author's own life and the novel. (Cooke 1998; Stein 1999, 87.) Mycak concentrates, from a phenomenological perspective, on the issues of time, construction of subjectivity and reality (Mycak 1996, 180-183). In his article, Banerjee explores the motifs of hiding and art in *Cat's Eye* (Banerjee 1990).

In *Cat's Eye*, the motif of food is an undercurrent. The images of concrete food illustrate and symbolise Elaine's feelings of misery, depression, and displacedness. They are also connected with nostalgia and the past. Symbolic hunger and eating are present in Elaine's feelings of herself as a victim, as well as in her obsession with her childhood bully, Cordelia.

"The Trapped Self: Elaine" reads *Cat's Eye*'s images of childhood entrapment and the division of self, and Elaine's concrete and symbolic hungers. In "The Cruel Education" I concentrate on the tormentors of Elaine's life, their hungers and needs. "The Old Light" examines the novel's ending and its ambiguity.

8.1 The Trapped Self – Elaine

> [M]y life is now multiple, and I am in fragments. (CE, 336.)

Elaine is a character, whose self is too involved with the relation to another, too intertwined with another person of the past. This intense internal connection haunts her and makes her depressed and suicidal.

As Bouson writes, *Cat's Eye* is a novel about "psychic vampirism" (Bouson 1993, 160). There is a struggle for survival by trying to defeat the other. Elaine's present life is full of her tormentor Cordelia and other people from her past. She is in struggle with her internalised demons, and cannot stop thinking of them. Her painful childhood has determined her life and still defines her personality in the novel's present time, when Elaine is in her fifties.

Elaine is in continuous internal dialogue with Cordelia. Not only does Cordelia play the main part in her memory sequences, but in addition to this Elaine has imaginary conversations with Cordelia in her head. Coming to Toronto brings back Elaine's old ways of survival, although they are not necessary anymore: "I've started to chew my fingers again. There's blood, a taste I remember" (CE, 9). The past is surfacing: she is hurting herself like she did as a child.

There is a division in Elaine's life. In addition to the part of her that lives in the past, there is another:

> Apart from all this, I do of course have a real life. I sometimes have trouble believing in it, because it doesn't seem like the kind of life I could ever get away with, or deserve. This goes along with another belief of mine: that everyone else my age is an adult, whereas I am merely in disguise. (CE, 14.)

The above quotation suggests insecurity and feelings of inauthenticity and falseness. Elaine feels that she does not deserve the life she has got and she is a child pretending to be adult, differing from all other peers. Elaine's "real life" contains a second husband, travel agency owner Ben, and two adult daughters, and their house in British Columbia. Elaine does not tell us much about her real life, her daughters or her present life with her husband Ben. Elaine's other, "unreal" world is what *Cat's Eye* is all about; it is the novel's subject.

Elaine's career as a painter is a middle ground between these two worlds. In Elaine's view it does not exactly fit in her "real" life. Her art is a mediator between her past and the present, a medium through which she negotiates these two entities. Through her paintings, she is in dialogue with her painful memories, and tries to process them (see also Banerjee 1990, 516).

Like Atwood herself and *Surfacing*'s nameless protagonist, Elaine spends her early childhood in Canadian bush. Her father is an entomologist and they spend time on his field trips. Elaine's mother teaches her and her brother at home, and the children attend school only for short periods of time. Elaine spends most of her time with her older brother and hungers for having girlfriends.

When she turns eight, Elaine's family moves to Toronto for permanent residence. Elaine goes to school there and in her second year she becomes gradually a target for intense bullying by other girls. Moving to Toronto is a watershed in Elaine's life. She observes: "Until I moved to Toronto I was happy" (CE, 22).

The change between the bush and Toronto is visible in terms of food. The food of Elaine's childhood in the bush is very simple, practical and easy to prepare. The family tries to live in unison with nature, eating berries and using them for puddings and sauces. The idea of food is to satisfy hunger, not to give culinary pleasure or to perform one's (class) position in society. At school, Elaine has her first encounter with drinking straws, and "they amaze me" (CE, 48), an example of how different the world in the city is compared to her life before. Cordelia's family eats their eggs from eggcups, a thing Elaine has never heard of. This, and Cordelia's home altogether makes Elaine understand for the first time that they are not a rich family. The Sunday dinners at another friend and bully Grace Smeath's home are strange to Elaine; she does not know the rules, for example she starts eating before saying grace. She finds "Smeath's dinner table" to be the "stronghold of righteousness" (CE, 133), where she is a heathen.

In Toronto, Elaine must start performing the schoolgirl role, which is very difficult to her because she is not used to it. She feels artificial: "I feel strange (…) as if I'm only doing an imitation of a girl" (CE, 55). She is an outsider at school and she has no experience of peer groups. In terms of the false self theory, the word imitation implies that Elaine hides her true self and lets the false self do the school girl act.

With her brother Elaine is used to physical confrontation and challenges. With girls, she finds out that things are very different: "All I have to do is sit on the floor and cut frying pans out of the *Eaton's Catalogue* with embroidery

scissors, and say I've done it badly. Partly this is a relief" (CE, 57). Being a girl is connected with food making, submission, self-denial, and physical stillness. Feeling of relief may suggest that Elaine felt a little out of place when competing and identifying with her brother, who was older and thus stronger and bigger.

The motif of food is often present in the images of bullying and its consequences in *Cat's Eye*. The edible objects that might bring pleasure and usually do, echo misery to Elaine. Elaine buys candy with all the money she has earned as a baby sitter and gives them to the other girls:

> I buy licorice whips, jelly beans, many-layered blackballs with the seed in the middle, packages of fizzy sherbet you suck up through a straw. I dole them out equally, these offerings, these atonements, into the waiting hands of my friends. In the moment just before giving, I am loved. (CE, 144-145.)

Needless to say, the sacrifice has value only for a second. The edibles that might be the pleasure of her life, and the candy day that might mean fun and a break from the every day are painful to her. They symbol her pain and confusion, her uncomfortable and incomprehensible role as a girl. The sweets represent her feelings of being displaced and not accepted.

Elaine has her ninth birthday during the first year of bullying. It is her first birthday party with girl guests, thus it could be memorable and filled with joy. As it is, Elaine cannot remember that particular birthday at all, although she remembers others:

> There must have been a cake, with candles and wishes (…) the only trace they've left on me has been a vague horror of birthday parties, not other people's, my own. I think of pastel icing, pink candles burning in the pale November afternoon light, and there is a sense of shame and failure. (CE, 113.)

Elaine's birthdays and the cakes are since then connected with the feeling of "vague horror", shame, and failure. The cake is not a sign of pleasure and a special day as it could and should be, but of pain and violence.

During the time of intense bullying Elaine has difficulties with her breakfast:

> The porridge is like boiling mud. I know that when it comes time to eat the porridge I will have trouble: my stomach will contract, my hands will get cold, it will be difficult to swallow. Something tight sits under my breastbone. But I will get the porridge down somehow, because it is required. (CE, 126.)

The porridge appears to symbolise the torment, which the day ahead will offer to Elaine. It is difficult and painful, against her nature to stomach it, but she does it. She knows she has to eat it, because it is part of the proper behaviour of a girl.

As Sceats notes, this compliant behaviour echoes Elaine's compliance with her tormentors (Sceats 2000, 115). In my opinion, this suggests that Elaine's invisibility in the eyes of her parents enforces all her compliant behaviour. She concentrates on the details of the toaster or spoons, trying to avoid thinking that

she has to go to school after this breakfast. She thinks of putting her hand into the toaster, inflicting pain. The breakfast is a part and a sign of the daily misery, and her thoughts during it describe her situation.

Also, Elaine's Saturday lunch, an alphabet soup that her mother thinks as "a cheerful treat for children" (CE, 146) and which Elaine used to enjoy, picking up the letters and playing with them, becomes associated with her feelings of entrapment. Now "the letters taste like nothing" (ibid.). (I will return to the iterative "nothing" later.)

Christmas turkey is not a pleasure to Elaine during this time either:

> [The turkey] resembles a trussed, headless baby. It has thrown off its disguise as a meal and has revealed itself to me for what it is (…) I'm eating a wing (…) of a tame turkey, the stupidest bird in the world, so stupid it can't even fly anymore. I am eating lost flight. (CE, 140.)

In the conversation between the adults the turkey represents utmost stupidity, the submitting traits of a domesticated animal, and its breeding echoes human greed, cruelty and ignorance. Elaine identifies with the qualities of the turkey: the tameness, the stupidity other girls claim her to possess, lost possibilities, and a lousy fate.

Elaine's mother seems to have a hunch of what is going on, but her effort is a mere shy suggestion that Elaine does not have to be with the others if she does not want to. This scene takes place in the kitchen where the mother and the daughter bake muffins together:

> "You don't have to play with them," my mother says, "There must be other little girls you can play with instead." (…) "You have to learn to stand up for yourself (…) Don't let them push you around. Don't be spineless. You have to have more backbone." (…) I think of sardines and their backbones. You can eat their backbones. (…) This must be what my own backbone is like: hardly there at all. What is happening to me is my own fault, for not having more backbone. (…) "I wish I knew what to do," she [the mother] says. This is a confession. Now I know what I've been suspecting: as far as this thing is concerned, she is powerless.
> I know that muffins have to be baked right away, right after they've been ladled out, or they'll be flat and ruined. I can't afford the distraction of comfort. If I give in to it, what little backbone I have left will crumble away to nothing.
> I pull away from her. "They need to go into the oven," I say. (CE, 168.)

This scene could be idyllic: mother and daughter baking together. It appears that the mother is unable to take parental responsibility of the situation and Elaine is left alone (see also Banerjee 1990. 518, 520). The mother even partially blames Elaine for the bullying, saying that she should have "more backbone". Elaine takes the blame to herself: she is compared to unbaked muffins and sardines: weak, small and soft edibles. Elaine's strained thought, "They need to go into the oven", end the chapter and the scene with emphasis. Her mother cannot and will not help her: Elaine has to go to the oven, to the grill (see also Davidson 1997, 52). She has no option. She cannot be weak, or she will collapse: "what little backbone I have left will crumble away to nothing".

Elaine's compliance to the other girls ends with a scene of epiphany. Cordelia throws Elaine's hat off the bridge to the ravine, which is considered

forbidden and dangerous. Elaine goes to get it and almost drowns in the icy water of the ravine and is threatened by hypothermia.

When she lies in the snow, losing feeling in her body, she has a vision of Virgin Mary, which makes her strong enough to go home. This epiphany gives her strength to resist the others. They do not stop bullying, but Elaine stops caring about it and hearing them, and starts having other friends. She understands how much the other girls needed to have her as a safety valve. They hunger having Elaine as their boxing sack – it makes their own lives bearable. Elaine sees their "need" and "greed" (CE, 208) for her to come back and play her part as their victim, but she refuses to.

As a teenager, Elaine becomes the one to torment Cordelia. Teenager Elaine has "a mean mouth" (CE, 251), which she uses to insult everybody. Her verbal aggression appears to be sometimes beyond her own control, she hurts even though she would not always want to, which suggests that a protective mechanism has become a compulsory behaviour pattern. Elaine answers back in the same style that Cordelia used to, but now Cordelia takes the place of the victim. The verbal abuse is re-enacted: the scene is the same, but the roles change. In this scenario, there is always a victim and an abuser. Originally it was Cordelia and her father (which I will discuss later), then Elaine and Cordelia, and now Cordelia and Elaine.

The motifs of double and division are strongly present in the representation of Elaine and Cordelia's relationship. The phrase "half a face" is repeated in the novel. It is connected with a horror comic, which frightens Elaine, it is a title of a chapter in *Cat's Eye*, and it is a name of the painting the adult Elaine has painted of Cordelia. Elaine analyses the working process and the ready painting, which is in the Toronto exhibition:

> This is the only picture I ever did of Cordelia, Cordelia by herself. *Half a Face*, it is called: an odd title, because Cordelia's entire face is visible. But behind her (…) is another face, covered with a white cloth. (…) I had trouble with this picture. It was hard for me to fix Cordelia in one time, at one age. I wanted her about thirteen, looking out with that defiant, almost belligerent stare of hers. *So?*
> But the eyes sabotaged me. They aren't strong eyes; the look they give the face is tentative, hesitant, reproachful. (…) Cordelia is afraid of me, in this picture.
> I am afraid of Cordelia. (…) I'm afraid of being Cordelia. Because in some way we changed places, and I've forgotten when. (CE, 243.)

The painting points out how complex the power play between Cordelia and Elaine is. Although Cordelia was Elaine's torturer, it was the other way around, too. Elaine intends to make the image of Cordelia look strong and mean, but the painting ends up showing Cordelia as vulnerable and frightened, scared of Elaine. The argument of Elaine as a victim is only half the truth, and the portrayal of Cordelia as a powerful enemy depicts only half her face, half the truth (see also Davidson 1997, 68). Elaine and Cordelia are intertwined, unable to tell themselves apart. It is unclear where the other one ends and the other starts. In dialogic terms, the painting demands polyphony of Elaine's past, and does not allow one-sided interpretation. They are both deeply symbolically hungry in their interaction.

In the context of feminist object-relations theory, Elaine and Cordelia's relationship suggests female feeling of embeddedness in another person. Chodorow sees that Western women often have intense feelings of guilt, which "seem to grow out of and to reflect lack of adequate self/other distinctions and a sense of inescapable embeddedness in relationships to others" (Chodorow 1989, 58). Elaine feels she is trapped inside herself with Cordelia, there is not enough distance between them for her to feel she is an individual.

For some feminist readers, the portrayal of girls' cruelty towards each other may appear as non-feminist (see e.g. Davidson 1997, 22-23). To this feminist reader, however, it is not so. This representation can be seen as an example of Atwood's way of being in dialogue with the feminist and patriarchal discourses. On one hand, it can be argued that *Cat's Eye* enforces misogynist conception of women and girls as passively aggressive and verbally talented tormentors. On the other hand, Atwood is showing what kind of power girls have – that girls are powerful too – and how this power is influenced by larger forces, such as family structure and gender arrangements in society (see also Bouson 1993, 183).

Atwood says in an interview regarding *Cat's Eye*:

> [W]riters haven't dealt with girls age eight to twelve because this area of life was not regarded as serious "literary" material. You get girls this age in *juvenile* fiction (…) I sometimes get interested in stories because I notice a sort of blank – why hasn't anyone written about this? *Can* it be written about? Do I dare to write it? (Ingersoll 1992, 236, italics original.)

From this, it appears that Atwood's intention has been, in part, to fill out a blank in women's portrayal in fiction for adults, and to make the girls' experiences significant and meaningful, too, in addition to the repeated portrayals of boyhood in male writers fiction for adult readers.

Elaine's past lead to emotional frozenness and depression in her adulthood: to "the days of nothing" (CE, 121). She narrates:

> There are days when I can hardly get out of bed. I find it an effort to speak. I measure progress in steps, the next one and the next one, as far as the bathroom. These steps are major accomplishments. I focus on taking the cap off the toothpaste, getting the brush up to my mouth. I have difficulty lifting my arm to do even that. I feel I am without worth, that nothing I can do is of any value, least of all to myself.
> *What do you have to say for yourself?* Cordelia used to ask. *Nothing*, I would say. It was a word I came to connect with myself, as if I was nothing, as if there was nothing there at all. (CE, 43, italics original.)

The word "nothing" is of great importance in the book, and iterative in regard to Elaine and her painful memories. Throughout the novel, Elaine is portrayed having waves of severe depression. When she has problems with her marriage with Jon and her painting, she even tries to commit suicide, feeling "inadequate and stupid, without worth" (CE, 394). Before doing it, she hears a voice: "Not menacing but exited, as if proposing and escapade, a prank, a treat. Something treasured, and secret. The voice of a nine-year-old child" (CE, 396). This, of

course, alludes to Cordelia. When there are problems in her adult life, the childhood is back with its worst memories, tempting her to end her life.

Elaine has several revenge fantasies about meeting Cordelia. She imagines Cordelia as homeless and abused, and the most pleasurable image is of Cordelia dying:

> Cordelia in an iron lung, then, being breathed, as an accordion is played. A mechanical wheezing sound comes from around her. She is fully conscious, but unable to move or speak. I come into the room, moving, speaking. Our eyes meet. (CE, 8.)

Elaine wants Cordelia to recognise her power and success. She thinks that she would tell Cordelia "whatever would make me look good" (CE, 6). In the scenario, Elaine is in charge and can do whatever she wants when Cordelia is able to do nothing. Elaine wants Cordelia to see her, to understand that she is there, to see that Elaine is doing fine, at least better than Cordelia. The iron lung is "a gigantic sausage roll of metal" (CE, 7), enclosing Cordelia as its victim. The sausage, a mixture of meat chopped up and minced, eats up Cordelia, making her a part of it. The giant sausage stresses Cordelia's smallness and helplessness, her harmlessness and misery: she cannot hurt Elaine; she cannot even try to.

Elaine also pictures Cordelia coming to the opening of her exhibition: Elaine coolly holding her glass of wine and seeing Cordelia enter, not spilling one drop, and "looking successful" (CE, 21). The unspilled wine is a symbol of her position, her aura of calm and not caring. These daydreams suggest symbolic hunger for revenge, to show that Cordelia means "nothing" to Elaine.

The childhood is always present to Elaine; the painful incidents are restaged and felt again. Coffee appears to be a protective substance for Elaine. The adult Elaine seems addicted to coffee, she needs "thick, jolting, poisonous coffee" (CE, 18). It gives her energy and drives away the tiredness, the nothingness and the misery. Coffee is "[j]itter in a cup. It cheers me up to know I'll soon be so tense" (CE, 44). When she is suddenly interviewed, coffee "seethes" (CE, 95) in her, giving her strength, even aggression towards the reporter. She dislikes these situations, and they remind her of Cordelia's cruel games: "*Sit up straight and don't answer back*" (CE, 95, italics original). Elaine is defensive, she feels she is under attack and has a need to retaliate.

Elaine daydreams of making a good change in her diet, starting a new life in which she would take better care of herself:

> I will buy oranges, yogurt without the jam. I will have a positive attitude, take care of myself, I'll feed myself enzymes, and friendly bacteria. These good thoughts carry me (CE, 117.)

The life she has created in another city and with Ben, and his control over her habits does not apply in Toronto and she desires a healthy routine. This kind of daydreaming of a new life style is common in Atwood's novels. There is intense symbolic hunger to start afresh, and food symbolises this. On her way to the

food section of a department store, Elaine gets lost several times, which suggests that her new decisions will not hold or succeed. Finally she decides that she will not buy food from the fancy department store because "I'm too intimidated by it" (CE, 161).

Dieting and healthy eating can also be seen as a "safe" solution, a retreat from other things: you can escape from some painful realisations if you mainly concentrate on eating and food (Noble 1987, 131). Anna Johansson remarks that if new diet means hope for a new life and a new body, stopping dieting may symbolise giving up hope and control (Johansson 2001, 57).

As with Lesje and Nate in *Life Before Man* or with Jake in *Bodily Harm*, a close man controls and improves Elaine's eating habits:

> When I'm with Ben I eat at regular times because he does, I eat regular things, but when I'm alone I indulge in junk food and scavenging (…) It's bad for me, but I need to remember what bad for me is like. I could begin to take Ben for granted (CE, 189.)

The fact that Ben controls their eating does not seem to bother Elaine, on the contrary: "It makes me appreciate him more" (ibid.). This implies that she desires to be taken care of, and will possibly be reckless and self-destructive if somebody does not do that. Elaine does not like her own eating habits and gladly accepts Ben's, which makes her feel that she is being protected from herself. Usually in hetero-sexual relationships women change men's eating: according to studies if a man is married, his eating habits become lighter and healthier (e.g. Lindberg 2003, A14). This reversal in *Cat's Eye* suggests Atwood's typical gender role oscillation strategy.

Elaine compares Ben to a fruit: "he is like an apple, after a prolonged and gluttonous binge" (CE, 403). Ben is fresh and healthy, good for her. Ben is present in the novel only through Elaine's cursory thoughts and short memories. From this little information, however, the feminist reader finds Ben as one of the good men in Atwood's fiction. Elaine thinks: "[I]t was a relief to be with someone who was so uncomplicated, and easily pleased" (CE, 212).

8.2 The Cruel Education

A repeated pattern in *Cat's Eye* is the parents' inability to recognise their children. The novel argues that the peer bullying between children would not exist without the parental approval of it, and parental abuse create and enforce peer bullying. The adult approval of peer bullying is illustrated in Mrs. Smeath's character, and the abuse that drives children to abuse others is shown in Cordelia's family.

As an adult, Elaine still hates her childhood friend Grace's mother Mrs. Smeath and is intrigued by her, desiring to know "what went on in her head" (CE, 62). Mrs. Smeath has a heart condition, "a bad heart" (CE, 61), as Elaine calls it. Indeed, she has a bad heart in more than one way (see also Bouson 1993,

171-172): she knows that the other girls abuse Elaine, but does nothing to stop them from doing so. Actually, she sees the bullying justified because she does not approve of Elaine's atheist family. To her, Elaine is "heathen" (CE, 193), who has to be improved and moulded. This echoes the way of bullying the girls use: overt control and critique of everything Elaine does or says, or how she looks like.

Mrs. Smeath is the adult force and encourager behind Elaine's suffering. In a way, she is the motor of the bullying, giving her blessing to the abuse.

The way in which girls pick on Elaine is an adult way of putting down their children, and it seems clear that at home Cordelia is being treated in a similar way she treats Elaine (this view is commonly held by Atwood scholars, see e.g. Cuder 2003, 47; Sceats 2000, 116-117; Davidson 1997, 17). Elaine sees this too, when she finally gives up the "game": "It's an imitation, it's acting. It's an impersonation, of someone much older" (CE, 207).

The phrases, which Cordelia uses of Elaine, are reminiscent of the parents' way of speaking to unruly children, such as "You should be ashamed. You should have your mouth washed out with soap" (CE, 144) and "Wipe that smirk off your face" (CE, 183). As a teenager, years after the bullying, Cordelia tells that she was frightened by her father's words, and mentions the latter phrase, "Wipe that smirk off your face" (CE, 271). Cordelia repeats the abuse she experienced at her home.

In several places, Cordelia expresses her desire to have something of her own, something outside her family, something unknown and uncontrolled by her father and other punishing family members. In the context of poisonous pedagogy, according to Miller, abused children may have a strong need for a room of their own, a space that they would own and have control over, because their borders have not been respected. It comes from the desire to say no, to feel separate from the others and their needs. (Miller 1986, 175.) The things that Cordelia wants are movingly small and her desire and need for them very strong: a hole in the garden, the things she steals from shops, a doughnut.

After Elaine's Grade Thirteen exams, she sees Cordelia after several months, and Cordelia is "a wreck" (CE, 275). Elaine describes Cordelia's face as "pasty" (CE, 275), which implies an edible, suggesting that Cordelia is ill, used and sucked empty. Cordelia starts eating a doughnut, expressing satisfaction: "I've been waiting for an excuse to eat the rest of these" (CE, 275), but she takes only one bite. It seems as if Cordelia is ashamed of her hunger or that her hunger is satisfied very quickly. Elaine reports that Cordelia has put on weight, so it could be guilt and her family's control that prevents her from eating more. The doughnut suggests confusion, entrapment, shame, and failure.

The last time Elaine sees Cordelia, she has been committed to a mental hospital after a suicide attempt. She has gained weight and has trouble speaking because of the medication. Elaine has mixed feelings: worry, anger and confusion. Elaine thinks: "She is lost" (CE, 379), and does not give her the money Cordelia asks for, or help her to escape. Elaine sees Cordelia as a needy child: "There's a frantic child in there, behind that locked, sagging face" (CE, 380). After Elaine leaves the institution, denying helping Cordelia, she feels

"free, and weightless" (CE, 381), but keeps dreaming of Cordelia. In Elaine's dreams Cordelia "knows I have deserted her, and she is angry" (ibid.).

Elaine's overt empathy in the novel's present time can be seen to echo this scene. She gives money to everyone who asks for it on the street, as if to compensate her earlier denial to help Cordelia. Elaine thinks, "I'm a sucker, I'm a bleeding heart. There's a cut in my heart, it bleeds money" (CE, 163). She is trying to satisfy Cordelia's hunger now, but it is too late.

8.3 The Old Light

During the novel, Elaine accepts and understands her past. She is, at least in part, able to healthily destroy some of her internalised demons, whom she has struggled with.

To Elaine, art and painting represent healing experiences, a way of negotiating and being in dialogue with her symbolic hunger and anger. Bouson argues that in *Cat's Eye*, a "deep emotional trauma [is transformed] into a complex and coded work of art" (Bouson 1993, 160-161). Elaine's paintings are nourishment to a needy self, a way of understanding. In the retrospective of her art, she looks with pity, almost warmth at the Mrs. Smeath of her paintings: "A displaced person; as I was" (CE, 427). Again, her art helps her to see the others as more complex than she had thought; the paintings complicate her memories. She finds she understands Mrs. Smeath now, even her attitude towards Elaine as a girl. Elaine's qualities, her difference were a threat to Mrs. Smeath's rules and stability. Mrs. Smeath's own neediness and vulnerability made her act hatefully towards Elaine.

At the end of *Cat's Eye*, Elaine returns to her childhood suburb and goes to the bridge over the ravine. The ravine is repeated in the novel (and is important in several of her novels, for instance *The Edible Woman* and *Lady Oracle*), and it appears to hold dark information and pain. A raped and murdered girl is found there during Elaine's teen years, the mothers warn that bad men lurk there, and of course Elaine herself almost drowns in there. Elaine imagines seeing Cordelia as a girl, and thinks,

> There is the same shame, the sick feeling in my body, the same knowledge of my own wrongness, awkwardness, weakness; the same wish to be loved; the same loneliness; the same fear. But these are not my own emotions any more. They are Cordelia's; as they always were.
> I'm the older one now, I'm the stronger. (…) *It's all right*, I say to her. *You can go home now*.
> The snow in my eyes withdraws like smoke. (CE, 443, italics original.)

The return to Toronto, to the memories, and to the ravine is an epiphany to Elaine. She is now able to distinguish herself from Cordelia, to see them apart from each other. Her ability to see returns or is born: the trouble in vision is gone now, like "smoke".

On the last two pages of *Cat's Eye*, Elaine is on the plane returning to Vancouver, to her "real life". She talks to Cordelia in her mind: "This is what I miss, Cordelia: not something that's gone, but something that will never happen. Two old women giggling over their tea" (CE, 445). The past is resolved now, at least in part, there can be new thoughts and emotions about Cordelia, such as the feeling of loss. Now, Elaine hungers for Cordelia's company.

In the last sentences, Elaine looks at the stars, and thinks: "It's old light, and there's not much of it. But's enough to see by" (CE, 445). This makes the ending enigmatic. The old light suggests that the past is the light in which Elaine lives *still* her present, and her future. Is the reconciliation after all complete? Is she saying that although she has been able to deal with the issue now, she is never over with it? That the old light always colours her life?

Of all Atwood's novels, I feel most emotionally engaged as an implicated reader by *Cat's Eye*. Its "cycle of disaster and recovery" is, to me, compelling and there is a feeling of familiarity when I read the novel. The described feelings of being an outsider and not accepted, depressed and stunted, strike me with recognition.

I think that it was *Cat's Eye* that first made me think that some of the things Atwood writes about could be from my own life. This feeling has extended to other books and some elements in them later, but it still is *Cat's Eye*, which grips me the deepest. How does she know? I remember thinking while reading the novel for the first time. Still, with my fifth or sixth reading time, I feel the familiarity, which is at times uncomfortable. I am not alone with these feelings. Bouson writes: "[b]ecause the reader of *Cat's Eye* is positioned as an empathic insider (…) proximity to Atwood's character can be unsettling, if not anxiety-provoking" (Bouson 1993, 167.)

With *Cat's Eye* I find the ending, unlike in the earlier novels, to be totally purifying and cathartic. This time, as an implicated reader, I see its openness as deeply hopeful and comforting. There are no feelings of ambiguity or amusement for me.

But as a feminist reader, I'm more critical. The novel is so sad and bleak altogether that the negative tone and being tied to the past is the main issue, in spite of the ending's scenes of reconciliation. This ambiguity gives way to several interpretations (see also Bouson 1993, 181). We do not see Elaine returning to Vancouver, or how her life will be from now on. She is suspended in the air, going to her future of which we know nothing about.

My implicated reading's partial insistence on the ending's positive nature is also visible in other readings of Atwood. When an Atwood interviewer, Earl G. Ingersoll quotes a review, which says, "It [*Cat's Eye*] ends on a note of gaiety, forgiveness and hope" (see Ingersoll 1992, 238), Atwood does not agree. Her reaction to this quote is annoyed, and I as a feminist reader and implicated reader agree with her:

> I'll buy the forgiveness, sort of; but gaiety? Eh? Where? The jolly old women in the plane is something she *doesn't* have. (…) Maybe the readers were identifying with the character's *attempt* to achieve distance, etc. She certainly attempts it, but she doesn't get it. (Ingersoll 1992, 238, italics original.)

From *Cat's Eye*'s images of food and misery we turn to *The Robber Bride*'s three women's three different relationships to food. Like in *Cat's Eye*, the female protagonists' most intense, mostly internal relationship in the *Robber Bride* is to another woman, and their symbolic hunger is often connected to her. *The Robber Bride*'s style is, maybe because of its several main protagonists and external narrator, less dark than that of *Cat's Eye*'s.

9 *THE ROBBER BRIDE*: THREE LITTLE HUNGERS AND THE VAMPIRE

In *The Robber Bride* (1993), the three protagonists – Antonia (Tony) Fremont, Charis (originally Karen), and Rosalind (Roz) Andrews (originally Grunwald) – all have an obsessive attitude towards a fourth character, Zenia. In the course of the novel, the three women remember their lives and their painful pasts, and especially the events including Zenia, whom they all have met while studying at the same university in Toronto. The story begins with women having lunch and seeing Zenia, whose funeral they had attended earlier, thinking that she had died in a bombing in the Middle East.

In *The Robber Bride* – and it is possible to argue that in all of her novels – Atwood is in dialogue with, and even reverses the old pattern of Gothic, gendered thriller, and Grimm brothers' tales of human male predators (such as the Bluebeard) (see e.g. Gregersdotter 2003, 28; Howells 1996, 76-85). Zenia is the female bluebeard (see also e.g. Cuder 2003, 50).

As Stein has noted, "[t]he three women are also three aspects of the personality: Tony the mind, Charis the spirit, and Roz the body" (Stein 1999, 99).[75] Tony is a scholar of war history at the University of Toronto, has no children and lives with her husband West. Charis works part-time in a lifestyle shop that offers alternative things like crystals. Her narrative stresses the spiritual side of life; things like astral body and aura recur in her story. Charis is a single mother of her adult daughter August (originally Augusta), who is a student in her early twenties. Roz is a successful businesswoman who has taken over the family business after her father's death. She is mother of teenager twin girls Paula and Erin, and twenty two year old son Larry. Zenia has no story of her own; her stories have existence only through the other women's perspectives. All women are in their early fifties.

The Robber Bride's theme, in my opinion, is women's relationships with other women, themselves, and men, which can be abusive or nourishing. War is a strong motif in *The Robber Bride*. The novel emphasises that there is always war somewhere, and wars are not waged only between nations and religious groups, but between people in relationships. Words and phrases connected to

war recur throughout the novel, especially in Tony's story. As usual in Atwood's novels, all the main characters, including Zenia – if any of her stories are true – are traumatised and affected by the Second World War.

In the beginning of the novel, the narrator states the date of the story's beginning and describes the political, economical, environmental, and national situations and crises of the moment:

> October 23, 1990. (…) The Soviet bloc is crumbling, the old maps dissolving, the Eastern tribes are on the move again across the shifting borders. There's trouble in the Gulf, the real estate market is crashing, and a large hole has developed in the ozone layer. (RB, 4.)

This quotation is very similar to Tony's descriptions of the starting points of the wars she studies. It gives an overall picture of the world's current state of affairs. The last and first chapters, "Onset" and "Outcome" also suggest war and, as Stein remarks, "assault or onslaught" (Stein 1999, 97). This, of course, points out that there is a war beginning, a war between the protagonists and Zenia. At the end of the novel there is a reminiscent description of the time and situation of the world, which tells us about the global context of the ending of the battles between Zenia and Tony, Charis and Roz.

The Robber Bride's narrator is external, which, as with *Life Before Man*, gives possibility to maximal polyphony. The three women's stories are narrated in the third person and the focalisation alternates between them. The first and last chapters (which I see as prologue and epilogue because of their style and shortness), "Onset" and "Outcome", are narrated from Tony's perspective, which suggests that she is the main protagonist. She has the power to start and finish the story.

As usual for Atwood's novels, the issues of story telling and truth are *The Robber Bride*'s motifs. Tony explains that history is written from the perspective of the winner, which suggests that their powerful opponent Zenia did not win. She lost the war because Tony is telling this story. But winning a former friend and a strong enemy is never unambiguous, and in many ways Zenia can be seen as the main character of the novel. She is the force that drives the three women and the narrative forward (see also Howells 1996, 80). In Tony's thoughts, the three protagonists' stories and the novel are contextualised and problematised: What is the truth? Can it ever be told? Can a personal view of the other ever be correct or even near to it?

The novel's time line extends from the protagonists' early childhood in the 1940s to the novel's present time in 1990-1991. The present time of the novel is narrated in the present tense, the memories in the past tense. The novel's today happens between 23rd October 1990 and 11th November 1991, a time period lasting a little over year. On the first date the women find out that Zenia was not killed in the Lebanon bombing after all, and on the last date the protagonists disperse Zenia's ashes from a ferry and have a "ceremonial meal" in memory of Zenia (Stein 1999, 102).

In *The Robber Bride*, in the first part "The Toxique" (there are two parts with this same name) the present life of all the three women is described in

separate narratives. The three following parts narrate the protagonists' biographies. The part "Black Enamel" concentrates on Tony's past and to a lesser extent on her present life with her husband West. "Weasel Nights" is Charis's story. Implicitly 'Weasel' refers to Charis's boyfriend Billy who ran away with Zenia, and to Charis's hens, which they butchered, to her horror, before leaving. The chapter "The Robber Bride" concentrates on Roz. She sees that Zenia is the robber bride, a robbing beauty who "steals" Roz's husband Mitch.

The second "The Toxique" starts with the dreams of all the protagonists in the same order as in their earlier stories, narrated in the same style as the first namesake of the part. After the dreams the chapter continues with short pieces of narrative, the focalisation changing between the three women. This suggests that their connection strengthens towards the end of the novel.

One can see that this style points out that the novel aims at being realist, but on the other hand, the importance of dreams, nightmares, imagination and Gothic and fairy tale elements undermine this interpretation. The novel also has elements of a ghost story, like *Surfacing*. Zenia is a ghost from the three women's past, a person who was supposed to be dead.

Although *The Robber Bride* appears to be about women's fight over men, it is fundamentally about women's relationships (see also Stein 1999, 96). The novel's concentration on women and female relationships tells about feminist and female alignment. The preferred addressee, the ally of the narrator is a woman, or a man who has sympathy and interest in women. Unlike in Atwood's earlier novels, the female friendship is a positive force. As Stein points out, "where heterosexual relationships have failed, female friendship has been a source of strength" (Stein 1999, 97) to the three protagonists.

A distinguishable pattern, a motif, in *The Robber Bride* is that parenting is often inadequate. The childhood of all the three (or four, including Zenia) women is coloured by neglectful, even abusive education and its effects, which taint their adulthood. All the women in the narrative have renamed themselves, including Roz's twin daughters and Charis's daughter and her employer. This suggests a desire to separate from the past, create a new identity, and a new, truer self.

There are several interesting critical writings of *The Robber Bride*. Mycak discusses the novel's motifs of the constitution of one's self in relation to another person, and more particularly, aggression in this relation. To argue her point, she uses writers as various as Hegel, Merleau-Ponty and Lacan. (Mycak 1996, 213). In her article, Howells explores the motif of Canadian identity with a postcolonial emphasis in *The Robber Bride*. Canada has moved beyond the often seen split of people with British vs. French origin, and the national identity is under negotiation. Howells sees that the novel is "an attempt at a realistic reappraisal of Canadianness in the 1990s and a more honest recognition of the differences concealed within constructions of personal and national identity" (Howells 2003, 100). In her book *Margaret Atwood*, Howells explores *The Robber Bride*'s "Atwoodian Gothic" (Howells 1996, 76-85).

The food motif in *The Robber Bride* is an undercurrent of the narrative. The concrete food is the daily and the banal in the novel, but it also reveals a lot of the protagonists' inner lives. The motif of symbolic hunger is motivated by their unresolved pasts and their conflicted feelings towards Zenia. Zenia's hunger is threatening to the three women, but they all also desire her in a complex way. In addition, the symbolic hunger is visible in the motif of nursing and caretaking in *The Robber Bride*, and in the hunger that the male characters feel for Zenia.

In "Tony – "sewn together"" I examine Tony's character, her concrete and symbolic hungers, which often have to do with her husband West, and Zenia. "Charis – "soft, like marshmallows"" turns to Charis's character, dealing, for example, with her way of connecting animal meat with the abuse she has suffered. The chapter titled "Roz – The Hungry Void" concentrates on Roz, who is a sensual and sentimental, even compulsive eater. In "Zenia – "the drinker of innocent blood"" I explore the representation of Zenia, who is the ultimate female hunter of Atwood's production, a woman who has taken the male predatory position with revenge and delight. The last chapter "The End of a Battle" reads the novel's ending and its meanings.

9.1 Tony – "sewn together"

The Robber Bride's Tony is a practical eater, fuelling herself in order to work and live. It seems that she wants things to be out in the open, not hidden or shuffled. This applies for eating meat:

> The French liked to make dishes in the shapes of the things that were going to be served in them; when it came to eating they rarely beat about the bush. Their menus read like a vegetarian's nightmare – hearts of these, brains of that. Tony appreciates this directness. (RB, 13.)

Tony wants to give an image that she wants to speak of matters as they are and that she is not a hypocrite or a snob. She hungers for meat and intestines and she is not shy about her hunger. She refuses to use euphemisms or to make things look prettier than they are; she is not trying to please anybody.

This, however, is not the only truth. Meat eating contains plenty of cruelty and things that are not spoken about, just like Tony's life. She has created a language of her own and in her own world, which she would like to surround with "a moat (…) drawbridge and crocodiles" (RB, 18), she is silent about certain things. She and her husband West never talk about Zenia, although Tony thinks of her. The negative and painful memories of her mother and Zenia are "shoved back into the spidery corner where Tony keeps her shadows" (RB, 10). The painful memories have to be repressed and not allowed to surface with their full force – that would destroy Tony's life as it is now – or so she thinks.

At the beginning of the novel, when the protagonists are having lunch in Toxique, a place "with a buzz", which "makes them feel younger, and more daring, than they are" (RB, 27), Zenia reappears. All three women feel that their stability is shattered. The routines, which keep Tony's life together, are in jeopardy:

> Tony felt safe this morning, safe enough. But she doesn't feel safe now. Everything has been called into question. Even in the best of times the daily world is tenuous to her, a thin, iridescent skin held in place by surface tension. She puts a lot of effort into keeping it together, her winged illusion of comfort and stability, the words following from left to right (…) but underneath is darkness. Menace, chaos (RB, 35.)

She feels that she and her home are threatened, that Zenia is after her husband West. Zenia forces the insecurities and painful memories to surface. To Tony, Zenia represents menace and destruction.

Tony sees herself as dual, having "two halves" (RB, 8, see also e.g. pp. 19, 35-36, 397) that are separate. The novel suggests that for Tony this division begins from her early childhood on. Like with *Lady Oracle*'s protagonist Joan, Tony's parents' marriage is "a hasty wartime marriage" (RB, 158) and Tony an unplanned baby. Her mother Anthea is emotionally hungry, and wants "Tony changed, fixed" (RB, 138). Tony's mother is originally English, and in Canada she feels like a displaced person and is displeased when Tony is so clearly Canadian. As usual for children, Tony thinks that if she could behave well enough, her mother would be satisfied and happy, and thus the whole family would be functional and content. She makes her mother tea as "possible atonement to Anthea for failing to be English" (RB, 149).

Tony's childhood hobby is to reverse words and sentences, even whole songs. It is a form of communication between her conscious and unconscious mind. At the same time, it protects her and it threatens her. She thinks, "language isn't evil (…) It's dangerous only to her. It's her seam, it's where she is sewn together, it's where she could split apart" (RB, 19).

In terms of the false self theory, in front of her mother, Tony has to deny her true self and create a false self in order to defend herself and to please the mother. She desires to be more authentic, and creates a "twin" Tnomerf Ynot by reversing her name Tony (Antonia) Fremont, and sees her as "[t]aller (…) stronger and more daring" (RB, 137).

Tony's mother leaves her family when Tony is still a child, and dies in suspicious circumstances. When her mother leaves, Tony blames herself. She thinks that she "hasn't made enough cups of tea" (RB, 151). The memories and images of her mother keep haunting Tony. In her disturbing dream, an egg is connected with the mother: "[H]er mother takes an egg, an egg that smells like seaweed. If Tony can have this egg and keep it safe (…) the future can be avoided. But her mother lifts the egg up into the air, teasingly overhead" (RB, 397), and when Tony gets the egg back, it is hot and she drops it. It breaks and "time runs out of it" (RB, 398), which suggests that the task is too much for Tony. The smell of seaweed is a hint to her mother's death by drowning. This

dream repeats Tony's mother's lack of responsibility and adult behaviour, and concentration on her own pleasure.[76]

Tony's life is depicted with the imagery of war. As a child, her thoughts are involved with war, "which is such a mystery to her but which appears to have been decisive in her life" (RB, 146). Without the war, her parents would have never met and she would have never been born. Tony's mother's death makes her to resort to knowledge and facts. Her mind has to be occupied with something, because her mother left "emptiness (…) which Tony filled up with whatever she could, with knowledge, with dates and facts" (RB, 154).

The Robber Bride suggests that the childhood setting encourages Tony to use knowledge and learning as a defence against painful thoughts and memories. Even her career choice, then, is dictated by the desire "to silence the echoes" (ibid.). The dates and facts give her comfort and protection, something else to think about.

Tony's father Griff is one of the many Atwoodian male characters who suffer from posttraumatic stress because of the war they had to attend. At the beginning, he is an absent and distant father. Tony sees him as an unhappy man, who finds his work much more important than her. Her parents battle during the dinners: her father asks cunning questions in order to make her mother fall in to a trap and her mother's eyes "narrowed a little, as if aiming" (RB, 147). When Tony's mother dies, her father's behaviour changes: he starts to drink and when drunk, he "chased her through the house" or "wanted to tousle her hair, to hug her as if she were still a child" (RB, 156). These drunken scenes are demands of or appeals for intimacy, an expression of a complex wish to have Tony to fill up the place of her mother, who has left them. He ends up shooting himself, after Tony has graduated from the high school. His character is a mixture of a tormentor, a cruel soldier and a victim, and in many ways similar to the character of Joan's father in *Lady Oracle*.

In *The Robber Bride*, history and storytelling are often connected with images of handicraft: thread, knitting, weaving et cetera. Tony enjoys using the images of knitting and weaving in her lectures, in which the audience is mostly male. She uses "the mix of domestic image and mass bloodshed" (RB, 3), making her listeners surprised and puzzled. Women and the feminine sphere are not usually connected with bloody battles. The feminist reader sees this as an ironic gender reversal: a subject that is thought to be masculine is feminised.

Tony has a three-dimensional map, which is made of flour and salt, where she stages the battles she is currently interested in. The men, soldiers and ordinary people, are represented by "kitchen spices": cloves, dill, chocolate sprinkles et cetera (RB, 111). They appear to be a feminine comment on war: a mixture of kitchen, cooking, tangibility and waging war. The people on the map are all edible, so is the whole map, suggesting their vulnerability and momentariness. An army of cloves or green peppercorns is slightly amusing, a degradation, too. In this representation, something so fundamental in humanity and masculinity as war is diminished into spices. Tony even eats one of the cloves: "It is a bad habit of hers, eating parts of the armies on her map; luckily there are always replacements" (RB, 113, see also RB, 463). Thus Tony plays a

goddess above her own kingdom. This appears to be ironic, degrading, even a crude commentary, and it is connected with the actual lives of actual soldiers: "the dead soldiers would have been eaten too, one way or another" (RB, 113).

The repeating Atwoodian motif of nursing and care taking is thematised in Tony's feelings toward her boyfriend and husband West. Tony hungers West intensely, and she desires to help and serve him.

Because of her father's drinking problem, as an adult Tony mixes her wine with water, she is "wary of alcohol" (RB, 29), a person who likes to be in control of herself. In the embedded narrative of Tony's time at the university, Tony sees West drunk for the first time and feels sick and disappointed: "Something turns over inside her, turns over and sinks" (RB, 126). Tony is reminded of her father's drunken scenes and feels physically ill – her unconscious and conscious minds are making a connection. The same night she meets Zenia for the first time. Zenia and West are a couple and behave in a manner that disturbs Tony, because it reminds her of her parents: she is again invisible and unrecognised. When West was alone with her, she was seen; now she is not.

Tony's desire and hunger for West is intertwined with her feelings of inadequacy and being a victim. She feels that she should not want him; that he is not for her because he is for Zenia: "She feels like a stray child, ragged and cold, with her nose pressed to a lighted window. (…) a bakery window, with fancy cakes and decorated cookies. (…) These things are for other people; nothing for her" (RB, 161).

Tony's desire is the desire of the fairy tale's girl with matches, freezing at Christmas and looking at a happy family from outside. She is an outsider, who will never get what the others have. Zenia and West's relationship is sweet and delicious food, cakes and cookies, something Tony desires and hungers for, but "poverty prevents her entrance" (RB, 161). Tony is envious of Zenia's stories of sex: "Sex as a huge plum pudding, a confection of rich delights (…) while Tony listened, shut out, nose to the glass" (RB, 407).

It seems that Tony's desire for West consists mostly of envy. She wants to have what she sees and hears others having. In the context of feminist object relations, Benjamin asserts that envy often defines women's desire. They may want love relationships in order to have something they cannot have without the relationship. It may represent subjectivity and recognition for them. (Benjamin 1988, 89.)

Tony's wishes are very innocent, small and touching, even funny in their banality and smallness: "Ah, thinks Tony, I could make his tea! She longs for such simple domestic chores, to offer up to West" (RB, 168). She wants to comfort him, to own him by taking care of him – suggesting a nurse-like desire. Making tea is something she used to do for her mother, in order to show what a good and obedient girl she was. This suggests that at least in part her desire towards West is a restaging. Tony observes that in addition to their relative happiness they are also trapped together and the power balance is not clear: "[T]hey always look as if one of them is on a leash; but which one?" (RB, 39). This feeling of being trapped and on a leash is clearly reminiscent of Tony's parents' marriage.

Inspired by Roz, Tony "grits her teeth and sets out to seduce West", although she is horrified by the thought, afraid of being "shredded" (RB, 178). But she sees the sexual act as an act of heroism from her part: "[I]sn't it a matter of saving his life? It is. So heroism and self-sacrifice are called for" (RB, 178). Tony thinks she saves him from depression and gets him over Zenia by sleeping with him. Reminiscent of *The Edible Woman*'s Marian, Tony sees herself as a heroic wartime nurse, who will by her own sacrifice, her virginity, save the poor suffering man. There is desire from Tony's part, too, but it is a confused and frightened desire, so it is safely masked as nursing.

In the novel's present time, Tony feels protective towards West. She thinks he is fragile and weak, a person that has to be protected from the ugly sides of life. She cooks his eggs for him and thinks that "bad eggs depress him" (RB, 14), which implies excess worry in both. Sceats argues that Tony "infantilises" West (Sceats 2000, 120). Tony does not recognise West as an adult, but as a small and easily vulnerable child, who cannot take care of himself.

Tony's reversal of his name Stew to West, reverses also the meaning of the name: as Stein points out, Tony "transforms him from Stew, meaning food; an article of consumption; or mental agitation, worry, fret, to West, meaning direction, a place, the Western world" (Stein 1999, 97). During the novel's narratives, Tony does many things for West, helps and heals him. This name change echoes Tony's help: from an edible object of Zenia Tony enables him to be more independent and more self directed person. West is a positive male figure in Atwood's oeuvre. To "thirsty" Tony, he is "a long drink of water" (RB, 179).

At the end of *The Robber Bride*, Tony understands that she has been protecting West unnecessarily. In this way, Zenia's return from the staged death improves their relationship, because it forces them to face and discuss the past. At the end of the novel Tony sees West as a more complex individual than the image of West she had in her mind. In terms of the feminist object-relations theory, the adult intersubjective communication and the equal recognition of the other has begun, at least in part.

9.2 Charis– "soft, like marshmallows"

During their lunch in Toxique, where Zenia reappears, Tony sees Charis with her childlike dessert – "the Assorted Sorbets, a ball of pink, a ball of red, a ball of curranty purple" (RB, 31) – as a child on a birthday party, naïve and stubborn. The sweet dish represents "innocence" to Tony and makes her feel conflicted in her attitude towards Charis: "She wants to console Charis; also to shake her" (ibid.). In other words, Tony wants to make her feel better and wake her up from her world, which to Tony is unrealistic. The dessert symbolises Charis' lost childhood, her desire to live in peace and enjoy life in a childlike

manner. It is an expression of desire and hunger to have those happy birthdays, which she missed as a girl, and maybe a wish to rewrite the past.

When Zenia is reborn, Charis feels "thinner (…) as though energy has been drained out of her" (RB, 68), which suggests that Zenia takes her power from Charis, sucks her empty like a vampire. This is clearly reminiscent of Charis' feelings of Uncle Vern, who sexually abused her when she was child. Seeing Zenia makes Charis panicky, and she has to resort to assertive mantras: "*My body, mine* (…) *I am a good person. I exist*" (RB, 67, italics original).

Charis's childhood is portrayed as the most overtly violent of those of *The Robber Bride*'s three protagonists. Karen's (Charis's given name) mother Gloria abuses her, beats her with "shoes, (…) pancake flipper or the broom handle, whatever was nearby" (RB, 235). Karen's mother uses her daughter as a recipient of all her negative feelings and projections, her "nerves" (RB, 234). Karen is blamed partially for these nerves: her mother is a single parent and Karen has concluded from adult talk and attitude that bringing her up is "very hard, practically impossible" (RB, 234). Karen is, once again in Atwood's novels, an unplanned baby born amidst the wartime. Her parents did not get married and Karen knows nothing about her father.

Child's imperative wish to be loved is visible in Karen's efforts to please her mother: "Karen tried to help, she tried to care. She would have cared except she didn't know what she was supposed to care about, and also there were so many things she needed to watch (…) and (…) listen to" (RB, 235). Karen thinks that her own pain is irrelevant and non-existent, "it's nothing because her mother says it's nothing" (RB, 243).

After Karen's mother dies, she has to live with her aunt and uncle. Uncle Vern starts harassing Karen sexually when she is nine years old. The sexual abuse makes Karen literally lighter: she "loses her appetite: the effort of not thinking about Uncle Vern (…) is making her weak" (RB, 260). Karen thinks that Uncle Vern is eating her: "an animal eating another animal" (RB, 262). In order to survive the sexual abuse Karen's self is divided, which is usual among people who experience incest or other abuse (Laing 1971, 57, 61, 71-72; Winnicott 1960, 142-143; Miller 1996, 12, 20, 56, 62): "Karen knows she is trapped. All she can do is split in two (…) float out of her body and watch Karen, left behind with no words" (RB, 263).

The sensitive and perceptive, "soft" Karen is replaced by Charis, who is "harder, hard enough to get by" (RB, 41). Charis thinks that Karen stays inside of her, and stops growing: she is a little girl and Charis grows up. In the context of the false self theory, according to Laing, one's true self can feel like a little girl, because the true self may stay underdeveloped when the false self does all communication and takes care of relationships (Laing 1971, 157. This opinion is actually held by one of his patients. See also Winnicott 1960, 146, 148).

Karen is the powerless victim and Charis the new woman, the survivor who has a future and who despises her abuser (and maybe even her own former self). She is divided: Karen is her true self, left behind and Charis is her false self, the survivor – although Charis herself appears to feel that Charis is her true self.

In Charis's narrative, her abusers are connected with meat. Her mother Gloria is committed into a mental institution, and Karen sees her as "the dead fish in the white enamel trays at the fish store" (RB, 255). Gloria is an eaten victim, reminding Karen of the butchered pig she declined to eat: "Her mother has the texture of luncheon meat" (RB, 255). Uncle Vern smells like "rancid meat" (RB, 262), and his face looks like "uncooked beef" (RB, 261). His fingers are "sausage fingers" (RB, 260) and he has a "meaty hand" (RB, 41). Towards the end of the novel, Charis dreams of her boyfriend Billy, who has a face of "raw meat" (RB, 399), which implies that some part of Charis connects Billy with the other male abuser of her life, Uncle Vern.

In *The Robber Bride* meat becomes the symbol of sexual assaults, and Charis becomes a vegetarian.

Charis's light diet and yoga exercises are an effort to push away the body's weighty knowledge of the abuse: she thinks that her yoga students "must have heavy metals hidden in them, they too must yearn for lightness" (RB, 216).

The cunning eater Zenia gets Charis's sympathy and attention by claiming that she has cancer and other people try make her eat animal protein against her own will:

> "He tries to get me eat… mounds of food, steak and butter, all those animal fats. They make me nauseated, I can't, I just can't!"
> "Oh," says Charis. This is a horrible story, and one that has the ring of truth. So few people understand about animal fats. (…) She is troubled, she is on the verge of tears; above all she is helpless. (RB, 221.)

This argument of "forced" meat eating, due to Charis's childhood experiences, has an equally, or a more, shocking impact on her as does Zenia's claim that her boyfriend West physically abuses her or that she has cancer. This is a good example of how Zenia's character is portrayed: a cunning and abusive knower of everybody's weak and soft points, their painful experiences. Charis's horror of animal fat is sometimes *in excess*, which brings also humour to the motif of meat in her narrative. Mycak sees Charis as "a New Age eccentric [who] provides comic relief in the novel" (Mycak 1996, 237).

In the novel's present day, Charis feels like a penetrable victim, soft as "marshmallows" (RB, 212). She is portrayed hitting her head on the table's edge, unable to stop thinking how Zenia seduced her boyfriend Billy, who was a draft dodger and criminal from USA, and Charis never saw him again. Charis is stuck with Billy; she cannot stop thinking of him, even after two decades. She cannot find closure. She cannot decide whether the Billy was a Bluebeard figure or not. The question remains unanswered in her head, but to the feminist reader there is no room for doubt, even though we do not know Billy's thoughts except for a couple spoken sentences.

From the narrative as whole, it is clear that Billy is just passing time with Charis and does not intend to stay or start a family like she wishes. The lousy compatibility of Charis and Billy is shown repeatedly, for instance in Billy's

attitude towards Charis's eating habits and principles. He eats meat and drinks coffee and finds her diet "[r]abbit food" (RB, 212).

In the novel's embedded narratives, Charis is hunting Billy and wants to own him, but in a subtler manner than Atwood's male characters. She is hungry for Billy, hungry for a child by Billy and a future together as a happy family. Charis touches Billy possessively, like male characters often do touch female characters in Atwood's novels, and she thinks of him as hers: "She can't help thinking of him as a captive; her captive (…) He is hers, to do with as she will" (RB, 210).

Charis has some hunch of their different desires and of the hopelessness of her struggle: she "loves to watch Billy [asleep] (…) It's easier to maintain her view of him that way than when he's talking and moving around" (RB, 207). The real Billy, his speech and being, threaten Charis's conviction that he is what she wants him to be. Charis is not present in the relationship, she does not tell Billy anything she thinks or wants.

Dramatically, when Zenia and Billy leave, they butcher the hens Charis cherishes – an act that appears as extreme and intentional cruelness. But, as usual in Atwood's novels, this act is ambiguous. The abused Karen desires to chop off the heads of her tormenting foster parents as if they were chickens. This aggression is not acted out, more like imposed inward, so the actual killing of the chickens is a twisted fulfilment of this desire for revenge, implying that Zenia is the three women's sinister twin, the desired and unobtainable "dark double" (Howells 1996, 82. This twin or Doppelganger motif Zenia as a twin to the main characters is an interpretation shared by scholars, see e.g. Cuder 2003, 51). Zenia is the doer, the others done-to.

After Billy Charis avoids sexual relationships: "men and sex are too difficult (…) snarled up with rage and shame and hatred and loss (…) the taste of vomit and the smell of rancid meat (…) and hunger" (RB, 285). Sexuality is ambiguous and painful to Charis, but she hungers for recognition, love, and sexual fulfilment. Charis is unable to reconcile these conflicting forces, so she protects herself by remaining celibate.

9.3 Roz – The Hungry Void

Roz's narrative has lighter and more comic tone than Tony's and Charis's: there is wittiness and jocularity in her chapters and direct speech.

When Zenia returns, the pain for Roz's husband Mitch's death resurfaces – he left Roz to be with Zenia. Roz calls a private detective in order to hire her to get information on Zenia, and at home she overeats and cries in the cellar. She thinks of the fairy tale of the three little pigs and a wolf that her twin daughters loved as children:

> At one point the twins decided that the wolf should not be dropped into the cauldron of boiling water – it should be one of the little pigs, instead, because they had been

> the stupid ones. But when Roz suggested that maybe the pigs and the wolf could forget about the boiling water and make friends, the twins were scornful. Somebody had to be boiled. (…) the twins were right: no matter what you do, somebody always gets boiled. (RB, 294-295.)

Tony, Charis and Roz can be seen as the three little pigs, and Zenia as the wolf. Zenia tries to eat them all, and is successful, at least on the symbolic level. Roz's desire to make peace with the wolf is utopian. The quotation alludes to the end of the novel: all four women cannot survive; someone has to be boiled.

Like Tony and Charis, Roz's life has been affected by war. Her father was in Europe and came back from abroad when Roz was a schoolgirl. His fortune, in the novel's present time her fortune, is made by usurping the war conditions. Roz's father is a typical ambiguous Atwoodian father. He is absent for years, and there are at least two versions of him: he is a criminal who helped the Nazis or a hero who saved people's lives – or something in between.

Roz's childhood and youth is a mixture, a series of transformations: at first she is a Catholic schoolgirl living with her mother who keeps a boarding house. At her catholic school the nuns emphasise self-sacrifice, especially for women: "The Self should be scrubbed like a floor: on both knees, with a harsh wire brush, until nothing is left of it at all" (RB, 301). In terms of the feminist object-relations theory, this suggests that femininity represents self-abnegation and self-sacrifice and women are not subjects (see Benjamin 1988, 79-80; Gilligan 1983, 70).

Everything changes when her father comes back from abroad, where he has been first in war and then doing something Roz figures out much later (getting rich by questionable methods). Roz becomes a Jew and her name changes: she is told that her name is not Rosalind Greenwood anymore, but Roz Grunwald and their family is now rich and moves to the north of the city, leaving the poor working class life behind. Roz soon realises that her father holds the real power and it is best to side with him. In terms of the feminist object-relations theory, Roz's father represents power, subjectivity and separation from the mother and her school's nuns, who at first seemed omnipotent (see also Mycak 1996, 230).

As many Atwood's protagonists, Roz has always felt like "a displaced person" (RB, 344). She hungers to belong somewhere but feels like "an oddity, a hybrid, a strange half-person" (ibid.). Roz creates a false self in order to survive among her peers: "[S]he imitates. She picks up their accents, their intonations, their vocabulary; she adds layers of language to herself, sticking them on like posters on a fence, one glued over the top of the next, covering up the bare boards" (RB, 345-346).

Roz feels she never had a chance to be a child, irresponsible, jocular, and wild. In the novel's present day her daughters comfort her when she cries and feels helpless, which implies that she is needy for her children. Roz notices that her daughters try to make her feel better: "[T]heir mimicry, their vulgar idiocies, their laughter, all of it is a distraction they put on, for her benefit" (RB, 78). There seems to be little room for the girls' true selves when they have to take care of their mother. Roz's son Larry "tended Roz, in a dutiful sort of way.

He took out the garbage, he washed (…) her car (…) like a middle-aged man" (RB, 82). This implies that Larry is trying to take care of his mother as if he was her partner, an adult man who answers to her needs. When Larry is twenty-two, he still lives with Roz and his little sisters and his room is "a boy's room" (RB, 83), not a grown man's.

The way Roz's character eats, treats, buys and thinks of food is coloured by her good financial status and the knowledge of healthy eating and proper weight in the glossy women's magazines (she is an editor of one). Roz needs strong coffee, and makes it with style: grinds beans and has an Italian espresso maker. She is not a good cook and eats often out: "why did God make restaurants if he intended her to cook" (RB, 357). This remark is typical of Roz's character. She tries not to feel guilty of not being "the angel of the house" type of a mother and thinks that if she has money she should use it, too. She often talks of or to God, because of her strict Catholic upbringing, but in a secular and comic manner.

Roz is a greedy and sensual eater, who sometimes (only alone) licks her plate avariciously. When Roz finds out of Mitch's current lover, in the embedded narratives of her past, she eats "chocolate mud cake" (RB, 300). When she feels rage because of Zenia's return, she eats chocolate and when she mourns for her late husband Mitch, she eats again. She is described eating automatically: "[S]he finds herself holding an empty plate and wondering why there is no longer anything on it" (RB, 292). When she is nervous, she eats and drinks – eating is a way of dealing with her emotions.

Roz fills herself with food: "She gets hugely, cavernously lonely, and then she eats. Eats and drinks and smokes, filling up her inner spaces" (RB, 91). Overeating can be an effort to fill the feeling of emptiness inside and to suppress negative emotions. Food and eating can be an effort to fill time, numb pain and stop negative emotions by suppressing them with edible substance. In other words, one is trying to satisfy oneself by eating when the thing one really needs is unavailable. (E.g. Miller 2001, 20; Epstein 1987, 29.)

Roz has ambivalent thoughts about her weight. She is often on a diet, especially before the novel's present time: "Grapefruit ones, bran added to everything, all-protein" (RB, 79). She starts a diet at breakfast, but stops it during the same meal, thinking: "Why punish the flesh?" (RB, 80). On one hand, she is trying to eat less, but on the other hand, she is satisfied with herself: "It's not as if she's fat, anyway. She's just solid. A good peasant body" (RB, 79).

Nevertheless, her body appears in her dreams as shameful, even grotesque: "big slack raw embarrassing body" (RB, 72). Zenia, in Roz's mind, is always on a diet: "you don't get a waist like Zenia without hard work" (RB, 80). Roz feels that in order to be evil, seductive and deceitful, as she would like to be in order to fight the Zenias of the world, she ought to be thinner. Her own body is "too clumsy, too lumberingly honest" (RB, 393).

In the embedded narratives of *The Robber Bride*, Roz loves watching her husband Mitch, especially when he is asleep or when he is shaving. She appears to have a possessive desire towards him: "Roz checks him over for rust spots,

the way she would a car" (RB, 302). The comparison of Mitch to a car is revealing. He is, at times, Roz's possession, her pride and joy, an enjoyable object Roz is hungry for. Roz is constantly examining him in order to speculate whether or not he is seeing someone else. In the terms of feminist object-relations theory Roz is like a panicky child watching her father, a representative of power and desire, who can give her recognition – although she is rich and he is poor.

According to Roz's narrative, in order to keep Mitch, "[s]he has to tread more softly, she has to diminish herself, pretend she's smaller than she is, apologize for her success" (RB, 351). She cannot be herself; she cannot be powerful, or not more powerful than her husband if she wants to save her marriage. It is suggested that intelligent or better-paid wives frighten men. Roz's thoughts are also a distortion: she feels ambiguous guilt for her money and success, and projects this guilt onto others.

During their marriage, she lets Mitch order for her in the restaurants, although she is far from dependent and insecure. She is pleasing him, trying to live up to the image she thinks Mitch wants her to be. Mitch eats according to his character's quality as a Casanova, choosing "the Catch of the Day" (RB, 314) in a trendy fish restaurant – maybe implying that he would like to have a catch or is one himself.

Roz's narrative often attaches images of food to Mitch. When they start dating, Roz sees him as "a frozen fish fillet" (RB, 309), which implies his coolness and even coldness, his timid and stiff upper class behaviour – maybe even his possibly calculated desire towards Roz. When Zenia snatches Mitch, Roz is miserable and hopes that "Mitch will fizzle out like a barbecue in the rain" (RB, 373). She wants him to stop burning for Zenia, she wants to extinguish his fire and have him back to herself. The comparison to barbecue appears to be an effort to diminish the power of his burning, to make him cosy and homey again.

Mitch is a selfish skirt chaser character, "a rascally wolf" (RB, 381) who always comes back to Roz after his short affairs are over – until Zenia comes into the picture. Mitch is cool and self-secure on the surface, but after his death, Roz sees that under his pose he was always uncertain of himself.

To the feminist reader, Roz and Mitch's relationship does not only comment on male promiscuity, but also on female compliance and co-operation with it. According to Roz, Mitch's plot is to "[s]ink his teeth into them, spit them out, and Roz is expected to clean up the mess" (RB, 298). Roz is needed in Mitch's pattern when he wants to get rid of other women. She is the excuse and his safe castle. Roz wishes that Mitch would be monogamous, but gradually she starts to "enjoy" (RB, 300) this game. Roz's parents had a reminiscent pattern, and thus one can argue that Roz and Mitch are restaging and struggling.

9.4 Zenia – "the drinker of innocent blood"

The images of Zenia are *in excess*: her character is an inhuman nightmare in the minds of the three main characters. There is also polyphony in her representation: the three women all tell different, even partially contradictory tales of her, and in dialogue Zenia denies the protagonists' thoughts and perceptions of her. Zenia's excessive character also points to the ghost story and Gothic elements of the novel. She is an unrealistic character, the others' projection. (See also Howells 1996, 80-82.)

Zenia has created herself: her name, her face, her body, her past, and her present. She has "snaky hair" and mysterious "smile" (RB, 470), a medusa mixed with Mona Lisa: a powerful woman with a life of her own, a mystery of her own.

Zenia is portrayed, in the eyes of the three protagonists, as the ultimate female hunter, ruthless, without rules and incredibly successful – having "row of men's dicks nailed to her wall like stuffed animals heads" (RB, 281), as Tony bitterly claims. Zenia is a female Bluebeard, a hungry and successful man-eater.

Zenia is seen as a force of nature, a *force majeure* that cannot be controlled. She is compared to the moon, wind and hurricane. She is represented as a force of nature "raging unchecked" (RB, 135), all-powerful and cunning, like a goddess or a witch. In Tony's dream, Zenia has gills. So she can even breath underwater, in addition to all her other abilities, which suggests that she would not even drown and die like Tony's mother. In Roz's narrative, Zenia is a terminator-like figure, the high art achievement of technology, a monstrous and bloodthirsty cyborg and an impossible thing to destroy.

The three women feel like Zenia's victims, but they have also been hungry for her, as Tony observes:

> Tony was the first one to let her in, because people like Zenia can never step through your doorway, can never enter and entangle themselves in your life, unless you invite them. There has to be a recognition (RB, 114.)

In the psychological context, one can argue that the female and the male characters in *The Robber Bride* are left starving from their childhood on. They are in constant search for recognition and hope that someone new would come and make their life better or perfect. This hunger and desire can be seen as the context of the protagonists' complicated feelings and thoughts about Zenia. The three women are needy for someone to need them, someone to answer to their needs. As Sceats writes, Zenia can be seen as "a projection of the desires of the three women" (Sceats 2000, 119; Howells 1996, 81-82).

Sceats remarks, "Zenia represents whatever her victim is hungry for" (Sceats 2000, 119). Zenia pretends to be the protagonists' friend and ally, but in truth she is using them. She appears to sense the other's weak spot and uses it; her tools are sex appeal, manipulation, and blackmail. According to Roz, Zenia gets Mitch by pretending to be "an empty beggars bowl" (RB, 371), thus giving

him the satisfaction of being the one to rescue her, giving him the role of the powerful one. Zenia's weakness and neediness is not only an act. She appears to be really short of cash and other things, which she takes from the women and men.

In the context of the feminist object-relations theory, Zenia gives the hungry men a possibility for desired recognition, but denies it.

Zenia is portrayed wanting to hurt the three women more than wanting their boyfriends or husbands. The power play and even desire is played mostly between the women. (See also Howells 1996, 81; Mycak 1996, 222.) This pattern is a reversal from the usual one, in which women are seen as objects of exchange in men's intense relationships, even so that when male friends fall in love with the same woman, she is the needed object because they cannot fall in love with each other in the scene of compulsory heterosexuality (Benjamin 1988, 6-7). I see this *The Robber Bride*'s pattern as an ironic reversal, used to compromise the scenario of gender polarity.

Zenia's character is repeatedly connected to images of food and eating. Tony thinks that

> Zenia (…) was raw (…) raw sex, whereas Tony herself was only the cooked variety. Parboiled to get the dangerous wildness out, the strong fresh-blood flavours. Zenia was gin at midnight, Tony was eggs for breakfast, and in eggcups (RB, 406.)

Zenia represents forbidden and seductive elements: raw meat is delight for some and scary for others, it is a walk on the wild side. Eating raw meat, or seeing somebody eat it can cause abjection. It is also is a part of rituals and a sign of different desire, a desire outside the proper order of cooked and raw. Gin gives you strong intoxication but also a painful hangover – a very precise image to describe Zenia's presence in the lives of the characters of *The Robber Bride*. In the quotation Tony is the opposite of Zenia in terms of food and propriety. She is boiled and cooked, implying civilisation and good manners; she has even a touch of prudishness with the eggcups. No spontaneity and sudden impulses with Tony – these images suggest. Zenia is the pleasure and wildness of midnight and Tony is the awakening and sobriety – maybe even the hangover – of the morning.

The connection with Zenia and blood is iterative in *The Robber Bride* (see also Sceats 2000, 118). When Zenia comes back after leaving West and Tony during their time at the university, Tony is cooking food and lamb blood drips on the floor and she thinks of sticking a skewer into Zenia's chest. Tony thinks that Zenia is hungry for her blood. Charis connects Zenia with rituals including "chicken blood and eating of still-alive animals" (RB, 197), and sees Zenia as a "drinker of innocent blood" (RB, 286). When Tony thinks what she should bring to Zenia's funeral (which proves to be a fake one), she disregards flowers and sees "a bowl of blood" (RB, 13) more suitable. For the dispersal of Zenia's ashes, for real this time, Tony wants the date to be "Remembrance Day. Bloody Poppy Day" (RB, 466).

The protagonists do not only hate Zenia, they also envy her and even love her in the embedded narratives. Zenia represents beauty, toughness, strength, insolence and arrogance, and Tony, Charis, and Roz would like to possess those qualities, although they know they are not the makings of a nice person. From Roz's narrative we can read, "sometimes she would like to be Zenia" (RB, 393), and Charis dreams of dissolving into Zenia's body, becoming Zenia. When Tony looks at Zenia, during their friendship at the university, she "sees her own reflection: herself, as she would like to be. *Tnomerf Ynot.* Herself turned inside out" (RB, 167).

Zenia is always there with them, present as a dark shadow, or their rebellious, evil twin. Tony thinks, "What is she doing here, on this side of the mirror?" (RB, 34), suggesting that Zenia is their distorted image. Zenia is also "a tumour" (RB, 467), a malign illness that possesses you and is a forceful power inside you – it is you but destroys you at the same time.

As Howells argues, Zenia "represents their repressed pain-filled childhood selves" (Howells 1996, 82). In terms of the false self theory, Zenia is a representation of the true self that the three women desire. Zenia carries the burden of projections of the other women. She has done bad things to them, but they see her as the source of all evil, which suggests that they cannot connect their feelings to the right cause.

In the novel's present day and in its embedded narratives, Zenia forces, but also enables the women to look back on and understand their past, make it a part of themselves. It is painful, but gives them also a possibility to move forward and to close a chapter in their lives. Zenia's insights are perceptive and sharp. To Tony, Zenia tells, "At heart you are a coward, you hole yourself up in that bourgeois playpen (…) with your warped little battle-scars collection, you sit on poor West as if he's your very own fresh laid fucking egg" (RB, 414). To Charis, Zenia says that obsession about Billy is "just an excuse (…) lets you avoid your life" (RB, 427). About Mitch, Zenia says that he "was a creep. Roz is better off without him" (RB, 411). Zenia demands for adult responsibility beyond the perceptions of abused children. As Mycak points out, the three women's struggles with Zenia represent "the crucial battle for recognition that each and every individual must undergo if he or she is to reach subjective maturity" (Mycak 1996, 213).

In addition to her excessive powers, Zenia can be seen as a victim, if we consider the narratives she tells of her life. For instance, to Tony she claims when she was a child her White Russian mother sold her for adult men, as early as when she was five years old. To Charis, Zenia tells that her mother was a Romanian gypsy and was stoned to death. To Roz, Zenia says she barely escaped Nazi's imprisonment as an infant and lost her family in the Holocaust.

Charis visions Zenia as eaten: "Black lines are converging on her, targeting her; soon she will be ensnarled. In the centre of them her soul flutters, a pale moth" (RB, 430). Zenia is a moth in the web of a spider, eaten away slowly. Despite all her cunning wits, Zenia is a victim, too, a pathetic creature worthy of pity.[77]

Zenia is the force, which makes the protagonists friends. Without her doings they would not have found such friendship and solace in each other. For *The Robber Bride*'s three women caring for others often means feeding others. (See also Sceats 2000, 119; Howells 1996, 82.) When West runs off with Zenia, Roz takes care of Tony, feeding her "baby food": "[C]anned chicken noodle soup, caramel pudding, peanut butter and banana sandwiches, grape juice" (RB, 187). Food is shown to be a comfort and a part of a healing process. Roz is feeding Tony in order to make her feel better or at least to keep her in shape in order to live again, after the "illness" fades. When Roz's husband Mitch passes away, possibly committing suicide, Charis and Tony lovingly feed Roz, both in their own characteristic way: Charis buys Roz various things from the health food store and Tony gives Roz chocolate in secret. This loving care is giving without demands. In a way, they mother each other; they are the comforting and loving mothers they did not have as children.

9.5 The End of a Battle

The end of *The Robber Bride* is in the usual Atwoodian manner open to multiple interpretations, and thus, in my opinion, polyphonic. The day that Tony, Charis and Roz, each independently, confront Zenia, she dies of an overdose and falls from her hotel room's balcony to the ground floor fountain. The reasons leading to her death remain unsolved: she could have been killed, it might have been an accident, or she could have committed a suicide. After her death the women find out that Zenia was diagnosed with ovarian cancer and had only six months to live. All three women had the opportunity to kill Zenia, and so did Roz's son Larry and Tony's husband West. In addition to these candidates, Zenia was involved in at least drug business, which creates several other possibilities. The woman falling from the balcony is repeated in Charis's narrative from the early pages on, which might suggest not only Charis's talent for premonitions, but also her involvement in the incident (see also Gregersdotter 2003, 163).

When Zenia is dead, the three women want to have a ceremony for dispersing Zenia's ashes to the lake from a ferry. On the occasion, the protagonists have warm feelings towards Zenia: Roz feels gratitude, and Tony respect for an equal enemy. Charis's feelings are more mixed: the feeling of Zenia's presence in the ceremony satisfies her and it is implied that she feels admiration towards her spirit, but she cannot fully wish Zenia her best. Tony thinks, "*I am the enemy you killed, my friend*" (RB, 468, italics original), which suggests that Zenia is them and they are Zenia. She has been their teacher, their double, and their tormentor.

During the ferry ride, Roz thinks hungrily of the meal they will be having after the ash dispersal, in Charis's home: "death is a hunger, a vacancy, and you have to fill it up" (RB, 467). The abjection of death is thrown away, pushed back with eating. Food makes us feel stronger and healthier and comforts us: we are

not the one who died. We are still alive. Food and eating are marks of our living; food represents life (e.g. Lupton 1996, 1).

For the first time in Atwood's novels, the ending depicts female protagonists together, in mere female company. In the last sentence Tony "opens the door, and goes in to join the others" (RB, 470). This time, there is no company of ambiguous men, like in *The Edible Woman*, or contemplating solitude as in *Cat*'s *Eye*. Instead there is friendship and solidarity between women (see also Howells 1996, 82). To the feminist reader, this appears as a positive thing: emphasis of female companionship instead of loneliness.

However, the ending gives space to more disturbing thoughts, too. The peace of three protagonists is achieved by the death of another person, another woman. It is even possible that one of them killed her. In a way, the three protagonists have eaten Zenia. In any case, all of them wanted to finish off Zenia. This does not imply friendship and solidarity between women. It shakes the interpretation of the ending as peaceful. *The Robber Bride*'s ending says that there has been a battle, between the three women and Zenia, and the three women won. Zenia lost, but in the women's stories she will always live and be a powerful opponent. The ambiguity of the ending, I think, says that there is no such thing as universal female solidarity. Women's relationships are complex and problematic, just like relationships between genders and between men. *The Robber Bride* is critical towards certain over-simplified feminist views of women as kind, positive, and loving (see also Howells 1996, 79).

As an implicated reader, I feel that my significant other in *The Robber Bride* is "the tragic structure of feeling" (Pearce 1997, 16). I find the protagonist's childhood tragedies and their feelings of being displaced outsiders deeply touching. I must admit that my interest in these female characters, probably due to my age, goes not to their present time as much as to their pasts.

When I first read *The Robber Bride* in the 1990s, I mostly identified with Tony's character. Of course, due to the narrative structure, which brings polyphony, my identification alternated and still alternates during the reading. While reading Tony's narrative, I was mostly involved with her, but when Charis's perspective came, I became involved with her too, et cetera. But there has been a change. At the moment, I feel much less involved with Charis than I used to be, and mostly my involvement goes to Roz. I think that this is because Roz's narrative's style is somewhat more positive, or more coloured with sarcasm than that of the other two women. With my own aging, I suppose, I have become to prefer a sense of humour and the kind of determined stubbornness about continuing one's life, even though the obstacles may seem overwhelming – something I see Roz's character as a representative of.

From *The Robber Bride*'s 1990s Gothic Toronto we turn to Kingston in 1859 and to the story of Grace Marks, who is a convict in a female penitentiary, convicted for having been an accomplice in two brutal murders. In *Alias Grace*, unlike in *The Robber Bride*, food is often scarce or of bad quality. Grace's concrete and symbolic hunger fill the narrative with metaphors and images of food and eating.

10 *ALIAS GRACE*: HIDDEN HUNGERS

Alias Grace (1996) is a historical novel, and it is written in the style of nineteenth century novels. It tells a fictional story, based on a life of a real woman, Canada's "celebrated murderess" (AG, 22) Grace Marks. In 1843, at the age of sixteen Grace, an immigrant from Ireland, was convicted of murdering her employer, gentleman Thomas Kinnear and his housekeeper and mistress Nancy Montgomery (who was at the time pregnant by him). Another servant of the house, James McDermott, was hanged for the crimes. Also Grace had a death sentence at first, but it was changed into life sentence. In addition to decades of imprisonment, Grace spent years in a mental hospital during her sentence. She was pardoned in 1872 and she emigrated to the USA, and the rumour (or one of them) goes that she got married.

Atwood has been interested in the case long before the publication of *Alias Grace*. She first encountered Grace Marks's story through her reading and writing of Susanne Moodie, Grace's contemporary Canadian writer. In 1974 Atwood wrote a television play on the topic, titled *The Servant Girl*. Atwood's afterword and acknowledgements in *Alias Grace* tell that the author and her assistants have done extensive research on the subject. Through this work, Atwood has become convinced that some parts of Moodie's writing were fictional, even wrong. Atwood wrote *The Servant Girl* following Moodie's version, but *Alias Grace* is based on her new knowledge.

In spite of all the research, Atwood writes in the afterword: "The true character of the historical Grace Marks remains an enigma" (AG, 465). Many things of the real Grace's life and fate remain unknown and unproven. It is a mystery whether Grace was McDermott's lover and partner in crime, or even the planner of it all who tempted McDermott to go along, or only an innocent victim. Grace might have been in need of mental hospital, or she may have been committed there wrongly, or she may have pretended her condition in order to get to better circumstances than in the prison (which was usual for inmates). Accordingly, Atwood's *Alias Grace*'s solution to the question of truth of Grace's case is equally enigmatic.

The present day of the novel stretches from 1851 to 1873. The main part of the story consists of Grace and doctor Simon Jordan's life in 1859, during his visit to Kingston, and of her embedded narratives during the time. Simon comes to examine and interview Grace and she tells him the story of her life. She suffers from a partial amnesia: her memory has gaps concerning the time of the murders. He tries the "technique of suggestion" (AG, 322) to reveal the truth.

The novel circles around the questions of Grace's possible guilt or innocence, and the truth regarding the Kinnear farm murders. Like Simon, the reader is put in the position of a detective, trying to make sense of the novel's past and present events. In my opinion, *Alias Grace*'s theme is about the complex nature of truth, guilt, victimisation, justice and punishment.

Grace is the internal narrator of her own story and she starts and ends the novel, which implies that she is the main protagonist. In the parts where Simon's life is described, the narrator is external and Simon is the focalisor, focalisation being internal (his thoughts are narrated). Simon is first introduced to the readers through Grace's eyes, and through the letters written by him and to him, so we do not get as close to him as we do to Grace.

Grace's amnesia suggests intense trauma. This trauma also affects her way of narrating her story. Her memory fails and colours, maybe because she wants it to, or because of the mind's own protective mechanisms. As often with Atwood's traumatised protagonists, Grace's memories come in bits and pieces, dreams and nightmares. The paralysing trauma is visible on story and text levels. This narrative structure points to a "broken sense of self". The gradual and lingering way of telling the story also increases the readers' emotional involvement with the story. (Bal 1997, 83, 147.)

Alias Grace describes the late nineteenth century Canada. With the character Grace, issues such as immigration, poverty, class and gender differences and inequality are discussed and become motifs. The division of the nation and the country is visible: the nineteenth century Canada's rebel uprising and violent keeping of the order are present in the characters' memory and talk (this is especially important in the case of Grace's close friend Mary Whitney). The early discourse of psychology, with issues such as free association, hypnotism, mesmerism, and "mad asylums" is brought up in the character of Simon Jordan, and in the multifaceted character Jeremiah the peddler alias doctor in "Neuro-hypnotism", Jerome du Pont. Also the religious movements and interest in paranormal movements of the time, such as Spiritualism, mould the context of *Alias Grace*. The novel's motifs also include prison system and its practices.[78]

At the first look Grace appears to be a very different protagonist compared to Atwood's other novels with their middle class 20th century educated women. However, the familiar motifs are strongly present in *Alias Grace*, too: the traumatised protagonist, feelings of entrapment and actual confinement, abusive childhood, the Gothic and the ghost story elements, artistic work, and strong images of concrete and symbolic eating (see also Stein 1999, 103).

To the feminist reader, *Alias Grace*'s subject – the first infamous female murderer (or falsely accused innocent woman) and her life – signals alignment to female and feminist literary tradition. Although doctor Simon Jordan acts also as a focalisor and as a kind of opposite force, the reader is more inclined to identify with Grace than with Simon. This is due to Grace's status as a less powerful character in terms of hierarchy, which is likely to induce sympathy in the reader. She is also, when she is a focalisor, a first person narrator unlike Simon Jordan, which makes the bond between her and the reader more confidential and intimate. Although Grace hides her most important secrets from the readers, she shares more with us than with Simon, making us her confidantes and friend-like listeners. With Grace's narrative, we are her addressees, but with Simon, we are looking over his shoulder, sort of spying on him.

Although the reader is more distanced from Simon than from Grace, Simon, like *Life Before Man*'s Nate, is the second man in Atwood's novels to be a focalisor in the story. Unlike Nate, Simon is not straightforwardly a "good man", but more reminiscent of the aggressive Bluebeard characters in Atwood's fiction. However, Simon has several positive elements, and he does not stay as a "cardboard cutout" (BA, 479) like Atwood's Bluebeard figures usually do. Because he is a focalisor we learn to know him and create a bond with him.

Although the relationship with Simon is unlikely to be as warm as with Grace, Simon's character gives, for the first time in Atwood's oeuvre, an insight into the Bluebeard character's mind and thoughts. Because of the intimacy – we know his thoughts and we read his private letters – this feminist reader has interesting feelings of ambiguity towards him.

Although it on the surface looks like Simon is armed with power and freedom, and Grace is not, the narratives reverse this and make it clear that Simon is more naked and vulnerable than Grace, who is a cunning survivor and a witty story spinner.

The last two novels of my study, *Alias Grace* and *The Blind Assassin*, are, in dialogic terms, significantly more polyphonic or heteroglossic (i.e. contain more different text types) than the earlier ones. *Alias Grace* includes different types of narration and information: in addition to Grace and Simon's separate narratives, there are dreams, letters, newspaper clips, parts of real Grace Marks's and James McDermott's confessions, quotation from Kingston Penitentiary's punishment book from year 1843, songs, hymns, poems and a ballad (which Atwood wrote in the nineteenth-century style, and which tells about the murders). This means that there is an external unknown narrator, who has constructed the puzzle. The reader sees the story and the events from several different viewpoints, and builds the narrative in a constructive manner – reminiscent of a motif of quilt patterns and quilt making in the novel.

This motif is reminiscent of Elaine's paintings in *Cat's Eye*. The quilts and the paintings can be seen as metaphors, compressions and retellings of the main narratives (see e.g. Wilson 2003; Gregersdottir 2003, 143-150). The patchwork names echo the story and its thematics. *Alias Grace*'s fifteen parts are named after patchwork patterns, such as "Pandora's Box" and "The Tree of Paradise".

The handicrafts are of a great importance in Grace's life. Critics see her as a quilt artist, who is proud of her work. Stein points out that "Grace's story is also a kind of quilt, a patching together of memory, fantasy, and ideas to serve her own purpose" (Stein 1999, 107). In my opinion Grace's art nourishes her. Patchworks and sewing are her pride and joy, and through them she is also able to negotiate her past and present life, and her subjectivity.

There are interesting critical writings on the two last novels of my study, *Alias Grace* and *The Blind Assassin*, but the amount of these writings has not yet grown as enormous as that of certain earlier works. Sharon Wilson examines the issue of metafiction on *Alias Grace*, concentrating especially on the quilts. She sees that the patchwork titles "draw attention to the sexual politics" (Wilson 2003, 130). In a Swedish dissertation, Gregersdotter analyses patriarchal structures and the construction of the female self in Atwood's three novels. She concentrates on the motifs of storytelling, watching, mobility and falling in *Alias Grace* (she also discusses *Cat's Eye* and *The Robber Bride*). Nina Auerbach explores the novel in the context of rewriting the nineteenth-century novel, and sees *Alias Grace* as "the most faithful reconstruction" of the Victorian novel when compared to other rewritings (Auerbach 1997).

The food motif in *Alias Grace* is a strong undercurrent. It is motivated by the imprisonment. On the level of concrete food, the edibles represent survival and thus freedom and future, which can only come if one survives. This applies both to Grace's present situation in the prison and to her life before that, when the famine and poverty threaten her nourishment. On the level of symbolic hunger, the imprisonment and poverty enforce her desire to own, win, and survive. In Simon's case, his hunger is not physical but mental.

The novel's motif of symbolic hunger is most strongly represented in the relationship between Grace and Simon. Both have something that the other wants: Grace is in need of companionship and recreation, and Simon as a doctor could give a statement that might increase her possibilities for having a pardon. If Simon could solve Grace's mystery, his professional ambitions would be answered. The motif of symbolic hunger is also present in the protagonists' other relationships, such as Simon's ambiguous desire towards his landlady.

Alias Grace's images of symbolic hunger and eating are often intertwined with the class system. The characters, in their hunger, try to transgress their social status and are usually punished for this unruliness. This emphasis on class system and its power hierarchies echoes the writers whose work *Alias Grace* intertextually alludes and pays a tribute to, such as Jane Austen and Charles Dickens. Austen's stress on courtship plots and marriage between properly suitable people can be seen as one intertextual context of *Alias Grace*. There are many romance plots, and many of them fail, often just because of the problematic difference in social status. One allusion to Austen is the names of the Governor's unmarried daughters who are trying to get husbands: Lydia and Marianne. These names suggest *Pride and Prejudice*'s Lydia Bennett and *Sense and Sensibility*'s Marianne Dashwood, both Austen's young women with problems in finding a suitable match, whom they would love and whom the society would approve of for them.

In "Grace – "a Cleaving in my Mind"" I study Grace's character, her concrete hunger and eating, and her symbolic hungers. "Grace and Simon: "a contest of wills"" explores Grace and doctor's struggle over the contents of her head: her memories and the truth of the murders. "The Needy and Brutal Doctor" concentrates on Simon Jordan's character, his violent imagination and reality, and his intense hunger and need. In "The Imagined Letter" I examine the novel's ending and its possible interpretations.

10.1 Grace – "a Cleaving in my Mind"

> I felt a Cleaving in my Mind —
> As if my Brain had split —
> I tried to match it — Seam by Seam —
> But could not make it fit.
>
> Emily Dickinson, quoted in AG, 394.

Grace's present time and her embedded narratives often tell about hunger. Her childhood in Ireland is full of hunger and thus food or its absence. According to Grace, her parents "felt trapped" (AG, 105) with each other. Her mother is portrayed as a weak saint and her father as an irresponsible alcoholic and abusive brute (and a possible arsonist and a murderer). The father is unable to keep a job and in Ireland they rely on their mother's sister and her husband's financial support.

Grace's mother is "a timid creature, hesitating and weak and delicate" (AG, 105). Her weakness and inability to stand up for herself in front of her husband and her sister angers Grace: "I wanted her to be stronger, so I would not have to be so strong myself" (AG, 105). Grace's mother had at least twelve children and one miscarriage. Nine children survived, and Grace became the main caretaker of the children and the family's food provisions at the age of nine. Grace's father saw their fertility as his wife's fault and complained constantly about it.

Adult talk and overt responsibility for a child affects Grace's thoughts of her mother's pregnancies and other children. She sees pregnancy threatening:

> I put my hand on my mother's belly (…) and I said What is in there, another mouth to feed, and my mother smiled sadly and said Yes I fear so, and I had a picture of an enormous mouth (…) with teeth (…) eating away at my mother from the inside, and I began to cry because I thought it would kill her. (AG, 107.)

In the child's eyes, the foetus is a cannibal, devouring her mother. It is a greedy eater, which threatens her mother's life. Pregnancy is "an unhappy condition" (AG, 107) in poor surroundings. In a society in crisis, Grace's family was in trouble.

Grace's father jokingly proposes that they would eat the newborn baby to satisfy their hunger: "[H]e said it made him hungry just to look at it, it would

look very nice on a platter with roast potatoes all round and an apple in its mouth" (AG, 110). The father's words are absurd and horrible to his children. From the perspective of an adult well-fed reader, it seems ironic because it is so *in excess*: he cannot be serious, can he? It is easy to understand that in they eyes of the children the father figure is monstrous, but when distanced he is also partially comic. The quotation tells about Ireland and its famine and alludes to Jonathan Swift's classic satire *A Modest Proposal* (1729), in which the hungry and the poor Irish people are advised to eat their children or sell them to rich Englishmen to be eaten. There were plenty of children but not enough food.

Grace is influenced by his father's thoughts and thinks of drowning some of her siblings in order to ease up her own chores. She is a child who is not allowed to be a child, she is not recognised and taken care of by an adult, and the desire to kill comes from an overbearing situation.

The situation gets unbearable for the family, and heated for the father who is being suspected for several offenses, and Grace's mother's sister and her husband pay the family's voyage to Canada. Canada represents a new possibility for the family.

Canada is wealthy in comparison to Ireland. Grace grows stronger and taller and the portrayal of food and its availability is detailed:

> Food was certainly easier to come by in the Canadas than on the other side of the ocean, and there was a greater variety of it; and even then the servants ate meat every day, if only salt pork or bacon; and there was good bread, of wheat and also of Indian corn; and the house had its own three cows (…) fruit trees, and strawberries, currants, and grapes (AG, 150.)

Concrete food is of real importance to Grace because of her starvation as a child, and in the present time of the novel when she narrates her memories. It represents life, survival and pleasure. Sceats remarks that the scarce prison diet enforces Grace's memories of times when food was easily available (Sceats 2000, 123). It also heightens the scenes where Grace is able to eat as much as she wants, and motivates the often-long descriptions. The detailed nature of these portrayals implies two intentions at least: to give realistic portrayal of Grace's world, and to emphasise her concrete and symbolic hunger for different life.

When Doctor Simon Jordan sees Grace for the first time, he is not sure what to expect:

> She must be quite different by now (…) more dishevelled; less self-contained (…) quite possibly insane. (…) [The guard warns] that she (…) could give a man a devilish bite (…) As soon as he saw her, he knew this wouldn't happen. (…) a nun in a cloister, a maiden in a dungeon, awaiting the next day's burning at the stake, or else the last-minute champion come to rescue her. The cornered woman (…) the eyes, enormous in the pale face and dilated with fear, or with mute pleading (…) He'd seen many hysterics (…) who'd looked very much like this. (…) But then Grace stepped forward, out of the light, and the woman he'd seen the instant before was suddenly no longer there. Instead there was a different woman — straighter, taller, more self-possessed (…) Her eyes were (…) far from insane. Instead they were frankly assessing him (…) as if it were he, and not she, who was under scrutiny. (AG, 59-60.)

The many conflicting perspectives on Grace are present in the above quotation: is she violent and bloodthirsty, or is she a traumatised hysteric woman? Is she trapped and hungering for somebody to rescue her? Or is she indeed an intelligent woman who mostly hides her wit? The motif of double or several personalities is present. Simon sees at least two women in her: the hysteric and the capable woman.

The novel's repeated images of double point to and echo the *Alias Grace*'s climax scene, in which Grace, under hypnosis, appears to have split personality or is in part possessed by the spirit of Mary Whitney. Under hypnosis, there are two personalities inside Grace's body: Mary and Grace.

Allusions to this split personality or possession are iterative. For instance, Grace screams in the mental hospital: "I told them I wasn't mad, that I wasn't the one" (AG, 31), and "I did nothing! It was her, it was her fault" (AG, 32.) There are also several sentences that can be seen having a double meaning and thus hinting at the split personality motif, for instance, "without her [Mary Whitney] it would have been a different story entirely" (AG, 102).

Grace's strongest connection to another person is to another woman, even after Mary's death. These two subjectivities are intertwined, in an intense relation.

Mary is Grace's co-worker, a maid, and a strong person with "democratic views" (AG, 159) and her background implies commitment to more equal society, in which there would not be drastic class distinctions and hierarchies. Mary is wild and rebellious in her views of the class system and politics, although she fakes subordination in front of the people in power.

In terms of the false self theory, Grace is in many ways the compliant false self and Mary her desirable true self, untamed and powerful, who has the strength to resist Grace's father, and the oppressive sexist society.

For the feminist reader, Mary Whitney represents an ultimate female victim of Atwood's novels from *The Edible Woman* to *Alias Grace* (only *The Blind Assassin*'s Laura's representation goes even further). Mary falls in love with an upper-class man, probably her employer's son, and ends up pregnant. Desperate, because the man will not take any responsibility or even admit the child is his, Mary goes to an "angel maker" and bleeds to death in the following night.

Gender and class are underlined: Mary, a woman and a servant, is the one who has to take care of the consequences and suffers, but the rich man is left intact: "[H]e is still alive and well, and most likely enjoying his breakfast (…) not having any thoughts in his head about poor Mary, no more than if she was a carcass hung up at the butcher's" (AG, 178.) Mary is compared to slaughtered animal. In a way, the rich have eaten her: used and thrown her away.

When Mary has died, Grace hears her voice saying, "*Let me in*" (AG, 176, italics original). At the same time, on Mary's deathbed, Grace faints and behaves very anxiously:

> I did not seem to know where I was, or what had happened; and I kept asking where Grace had gone. And when they told me that I myself was Grace, I would not believe them (AG, 180.)

This suggests that Grace's personality is split, and that at moments Mary's spirit possesses her.

Alias Grace states that the male symbolic hunger can be destructive for women in an unequal society. The pattern of gentleman's loose sexual behaviour and lack of responsibility for their actions is repeated, and its tragic consequences for women are shown in the novel. Mary Whitney, Nancy Montgomery, and Simon's lover Mrs. Humphrey are all women, whom men use and destroy.

It is suggested that Grace/Mary's symbolic hunger leads to the murders on the Kinnear estate. In one of the novel's numerous pretexts and quotations, real James McDermott claims that the real Grace Marks was envious of the housekeeper Nancy's position in the house: "What is she better than us (…) that she is to be treated like a lady, and eat and drink of the best?" (AG, 235). Grace and McDermott do not approve of Nancy's relationship with their employer Mr. Kinnear, and her behaviour towards them. It is implied that there may be something going on between Mr. Kinnear and Grace, so that Grace/Mary's and McDermott's actions might be driven by jealous hunger as well.

When Grace finds out that Nancy is pregnant to Kinnear and appears to get by with the situation, Grace feels that the situation is unfair: "Mary Whitney had done the same as her, and had gone to her death. Why should the one be rewarded and the other punished, for the same sin?" (AG, 276).

The same night, when trying to sleep, Grace hears a voice, "whispering: *It cannot be*" (AG, 279, italics original), which implies that there is a part in Grace who will not let the events in Alderman Parkinson house be repeated. This time the gentleman will be punished. After this she assumes she has lost consciousness and has sleepwalked, because her clothes reveal that she has been outside. The whisper and her loss of consciousness, and the odd dream she describes having, however, allude to another story: that "Mary" in Grace has taken over, and thus she may be guilty of the murders.

The question of Grace's guilt remains open in the novel. There are hints that she was guilty, and that she is not. As Simon's narrative states, after his hard effort: "Nothing has been proven. But nothing has been disproved, either" (AG, 388). In a similar vein, Grace thinks, "It might have happened" (AG, 296).

After all, the split personality can be just a plot by doctor Jerome DuPont alias Jeremiah the peddler and Grace, fabricated in order to free her. The scene of "neuro-hypnotic experiment" (AG, 322), which convinces Grace's support groups of her innocence and her divided personality, is possibly a show, a trick with smoke and mirrors. Jeremiah could have tried to help his old friend in anguish by advising what she should do and say. As also Wilson notes, the readers and characters of the novel may have witnessed "a parlo[u]r trick" (Wilson 2003, 132).

10.2 Grace and Simon – "a contest of wills"

> Grace (…) eludes him. She glides ahead of him, just out of his grasp, turning her head to see if he's still following. (AG, 407.)

The conversations between Grace and Dr. Simon Jordan are an important part of *Alias Grace*. Their positions are oppositional: Simon is a privileged, educated, American man with a wealthy background, and Grace a poor Irish Protestant immigrant and a convict.

At the beginning of the novel, Grace sees Simon as a hungry and greedy hunter, who wants to reveal the truth of the murders to be able to win the other greedy knowledge seekers. According to Grace, his desire is for a superior knowledge of her; he has a powerful will to know her secret. This desire, in Grace's view, is veiled into charity:

> Help is what they offer but gratitude is what they want (…) He wishes to go home and say to himself, I stuck in my thumb and pulled out the plum, what a good boy am I. But I will not be anybody's plum. (AG, 41.)

Grace's thoughts mock Simon: he is compared to a child who is proud after a deed well done. Simon is using her for making himself a hero, more excellent than the others in the art of trying to open up Grace. She refuses to be his edible, his fruit, his catch of the day that will give him fame and fortune.

Almost every time, Dr. Jordan brings an edible – fruit, root, or vegetable – to their sessions, in order to provoke a reaction in Grace. The first time, he brings an apple, a fruit which bears "heavy – and multiple – significance" (Sceats 2000, 121). With the apple and his other gifts, Jordan is trying the method of association in order to get to the "underground", the "cellar" of Grace's mind, but Grace sees his intention:

> He's playing a guessing game (…) There is always a right answer, which is right because it is the one they want (…) The apple of the Tree of Knowledge, is what he means. Good and evil. (…) But I will not oblige. (AG, 40.)

She resists and mocks his intention: she gives him names of foods and recipes, for instance apple pie. She does not share her thoughts with Jordan, but the reader is privileged to know what she thinks of his offerings and what they make her think about. Grace's resistance does not come from not wanting the apple, on the contrary. She bas been in an isolation cell and has been without proper food and drink for a couple of days. She desires the apple ferociously and sees it as a gift of life after strong feelings of thirst and dehydration: "I am so thirsty the apple looks to me like a big round drop of water, cool and red. (…) It has such an odour of outdoors on it I want to cry" (AG, 39).

For Grace, the apple is a sign of freedom and the world outside. The apple is a tool for Dr. Jordan, but essential for Grace – he is in power. It is probable that the importance of the apple to Grace is not clear to the doctor, who is well

fed, at least in comparison to Grace. It appears that Jordan wants to cheer Grace up and build trust between them with the gift, and seeing that she does not eat it immediately with gratitude displeases him. Not wanting to eat in the presence of others suggests that showing desire is dangerous for a woman in Grace's position. She wants to hide her hunger and desire so that it could not be used against her, so that the others could not have the power over her. As Grace thinks: "The truth is I don't want him watching me while I eat. I don't want him to see my hunger. If you have a need and they find it out, they will use it against you. The best way is to stop from wanting anything" (AG, 39-40).

Grace and Simon are struggling over power and knowledge. The communication between them is a game of hiding and calculated revealing, partial honesty. The scenes with vegetables and fruits are repeated and every time a new kind of aspect of frustration and impossibility of trust is presented. The edibles are an important part of the intellectual game between the two characters. Their desire in the situation is different and neither one of them wants to give in. They want something from each other, but want to keep their own integrity.

In a letter to his friend, Simon portrays Grace's mind as "a locked box, to which I must find the right key" (AG, 132), alluding to Pandora's box, which suggests that opening Grace may be dangerous.[79] Simon is aware that Grace is a difficult case and she is in charge of herself: "I have never known any woman to be so thoroughly self-contained" (AG, 132). He sees her as "cool as a cucumber" and he portrays himself "trying in vain to open her up like an oyster" (AG, 133). Grace is an edible, a cucumber and an oyster, which Simon wants to open up, eat, and learn about thoroughly.

As Simon himself observes, some of his thoughts about his project, Grace and her story are "drastic" and cruel:

> [H]e'll pry it out of her yet. He's got the hook in her mouth, but can he pull her out? Up, out of the abyss, up to the light. Out of the deep blue sea. (…) He means her well, he tells himself. He thinks of it as a rescue, surely he does.
> But does she? If she has anything to hide, she may want to stay in the water, in the dark, in her element. She may be afraid she won't be able to breathe (AG, 322.)

Simon is repeatedly thinking of Grace in the terms of animals and food: fish, meat and cat. They all are controlled and used by people. Simon is trying to convince himself that he is doing a good deed, but the words such as "surely" suggest that he has doubts. The image of hook in the mouth does not signal saving or helping. It implies catching and killing, taking something from their own world to the catcher's world, where the loot has the position of a victim. He seems to want to do her a favour by giving her the truth she has said to desire, but he also appears to feel responsible for his action: what will happen to Grace, he wonders. He understands that their stakes are different. In the above quotation, Simon is alternately a cruel fisher and a hesitant helper acknowledging the ambiguity of his undertaking.

Simon is convinced that Grace is not telling him everything. He feels that "she is (…) exerting her passive stubborn strength against him" (AG, 362). His

aggression is "almost overwhelming" (ibid.), suggesting desire to oppress Grace; make her what he wants her to be.

For the feminist reader, Simon's thoughts and ideas are violent. In the context of feminist object-relations theory, Grace represents the siren who lures to regression and the loss of self, and Simon represents the desire to break free from the seductive force of undifferentiation. Grace is the obstacle he has to overcome in order to establish his independent subjectivity, a life where "the (m)other" is won for good. Grace is the possibility for him. If he reveals her mystery, he may be able to realise his dream: to establish a private mental asylum.

Importantly, Simon does not succeed in his effort to "crack [her] open" (AG, 307). Simon's violent metaphors are undermined by Grace's opinions of him. Our bond with her, because she is the main protagonist, is stronger than with Simon, and it is enjoyable to see how resistant and cunning Grace is in her relationship with this distinguished doctor and gentleman. The narrative strategy of *Alias Grace* is polyphonic: we see the same events from different perspectives and are able to understand both parties.

The doctor represents the possibility for recognition, even freedom for Grace. His good opinion might help her to become a free citizen. He is an interested listener who changes Grace's prison routines and gives her a special status among the other prisoners. As Sceats observes, Jordan suggests rescue to Grace, but also risk, because "to cooperate fully with him Grace would have to relinquish the only area of control she maintains: over the contents of her mind" (Sceats 2000, 121). Grace cannot open herself to Simon totally, in spite of the temptation: "I have little enough of my own, no belongings, no possessions, no privacy to speak of, and I need to keep something for myself" (AG, 101).

It is implied several times that Grace is in charge of the narrative, not the doctor (see also Gregersdotter 2003, 142-143, 149). When Grace is delighted by the radish she has asked Simon to bring, she decides to make her story of the day "as interesting as I can, and rich in incident" (AG, 247), which implies that she invents or at least colours her stories. When Dr. Jordan meets Grace's former lawyer Kenneth MacKenzie, the latter interprets her narrations to him as Scheherazade's tales, narrated in order "[t]o keep the Sultan amused" (AG, 377).

It is suggested that Grace is more than flattered by the doctor's keen interest. She is happy to have an interested and empathetic listener:

> I feel as if everything I say is right. (…) Dr. Jordan smiles and writes it down, and tells me I am doing well.
> While he writes, I feel as if he is drawing (…) on me — drawing on my skin (…) with an old-fashioned goose pen (…) with the feather end. As if hundreds of butterflies have settled all over my face, and are softly opening and closing their wings. (AG, 69.)

The quotation is very sensual. The image Grace describes is very beautiful and tender, even erotic. It could imply an emotional attachment towards the doctor, but it is also an image of telling, speaking and writing. The relaxed and excited

feeling of the skin when tickled or caressed with a feather is a metaphor for opening up to somebody, trusting somebody. It shows what a pleasure narrating can be – if you tell your own story on your own conditions and you are listened to with appreciation.

In a typical Atwoodian manner, this is followed by an image of something closed and the situation is reversed: "[I]nside the peach there's a stone" (AG, 69). It appears that Grace has a symbolic hunger for showing herself to Simon, but she cannot trust him.

There is a strong erotic tension between Grace and Simon. Simon thinks that Grace would be the only woman he would like to marry, and Grace wishes that Simon would wait for her after her pardon. This desire, however, is not fulfilled.

10.3 The Needy and Brutal Doctor

Simon Jordan finds his relationship with his mother at least in part suffocating. The relation is too intense, and Simon feels that his own subjectivity and individuality has been or is sometimes under threat because of his mother's influence. His mother continues still, when he is grown-up, to try to dominate his life. She does not approve of his travelling and interest in mental disorders. She constantly writes to him that she wants him to change. She disguises her desire to dominate and command her son as doing her best for him:

> I say these things, not from any wish to meddle or interfere, but out of a Mother's anxious care for the future of her only and beloved Son (…) You know I live only for your welfare. My health took a turn for the worse after your departure — your presence always has an improving effect upon my spirits. (AG, 51.)

Her hunger and greed are hidden under the guise of self-sacrifice and goodwill. In the context of interpersonal psychoanalytic feminism, it appears that Simon's mother represents self-sacrifice, which is veiled hunger for power over the other; an effort to manipulate the other.

Simon has felt and in the novel's present time continues to feel slightly guilty because of his independence and his mother's ailments: "[H]is was a difficult birth, which almost killed her, and fatally weakened her lungs – a medically implausible effect which (…) used to reduce him to a jelly of guilt" (AG, 88). Jelly is boneless, often somewhat transparent and shapeless. This image suggests childlike vulnerability and powerlessness in front of the dominating parent. Simon is a dutiful son, who feels that his mother is his responsibility. He is in conflict with his own desire and his connection to his mother.

In terms of feminist object-relations, Mrs. Jordan appears not to recognise her son as an individual separate from herself. She is possessive, dominating and cannibalising mother. She has used him, and continues to do so, to fulfil

her own needs. Simon's mother represents "a swamp of narcissistic bliss" (Benjamin 1988, 175; Chodorow 1989, 35). The jelly, a product without distinct shape or form implies the danger of succumbing to this swamp.

Mrs. Jordan's supposed living through her son is also understandable. Women are, in our society, often encouraged to have their identity fused with their children and their accomplishments. Because they are not given full subjectivity they sometimes try to reach it through their children, especially male children. (See e.g. Chodorow 1989, 42).

Simon feels that her mother's efforts to make him a married man are too intense:

> How many acceptable young girls has she trailed discreetly before him, like feathered fishing lures? (…) Their morals have been irreproachable, their manners candid as spring water; their minds have been presented to him as unbaked pieces of dough which it would be his prerogative to mould and form. As one season's crop of girls proceeds into engagement and marriage, younger ones keep sprouting up, like tulips in May. They are now so young in relation to Simon that he has trouble conversing with them; it's like talking to a basketful of kittens. (AG, 87-88.)

Simon sees the women his mother introduces to him as fishing lures, spring water, dough, tulips, and kittens. They are as pure and simple as the spring water; their minds are dough – suggesting easy consumption. In Simon's perception, the young women are his mother's lures, her weapons for making him bend to her hopes: to marry and give her grandchildren. Simon does not see these women as individuals: they are the fruit of the land and kittens, sweet but unintelligent and growing and changing soon. Also the dough suggests growth and change. The idea of change implies danger: these women may not be as sweet and innocent as they look at first: they may have teeth and nails.

The mother wants to choose whom Simon marries. To him, the situation is nightmarish: in his eyes, an arranged marriage would turn him into a victim. He would be

> imprisoned in an armchair by the fire, frozen in a kind of paralyzed stupor, with his dear wife winding him up gradually in coloured silk threads like a cocoon, or like a fly snarled in the web of a spider? (AG, 293.)

Simon sees himself as a fly and the possible wife as a spider. She is gently but firmly spinning a web that will suffocate him. On the other hand, to Simon marriage also means proper life: routines and good food. Simon sometimes thinks of giving up and marrying some woman his mother would accept: "[H]e's tempted to succumb (…) his daily life would be orderly, his breakfasts would be edible" (AG, 88). When he in part seriously thinks of proposing to Miss Lydia, he decides against it, because "he's not that lazy, or weary, not yet" (AG, 324).

Marriage represents a failure to Simon: losing against his mother and giving up his dreams. Marriage is equalled with his mother's power over him.

In the context of feminist object-relations, Simon's career represents masculinity: growth, power, individuality and independence. The marriage,

arranged by his mother, implies same things as the mother: loss of self and indifferentiation, loss of independence and subjectivity.

Simon is not only in symbolically hungry struggle with his mother and Grace, but he also has intense relations with other minor female characters in the novel.

During *Alias Grace*, Simon starts having sexual and sadistic thoughts of his landlady Mrs. Rachel Humphrey. He sees her as a woman who is "waiting for a slap, a kick, a flat-handed blow" (AG, 290). At first, however, Simon distances himself from this scene of brutality: "not from him" (AG, 290) she is going to get abuse. But this changes and their relationship becomes sexual and sadomasochistic.

In the eyes of the feminist reader, Mrs. Humphrey is in a difficult situation, a victim. She has an abusive and alcoholic husband, who does not take care of her financially. She has become addicted to drugs and steals laudanum from Simon's medicine bag.

Simon sees their affair and meetings as a game. Meetings start with Mrs. Humphrey's self-blame for letting herself get "lost" (AG, 363) into their relationship, and proceed with her expressions of desperateness. The pattern continues to her advances in the guise of getting comfort from him and his comforting her and becoming aroused. In Simon's view, she needs and desires this drama. According to him,

> Her pretence is a pretence of aversion — it's her part to display resistance, his to overcome it. She wishes to be seduced, overwhelmed, taken against her will. At the moment of her climax — which she attempts to disguise as pain — she always says *no*. (AG, 365, italics original.)

He sees Rachel as "a captive (…) Imprisoned" (AG, 399), but an active one: according to him, she asks him to hit her. In terms of the feminist object-relations theory, Simon represents recognition and power to her. He is her chance to get out of her unhappy and poor life, to have new possibilities, even to immigrate to the USA and to become his wife.

During their struggle, Simon is depicted having a divided self. He has contradictory selves during day and night, and there are a brutal aggressor and a cool observer inside of him:

> During the day, Rachel is a burden, an encumbrance, and he wishes to be rid of her; but at night she's an altogether different person, and so is he. He too says no when he means yes. He means more, he means further, he means deeper. He would like to make and incision in her – just a small one – so he can taste her blood, which in the shadowy darkness of the bedroom seems to him like a normal wish to have. (…) another part of him stands with folded arms, fully clothed, merely curious, merely observing. How far (…) will he go? (AG, 365-366.)

Simon has two selves, one of them involved and the other one mocking and analysing the first. It is as if the doctor, the analyst part of him is the curious one, and the other side is deeply involved in the scenario. To Simon Rachel represents what he would like Grace to be, "trembling and clinging" (AG, 408).

When Grace eludes him, the landlady is his and "will not slip through his fingers" (AG, 407) (see also Sceats 2000, 123).

In the context of the feminist object-relations theory, Benjamin argues that the scene of erotic domination is filled with both parties' "deep longing for wholeness". The need to hurt and be hurt may break the boundaries between oneself and the other, but it also is about finding the lost boundaries. The struggle can be seen as the self's sincere effort to break out from the trap of the false self. (Benjamin 1988, 64, 82; Ghent 1983, quoted through Benjamin 1988, 72.)

Benjamin writes:

> Submission (…) is often motivated by the fear of separation and abandonment; masochism reflects the inability to express one's own desire and agency. In submission, even the fulfilment of desire is made to appear as the expression of the other's will. (…) In erotic submission, fear of the master's power takes the place of the deeper fear — of the separation that feels like death. (Benjamin 1988, 79.)

Rachel is a good example of this. She says to Simon, "I love you more than my life!" (AG, 409-410). The scenario is about female self-negation, but at the same time it is about a struggle to be recognised by the powerful other. As Benjamin analyses Pauline Réage's *Histoire d'O* (*Story of O)*: "Her masochism is a search for recognition through an other who is powerful enough to bestow this recognition. The other has the power for which the self longs, and through his recognition she gains it, though vicariously" (Benjamin 1988, 56).

Mrs. Humphrey wants them to start a new life. She even suggests, according to Simon, that he ought to kill her husband. Simon muses with the thought, making the scheme look like "third-rate shocker" or a "midnight burlesque" (AG, 410). The thoughts echo the happenings in Kinnear estate murders: he would kill the master of the house, a female servant and then be tied to his accomplice in crime, and possibly kill her, too, later. Simon is terrified when he understands that she wants this in earnest. He thinks that she wants to bind him, make him eternally hers by being the only witness for his possible murders: "He'll be wedded to her; chained to her; melded to her (…) He will never be free" (AG, 410).

Simon leaves Mrs. Humphrey and Kingston without any warning. She keeps writing to him and threatens to commit suicide unless he comes back. She is a desperate victim: separation from the powerful other feels like death. Her letters are opened and answered by his mother. Mrs. Jordan lets her know that if she will continue writing, the letters will not be read but destroyed. So her voice seems to be left hanging in the air, in the possible letters, pleading.

The depiction of Simon and his landlady's relationship is complex and multifaceted. Their addiction to sadomasochistic practices is portrayed in a way that emphasises the power play's intricacy: they both want it and they both are portrayed as its victims. Their sexual practices are a power and an entrapping pattern beyond their control. They are in a struggle, in which they both are unhappy. They appear addicted to each other, demanding a recognition that cannot be achieved, but they keep on trying.

For the feminist reader, Simon's wishes and thoughts concerning the women in his life are often disturbing, even brutal. But because the reader is somewhat distanced from Simon, there is also amusing and ironic edges to his character's beastly symbolic hungers, which are in excess. One protecting factor for the reader is Grace's unbreakable resistance to him.

At the beginning of Alias Grace, doctor Simon Jordan is "one of the up-and-coming men" (AG, 78), bound to be successful. But at the end he is a wreck, and thus reminiscent of, for instance, The Edible Woman's Len. Simon feels like a victim in front of the women in his life: his mother is too demanding, Grace is too cunning; Mrs. Humphrey is like a vampire and the servant Dora is too disrespectful.[80]

Grace's narrative seems to have a particular effect on the doctor: his condition deteriorates as the narrative progresses. Simon cannot stop thinking about the truth of the story and is troubled by the events Grace narrates, for instance by Mary Whitney's tragic story. It reminds him of his own desire towards the maids in his childhood. He even kissed one, a maid whose mouth tasted of "strawberries" (AG, 187), which suggests similarity with Mary Whitney's affair with the gentleman. Gradually Simon begins feeling weak and "[h]is body insubstantial as a bladder, emptied of will" (AG, 291). He has health problems, or at least feels like he is having them (like Mr. Kinnear in Grace's story to Simon), he has problems concentrating, loses often the track of time, and self-medicates himself with laudanum.

He sees Grace as a sort of vampire, who sucks his strength away and uses it herself: "It's as if she's drawing his energy out of him" (AG, 291). In his mind, Grace is more powerful than him, wearing him out, even symbolically cannibalising her. Simon's belief in rationality suffers in the situation: "[H]is brain feels like a roasting chestnut" (AG, 407). As Sceats observes, "her discourse has subsumed his own" (Sceats 2000, 123).

Simon's letters to his mother and a friend, once witty and eloquent, become impossible to complete. When he tries to write to his friend Edward, the following thoughts are depicted:

> His hands are empty; he has discovered nothing. (…) he must take into account the possibility of defeat. (…) *Suffering from malaria. Bitten by snake. Send more medicine. The maps are wrong.* (AG, 293, italics original.)

Simon is compared to the searchers of the source of Nile. He is described as a victim of a snakebite, and the biters are Grace and her story, and his own compelling desire for knowledge and ambition. The fact that maps are wrong suggests that his methods are not adequate. Simon is compared to a possibly dying man with a mission gone wrong, waiting for a rescue, which may never come.

Simon's feelings of weakness and powerlessness are often connected with food. In a letter to his friend, he complains that his breakfasts are "deplorable" and other meals catastrophes: "every meal is a burnt offering (…) addition of a

little dirt and grime, and a seasoning of insects" (AG, 54). He calls his eats "travesties of the culinary art" (AG, 54).

Simon's attitude towards his meals is condescending: the small Canadian town cannot satisfy his needs. He has learnt the ways of Europe and the wealthy Americans, and his dissatisfaction marks the difference between Canada, Europe and the United States. It also stresses his (desired) difference when compareed to the local people. His complaints underline that he is just a visitor, an educated man of the world who knows better.

Simon's morning egg seems to be very important to him. A bad egg in the morning may spoil his day. The eggs are depicted with detail and rich language:

> Yesterday his egg was like india-rubber; (…) today the egg is so undercooked as to be scarcely jellied, with a blueish tinge to it like an eyeball. (AG, 60.)
> [T]he egg had the consistency of the excised tumour a fellow medical student once slipped into his pocket for a joke — both hard and spongy at the same time. (AG, 74.)

The comparisons of food to eyeball and tumour seem clever and disgusting, even abject. Simon feels that neither his landlady Mrs. Humphrey nor her servant Dora can make the egg he desires. It seems that Simon thinks these women purposefully try to ruin his food and thus leave him hungry and weak. These women have the power over him when they serve him food, his necessary nourishment, and maybe remind him of his mother's power over him.

Simon's concentration and fussing over his meals is *in excess*. It ridicules him, and in comparison to Grace whose diet is much worse, he seems petty and over indulgent.

In terms of feminist object-relations, Simon is afraid of being dependent and weak. He is trying to be a distant master, to avoid being manipulated by women.

Simon leaves the town suddenly after hearing that Mrs. Humphrey's husband is coming back. Grace, Mrs. Humphrey, and his work in Kingston represent suffocation, swamp like femininity, and when he catches his train he is relieved: "The presence of a train conductor in a uniform, is reassuring to him (…) Order of a sort is reasserting itself. (…) He could have fallen in. He could have drowned" (AG, 412). The train and its male conductor represent male mastery and reason, refuge from merging with the feminine.

Simon thinks of reorganising his life after he is back in the United States: he plans to start a new, better and active life, and it seems to succeed at first. After leaving Kingston and travelling in Europe, he writes to his friend that the whole episode is like "a troubled dream" (AG, 423). However, Simon is unable to forget Grace, her story or the problem of the truth of the guilt: "[H]er face floats before in the darkness, like some lovely and enigmatic mirage" (AG, 424). After this, Simon's focalisation ends in the novel. What we hear about him after this, is through other people, mainly his mother. This suggests that he has lost his battle for his independence with his mother.

According to Mrs. Jordan's letter, Simon has gone to war and been wounded himself in the head and suffers from amnesia, being in a "damaged and at times delirious state" (AG, 430). This is an ironic reversal: he set out to cure Grace's amnesia and now he has lost all his memories and interests after childhood. And indeed, he is been shown "little homely objects" (AG, 431) in order to refresh his memory – a comic congruence to his offerings of edibles to Grace.

Simon's fate seems in part pitiable: he has lost his independency and is now at the mercy of his dominating mother. His mother claims that he cannot remember anything but his boyhood, and nothing after that. His mother is determined to make an acquaintance of hers his wife, and Simon calls this woman Grace, which suggests that he is still intrigued by and obsessed with her.

Because the feminist reader is more likely to be more involved with Grace than with Simon, his fate appears as, at least in part, comic and amusing. He could not break Grace, but was broken. He takes Grace's place as it was at the beginning of the narrative. In other words, he becomes feminine, "a woman".

10.4 The Imagined Letter

Alias Grace ends with Grace's letter to Simon, composed in her mind. Other letters in the novel have a recipient and an address, but this one does not, which confirms that the letter is neither written nor sent. In the letter, the forty five year old Grace tells that she was pardoned after almost 29 years in prison, and she narrates what has happened to her since. The letter is told to be composed a year after her pardon, in the year 1873.

The fate of the historical Grace Marks is unknown, although it is assumed that she immigrated to the USA and got married there. In *Alias Grace*, Grace marries Jamie Walsh, who was her neighbour friend during the times of the Kinnear murders. They live on a farm in the USA and their life appears to be rather happy in a quiet way, although it would not be an Atwood novel without some ambivalence. According to Grace's letter, her husband Jamie enjoys her stories of her predicaments. He insists that she tells him all the grisly details, the worse the better, and he is aroused by hearing about instances of sexual harassment. Grace would like to stop thinking about her past, but he enjoys it. He begs for her to forgive him, as "he likes to think it was him that was author of all" (AG, 456). He wants to be considered as the person who put Grace to jail and caused all her torment. It appears that he gets pleasure of picturing himself as the powerful, malicious, but now repenting figure, and Grace as the victim who will forgive him, over and over again.

The imagined letter suggests that Grace is still intrigued by Simon, unable to forget him (just like Simon's mother's letter suggests that he is besotted with her). Even though she is married and leads a new life, she wants to tell him her

story like she used to when they still were face to face. Simon is the one Grace wants to recognise her, see her as she is – she shares her secrets with him in the letter. Simon is Grace's most intimate confidante, at least in her mind, even years after they have seen each other.

To Grace, there may be death or childbirth ahead:

> Now there is another thing I have told no one. (…) unless I am much mistaken, I am now three months gone; either that or it is the change of life. (…) But then it might as easily be a tumour, such as killed my poor mother at last; for although there is a heaviness, I've had no sickness in the mornings. It is strange to know you carry within yourself either a life or death, but not to know which one. (AG, 458-459.)

She does not know whether she has cancer, or a foetus inside of her, and accordingly, neither do we. In the last lines, Grace thinks of doing the quilt of the Tree of Paradise, in which she will include things from Mary Whitney, Nancy Montgomery, and a piece of her own night gown from the prison. The last words of the novel state: "And so we will all be together" (AG, 460). The victims and the possible killer are intertwined, which suggests – as the whole novel – that guilt, responsibility, and victimisation are complex and intricately connected issues. According to Grace, victims co-operate with their abusers, they are not entirely innocent (see also Sceats 2000, 124).

As an implicated reader I am mostly drawn to the mystery of the novel, and its seductive style and language. Grace and Simon's relationship is pleasurable, his hunger and her resistance enjoyable to the reader when written so beautifully. Grace is the ultimate survivor in Atwood's novels, the woman who appears to be stripped off all her powers, but she still is in control of her life through her narrating. She does not give up or give in, she does not give away her secret (in a reminiscent way of *The Robber Bride*'s Zenia), not even to the reader.

With Simon's character, I have noticed friction between my reading as an implicated and a feminist reader, between the emotion and the consciousness. As an implicated reader, I am emotionally involved with Simon, but as a feminist reader, I find it often difficult to like him because of his violent thoughts of the female characters. I am interested in him and in a way I like him, but there is reservedness and a sense of amused curiosity in my attitude towards him.

From the 1900th century celebrated murderess we turn to Atwood's tenth novel *The Blind Assassin*, which won the prestigious Booker-prize. *The Blind Assassin* is an autobiography by an 83-year-old Iris Chase, who reports significant present and past hungers, foods and meals.

11 THE BLIND ASSASSIN: EATING, COMPLIANCE, AND RESISTANCE

The Blind Assassin (2000) describes the rise and decline of a rich upper class button factory owning family, the Chases, and through marriage of another rich family, the Griffens. It depicts the rapidly changing political and economic atmospheres of the 20th century North American society, bringing up dilemmas and motifs such as right wing versus left wing politics, and the inequal class system and its problems. The novel emphasises the effects of the two world wars on the personal and societal levels.

In the novel, the protagonist Iris Chase narrates her sad "family saga" (Kathryn Hughes's newspaper criticism in the Sunday Telegraph, September 2000, quoted through Reynolds and Noakes 2002, 145). *The Blind Assassin* includes several layers of narration and stories, which, in dialogic terms, suggests polyphony or heteroglossia. Stein, among others, sees that the novel is constructed like "a Russian wooden doll" (e.g. Stein 2003, 135). First, in the frame story, Iris Chase at the age of 83 in the year 1999 writes depictions of her daily life and the story of her life and its tragic events. Iris is the internal retrospective narrator, whose voice starts and ends the novel. Iris is also the focalisor, the focalisation is internal, and she tells about her former self in the first person singular. Second, there is an embedded novel inside of the novel, again *The Blind Assassin* (from now on *The Blind Assassin* 2), a short tragic love story written by Iris, but published under her sister Laura's s name in order to show respect for her. The real authorship is kept hidden until almost the end of the novel, but there are clues for the reader. It is repeatedly implied that the main characters "she" and "he" in *The Blind Assassin* 2 are (doubly) literary Iris and the writer Alex Thomas, a man whom both sisters, Iris and Laura, love.

Third, in *The Blind Assassin* 2 he tells a story about a city of Sakiel-Norn to her, a tale with elements of archaic past and science fiction. He is portrayed as narrating, creating and innovating other narratives and storylines as well, but the story of the blind assassin and the sacrificial virgin who escape from Sakiel-Norn is the longest. Fourth, there are newspaper clippings and letters that inform the reader of for instance about Iris's death and give extra information of the events. Also photographs are of great importance in the narrative

construction. The Chase and Griffen families, their lives, interests and values are often introduced through newspaper articles before Iris's autobiography tells about them. There is often a gap between Iris's reality and the newspaper writing. This brings polyphony and irony to the text, and irony's edge is targeted towards the public appearances and the factuality of newspapers.[81]

The Blind Assassin is a novel of letters, a confessional autobiography. At the beginning, Iris insists on not knowing whom she is writing to, but later she understands or confesses that her addressee is Sabrina, her granddaughter with whom she has had no contact for years. The novel is an effort to explain why it all – Iris's life and her separation from this granddaughter – happened. In my opinion, this is *The Blind Assassin* theme: an effort to reveal the truth behind facades, masks and lies. Iris has never had a chance to tell the story to Sabrina in person, so she writes it, and dreams of meeting her again and telling the story to her herself.

Iris's autobiography includes mysteries and secrets, and clues to solving these puzzles. At the end, most secrets and mysteries are solved; many questions answered. Because of the novel's complex structure, one can argue that the narrator is external and the novel in its entirety is the locked box, a "steamer trunk" (BA, 521) where Iris keeps her treasures: photographs, newspaper clippings, letters, and the manuscripts (of *The Blind Assassin* 2 and her story to Sabrina). One could argue that the position of the external narrator is reserved for Sabrina, whom Iris wishes to open the box and to read her secrets.

The alignment with female and feminist tradition is strong again in *The Blind Assassin*. According to Pearce, it often happens in the contemporary feminist texts that the narrator allies with her reader, is in dialogue with her (Pearce 1997, 39, 67). Because *The Blind Assassin*'s addressee is unknown at the beginning, it enforces the relationship between the feminist reader and the narrator. We are spoken to; we are addressed as the hearers of a private, confessional story.

The protagonist Iris is, like Atwood's main characters often are, an artist. She is retired in the novel's present time, but has been an artisan, a jewellery maker. Unlike most of Atwood's protagonists, she does not live in Toronto, but in a town called Port Ticonderoga, a hundred miles from Toronto.

As Atwood has said in an interview, to her writing is "elegiac", among other things. It is an effort to praise and capture the present time and the times and things that are lost in history. It even includes a desire to "attempt to stop or bring back time" (Ingersoll 1992, 236-237). This can be seen as the motivator for *The Blind Assassin*'s Iris's detailed memories of her past. They celebrate and describe lived history and lost happiness. Iris portrays places, events, clothing, and meals, sometimes with meticulous care. At the beginning of the new millennium, one can think that Atwood has tried to capture the entire 20th century in one novel through the perspective of a female protagonist who has lived almost all of it (Iris is born in 1916 and dies in 1999).

Jodie Foster's film company Egg Pictures has bought the film rights for the story, so it is possible that in the future we will see *The Blind Assassin* on the movie screen.

As with *Alias Grace*, there has not yet been enough time for academic writings on *The Blind Assassin* to accumulate into an exhaustive amount. In her book *Margaret Atwood. A Critical Companion* Cooke analyses the novel as a "villainess novel". According to her, Iris is the blind assassin of the novel, a character who is "steeped in the rank darkness of villainy and self-deception and still appear[s] so beguilingly sympathetic" (Cooke 2004, 138). In her article, Stein analyses *The Blind Assassin*'s Gothic elements and especially the novel's motifs of "hiding/revealing, and speech/silence" (Stein 2003, 138). She explores the text's use of costume and disguise.

The food motif in *The Blind Assassin* is a strong undercurrent. It is motivated by the narrator's feeling that she has lost the most important people in her life and is herself lost in many ways. In the present time, the motif of concrete food it is motivated by Iris's old age and deteriorating health. In the embedded narratives, Iris and her sister Laura are physically fed, but mentally hungry children and their hunger drives them forward to unfortunate events and places. The symbolic hunger is present in male and female characters' perceptions of each other, motivated by a forceful need to differentiate and be recognised. [82]

In chapters "The Trapped Sisters", "Iris – The Empty Face", and "Laura – "a pigeon smashing into glass"" I analyse Iris and Laura's intense relationship, and Iris's autobiographical memories and their plentiful images of victimisation and resistance. In "*The Blind Assassin* 2" I explore the embedded novel's motif of concrete and symbolic food, eating, and hunger, and look at the novel's ending.

11.1 The Trapped Sisters

Laura's character is a crucial force behind *The Blind Assassin*. Her fate begins the novel and her importance for Iris and the other people is of immense significance. It appears that Laura's life is one of the motivators for Iris writing her autobiography. It is almost as much Laura's biography as it is Iris's, their lives and subjectivities are intertwined and dependent (see also Cooke 2004, 146). Iris invites and even demands the reader to be as interested in Laura as she is: "Laura has been singled out, by you, by me" (BA, 417). As an implicated reader, I have found myself repeatedly resisting this emphasis on Laura while reading *The Blind Assassin*. I resist Iris's claim that the reader would put Laura first and Iris second. This alignment is unlikely because readers ally more easily with the narrators and the focalisors.

From an early age on, Iris's parents encourage and demand her to take care of her sister Laura. Their bond is described as strong and complicated. Iris feels responsible for her sister, who is repeatedly portrayed as rather different

from others, even extraordinary. For example: "Being Laura, I thought, was like being tone deaf: the music played and you heard something, but it wasn't what everyone else heard" (BA, 199).

In the context of the feminist object-relations theory, it appears that Iris and Laura's relationship epitomises the dilemma of "lack of adequate self/other distinction" (Chodorow 1989, 58). Iris feels responsible for her sister, but she also wants to be independent and irresponsible. She feels uncomfortable because of this intense connection and tries to distinguish herself from Laura, but feels guilty for her desire to resist this bond.

Iris thinks of her and her sister Laura as victims during their childhood: "The two of us on our thorn-encircled island, waiting for rescue; and, on the mainland, everyone else" (BA, 43). The girls' parents are distant and mostly absent.

Iris feels jealous of her mother's love, she is afraid that her mother loves Laura more than her: "Her love for us was a given – solid and tangible, like a cake. The only question was which of us was going to get the bigger slice" (BA, 93). The love of the mother is described as something that is necessarily and undoubtedly there. Nevertheless, the metaphor of a cake is something rare and festive. A cake is not always there, like Iris's mother, who is often absent because of her charity work. Cake is delicious, and it has something to do with Sundays and birthdays. The child's hope seems to be that the mother will not diminish, or that her love will not get stale even though she would eat it up everyday, that the mother would not deny and dissatisfy her needs and hunger.

Iris learns that the way to be accepted and allowed to spend time with her mother demands hiding her own symbolic hunger:

> I soon found out that if I could keep quiet, without clamouring for attention, and above all if I could be helpful – especially with the baby, with Laura, watching beside her and rocking her cradle so she would sleep (…) I would be permitted to remain in the same room with my mother. If not, I would be sent away. So that was the accommodation I made: silence, helpfulness. (BA, 85.)

As Stein writes, Iris understands that in order to be approved by her mother she has to be quiet and servile (Stein 2003, 148). In terms of the false self theory, in relation to her parents Iris becomes a compliant false self in order to be loved. From the beginning of her little sister's life, Iris understands that Laura is more important than she is, the one who needs and gets most of the available attention.

Iris and Laura's mother dies when Iris is nine and Laura six years old. Before her death, Iris notices different smells of her mother: first the smouldering leaves and later "she smelled of milk, and of something raw, something rancid, like the brown paper meat came wrapped in" (BA, 93). At the same time her mother smells of milk, a substance tied closely to motherly love, and of the paper where the cut up (meat of) animals is stored and delivered to homes, to be eaten.

The girls' sorrow and desperation are connected to concrete food. The day after her mother's funeral the girls can eat as much as they will. The grief gets a

flavour of sugar and tragedy is coloured by overeating: “I felt desolate, and also grouchy and bloated. Sugar buzzed in my head” (BA, 97). The sisters eat the funeral leftovers without permission, and the food is described in detail: "I’d eaten too many cookies, too many slivers of ham; I’d eaten a whole slice of fruitcake” (BA, 96). It appears that the girls look for pleasure and comfort from food. Even more so, they are in need to be seen and heard. Iris wants to be noticed, even punished for overeating: she wants the housekeeper Reenie to say “warnings or predictions in which I’d always taken a secret comfort” (BA, 96).

After the mother’s death Reenie allows the girls to have picnics in the garden. These picnics are full of sadness and mixed feelings caused by the loss of their mother: the sisters are grief eating, eating grief. They are sort of mourning events, even sort of Communions.

Repeatedly in *The Blind Assassin*, the girls’ father represents the ultimate authority, the ownership of all power. Laura even confuses their father’s steps from the turret – while he is drinking – with God, the all-powerful and odd figure, who can be “everywhere”. Male authority and strangeness are present both in God and her father.

The father’s oddity and incomprehensibility is often described in images or scenes including food. One of them is the important event in Iris’s life, her first soda in the local diner Betty’s Luncheonette alone with her father:

> “We’ll go to Betty’s,” said my father. “I’ll buy you a soda.” Neither of these things had ever happened before. Betty’s Luncheonette was for the townspeople, not for Laura and me, said Reenie (…) sodas were a ruinous indulgence and would rot your teeth. That two such forbidden things should be offered at once, and so casually, made me feel almost panicky. (BA, 100.)

In this scene, the father represents freedom and rebellion from the girls’ strict education, mainly carried out by housekeeper Reenie. In the context of the feminist object-relations theory, Reenie has represented the real power in Iris’s life. Now, when her father gives her unusual attention and shows her parts of his world, her view of the world changes.

The father’s remoteness is underlined; he is a stranger whose face Iris stares at in the café, a wonder. Iris narrates, “he looked like someone I had never seen before (…) I rarely saw him this close up” (BA, 101). Iris looks at him carefully, trying to understand him.

When Iris is drinking her soda, several heavy demands are forced upon her: take care of your sister, learn to work for our family business and within those demands: make me happy. The father does not see her as a child, but as a peer from whom he can ask for things and promises. Iris notes: “I felt confused, and also inadequate: whatever it was he was asking or demanding, it was beyond me” (BA, 102).

Having a soda is something thrown away from Iris’s everyday life, something forbidden and seductive: almost abject. The feeling of panic is caused because the forbidden fruit from the other world is given to her, and she does not know how to act in this odd new sphere. It is threatening and a part of the male world, her father’s world.

Iris's father seems repeatedly unhappy and confused because his children are female. They do not function in the way he wants them to. Iris feels that the "values he required were those of the army: neatness, obedience, silence, and no evident sexuality" (BA, 158-159). Girls are not recognised and appreciated as they are. Their father does not respect their gender; instead, he is worried about it and tries to diminish their difference by acting as if they were boys.

Iris thinks that her father "wanted the lacy, frilly, somewhat murky edges trimmed off us as if we were lettuces, leaving a plain, sound core. (…) He wanted us turned into the semblances of boys, one way or another" (BA, 161). The round form and softness of lettuce suggests femininity. The uneducated girls are wild lettuces, whom her father wants to change into tamed ones. When Iris has her first period and is horrified, she is given "a cup of chamomile tea, which tasted the way spoiled lettuce smelled" (BA, 159). The "spoiled lettuce" can be seen as symbol of the change: childhood is spoiled and dirtied by the blood. The unsatisfactory taste marks the bewilderment in front of menstruation: fear and disappointment towards one's body and life altogether. The smell of spoiled lettuce confirms that Iris is ruined: now she will never be like a boy. She has been marked by the femininity, "[t]he grotesqueries of the [female] body" (CE, 7), as *Cat's Eye*'s Elaine puts it.

Iris and Laura are mentally and physically abused by their private teacher Mr. Erskine, who appears as sadistic, "irascible, unpredictable tyrant" (BA, 166) and it is suggested that he has paedophile tendencies. Laura says, "He only wants to put his hand up my blouse (…) or under my skirt" (BA, 164-165). Their father is of no help because the girls feel that their male authority is shared. After all, it is the father, who has given him the position. The housekeeper Reenie saves the girls from the situation, but they are damaged. They have learnt a lot, but the things they have learnt are ways of escaping and resistance:

> In addition to lying and cheating, I'd learned half-concealed insolence and silent resistance. I'd learned that revenge is a dish best eaten cold. I'd learned not to get caught. (BA, 167.)

The girls' childhood setting echoes Iris and Laura's adult life. They use the strategies, defences and methods they have learnt in coping with their parents, the housekeeper Reenie, and the sadistic teacher.

The girls' upper class education and status make them vulnerable and helpless, unable to cope on their own. They cannot do their laundry, cook or sew – they lack many important basic skills of the women of their time.

In the novel's present time, the motif of concrete food is often used to illustrate Iris's age, her physical condition and her perception of the changing of times.

The contents of Iris's fridge tell a story of their own:

> There was nothing much I wanted to eat: the draggled remains of a bunch of celery, a blue -tinged heel of bread, a lemon going soft. An end of cheese, wrapped in greasy paper and hard and translucent as toenails. (BA, 56.)

Everything is rotten, decayed and mouldy. Nothing seems to be edible, and it is no wonder that Iris does not want to eat anything. It might be read as a mark of not caring about oneself, or not being able or being too tired or depressed to care. Today it seems that in order to be considered a person who takes care of oneself, you have to have a fridge full of vegetables, fruits, yoghurts, and vegetable oils. This fridge is the opposite of the health and diet ideology's ideal.

Food in restaurants is too heavy and the size of the edibles or meals is too large for Iris's hunger. This may imply that she is not hungry for life anymore, or that her body is not. She is unable to finish a doughnut, eating only half of it, which suggests that she is less hungry than she used to be, or less hungry than younger people (or not so ravenous as the shop owners assume their customers to be). Her lunch at home is only "a piece of hard cheese, a glass of dubious milk, a flabby carrot" (BA, 475), all suggesting deterioration and contamination.

The present time of *The Blind Assassin*, through the protagonist Iris's eyes, is filled of ominous threat. There are memories that haunt her, guilt with which she has not come to terms with. This guilt and the painful memories colour her voice and vision as a narrator. The motif of food is also connected with this troubling past.

Iris gloomily thinks food as an enemy to her health: "I ate almost a third of an orange cruller. A great wodge of flour and fat, spreading out through my arteries like silt" (BA, 482). Food, this delicious edible, threatens her, threatens to end her life, to worsen the condition of her heart. Food is not a comfort and an energiser; it is something that becomes a part of Iris in a disturbing way. In a reminiscent way, Iris thinks: "Time: old cold time, old sorrow, settling down in layers like silt in a pond" (BA, 299). Food is stored into the body like painful memories, "old sorrow", affecting the body in a similar way.

The depiction of Iris's present day starts with the chapter "The presentation", in which Iris has promised to give away the first "Laura Chase Memorial Prize" to a student in a local High School. Late Winifred Prior, Iris's sister-in-law, whom she hated, funds the award. Thus all the tensions of the novel are present in this chapter and the painful, unresolved past is surfacing.

Iris's tension before a prize giving ceremony is illustrated through images of food. She does not want any breakfast and settles with a glass of water, which suggests stage fever. Iris thinks of her body as something soft and edible: her hand is "a brittle radius covered slackly with porridge and string" (BA, 37). The strings around her arm suggest meat tied with strings in order to keep it together, in the wanted shape. This image of edibility and vulnerability portrays and adds to the effect of Iris's tension.

Allusions to danger are repeated in connection with Iris:

> [T]here was still the sensation (…) of being about to step off a cliff. Each time I put a foot out I set it down provisionally, as if the floor might give way underneath me. Nothing but surface tension holding me in place. (BA, 35.)

This, of course, suggests physical ailments and old age, but in the larger context of *The Blind Assassin*, it also implies deep-rooted old fears and feelings of guilt.

The chapter, with its dark images, such as electrocution, ends with blood: "[T]he old wound has split open, the invisible blood pours forth. Soon I'll be emptied" (BA, 41). The memories and narrating them is like rapid bleeding. This implies that there is not much time left for Iris to tell her story, and that she must do it even without her will. As a narrator Iris appears as fragile and vulnerable. Will she be able to tell her story to us, and what is going to happen to her?

11.1.1 Iris – The Empty Face

Repeatedly in *The Blind Assassin*, love, sexuality and men appear dangerous to one's individual self.

Iris's marriage to her father's business competitor Richard Griffen is filled with images of her victimisation. Richard is portrayed as a cruel hunter figure, who lacks empathy. He is a man who "preferred conquest to a cooperation" (BA, 371). He proposes to her in a restaurant called the Imperial Room. The name already (which is also the title of the chapter) suggests inequality of power. Before the proposal Iris's father presents it to her as an offer you cannot refuse:

> [U]nless I married Richard, we wouldn't have any money. (…) me, and especially Laura — would never be able to fend for ourselves. (…) I saw how ashamed he was. How beaten down. (…) I was cornered. (…) There was nothing behind me but a wall. (BA, 226-227.)

Iris is depicted as a rabbit in a trap, a caught animal, that has to give her consent to her imprisonment. She feels that she has no choice if she wants to save the family business and to support herself and her sister. Her father is asking her to perform an act of self-sacrifice. He thinks the match demands "courage. Biting the bullet" (BA, 226) from Iris, suggesting war. Iris is a sacrifice made to save the family, their home Avilion, the factory and his reputation. The same night, Iris is not the happy bride-to-be, but miserable:

> My feet were icy, my knees drawn up (…) in front of me the arctic waste of starched white bedsheet (…) I knew I could never traverse it, regain the track, get back to where it was warm; I knew I was directionless; I knew I was lost. I would be discovered here years later by some intrepid team — fallen in my tracks, one arm outflung as if grasping at straws, my features desiccated, my fingers gnawed by wolves. (BA, 228.)

Iris is portrayed as an expeditionary, lost in the Antarctic. She has curled up to wait for the inevitable hypothermia and death. She sees her future as hopeless: years after this she will be found dead and eaten.

It appears, in terms of the false self theory, that Iris's false self bends to her father's will and afterwards she is a stranger to herself.

This portrayal of Iris as a victim of the marriage she does not want continues throughout the novel. Fear and hatred are important elements in the union, at least from her part. When Iris prepares herself for the wedding, she

sees her hands as "uncooked bacon fat" (BA, 235), edible but not ready, vulnerable and shaky. Her face in the mirror is "erased, featureless" (BA, 235), suggesting that she does not know who she is and what she wants. She is an object, not subject. Her baggage for their honeymoon is "full of darkness (…) emptiness" (BA, 237), implying miserable feelings, a future full of hopelessness. The word trousseau, which includes things that might make a bride happy and proud, associates gloomily in Iris's head: "It sounded like *trussed* – what was done to raw turkeys with skewers and pieces of string" (BA, 238). The image implies that she sees herself as a reminiscent of the turkey – that she is to be moulded into a posture, into a wife and into a person she does not want to be. This change is not gentle, but very violent, as the choice of words show.

When Iris portrays her wedding picture, she speaks of herself in the third person, "because I don't recall having been present, not in any meaningful sense of the word" (BA, 239). This may mean what Iris says after the sentence, that they are not the same person, because she is a retrospective narrator and the young Iris is her character, her invention – a reminder of the relational nature of narratives and the frailty of memory. This can also aim at saying that there was no space for the young Iris or her desire in the scene. She is a passive actor in a play she feels forced to take part in. Iris's teeth are hidden in the picture and she does not eat, which suggests that her desire and hunger are covered, maybe non-existent in this setting.

In terms of the false self theory, the bride Iris is a compliant false self and the commenting retrospective narrator has mixed feelings towards her(self).

After the very unhappy first lovemaking with her just wed husband, Iris feels miserable and this shows in the portrayal of their meal after the incident: "The dinner was a steak, along with a salad. I ate mostly the salad. (…) It tasted like pale-green water. It tasted like frost" (BA, 242). The refusal of meat could be read as unhappiness and the feelings of similarity with it, being an edible that somebody else is eating. Salad is cold, frozen and seems to imply that the eater feels frozen inside, unable to move from her unhappy position. The meal underlines that the marriage is and will be unhappy.

In the honeymoon mornings Richard eats huge amounts of food and Iris next to nothing: "Richard would have two boiled eggs (…) bacon and a grilled tomato (…) toast and marmalade (…) I would have half a grapefruit" (BA, 301). Her hungers are suffocated and unrecognised; her desire invisible.

Richard's symbolic hunger is depicted as too strong and violent for Iris and Laura. Richard devours – the food and Iris. It is suggested that Richard's business hunger drives Iris's father into his death, which is probably suicide. The father believes that by making Iris marry Richard, his factory and daughters will be saved, but Richard betrays all his promises.

Iris and Richard's marriage becomes a violent struggle for recognition and for the victory over the other:

> [M]y failure to understand him, to anticipate his wishes, which he set down to my wilful and even aggressive lack of attention. In reality it was also bafflement, and later, fear (…) he became less and less like a man for me (…) and more and more like

> a gigantic tangle of string, which I was doomed as if by enchantment to try every day to unravel. I never did succeed. (BA, 297.)

Richard abuses Iris physically. Iris suspects that the bruises on her skin are "a kind of code" holding a message, "[b]ut if they were a code, who held the key to it"? (BA, 371). In *The Blind Assassin* 2 the character he notices her bruises, suggesting that – if we see Iris and her lover Alex Thomas as she and he in *The Blind Assassin* 2 – the bruises are a code to him, or to the other men, saying that Iris belongs to Richard and he can do what he wants with and to her.

In the context of the feminist object-relations theory, Richard is the conqueror who seems to be trying to break Iris with his violence, trying to show his power over her: she is his possession. As often with intimate violence, it is premeditated and calculated (Husso 2003, e.g. 73). Richard hits Iris only "where it wouldn't show" because "[a]nything overt might get in the way of his ambitions" (BA, 371).

Iris is seemingly compliant in her marriage, but her secret extra-marital affair is hidden aggression towards her husband. It is her own space containing her own desire. One could argue that through violence Richard is trying to find where Iris begins and he ends, whether the compliant false self is the truth of her or not.

As a way of resistance and protection, Iris is repeatedly portrayed hiding her true self. Iris thinks that her young face is "so loose and transparent I could peel it off like a stocking" (BA, 43), suggesting a compliant and empty false self. She uses her "blank look (…) to conceal irritation or even anger" (BA, 423). Iris starts drinking in order to numb her feelings, she is "a little too fond of gin" (BA, 479). Her marriage and the situation – where they "kept up appearances" (ibid.) – are easier to bear with alcohol and being slightly drunk. In terms of the false self theory, her empty face is a defence and a shield, protecting her true self from the others' attacks. In addition, it imprisons the true self into hiding.

Richard is a very strong Bluebeard figure. However, Iris does admit that her portrayal of her husband is defective and subjective:

> I've failed to convey Richard, in any rounded sense. He remains a cardboard cutout. (…) I cannot truly describe him, I cannot get a precise focus: he's blurred, like the face in some wet, discarded newspaper. (…) He was ruthless, but not like a lion; more like a sort of large rodent. (BA, 479-480.)

The comparison to a rodent degrades and ridicules Richard. He is not noble and brave, like a lion, but as small and spry as a rat or a vole. The above reminder of Iris's subjective narration ("I've failed to convey…") encourages readers to be careful of what they believe. There is a hint, in dialogic terms, of polyphony. A story includes always somebody's point of view and the others are its objects, unable to defend themselves. Richard represents power and subjectivity, and in this sense he is as mysterious to Iris as her father.

The inadequate parenting of Iris's childhood is repeated with her own daughter Aimee. When Iris sees her for the first time, she thinks, "I had doubts about my own capacity to love her, or to love her as much as she'd need. I was

spread too thin" (BA, 431). The mother's own unsatisfied symbolic hunger makes her incapable of satisfying her daughter's needs. Aimee grows within a web of secrets and lies and becomes a substance abuser and an irresponsible single mother who does not know who her daughter Sabrina's father is. Sabrina has to go to her neighbours to beg for food. Aimee dies early in her life in an accident, which may be a suicide.

After her mother's death Sabrina goes to Iris's sister-in-law Winifred, and grows up in conditions, which are economically wealthy, but mentally poor. Iris imagines that Sabrina is hungry in spite of the abundance of food on Winifred's table, symbolically hungry. In *The Blind Assassin* hunger is transferred from one generation to the next.

11.1.2 Laura – "a pigeon smashing into glass"

If *Alias Grace*'s Mary Whitney is a figure of female victimisation par excellence in Atwood's novels, Laura is probably even more so. Because we know more about Laura, we emotionally invest more in her than in Mary Whitney. We see her growing up as a child and are told of her character and predicaments in more detail. Laura is vulnerable and sensitive, and repeatedly an object of abuse.

Especially Iris's marriage to Richard makes Laura unhappy. The night before Iris's wedding, Iris sees Laura as "a penitent (…) on her way to execution" (BA, 236). In the photos of Iris's wedding, she is "like a pigeon smashing into glass" (BA, 240). It appears that Laura is more able to see the real implications of Richard and his sister Winifred, and Iris is in denial, thinking that she can manage by acting out a role. When Laura is forced to live with Richard and Iris, she is trapped and miserable, constantly trying to escape. According to Iris, Laura "was not eating enough, she was too thin" (BA, 330), which suggests entrapment and unhappiness.

After Iris and Laura's father dies Iris's husband Richard becomes teenager Laura's legal guardian. His efforts to handle Laura are depicted in the same way as Simon's efforts to crack Grace open in *Alias Grace*. According to Iris, Richard sees Laura

> as a puzzle, one that it was now his business to solve. I'd catch him looking at her (…) searching out the grip, the twist, the handle, the wedge, the way in. (…) He wanted to get Laura under his thumb, he wanted her neck under his foot, however lightly placed. But Laura didn't have that kind of neck. So after each of his attempts he was left standing with one leg in the air, like a bear-hunter posing in a picture from which the slain bear has vanished. (BA, 381.)

The images are violent: Richard wants to open up Laura, to dominate and control her. Laura is compared to a machine that ought to have the right buttons, which Richard could use to make her move in his way. He is a hunter after her, but when he thinks he has got her, she is gone again.

Laura has her own way of resistance. The setting is a restaging of the girls' childhood teacher Mr. Erskine's sexual abuse: Laura "stared [Richard] at his

forehead, with the cultivated blankness she had once used on Mr. Erskine" (BA, 316). Elsewhere, Iris notes that Laura's face is "smooth and white as a porcelain plate, the expression sealed inside it" (BA, 427), which suggests false self.

Richard harasses Laura sexually, causing her pregnancy, which is aborted. Richard and Winifred deny the happening and claim that Laura is insane, making things up. Richard and Winifred commit Laura to a mental hospital, where she is treated with electrotherapy and insulin. According to Richard the affair is consensual, but to Iris and the feminist reader it is coercion, blackmail, and manipulation.

Throughout Laura's sufferings, she dreams of Alex Thomas, and is sure that he will come and take her away from her predicament and make her happy. Iris takes her only hope of Alex's rescue by telling that Alex is dead, and that Iris and he have been lovers. After hearing this, Laura kills herself by driving Iris's car off a bridge.

The loss of Alex Thomas puts an abrupt stop to Laura's symbolic hunger. There is nothing left to yearn and long for, no hope for a recognising other to return into her life.

When Iris sees Laura for the last time in a café called Diana's Sweets, Iris wants to feed her, thinking that Laura is too thin. She wants her to eat a piece of cake, but Laura refuses to. Iris warns Laura of the quality of the coffee, but Laura says she is used to it. Iris is trying to take care of Laura, trying to advice her as before, but Laura denies the familiar pattern. She has grown out of it.

In the novel's present time, Iris thinks of Laura's essence as "[m]eat dust" (BA, 45), after thinking a page earlier that hamburgers are made of this thing, which "is what is scraped up off the floor after they've cut up frozen cows with an electric saw" (BA, 44). The image is strong and disturbing: Laura has been cut up and sawed to pieces and what remains of her is the result of this extremely violent action. Laura is a product made into a suspicious hamburger, a second rate edible. This imagery is reminiscent of Mary Whitney's portrayal in *Alias Grace* as a butchered carcass.

It is suggested that, in a way, Laura is able to avenge Richard. After Laura's suicide, Richard has emotional problems, and the publication of *The Blind Assassin* 2 by Iris as Laura as the author appears to be the final nail in Richard's coffin. After this Richard dies in circumstances that can imply suicide. It appears that Richard really loves Laura, in his own twisted and abusive way, but never gets her to love him back (see also Cooke 2004, 144).

11.2 *The Blind Assassin* 2

The claimed author of the embedded novel *The Blind Assassin* 2 is Laura Chase. There are several hints in *The Blind Assassin* 2 that tell about the authorship. Many of them point to both Laura and Iris, so the reader can at first believe that the author is Laura. But gradually it becomes clear that it is unlikely that Laura

would have written such a sensual and erotic text, and Iris's hints of her own similarity with the novel's "she" become increasingly poignant. The bread crusts are one of the masterly hints, which point to the authorship: both Laura and Iris hate breadcrumbs so there is no valid proof of the authorship yet, but both of them are possible. The crumbs tell about the characters: they want to have and eat the soft side of the life and not its hard edges.

At the end of the novel, Iris reinterprets the question of authorship: "The real author was neither one of us: a fist is more than the sum of its fingers. (…) We wrote the book together" (BA, 513).

As Stein says, Alex's character, and his alter ego "he" in *The Blind Assassin* 2 can be seen as "a shadowy figure, a demon lover" (Stein 2003, 142). It is possible that Alex might also be Laura's lover, not only Iris's. He is a recognising and desirable other for both these women.

He in *The Blind Assassin* 2 tells a story of a city called Sakiel-Norn to her. His narrative is often reminiscent of pulp fiction with science fiction colouring, and the story of Sakiel-Norn is an allegory, set in an archaic past or a distant future, which echoes the injustices of the novel's today. This embedded narrative's images of victimisation and falsity can be seen as metaphors and symbols of the life of the frame story's characters and of greater civic issues, as, for instance, war, social injustice, and capitalism. The story is critical towards the society's false gods and hypocrite rituals.

In *The Blind Assassin* 2, food is sometimes used to portray the couple's relationship and feelings.

The characters' love story starts with a picnic. To them, the picnic means something outside their worlds, something new and pleasurable. To her, the picnic is a stolen moment from her organised and protected life. The picnic gives space and a place to be happy, to be something else than what she is in her ordinary life.[83]

His story is interrupted with questions and comments on their food and drink:

> Is there a cheese sandwich left?
> She rummages in the paper bag. No, she says, but there's a hard-boiled egg. She's never been this happy before. (…) Just what the doctor ordered, he says. A bottle of lemonade, a hard-boiled egg, and Thou. He rolls the egg between his palms, cracking the shell, then peeling it away. She watches his mouth, the jaw, the teeth. (…) Here's the salt for it.
> Thanks. You remembered everything. (BA, 11.)

Their hungry present is brought to the science fiction's imaginary world. He is very hungry, but she does not seem so hungry. She is happy feeding him. She is watching him eat, a scene reminiscent of the end of *The Edible Woman* where Marian watches Duncan eating. Is he going to eat her next? Is he a stronger and hungrier consumer than she is? But in this scene there is a warm tone and no hints or depiction of fear, unless we think of the detailed depiction of his egg eating. If we see the egg as a symbol of their affair or of her, or of him, this can be seen as a hint of their unhappy future and fates.

He asks, "Any more lemonade? No, she says. We've drunk it all up. Go on" (BA, 11). This underlines their hunger: her hunger for his story and his hunger for her food. They have had it all, they have nothing left, and they both yearn for more. The early ending of food and drink may imply their different desires on a larger scale: he is a man of political devotion and mission; she would like to have a safe haven.

This eating and feeding includes a power twist: it is implied that the person who pays for this food and enjoyment is a person who does not approve of him. She seems to have no money of her own, she does not have a job and there are implications that there are people who keep guard on her and do not allow her to do what she wants. It is clear that she should not be with him: "If I'm overdue, they'll want to know where I've been" (BA, 13). Thus there is also the enjoyment of something forbidden, a secret just between these two eaters. The person paying for this fun would be Iris's husband, Richard. Alex is a person with socialist views and Richard a rich right wing supporter. With this kind of secrecy, even adultery, his hold over her is crumbled.

In terms of the false self theory, the characters' relationship can be seen as an expression of the desire towards one's true self. She is trying to escape her compliant false self's routines.

The relationship between *The Blind Assassin* 2's characters is coloured by power struggle. They love each other, but do not want to be at the mercy of the other. They find it difficult, at times impossible to trust the other. They try to resist the seduction of merging with the other, and desire it at the same time. The characters are in a constant negotiation between vulnerability and the resistance of it.

The feminist object-relations theory argues that men emphasise separation and women try to underplay it (e.g. Benjamin 1988, 78). This is visible in *The Blind Assassin* 2. She is constantly emphasising their relationship and their meaning to each other, and he is downsizing it. He often expresses hostile and aggressive thoughts when in his "gloomy mood" (BA, 107):

> [She says:] You're not being kind.
> I detest kindness, he says. I detest people who pride themselves on being kind. Snot-nosed nickel-and-dime do-gooders, doling out their kindness. They're contemptible.
> I'm kind, she says, trying to smile. I'm kind to you, at any rate.
> If I thought that's all it was [he says] – lukewarm milk-and-water kindness – I'd be gone. (…)
> Perhaps it isn't kindness then, she says. Perhaps it's selfishness. Perhaps I'm ruthlessly selfish.
> I'd like that better, he says. I prefer you greedy. (BA, 106.)

Both characters argue that helping and empathy are ambiguous activities. The good doers are not being selfless but selfish, greedy and hungry. Throughout *The Blind Assassin* 2, his attitude towards her consists of cruel words and rude tenderness. She often feels vulnerable in front of him and is insulted by his words. He rejects, even mocks her empathy. The insistence of her being greedy sounds unsympathetic, careless, but there is also a possibility for trying to diminish her involvedness, trying to protect her. One can also see an effort to

protect himself by not getting too emotionally involved into a complex relationship in a difficult situation or trying to verbally undermine something that is already there, but feels threatening. This is implied elsewhere: when she blames him for being mean, he answers, "Self-defence" (BA, 111).

He is portrayed as mournful, in advance, for loosing her in the future: "He won't be able to hold on to her (…) She'll melt, she'll drift away, she'll slide out of his hands" (BA, 120). She is like a mirage, a fantasy to him – a desirable object that he will eventually lose.

In *The Blind Assassin* 2, the character she wants to have a happy ending to the story of the blind assassin and the sacrificial virgin. She wants them to have private happiness: a life together and children. This also suggests that Iris wants to have this happiness with Alex Thomas. But the character he cannot accept this. According to him, the couple is indebted to their people and they have to try to save them.

After he has gone to war, she finds his published story *Lizard Men of Xenor. First Thrilling Episode in the Annals of the Zycronian Wars*. She looks in vain for the romantic aspects he told her privately: the blind assassin and the girl are not there and the war breaks out much sooner than she expected. Thus, there is no room for romance in this masculine genre, and, so it seems, in his life (see also Cooke 2004, 143).

In the context of the feminist object-relations theory, the important relationships and battles happen between men (like the wars Alex Thomas and "he" insist on going to). To him, his autonomy and societal responsibility are in contrast with private happiness and love: they are mutually exclusive.

Iris understands or confesses towards the end of her autobiography, that she has been writing to her granddaughter Sabrina, offering her the truth of their family's past. However, there is no guarantee whether Sabrina will ever read Iris's story. Although she is the preferred reader, the addressee, Iris repeatedly acknowledges that she may not be the one to read the story. Reenie's, Chase household's housekeeper's, daughter Myra is pointed out to be a probable reader of Iris's autobiography. However, she is not the preferred one, but instead a reader who will read the text anyway after Iris's death, even without permission.

Iris is the first of Atwood's novels' protagonists who dies. The chapter before the last is Iris's obituary in the local newspaper. The fate of the manuscript, and the whole trunk which includes the truth about Iris and Laura's lives and the authorship of *The Blind Assassin* 2, remains to be a mystery. The last chapter, "The Threshold" depicts Iris writing the last pages of her autobiography, the very last pages we are reading too:

> Beside my elbow is the stack of paper I've been adding to so laboriously, month after month. When I'm done – when I've written the final page – I'll pull myself up out of this chair and make my way to the kitchen (…) I'll tie the papers up, then lift the lid of my steamer trunk and slide this bundle in top of everything else. There it will stay until you come back from your travels, if you ever do come back. (BA, 520.)

But it is raining, and we know from the obituary that Iris died in her backyard, and she is now sitting on her back porch. One of the possibilities – the worst one for the implicated reader – is that Iris dies before she does the planned storing of the manuscript and the wind takes the papers and rain ruins them. In this scenario, Iris's addressee, her granddaughter Sabrina will never find the truth about her family, for instance that she is the granddaughter of Alex Thomas, not Richard Griffen as she has thought. If Sabrina will never know the truth, we, the readers, are the only confidantes Iris had.

The book does not tell whether Sabrina comes to Port Ticonderoga or not, to enter her grandmother's house. The obituary says that she is expected, but not yet there.

The last words of *The Blind Assassin* are addressed both to the intratextual and extratextual reader: "I leave myself in your hands. What choice do I have? By the time you read this last page, that – if anywhere – is the only place I will be" (BA, 521).

As an implicated reader I mostly identified with the feelings and the atmosphere in the novel. Again, the cycle of loss and recovery gave me a spark of recognition. In Iris's case (and most Atwood protagonists), the stress is on loss and tragedy. Young Iris's feelings of being dominated, manipulated and smothered seem familiar and easy to identify with. Also the girls' ways of resistance seem familiar: silence, stubbornness, and secret transgressions.

As an implicated reader I did understand and even identified with the depiction of the love story of Iris and Alex Thomas's alter egos "he" and "she" in *The Blind Assassin* 2. However, as a feminist reader I felt friction and discomfort. His behaviour towards her, their relationship altogether, lacked appreciative recognition.

12 CONCLUSION

Food, eating, and hunger constitute a prominent motif in Atwood's novels. This motif is such a cornucopia that I have been forced to leave out hundreds of pages of analysis in order to keep this dissertation from bloating like a batter with too much yeast.

In this dissertation I have seen feminist literary criticism the best means for analysing the above motif. I have found it necessary and fruitful to use two methodological apparatuses: feminist close reading and feminist object-relations theory. This methodological richness, I think, is necessary for analysing the motif's multifaceted nature.

I have found it useful to explore not merely the feminist reader, but her sister, the implicated reader, too. I have argued that the feminist reader's emotional engagement with Atwood's novels can sometimes affect her interpretation of them. This is visible in the readings of other scholars as well as in my own. I have tried to see when the analytical reader and the engaged reader are in dissonance, and I have tried to explore what is the reason for this. I have claimed that the novels' endings offer especially fruitful ground for conflicting views. Because of her engagement, even adornment towards the protagonist, the implicated reader can find it impossible to leave her in a situation the narrator does. In her interpretation, the implicated reader imagines a better ending for her textual other. This is especially visible in my discussion of *Surfacing*'s and *Bodily Harm*'s last pages.

I have found the feminist object-relations theory a very fruit bearing companion in interpreting Atwood's motif of hunger, food, and eating. The psychological context has helped me to explain the roots and implications of concrete and symbolic hunger and eating in the novels. The theory's critique of our culture's way of polarising the genders, i.e. seeing them as oppositional and exclusive, is visible in Atwood's novels. In my opinion, Atwood's novels are in dialogue with psychoanalytical thinking.

I have argued that Atwood explores female (and male) psyche and heterosexual relationships with relentless accuracy and sharpness. Her novels demand awareness of inequality. She is in dialogue with patriarchal and

feminist agendas and values, and tries to oscillate the rigid gender polarisation. Atwood is "writing with intent" (Atwood 2005).

In my opinion, Atwood uses the motif of hunger, food, and eating as a tool for portraying and criticising misogynist world.

The emphasis on food, eating, and hunger is strong in all Atwood's novels. In the early novels *The Edible Woman* and *Lady Oracle*, the protagonists suffer from eating disorders. Later, food does not appear as illness. In all the novels, the protagonists' hungers and eating have a relevant status in the narrative. The protagonists' psychological situation and their life situations are portrayed through this motif. It narrates their desire, hopes, and fears and illustrates their relationship to others and to themselves. For instance, 26-year-old Marian McAlpin in Atwood's first novel and 83-year-old Iris Chase in *The Blind Assassin* both find food threatening and have rotting food remains in their fridge, but these things symbolise different things in each novel. For Marian, feelings of being cannibalised make her identify with the food, and her fear of marriage and future makes her find the food scraps ominous. Iris, on the other hand, compares food to her memories, her "old sorrow", and the food remains are a symbol of her feelings of herself and her old age, her fading hungers.

In my opinion, the motif has not changed much during the years. There have been, of course, slight differences and different emphases. For instance, the repeated image of an egg has usually negative connotations, such as weakness and vulnerability when it is used to symbolise or describe a person. On the other hand, when an egg is eaten, it can symbolise positive things. For example, in *The Handmaid's Tale* Offred finds immense pleasure in her morning egg, and to *The Blind Assassin*'s embedded novel's happy couple on a picnic, a hard-boiled egg is a symbol of happiness and falling in love.

One of the persistent figures in Atwood's novels is the Bluebeard, a cruel male predator. His symbolic hunger is repeatedly too much for the female protagonists. It is vampiristic and potentially destructive: it threatens to destroy the female protagonists' subjectivity. In *The Edible Woman*, Marian is certain that marrying Peter will make her one of his victims, alongside with the rabbits and other animals he has shot during his hunting trips. *Lady Oracle*'s Joan thinks that either her husband or her lover writes her anonymous threat notes and leaves dead animals at the door, and even wants to kill her. *The Blind Assassin*'s Iris's husband abuses her physically and mentally, and harasses her sister sexually.

From her first novel on Atwood stresses that women, too, contribute to the unequal relationships. Her narrators often try to deny their responsibility and co-operation with the Bluebeards, but are forced to admit it. Atwood's narrators are often unreliable and their vision is *in excess*, which undermines a simplistic feminist interpretation of men as bad and women as good. Atwood emphasises that women, too, can be ruthless and destructive Bluebeards in their relationships. For example, *The Edible Woman*'s Ainsley and Lucy are hunting for sex, child, and husband. *Surfacing*'s protagonist is cold towards her boyfriend, feeding him "unlimited supplies of nothing (S, 78)". *Life Before Man*'s

Elizabeth uses and manipulates men, treating her lover Chris "the way men treat women" (LBM, 153).

Although all Atwood's novels insist that there is always polyphony when heterosexual relationships are concerned, it is possible to see that her later novels *Alias Grace* and *The Blind Assassin* stress this even more. *The Blind Assassin*'s Iris convinces us that although her husband Richard seems to be just a brute, her portrayal of him is inadequate; she, as an outsider, can only give us a "cardboard cutout" (BA, 479) of him. In *Alias Grace*, for the first time in Atwood's novels, we learn to know a Bluebeard character from the inside: Doctor Simon Jordan, whose thoughts and writings we are allowed to read. Through this proximity, we identify with him in a way that has been impossible before. The Bluebeard becomes a more whole, more rounded character.

It is important to notice that throughout Atwood's novels there are always representations of good men, who are not cold, distant, aggressive, and manipulative. For example, *The Edible Woman*'s Joe and *Life Before Man*'s Nate cook, clean, and take care of the children. They are intelligent, co-operative, capable of loving, and even feminist.

Atwood's novels emphasise that men and women are symbolically hungry, some even aggressively and destructively hungry. The patriarchal, unequal society influences their expressions of and feelings about this desire. The male desire is more open and acknowledged, even appreciated in patriarchal and fraternal culture, whereas women's desire is more hidden, and the female characters often feel confusion and shame about it.

I have argued that Atwood's protagonists are traumatised, divided selves, and that this traumatisation is visible in the novels' narratives and narration. They tell their stories in bits and pieces, in a lingering style, which engages the reader. They see themselves as faulty and unreliable narrators, and often ponder about and apologise for this.

Atwood's protagonists' childhood is often abusive, and their adult relationships echo these early violent patterns. There are usually several traumatising events in their lives. During their stories, often through their narration, they are empowered and healed — in part.

In my opinion, the greatest cause for Atwood's protagonists' traumatisation seems to be the patriarchal culture, which rejects women's value, and makes women internalise misogyny.

Atwood insists on open endings, which are a strong feminist tool: the reader has to imagine what would be the best solution and fate for the protagonist. The reader is made into an active, implicated participant, and starts to ponder about questions such as what kind of a society do we need in order to have happy endings for women and men?

In my opinion, Atwood's novels' traumatic narration enables the reader to enter a scene of pain relatively safely. Her novels narrate personal, intimate stories of being in need of mental and/or physical nourishment. The reader can negotiate her own subjectivity, her own possible traumatising memories. In this way Atwood's novels can be seen as nourishing. The reader has a private space,

where she can intimately meet another person, the protagonist, but this person does not see her. The reader is alone, a spy, which can give her comfort, but also discomfort.

Maybe it is the motif of food, eating, and hunger, at least in part, which has made Atwood's novels into world literature. Also the traumas, physical and mental, I think, are something that speaks to people globally. The language of nourishment and the need for it have universal elements.

TIIVISTELMÄ

Ruoka ja ravinto ovat olennaisen tärkeitä kaikille eläville olennoille. Me emme ole vain fyysisesti nälkäisiä: leivän lisäksi tarvitsemme myös henkistä ravintoa, kuten nähdyksi ja hyväksytyksi tulemisen kokemusta. Ruoan representaatiot kirjallisuudessa ovat kietoutuneet ruumiillisuuden, vallan, toiseuden, sukupuolen, luokan, etnisen alkuperän, uskonnon ja kokemuksen käsitteisiin.

Väitöskirjassa tarkastellaan ruoan, syömisen ja nälän motiivia kanadalaisen kirjailijan Margaret Atwoodin kymmenessä romaanissa. Tutkitut teokset ovat: *The Edible Woman* (1969), *Surfacing* (1972), *Lady Oracle* (1976), *Life Before Man* (1979), *Bodily Harm* (1981), *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), *Cat's Eye* (1988), *The Robber Bride* (1993), *Alias Grace* (1996) and *The Blind Assassin* (2000).

Väitöskirjan metodologia pohjautuu feministiseen kirjallisuudentutkimukseen ja feministiseen psykoanalyyttiseen teoriaan. Työssä käytetään feminististä lähilukua, feminististä teoriaa lukemisesta ja feminististä objektisuhdeteoriaa. Tutkimukselle tärkeitä teoreetikkoja ovat feministiset kirjallisuustieteilijät Sara Mills ja Lynne Pearce, ja feministiset objektisuhdeteoreetikot Jessica Benjamin ja Nancy Chodorow.

Tutkimuksessa todetaan, että Atwoodin teokset keskustelevat feminismin ja psykoanalyysin kanssa. Romaaneissa suhtaudutaan kriittisesti patriarkaalisiin arvoihin, mutta myös äärifeminismiin.

Atwoodin romaanien kertojat ja/tai päähenkilöt ovat traumatisoituneita, ja tämä näkyy romaanien kertomuksissa ja myös kerronnan tasolla. Tarina kerrotaan pieninä palasina, ja hitaasti, uudestaan ja uudestaan samaan aiheeseen palaten, mikä saa lukijan emotionaalisesti kiinnittymään tekstiin.

Atwoodin romaanit kertovat yksityisiä, kertojalleen kipeän henkilökohtaisia selviytymistarinoita, psykologisia muistelutarinoita, joissa kertoja/päähenkilö on henkisesti ja ruumiillisesti nälkäinen. Päähenkilöiden lapsuus on lähes aina väkivaltainen ja traumatisoiva, ja he traumatisoituvat lisää aikuisina. Teosten alussa kertoja/päähenkilö on tilanteessa, jossa jotain ratkaisevaa on tapahtunut, ja hän yrittää selvittää miten on joutunut kyseiseen tilanteeseen. Romaaneissa on kaksi tasoa: ensiksi, retrospektiivinen kertoja kertoo tarinaansa, kommentoi sitä, ja valaisee nykyhetkeään. Toiseksi, kerrotaan kertojan henkilön, hänen nuoremman minänsä selviytymistarina.

Romaanien aikana päähenkilöt kokevat eheytymisen tunteita – vaikka usein tämä eheytyminen on vain osittaista.

Tarkasteltava ruoan, syömisen ja nälän motiivi kuvaa sellaisia asioita Atwoodin romaaneissa, joita muuten voisi olla vaikeaa ilmaista: esimerkiksi masennusta, pelkoa, nautintoa ja tunnetta ulkopuolisuudesta, ja kokemusta vallasta tai vallattomuudesta. Se on tapa kertoa henkilöiden elämäntilanteista, tunteista ja mahdollisuuksista – se on tärkeä henkilökuvauksen keino. Teoksissa motiivi kietoutuu usein epätasa-arvoisen sukupuolieron kuvaamiseen, ja se liittyy rakkaisiin tai traumaattisiin muistoihin.

Ruoka, syöminen ja nälkä nähdään tutkimuksessa laajasti, symbolisessa ja konkreettisessa mielessä. Selvimmin motiivi on näkyvillä *The Edible Womanissa* ja *Lady Oraclessa*, ja muissa romaaneissa kyse on enemmänkin pohjavirtauksesta, joka on välillä voimakas, välillä taas hienovaraisempi.

Ruoka on alituisesti läsnä Atwoodin romaaneissa. Henkilöiden ateriat, jääkaapit, nälkäisyys ja ruokahaluttomuus tuodaan jatkuvasti esiin. Jotkut tietyt ruoat, kuten kananmuna, toistuvat romaanista toiseen. *The Edible Womanin* ja *Lady Oraclen* päähenkilöt kärsivät syömishäiriön kaltaisista oireista: edellisessä romaanissa kuvataan anoreksia nervosaa ja jälkimmäisessä ahmimishäiriötä muistuttavaa käytöstä.

Sukupuolten väliset suhteet kuvataan Atwoodin romaaneissa symbolisen syömisen ja symbolisen kannibalismin kuvastolla. Naiset ja miehet ”metsästävät” toisiaan, mutta hieman eri tavoin: naisten tapa on piilotetumpi ja hienovaraisempi, kun taas miesten nälkä on näkyvämpää ja voimakkaammin kuvattua. Minäkertojien näkökulmasta mieshahmot pyrkivät usein murtamaan ja muokkaamaan naishahmoja. Miehet ovat minäkertojille vieraita ja outoja, heidän nälkänsä joskus tuhoavaa naishenkilöhahmojen kannalta.

Romaanien kertojat painottavat, että ovat subjektiivisia ja ajoittain epäluotettavia kerronnassaan. Kertojien ja päähenkilöiden kuvaukset ja ajatukset mieshenkilöhahmoista ovat usein liioiteltuja, eksessiivisiä (in excess). Tämä saattaa naishenkilöhahmojen ajatukset mieshahmojen luonteesta uuteen valoon.

Jotkut Atwoodin naishenkilöistä käyttäytyvät myös julmasti ja tuhoavasti ihmissuhteissaan, eivät vain miehet, ja tämä tekee romaanien feminismistä moniäänistä. Atwoodin romaanit painottavat, että vaikka elämme patriarkaatissa, joka usein alistaa naisia, naiset saattavat itse osallistua valtarakenteiden ylläpitoon ja ovat siten osittain vastuussa.

Väitöskirjassa tarkastellaan milloin feministinen lukija ja implikoitunut, affektiivinen lukija tulkitsevat teoksia eri tavoin. Joskus teksti viettelee lukijansa, ja silloin kriittisistäkin lukijoista tulee implikoituneita, tunteellisesti tekstiin kietoutuneita lukijoita. Tutkimuksen mukaan tämä näkyy Atwoodin teosten tulkinnoissa, erityisesti romaanien loppujen luennoissa. Se, mikä feministiselle lukijalle on tärkeä poliittinen viesti – esimerkiksi *Bodily Harmin* loppu, jossa päähenkilö jää saastaiseen selliin ja saattaa kuolla siellä – voi tuntua affektiivisesta lukijasta vaikealta hyväksyä, ja hän rakentaa itse uuden, paremman tulkinnan teoksen lopusta.

Atwoodin romaanien loput ovat hyvin avoimia, ja tutkimus näkee tämän tärkeänä feministisen viestin ja lukijan lukukokemuksen kannalta: lukija saa kuvitella mikä voisi olla paras mahdollinen kohtalo nais- ja mieshenkilöille. Lukija on aktiivinen tulkitsija ja kanssakertoja, joka joutuu miettimään millaista yhteiskuntaa ja millaisia muutoksia tarvitsisimme.

NOTES

1 Sceats 2000 explores the motif of food and eating in works of women writers. Kainulainen and Parente –Čapková 2006 includes interesting articles about food and drink in (mainly) Finnish literature. For studies of eating disorders, see e.g. Orbach 1986 and 1998; Harjunen 2000 and 2002. As Malmio writes, book reviewers sometimes use interesting and gendered metaphors of food when they describe the text's quality and nature (Malmio 1996, 118-120). For example, Pakkanen 2003 and Mäki 2003 are detective novelists' recipe books for food or drinks. Peter Haining's anthology *Murder on the Menu* (1993) includes famous writers' food-related murder stories.

To give a few examples, such works of art as Marcel Proust's *A la recherché du temps perdu* (of course, the Madeleine cake), Peter Greenaway's 1989 film *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife and Her Lover*, Laura Esquivel's novel *Como Agua Para Chocolate* (*Like Water for Chocolate*, 1990) and film by Jean-Pierre Jeunet and Marc Caro, *Delicatessen*, 1991, are famous for their representation of food and eating. In Finland, for example, such writers as Pirjo Hassinen and Anja Snellman often use food in their fiction. See also Päivi Lappalainen's article on food in Finnish literature (Lappalainen 2006).

2 My primary material includes ten novels by Atwood. I have left out the two latest novels, *Oryx and Crake* (2003) and *The Penelopiad* (2005), although both of these novels do have an undercurrent of food, eating, and hunger. There are several reasons for this. I think that ten novels form an adequately large primary material. This is especially so in this case: Atwood's novels are multilayered in meaning, narrative, and structure, and my method of reading is thorough close reading. When *Oryx and Crake* and *The Penelopiad* were published I had been writing this dissertation for several years and I did not find it necessary to include them.

Oryx and Crake is, like *The Handmaid's Tale*, a dystopia, a novel that introduces a gloomy future world. Importantly, for the first time in Atwood's novels, the main protagonist is male.

The Penelopiad is a sequel in 32-part group work of rewriting old myths; a novel made to order for this group undertaking – thus it is not a standard Atwood novel. *The Penelopiad* rewrites the myth of Odysseys from a female perspective. It gives voice to the usually silenced characters in the myth: Penelope and the twelve maids of her household, who are executed for disloyalty after Odysseys finally returns home.

3 There are several different views of theme and motif inside thematics, see Suomela 2001; Segre 1995: Rimmon-Kenan 1995.

4 Americanism is used here as a symbol meaning colonialism, over-consumption, money and profit centred thinking etc., not simply a country or its citizens. According to Hengen, Atwood and others "espouse not a mindless anti-Americanism but rather an informed understanding of preference for a Canadian way which, while ideally better than the American way, is also often obscure, unpopular, and impracticable. A Canadian nationalist in these terms is a socialist who opposes US economic and ideological imperialism, and in these terms an American can conceivably have "Canadian" qualities" (Hengen 1993, 12-13).

5 Atwood has often written and talked about how aspiring writers – especially women – were treated (read discouraged), and what kind of female author role models there were available. There was "current dirt about female writers", which claimed that "these stern and dedicated creatures" would never have a safe haven of home of their own, instead their fate would be "warped virginity or seedy loose living, or suicide" (Atwood 2002, 15, see also Atwood and Bealieu 1998, 59). But Atwood also points out that this lack of writers and role models gave her freedom. (Atwood and Beaulieu 1998, 32.)

6 Atwood's teachers at the university included Northrop Frye, known for his theories of myth and archetype. His works include *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (1957). Another important influence and role model was Atwood's teacher and poet Jay McPherson.

7 Some of her cartoon strips are included in Nischik 2000, 311-316 and Cooke 1998, 76-77. Atwood read and was influenced by comics in her childhood. One can say that they were as big an influence as the Grimm's tales. (See e.g. Cooke 1998, 25.)

8 To more biographical information see the two biographies of her life, Nathalie Cooke's *Margaret Atwood: a Biography* and Rosemary Sullivan's *The Red Shoes: Margaret Atwood/ Starting Out.* See also her collection of lectures given in University of Cambridge, United Kingdom: Negotiating with the Dead. A Writer on Writing (2002).

9 In Finland there are thirty-eight Master's theses written on Atwood's fiction (the situation according to library databases in April 2007), one of them my own (Lahikainen 1998). Twenty-nine are in English and written in departments of English or Translation Studies. Nine are in Finnish and completed in Literature departments. The earliest is from 1981. With one exception (Säntti 2005), writers are women. Most theses concentrate on Atwood's prose. Katajavuori 1995, a poet herself (and more recently, also a fiction writer), examines Atwood's poetry; Virtanen 1990 studies poetry and fiction. Three theses, Rinne 2001, Parkkonen 1999 and Olli 1999, concentrate on issues of Atwood's texts' (*The Robber Bride* and the short-story collection Bluebeard's Egg and Other Stories) translation from English into Finnish.

The most popular novel among the thesis writers is *Surfacing*. For instance Ovaska 1990 approaches the novel with feminist tools, interested in the Gothic and myths, and Kanerva 1996 applies Julia Kristeva's ideas of poetic language to *Surfacing*. Säntti examines *Surfacing's* different reading and interpretation possibilities, especially the friction between the novel as a *Bildungsroman* and laden with poststructural ironies. Also *The Edible Woman, The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Robber Bride* are analysed in several theses. See the Unpublished References.

10 By regressive narcissism Hengen means "pathological state deriving from cultural disintegration and characterized by feelings of isolation, emptiness and desperation" (Hengen 1993, 101). Progressive narcissism, on the other hand, is the "acknowledgement of human limitation and interdependence, [it] incorporates the past rather than longs for the future, and enables not ultimate individual efficacy and autonomy but rather communal identity and the limited powers of mutual trust" (ibid., 17). In addition, Hengen analyses Atwood's nationalism and its contexts, so her study can be included in the segment of Canadian nationalist criticism, too.

11 For texts concentrating on Atwood as an especially Canadian writer and introducing Canadian literature, see Hutcheon 1988, Hutcheon 1991, and Howells 1987. There are several acknowledged female writers in Canada nowadays, one could even say that most known Canadian writers are female – Alice Munro, Carol Shields, to mention a few. Inspired by Atwood, Donna E. Smyth comments, "American critics are constantly surprised by the number and quality of our women writers" (Smyth 1987, 38).

12 There are also studies on Atwood's reception and image in newspapers. See for e.g. Rosenthal 2000, whose article examines Atwood's visibility and influence in USA, Canada and Europe. To see how Atwood's novels have been received in newspaper reviews, see McCombs and Palmer 1991, passim, or McCombs' "Literary Introduction" to the book. McCombs remarks, "with most of Atwood's novels (…) [reviews] ranged from extremely positive to extremely negative" (McCombs 1991, xxiv). Other discussions on her reception, see e.g. Bouson 1993, 2-5.

13 In her book *Strategies for Identity: The Fiction of Margaret Atwood*, Leonora Rao argues that Atwood is a postmodernist writer. See Rao 1993. Her view of postmodernism is, I think, tied to the late modern writing, but I consider postmodernism more separate from late modern or postmodern writing.

14 Here, I have discussed postmodernism, the literary movement, not postmodern, a cornucopia of theoretical writing. There is a conflict between most feminists and postmodern thinking, too. Although some feminists see themselves as part of the postmodern movement (and one can argue that feminist movement has influenced postmodern), there are many feminists who disagree with its thinking. Feminists often find the postmodern idea of the subject problematic. Why is it, they ask, that at the same time when women start demanding and gaining more equal subjectivity, the male theorists tell us that the subject is fragmented, de-centred, even dead? (This thinking about the subject is not only a postmodern trait. It has a long tradition.). Many feminists think that we should hold on to the female subject: we should not deconstruct or abandon something we need. We have to be sensitive to the differences between women, we should not think that we are similar, but there is a need for a certain sense of "us". (See Kosonen 1996, 10-12; Rojola 1996 25-27, 31, 40; Ahokas and Rantonen 1996, 81-82; Di Stefano 1990, 75.)

15 Although I do not see Atwood's novels as postmodernist, her short story collection *Bones and Murder* (1995) could be seen more closely connected to this literary movement.

16 For a discussion on the categories of pure and dirty, see Douglas 2000.

17 In spite of food's often mentioned importance in our lives, both on practical and symbolic level, there are people who find the topic too "low" and too banal. In high writing, some people think, food should not be given too much importance. This is visible, for instance, in the discussion of the Finnish A-levels 2005, when the Finnish exam essay topics all had to do with food and eating. One high school teacher called the topic of food in this context as "nonsense" (Heltola 2005; see also Tirkkonen 2005 and Raiskinmäki 2005). In a reminiscent way, an influential Finnish man in the area of culture thought that one of the year 2002 Finlandia-prize's nominees was faulty, because although it was a book on war, it spoke of food in excess, which was, according to him, not appropriate. The author was female. See also Kainulainen 2006, 39-40, who has found a reminiscent attitude from a poetry reviewer: food is not always a proper subject.

To me, as a feminist reader, this small discussion around literary food and eating is gendered. Food is considered by many people nonsense precisely because its attachment to the low, the common, the everyday – all which imply female and femininity. (See also Kainulainen 2006, 39-40.)

18 Exemplary works of early images of women criticism that concentrated on the content scrutiny are for instance Susan Koppelman Cornillon's (ed.) *Images of Women in Fiction* (1972) and Mary Anne Ferguson's (ed.) *Images of Women in Literature* (1981 [1973]). Koppleman Cornillon presents a wide variety of texts that criticise both female and male authors' images of women. Ferguson's book is a collection of fiction, written by women and men.

The style of criticism, which *Images of Women in Fiction* and Ferguson's critical introductions to the chapters represent, has been criticised for its demand for authentic female characters. In these works, one can see a suggestion that someone can define what kind of characters writers should create and portray and that there are false and correct images of women. This idea has been justly criticised: literature is a complex artistic phenomenon, and this attitude tries to reduce its value to how good role models it gives to women. But when the weak points of early images of women criticism are acknowledged, its importance to feminism cannot be denied. (Koskela and Rojola 1997, 143-144; Sielke 1997, 16-18; Moi 1990, 59-62, 65-66.)

19 Mills uses here the words interpellation and hailing. The term interpellation comes from Louis Althusser, and it has been modified by feminist writers. See Mills 1995, 67-68.

20 As Pearce writes – following Michael Holquist – Bakhtin himself did not use term dialogism. Anglo-American scholars introduced it. (Pearce 1997, 66-67.)

21 In her study *Feminist Thought. A Comprehensive Introduction,* Rosemarie Tong divides strands of feminism into seven groups: Liberal, Marxist, Radical, Psychoanalytic, Socialist, Existentialist and Postmodern (or French) feminism. (Tong 1992.) Of course, all these strands can be used to explore Atwood.

22 In her reader survey of Atwood's short story, Pearce found out that there was a difference in reading position between the British and Canadian readers. The Canadian feminist readers found Atwood a strong figure, even an icon and felt that they had to distance themselves from her:

> The resistance to Atwood is not simply one of over-familiarity or the canonization of her work, but is in part due to the apparently stultifying inscription of her identity on their own. The 'irritation' (referred to explicitly by three respondents) may thus be seen to derive from a mutual 'recognition': 'Atwood' is the literary 'mother' who must be resisted if the 'daughter' is ever to achieve her own feminist/'national' identity. For it is the conflation of femininity, feminism and 'Canadianness' that Atwood's writing has come to signify for these readers above all. (Pearce 1997, 226-227.)

Thus, (some of) the Canadian feminist readers may feel not as ideal readers of Atwood and may become resistant readers. As Pearce observes, when a Canadian feminist reader reads Atwood, it appears that she has her audience, her interpretative community in mind. The possible emotional engagement can be in conflict with this audience, which has certain approved of opinions of Atwood. (Pearce 1997, 235-236.)

One of Pearce's Canadian readers felt "alienated" from the short story because Atwood's protagonist was "white Anglo-Saxon", and her family's background is Eastern European (Pearce 1997, 234). This can be seen happening to some readers in most Atwood's novels, because most of her characters are of white Anglo-Saxon origin. However, there are exceptions to this in her characters, such as Lesje in Life Before Man. But, following Pearce, identification and dialogue, even enamoration, with a textual other can be more complex than character identification.

In British readers' responses this stance or problem did not occur, and I would think that outside Canada and North-America Atwood has not become a negative icon for feminist readers. On the contrary. This is probably due to the scarce visibility of Atwood in the media here in Europe, in contrast to Canada. In addition to that it is probable that readers outside of Canada and North-America do not read her as an exclusively Canadian writer and are unaware of the context of this Canadian canonisation.

23 Nina Työlahti uses Pearce's method in her interesting dissertation *Encountering the New Woman. Feminist Rebellion and Literature* (2006; see also Työlahti 2007).

24 The term "structures of feeling" comes from Raymond Williams. He uses it in his effort to give new useful concepts to Marxist theorising. See Pearce 1997, 16, 31 n. 33.

25 In his essays of memory, *The Invention of Solitude*, Paul Auster writes of *The Arabian Nights*: "The story begins with the end. Speak or die. And for as long as you go on speaking, you will not die" (Auster 1982, 149). This quotation can be seen to have intertextual allusions to Atwood's method of writing and her narrators' way of narrating. (The whole name of *The Arabian Nights* is *The Arabian Nights' Entertainments or the Thousand and One Nights*).

26 For a recent Finnish study in this field see Kesävuori 2003.

27 The object-relations theory and its feminist applications are sometimes seen as a field that concentrates only on personal relations and ignores the social and cultural forces of the society. I consider this in most cases as a misreading. As Schapiro says,

> While the focus may be interpersonal and intrapsychic, most relational-model theorist would not deny that interpersonal relationships and intrapsychic dynamics are deeply affected by historical and cultural circumstances. (Schapiro 1994, 13.)

Social and psychological are not exclusive – they are interrelated. The individual, her family or caretakers and the society are in constant interaction.

28 See also Benjamin 1995, 15, who finds the polarised formulation too rigid. She demands "a fruitful dispute – a confrontation with difference" between Lacanian and object-relations theory and sees that their juxtaposition is somewhat misguided.

29 In another version of the fairytale, the newly wed wife gets an egg from her husband. The egg stains with blood after she finds the unfortunate wives, and so the husband finds out what has happened. There is also a version in which the wife saves herself through narration: by pretending that the horrible finding is fiction and tells it to the husband. See the tales "Fitcher's bird" and "The Robber Bridegroom", which can be found in for instance The Brothers Grimm, 1998, *The Complete Fairy Tales*. For the tale called "The Bluebeard", see e.g. Strich 1990, 466-472. Angela Carter has written a feminist rewriting of the tale of Bluebeard, see Carter 1995 (1979).

30 The writers I use in the following chapter, such as Winnicott, Laing, and Miller are not feminist theorists. However, as Chodorow argues, the psychoanalytic theory has always concentrated on gender (Chodorow 1989, 2). We feminists cannot and do not ignore theories that are not feminist to start with and it is usual in feminism to re-read and re-write traditional thinkers with feminist viewpoint (e.g. Michel Foucault).

31 Of course the ability to see others and assess situations is always bound to context. For instance our cultural background has an influence on what we think of other people. There is always a possibility of misunderstanding and conflicts, but the aim of this description is to make a difference between the divided self and the true, authentic self.

As Cynthia Burack points out, lesbian and queer critics have often been reluctant to accept psychoanalytical thoughts, and with good reasons. However, Burack sees that the concepts 'true' and 'false' self can be useful and productive for lesbian and queer critics. See Burack 1997.

32 When discussing issues of parenting, it is relevant to say that abusive parents have usually experienced maltreatment themselves (Miller 1998; Miller 1996, 80; DeSalvo 1991, 30). It is also noteworthy that society often encourages mistreatment: parents

perform "the difficult and complex task of parenting within a social structure which proscribes very clearly, if sometimes very indirectly, how children must be raised and what the role of the mother and father should be" (DeSalvo 1991, xv; also Miller 1998 says that child psychology books have, in history, bolstered maltreatment).

In her study *The Mother/Daughter Plot*, Marianne Hirsch says that psychoanalytic feminists take too often the daughterly position in their studies instead of the motherly (Hirsch 1989, 12-13). In other words, they blame mothers and their representations. Hirsch sees that we must see and recognise the mother and be careful not to ignore her like the patriarchal way of reading has done. I see, like Hirsch, that it is essential to see both mothers and daughters, and I also emphasise that it is impossible to adopt a truly motherly position without fully exploring one's daughterly history and situation.

33 The division of the self is not only an inner happening which takes place because the parent-child relationship, or because something else causes it. Winnicott sees that there can also be a trace of false self in otherwise healthy person: the part which takes care of individual's manners and behaviour towards other people, in a situations such as formal dinners. (Winnicott 1960, 142-143.)

34 The novel's pretext, a quotation from Irma S. Rombauer and Marion Becker Rombauer's classic cookbook *The Joy of Cooking* (Rombauer and Rombauer 1990 (1963) connects, on a symbolic level, clinical operating and cooking. The pretext is a part of a puff pastry recipe: "The surface on which you work (preferably marble), the tools, the ingredients and your fingers should be chilled throughout the operation…" At first this quotation does not first bring cooking or a cookbook to one's mind. It could be a description of an operation or a post mortem examination. The piece of text suggests that there is much more to cooking and food than one might think at first and that the issue is complex and worthy of interpretation.

35 It is important to note that I discuss feminist readership from my own, contemporary perspective, which differs from the readers of *The Edible Woman* in 1969 and the 1970s. Then the second feminist wave was beginning, and thus there were not feminist readers in the same sense than now. There were, of course, protofeminist readers, and readers whom we would call feminist, but there was no organised movement, no "us". I wish to thank Päivi Kosonen for pointing this out to me.

36 Marian's reaction is reminiscent of an awakening of a meat eater, who wishes to become a vegetarian. The meat producing industry is critically commented on: somebody dies in order for to Marian eat her steak. Something brutal and violent is made look natural and acceptable. Adams argues that in *The Edible Woman* "[d]omestic dynamics, a sexual war, led to vegetarianism" (Adams 1990, 131). Indeed, Marian's thoughts may at first look appear as if she would become a vegetarian, due to her noticing the brutality of meat eating. But the thought of becoming a vegetarian makes Marian sad and she thinks of vegetarians as "cranks" (EW, 153), and the treatment of the subject is tragicomical. Marian's scarce eating is not a willing one. She does not want to change her eating habits and she claims her mind has nothing to do with this issue, that only her body is whimsical.

37 Anorexia nervosa is not a new disease, see e.g. Bynum 1988, passim, and Puuronen 2004, 21, but it has become an increasingly more discussed and analysed topic in the 1980s and 90s.

For an interesting reading of modernist texts as anorexic, see Anderson 1988, who discusses such writers as Kafka and Beckett. His article includes also noteworthy points on female students and their "anorectic" position in life and studies.

38 There are also some hints that Marian's childhood has not been as nourishing as she would have needed. Although *The Edible Woman* (and Surfacing) does not include such a profound description of the protagonist's childhood as Atwood's other novels, the short mentionings of Marian's childhood and her present relationship with her parents are suggestive.

39 In part, Marian's vision of her work colleagues and her landlady, "the lady down below" (EW, 13) seems, to the feminist reader, misogynist: a hateful view of older women. On the other hand, these images can be seen to be motivated by Marian's hunger for having a life beyond these role models, and this is why they appear so demanding and suffocating. Marian is searching for separate self in front of the powerful representation of an older, more powerful woman, a "mother". These women stand for self-sacrifice and self-denial, which, understandably, is not

something that a young, ambitious woman wants. These images, however, are often in excess, which suggests polyphony and the retrospective narrator's irony.

40 For classical feminist writing about "the angel in the house" figure, see Virginia Woolf's beautiful and angry lectures in *Killing the Angel in the House* (Woolf 1995 [1931]).

41 Duncan, who has been considered Marian's alter ego, projection and her twin, represents anorexic thinness. Sceats justly remarks that both characters "reflect a desire for the clean and proper body" (Sceats 2000, 97). At times, Marian finds it repulsive to touch him because of his bony and starved figure, which reminds her "of a starved animal in time of famine" (EW, 171).

42 Atwood has said the following in an interview: "There was once an academic who wrote a piece that said, 'It does not matter whether a story is written in the first, second or third person', and I could not disagree more. It's essential" (Atwood in Reynolds and Noakes 2002, 17). See Lahikainen 2000, 122-124, for a discussion of the problematic I in *The Edible Woman*.

Also the changes in tempus are typical of Atwood's novels. Present tense is often used and it creates an atmosphere and illusion of "now", of everything is happening now. *Life Before Man* is narrated solely in the present tense. In *The Edible Woman* and *Surfacing* the tense changes. Of course some novels, like *Lady Oracle*, are narrated (mostly) in the first person and the past tense.

43 More of *The Edible Woman's* connections with these two classics see Lahikainen 1998.

44 Margaret Mead's production and her ideas of motherhood and fatherhood can be seen to have some connections with Ainsley's character's opinions. See e.g. Mead 1950 and 1963.

45 Also Marian's three co-workers about her same age – who are called "the office virgins" – are desperate to have a man, especially Lucy, who is shown constantly hunting for a husband. When Marian tells the office virgins about her engagement, Lucy asks, "How on earth did you ever catch him?" (EW, 113). This reaction shows hunger for knowledge of successful seduction strategies. The women seem to have shared interests, but only up to a point. Catching a husband is power.

For a more in-depth reading of *The Edible Woman* and its motif of food, eating, and hunger, see Lahikainen 1998.

46 *The Edible Woman* includes intertextual allusions to C. S. Lewis's *Alice in Wonderland*. Duncan's roommate Fish gives an interpretation of the novel and it might also be read as an interpretation of The Edible Woman. See EW, 193-194.

Duncan and his room mates are connected to the fairy tale Three Bears: they all have their own chair in the living room, forbidden from others and Duncan even calls Marian Goldilocks. For interpretations of The Edible Woman's fairy tale allusions, see MacLulich 1988 and Wilson 1989.

47 There are two cake scenes in the novel. The first cake is Marian's Valentine's Day's present for Peter. She tries to "test" (EW, 207) their compatibility with the edible. The cake is heart shaped, suggesting that Marian is offering Peter her love, a part of herself as Wilson argues (Wilson 1989, 85). Marian's test shows that they are different: Peter has no problems eating the cake and thus they are not similar or compatible, but from different worlds. Just like Peter enjoyed the steak that became an abject signifier to Marian, he enjoys the cake, which Marian sees as an act of destruction of the other. When she tries to eat the same cake, "it felt spongy and cellular against her tongue, like the bursting of thousands of tiny lungs. She shuddered and spat the cake out" (EW, 207). This suggests that Peter's appetite is huge and that he consumes Marian, with no thoughts or scruples, in the same way he consumes the meat and the cake.

48 See also Nicholson 1987, 40, who argues that the "cake (…) suggests a substitute offering to avoid being eaten", and Mycak 1996, 67. Wilson sees that "[b]y baking, decorating, serving, and consuming the cake-woman (…) Marian announces, to herself and others, that she is not food (Wilson 1989, 87).

49 Stein has noted the "biblical overtones" of the names of the characters: Anna (Hannah, graceful one), David (King David) and Joe (Joseph) (Stein 1999, 54).

50 Elaine Showalter suggested in her article "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" that feminist literary practice of the time could be divided into two categories, which are feminist critique and gynocriticism. The former meant women reading critically male texts and analysing the images of women in them. Gynocriticism could be called women centred reading: the analyst concentrates on women's writing and aims at

finding out the differences between female and male writing and writers. (Showalter 1985.)

51 *Surfacing* can be interpreted as a rewriting and retelling of the "madwoman in the attic" novel. The image of a madwoman, one of the central figures of feminism, was first presented as an "incomprehensible" minor character Bertha Mason in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. After Brontë's classic, several women writers have been interested in writing of women and madness (see e.g. Jean Rhys's intepreration of Bertha Mason, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966)). The mad woman in the attic has been seen as a metaphor of the situation of women (writers) in patriarchy, and of the conflicts that women have with the image of the angel of the house and their will to express themselves and to live as they wish. (See Gilbert and Gubar 1984.) Unlike in *Jane Eyre*, in *Surfacing* "madness" is connected to the protagonist: it is not an outsider.

52 Language and its complex qualities (rigidity, problematic communication, patriarchal basis et cetera) is a conflicted issue for the nameless protagonist. To her, the ordinary human communication – words, talking and writing – seem often frightening and dangerous and only make understanding between people more difficult or even impossible. More of "the language of alienation" in Ewell 1981. Also Mendez 1987 discusses the novel's language. For other studies of Atwood's fiction's language, see e.g. Griffith's 1980 view of Atwood's "verbal terrain".

53 How is *Surfacing* read as national negotiation novel? Stein sums up these possibilities:

> I read this novel primarily as a woman's quest and secondarily as a quest for cultural identity, describing Canada's struggle to come to terms with its past; to understand the proper uses of power; to mediate hegemonic United States influences; and to reconcile a series of dichotomies, including French and English language and culture as well as city and wilderness. The narrator's failed affair may suggest Canada's historic relationship with England. Acknowledgement of her abortion may indicate acceptance of responsibility for the violence in Canadian history. Wilderness (the bush), the world of nature, is an important source of values, although retreat to the past may be a tempting but untenable position. Joe, Anna, and David represent possible future directions. David is dangerously violent and sexist; Anna has capitulated to the oppressor. Joe is "only half-formed" (…) and therefore holds promise. (Stein 1999, 51.)

54 In *Bodily Harm*, the violent intruder ("the rope man") who luckily did not meet the protagonist Rennie in her apartment is also called an ambassador. In *Surfacing* the undertone with the word ambassador is not as dark as with the rope man in *Bodily Harm*. Joe might offer good things, but the rope man promises only violence and pain. Both, however, are ambivalent male figures.

55 Also *Surfacing's* narrator describes herself as "escape artist" (S, 66), but in a gloomier style.

56 See e.g. Tucker 1994, 35. According to her, *Lady Oracle* can be seen as a representative of the road story genre, too.

57 It can be argued that *Lady Oracle* warmly mocks the literary scene: publishers, critics, writers and the artist wannabes. Its depiction of literary parties, Joan's career as poet, dealings with publisher's representatives, television interviews etc. is certainly comic and ironic.

58 One of *Lady Oracle's* intertexts is the film *The Red Shoes* (1948, directed by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger), which is constantly alluded to in the novel. Cuder sees the *Lady Oracle* as "a comic rewriting of the film" (Cuder 2003, 36). The protagonist, played by Moira Shearer, is forced to quit professional dancing in order to keep her husband. This, of course, does not make her happy and in the end she commits suicide. Joan loves the film as a child, and as an adult she remembers the bitter choice of the protagonist in several places. "The Red Shoes" is originally a fairy tale by Hans Christian Andersen.

59 Bakhtin describes the classical body as unchangeable and self-sufficient. Its age underlines its independency of others: it is far from birth and death. All protrusions and holes of the body are covered and bodily functions seem non-existent. (Bakhtin 1995, 28-29.) This body, of course, represents masculinity.

60 The novel's images of the Fat Lady, Joan's imaginary character, discuss the power of the large woman, her possibilities and transgression. Into that figure Joan can project her desires and fears. The Fat Lady is an image that illustrates the voices inside of

Joan, "crying What about me? What about my own pain? When is it my turn?" (LO, 92).

The image of the Fat Lady is in excess and comic: she is repeatedly depicted in situations that are incongruous and undignified. But, and most importantly, the Fat Lady is also a moving image of the desire to be oneself and to be recognised as oneself. It can also be seen as a critique towards the position of the overweight women in the Western society and people's attitude towards them.

The Fat Lady is a counter image of the thin and beautiful, proper women. She is a contrast to the false and the compliant self. One could even argue that The Fat Lady is a counter representation of the society's image of a proper woman, which can be seen as a false self, compliant and for the pleasure of others. See also Lahikainen 2007.

61 In romantic fiction, food often has an important place and it is portrayed with the language from women's magazines. See e.g. Snitow 1985, 38.

62 Resistance and compliance are repeated in the novel on several levels. The novel uses and criticises the Gothic; Joan eats to resist and to comply with her mother; Joan desires Gothic narratives and characters, but has continuously problems with them. When Joan, as an adult, tries the automatic writing for the first time – a method she uses to write her collection of poems – the word she scribbles in a sort of trance, having no memory of writing it, is "Bow" (LO, 220). It means bending and curtsy, but also a weapon, cross-bow – typical Atwoodian double meaning.

63 The name of the novel, *Life Before Man*, points to several directions. Stein writes:

> For the palaeontologist Lesje Green, life before man refers to the time of the dinosaurs; For Elizabeth it may mean that life takes precedence over heterosexual relationships; and for Nate it may suggest that we have not yet evolved into our full expression of human civility. Other meanings include the length of life stretching out before humans, or the imperative of a life force that may have to disregard humans. (Stein 1999, 66.)

I would like to add that for Lesje, the title could mean that before Nate she has not been emotionally deeply involved with any man in a love relationship.

64 There is another reminiscent reversal concerning Martha's character: from assumed puppet and victim she turns into a cunning, witty and able woman with a sense of humour. See LBM 101-103.

65 Elizabeth's narrative remarks: "Food is always a part of it" (LBM, 170), meaning that sexuality and hunting for it usually include food. She also sees clothes and jewellery as a weapon of sexual hunting: "slit skirts, satin underwear, silver talismans to dangle between the breast like minnows on a hook. Bite here" (LBM, 50).

66 *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Surfacing* include reminiscent stories of the male character's control over the protagonist's eating. (See S, 28; HMT, 73.)

67 Minnow comments that his political enemies joke with his name, saying "A small fish in a small puddle" (BH, 30). He dies in the political upheaval and Rennie takes part in his wake. The comparison to fish is often a negative one or foretells a bad end in Atwood's production.

68 According to *Alias Grace's* doctor Simon Jordan, women think that doctors possess forbidden knowledge, frightening and exclusive, of death and female body. The human body is their playground, which they enter, where they do what they want and exit. The doctors represent even mightier god-like power than men usually do. (See AG, 82.)

69 The minor female characters Lora (Rennie's acquaintance on the island and her cellmate) and Jocasta (her friend in Toronto) confirm the gloomy view of the world as a war between polarised genders. The women have small spaces in the novel as narrators, telling their own stories and anecdotes. These embedded narratives are longer than the usual dialogue sentences, from one to two pages. Lora's and Jocasta's talk concerns the gendered practices of the world, emphasising conflicts between men and women. Also the difference between generations, the power imbalance between children and adults, is clear in Lora's portrayal of her past.

There is a clear class difference between Rennie and Lora (see also Bouson 1993, 126). It appears that Rennie's middle class environment and status protect her. When Rennie is threatened by various things, Lora, as a working class girl and woman, is not only threatened, but attacked at and hurt.

70 For example, Feuer contextualises *The Handmaid's Tale* in the dystopian tradition and compares it to *George Orwell's classic* 1984. According to her, "[s]tylistically and

thematically Atwood moves far beyond Orwell in her wariness of (…) one's righteousness". (Feuer 1997, 92; see also Valli 1996.)

71 There is a hint that her given name may be June. Offred tells the names of her closest women in the Red Centre, and one of them is June. Other women are introduced in the novel, which suggests that June is Offred. (See HMT, 14.)

72 Also *Surfacing* was filmed in 1981 by Claude Jutra. Atwood wrote the screenplay, but it was not used (Bernard Gordon wrote the used script). It was a Canadian production and less known or available than the Hollywood version of *The Handmaid's Tale.* Atwood has written versions of screenplays of her other novels, too (e.g. *Lady Oracle*, *Cat's Eye*), but the projects have not been completed.

73 The name Cordelia echoes Shakespeare's play *King Lear*. Elaine observes:

> Why did they name her that? Hang that weight around her neck. Heart of the moon, jewel of the sea (…) The third sister, the only honest one. The stubborn one, the rejected one, the one who was not heard. (CE, 281.)

These attributes apply well to Cordelia's character. For instance Stein 1999, 93 and Cuder 2003, 47, discuss this connection further. Davidson 1997, e.g. 18-19, 39, 49, discusses Cat's Eye's connections with Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and *King Lear*.

74 *Cat's Eye's* thoughts of time and the universe are connected to theories in physics and cosmology, e.g. Stephen Hawking (see Stein 1999, 89). The novel's second pretext is from Hawking: "Why do we remember the past, and not the future?"

75 See Stein 1999, 100, for a discussion on *The Robber Bride's* intertextual connections to myths and mythical women. (E.g. Charis: the maiden Kore, Roz: Demeter, mother and practical one, Tony: crone Hecate and Athena, Greek goddess of wisdom and war.)

76 Tony is connected to egg several times in connection with Zenia. She sees herself "ignorant as an egg" (RB, 165) in comparison to Zenia, and when Zenia makes Tony buy new clothes and dress differently, Tony feels that her head is like an egg. These connotations suggest fragility and vulnerability, a feeling of not being experienced.

77 Zenia's witty and story-spinning character is very much like Atwood's opinion of the writer's lot in her non-fiction book *Negotiating with the Dead*. Atwood has also explained that she herself identifies mostly with Zenia, and not for instance Tony, as readers often have assumed (e.g. Stein 1999, 99). Zenia is an image of a writer, or a taleteller.

78 In her study on hysteria and women, Kortelainen describes the concepts and practices of the movements of magnetism, mesmerism, hypnotism etc., which colour Alias Grace. See Kortelainen 2003, passim.

79 Grace and Simon discuss the myth of Pandora's box in connection with a quilt pattern (AG, 146), and one of the novel's chapters is called "Pandora's box".

80 Simon is in conflict of wills and power also with Mrs. Humphrey's maid Dora, and he feels a strong desire towards the prison Governor's daughter, Miss Lydia. I will not discuss these characters in this dissertation, because I have been forced to lop off certain representations of the motif of symbolic eating, due to the fact that they are so plentiful in Atwood's fiction.

81 The novel includes intertextual allusions to and important quotations of e.g. Virgil's *Aeneid*, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Coleridges "Kubla Kahn: or, A Vision in a Dream" and Emily Dickinson's poems. See e.g. Stein 2003, 149, 152-153; Cooke 2004, 152-155. Cooke (2004, 138, 140, 147) discusses the novel's name: who is/are the blind assassins?

82 In *The Blind Assassin*, food is present already in the titles of the chapters: 11 of the total of 93 chapters include food, edible or other connection with eating, for example: The hard-boiled egg, Bread day, The soda, Carnivore stories, and Peach Women of Aa'A.

83 In *The Blind Assassin* picnic is repeated as a happy or otherwise meaningful (usually happiness or excitement is intertwined with other emotions) event. There is the important event of family business, The Button Factory Picnic, where Iris and Laura meet Alex Thomas and Richard and his sister Winifred for the first time. *The Blind Assassin* 2's he and she enjoy their picnic, Iris's father and the sculptor Callista Fitzsimmons get to know each other during their picnics. After their mother's death the girls are allowed to have picnics of their own. Old Iris has lonely picnics on a small scale, for instance a cookie on a park bench.

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