

THE NOVELS OF MARGARET ATWOOD

AUTONOMY, IDENTITY, NARCISSISM, AND RELATIONSHIP
IN
THE NOVELS OF MARGARET ATWOOD

By

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ABSTRACT:

This study is an examination of all of Margaret Atwood's novels to date. In the first section of the thesis I argue that Atwood's first three novels concern themselves with a characteristically "feminine" form of heteronomy, and with the struggle to move away from a condition of heteronomy towards a state of autonomy. In the second section, I argue that Atwood's focus changes to a concern for the necessity of the Self to extend itself toward genuine relationship with the Other. The link between the two "periods" of Atwood's writing is the concept of narcissism. Different forms of narcissism are essential components in both the condition of heteronomy, and in the condition of tenuous, or on the other hand too-rigid, autonomy; once Atwood has explored the nature of "feminine" heteronomy and of woman's struggle for autonomy, she becomes interested in narcissism as a problem in itself, as it exists in various realms--personal, political, and academic. The ideological context of the thesis is eclectic, in that the assumptions underlying the development of my argument are rooted in feminist, existentialist, social-psychological, and religious discourses.

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For Steven, who has perpetually reminded me that
theory must not fly too far away from where we live.

And for my parents, who gave me room to think.

Introduction

The context of my study of the novels of Margaret Atwood is the rather eclectic space in which psychological, social-psychological, existential, feminist, and spiritual approaches to the subjects of autonomy, identity, narcissism and relationship converge. In mapping out the limits for my discourse, I have been very much influenced by Madonna Kolbenschlag's Kiss Sleeping Beauty Goodbye, in which the author draws upon the resources of many disciplines in an attempt to analyse some of the myths that have both mirrored and shaped feminine experience. Although Kolbenschlag only briefly mentions Atwood's work, I refer to Kiss Sleeping Beauty Goodbye often, as so many of the issues that inform Atwood's novels are illuminated by Kolbenschlag's insights into the feminine condition.

(Although Atwood is a politically conscious writer,^{but} her overwhelming obsession is, especially in the early novels, (with the Self--the "whatness" of its nature (identity), the internal and external forces that shape and change its nature, and its relationship with the "not-Self", especially the Other. Her language has its roots in the concerns of the existentialists, in particular Sartre, with being and negation, "seeing" (objectifying) and "being seen" (becoming object for the Other), action and passivity, ontological power and ontological powerlessness). The following passages, for example, (reveal a preoccupation with sight as a metaphor for the power to confer identity, to control, or evaluate, within the context of interpersonal relationships):

Once he pulled the trigger she would be stopped, fixed indissolubly in that gesture, that single stance, unable to move or change.¹

She had been seen, too intimately, her face blurred and distorted, damaged, owned in some way she couldn't define...She began to see herself from the outside,² as if she was a moving target in someone else's binoculars.

To be a man, watched by women. It must be entirely strange. To have them watching him all the time. To have them wondering, What's he going to do next? To have them flinch when he moves, even if its a harmless enough move, to reach for an ashtray perhaps. To have them sizing him up. To have them thinking, he can't do it, he won't do, he'll have to do, this last as if he were a garment...

She watches him from within. We're all watching him. It's one thing we can really do...³

(Atwood's interest in the self's power or lack of it, also finds expression in the language of being and negation) as in the following:

Anna...began to sing...Across the lake a barred owl was calling, quick and soft like a wing beating against the eardrum, cutting across the pattern of her voice.⁴

I wasn't going to let myself be diminished, neutralized by a navy-blue polka-dot sack...once when I arrived home in a new lime-green car coat with toggles down the front flashing like a neon melon, my mother started to cry...this [was] evidence of my power, my only power. I had defeated her: I wouldn't ever let her make me over into her image, thin and beautiful.⁵

For three weeks now he's been running up the cellar stairs when he hears the children come home from school...He tells them jokes, cooks them dinner, reads them longer and longer bedtime stories. Last night they said they were tired and would he please turn out the light...He darkened the room, kissed them good night, went to the bathroom to put a hot washcloth over his eyes. Already his reflection in the mirror was fading, the house was forgetting him, he was negligible.⁶

(Atwood's novels as a group may be seen as an on-going dialogue, in which the issues of metamorphosis, activity versus passivity, self-definition versus definition by others, and, increasingly, narcissism versus intimacy, are the pressing

subjects. These issues are, for the most part, taken up from the point of view of the female consciousness situated in a cultural-historical melange which may be described loosely as white-middle-class-contemporary-eastern Canadian.) It is not my purpose here (or anywhere) (to explore the complex and extremely difficult question of the extent to which cultural-historical factors influence the very articulation of questions of autonomy, identity and relationship) (e.g. would it even make sense in all times and cultures to talk about "self-definition"?). Rather, I step into the cultural-historical shoes of Atwood's protagonists (not difficult as I too am a white, female, middle-class eastern Canadian), and discuss the issues from that stance. I refer, however, to writings from other times and cultures in an attempt to illuminate some of the issues with which Atwood is struggling. That these writings often do shed light on the novels suggests that in spite of the fact that Atwood is, as B.W. Powe acidly and with some justification asserts, "the perfect recorder and personification of contemporary literary and intellectual fads"⁷, (she may also at times touch upon something closer to, if such an idea has any connection with reality, the universal.)

Chapter One

In this chapter, I discuss The Edible Woman, Surfacing, and Lady Oracle as a group. Not only are these three connected by an unbroken, of sorts, sequence of publication (they are Atwood's first three novels, though not her first three books), they are all characterized by an insistent concern for the fundamental question of identity--"who am I really?". They also fulfill Kolbenschlag's requirement for being "significant fiction about women": in her opinion such fiction is concerned with "the struggle--and, all too often, failure--of women to achieve ethical autonomy"⁸. I must here explain the use of this term "ethical autonomy", and briefly explain its intellectual context, before turning my attention to the novels themselves.

In Kiss Sleeping Beauty Goodbye, Kolbenschlag refers to the paradigms for spiritual development outlined by the Danish existentialist philosopher Soren Kierkegaard and the German theologian Paul Tillich, and draws out what she sees to be the relevance of these systems of thought for feminist theory. Both Kierkegaard and Tillich identify three stages in the development of the human spirit. This is not the appropriate context in which to discuss each of these paradigms in great detail; since, however, they are very similar from the perspective of my present purpose, I will "conflate" them somewhat, and describe the resulting tri-phasal pattern.

At the first stage, which Kierkegaard terms the "aesthetic" and Tillich the "heteronomous", the individual allows himself to be defined and controlled by something or someone outside of

himself. One achieves one's sense of meaning and purpose at this stage by accepting and acting in accordance with the vision that this Other, whomever or whatever this may be, has of oneself (or at least, with the vision that one believes the Other has of oneself). This stage is characterized by a compulsion to live "outside" of oneself or "for" something or someone.

The second stage, the "ethical" for Kierkegaard, and the "autonomous" for Tillich, is marked by the realization of one's essential freedom to, and responsibility to, choose, to make moral/ethical decisions, and by "a certain self-sufficiency in undertaking the project of existence"⁹. The phrase "project of existence" is, I think, an especially significant one as regards pinpointing the essential difference between the first and second stages. At the first stage, existence is not a project at all, because there is no concern for the making of the self; the self allows itself to be, or even demands of others that it be, made.

The third stage, termed the "religious" by Kierkegaard, and the "theonomous" by Tillich, is the point at which, first having achieved the ethical or autonomous stage, the human spirit realizes and admits its dependency on, and its contingency with respect to, that which transcends itself-- God, or what may be called "the ground of existence"¹⁰. Since neither Kierkegaard nor Tillich sees the essence of the true religious spirit in terms of institutions, this third stage is not merely a return to the first, but a profound realization of humankind's essential ontological dependence upon something beyond itself. Both see that institutionalized religion may play the role of the defining

Other to which the individual at the heteronomous stage surrenders his identity, and that even authentic religious faith, if not continually renewed at deeper and deeper levels, may solidify into an institutionalized form that invites heteronomous self-abdication.

Kolbenschlag's main point with respect to these paradigms is that for various reasons (social, psychological, historical), many women have been, and are, "spiritual dwarfs"¹¹, unable to pass beyond the first stage of development. It is no wonder that for Kolbenschlag, with her self-proclaimed commitment to "the transcendent purpose of life"¹², that significant women's fiction has to do with the struggle for ethical autonomy--this second stage, which marks the emergence of true personhood, is the necessary bridge between infantile and mature spirituality. Because the term "personhood" has become somewhat of a breeding ground for all sorts of vague humanistic sentiments, I here establish the specific sense in which I use it: accepting Tillich's definition of "personality" as "that which has power over itself"¹³, I define "personhood" as the state of having power over oneself.

Having sketched this bare outline of the context of my analysis in this chapter, I want to suggest that Atwood's first three novels are all explorations of the condition of spiritual dwarfhood and of the movement towards (but not always arrival at) a state of autonomous personhood. I am in complete agreement with B.W. Powe's assertion that "Atwood's great subject is becoming"¹⁴, at least as it applies to her first three novels. (Powe misses the important shift of emphasis in the last three

novels, but more on this later.) I also sympathize, to an extent, with his lament that "her [Atwood's] characters never achieve being. They are left with nothing on the edge of becoming something"¹⁵, again, in connection with her first three novels. But the power of the extremely perceptive and important comments that Powe makes in his article "'How to Act': An Essay on Margaret Atwood", is somewhat muted by his failure to recognize the importance of Atwood's exploration of the specific difficulties that attend female self-realization, or to use language akin to Powe's, "the achievement of being", in a society in which the sexual status quo is not conducive to such achievement. It is perhaps Powe's refusal to take seriously Atwood's concern with the issue of sexual fascism, and in particular, with the problem of the victim's complicity in her own victimization, that explains his assertion that,

She could never be a subversive writer- a rebel writing No, in Thunder--because ultimately she has "nothing" to oppose...Although it could be that Margaret Atwood's greatest problem is simply that she's not Jewish. Then all the angst would have been understandable. She would have then had a cause, a reason for suffering and acting.¹⁶

In spite of such alarming lapses as the above, Powe's article in general demands to be considered seriously; although he often makes questionable judgements and too-sweeping generalizations, he is, unlike a number of Atwood critics, attuned to the key issues with which Atwood is preoccupied and which make her work significant. Particularly important is his concern with Atwood's novels and narcissism, to which I will refer further on. My present concern, however, is a consideration of Atwood's first three novels in terms of their specific explorations of the

problems attending both the condition of, to use Kolbenschlag's terminology, spiritual dwarfhood, and the journey away from it. I begin with Lady Oracle, as it most strikingly embodies some of the abstractions that Kolbenschlag formulates concerning feminine autonomy and identity.

Although the young Joan Foster's obesity makes her, by its isolating effect, in some ways more independent than her peers, she is, nevertheless, influenced greatly by her socialization as a female. And in fact, as she grows thinner, and therefore more "normal", Joan increasingly manifests the characteristics of what Kolbenschlag refers to as the "formula female"¹⁷. The formula female, living at the heteronomous level of existence, is an existential Sleeping Beauty who waits passively until the "right man" comes along to rescue her from her freedom, give her life meaning, and provide her with an identity. From *Terremoto*, Joan reflects upon her early relationship with Arthur that "I myself was bliss-filled and limpid-eyed: the right man had come along, complete with a cause I could devote myself to" (L0,172); of her marriage she says, "For years I wanted to turn into what Arthur thought I was, or what he thought I should be" (L0,212). Although the formula female lives "for" others, she is in truth supremely narcissistic, because she is primarily interested in others as one is "interested" in a mirror--for the reflection of oneself that it gives. At a late point in the novel Joan, having gained some insight into her behaviour, says that, "I felt I'd never really loved anyone, not Paul, not Chuck the Royal Porcupine, not even Arthur--I'd polished them with my love and expected them to

shine, brightly enough to return my own reflection"(LO,284-5).

For much of the novel, Joan's most striking characteristic is her deceptiveness. She tells people what she thinks they want to hear; she presents herself in conformity with what she believes to be people's expectations. Until the point at which she plans her "death", Joan's deceptiveness has a passive rather than an active character, taking the form of evasion and omission. She avoids, for example, telling Arthur about her past as "the fat lady": "The trouble was that I wanted to maintain his illusions for him intact, and it was easy to do, all it needed was a little restraint: I simply never told him anything important"(LO,33). Joan suffers from what Kierkegaard names the "despair of not willing to be oneself", which he sees as "a flight response of the individual to the dread of autonomy"¹⁸. At one point, when she is recalling her teenage plans to escape from her mother, Joan explicitly says that "I was searching for a city I could move to, where I would be free not to be myself"(LO,139).

✧ Kolbenschlag makes a connection between such existential despair and the low self-esteem instilled in many female children by their mothers; mothers both transfer their own feelings of self-doubt and powerlessness to their daughters, as well as directing their suppressed energies into aggressive attempts to mold them. At least partially responsible for the self-doubt, feelings of powerlessness, and resultant covert aggression that have such disastrous results for their daughters, is the "myth of the mother"¹⁹ that demands of mothers both too much (that they give their lives entirely over to their children), and not enough (they need not bother with self-transcendence or with activities

out "in the world"). The more mature of Joan's reflections on her mother reveal an understanding of the connections between Mrs. Foster's view of herself and her attitude towards Joan, and between her socialization as a mother, and her frustration and unhappiness; these comments are "mature" because in making them, Joan transcends a kind of one-dimensional vision of mother as monster. (In her lecture, "The Curse of Eve--Or, What I Learned in School", Atwood remarks disparagingly of the one-dimensional images of women in the Western literary tradition that, "They have no motives. Like stones or trees, they simply are: the good ones purely good and the bad ones purely bad"²⁰.) Joan's reflections also underscore Kolbenschlag's contention that "we come into this world as mirror images of our mother- destined to be not only her reflector, but also her silent inquisitor"²¹:

It wasn't that she was aggressive or ambitious, although she was both of these things. Perhaps she wasn't aggressive or ambitious enough. If she'd ever decided what she'd 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,64)

I knew that in my mother's view both I and my father had totally failed to justify her life the way she felt it should have been justified. She used to say that nobody appreciated her, and this was not paranoia. Nobody did appreciate her even though she'd done the right thing, she had devoted her life to us, she had made her family her career as she had been told to do, and look at us: a sulky fat slob of a daughter and a husband who wouldn't talk to her... (LO,179)

"A woman who gives birth to a child long before she has given birth to herself", writes Kolbenschlag, "faces the impossible task of raising an autonomous daughter"²². Joan Foster's mother, it would appear, has passed on her own "passive-aggressive"

approach to the world, to her daughter. Kolbenschlag elucidates the nature of this passive-aggressive stance when she suggests that where overt feminine aggressiveness is not legitimated, a woman "may develop covert devices of verbal and emotional manipulation--guilt-producing mechanisms, habits of deception or evasion, ploys of helplessness, and even invalidism"²³. Joan, living inside of an unruly and complicated network of lies, and perpetually injuring herself (invalidism need not be consciously cultivated), is a more colourful and more self-conscious version of the average "formula female" Kolbenschlag describes. In a play on the idea of "falling in love", Atwood has Joan's affairs with both the Polish Count and Arthur begin with Joan actually falling to the ground; though humourous, such play makes the serious association between female helplessness and passivity, and the kinds of destructive "love" relationships into which such falls lead.

That Joan has some conscious apprehension of the nature of the feminine myths that govern so much of her behaviour, is evident not only in her mature reflections about her life but also in her reflections about the Costume Gothics she writes. She understands that her novels "perpetuate the degrading stereotypes of women as helpless and persecuted" (L0,30). But in spite of her intellectual awareness, she has significant "existential" similarities to her legion of female readers, about whom she says, "life had been hard on them and they had not fought back, they'd collapsed like souffles in a high wind. Escape wasn't a luxury for them, it was a necessity"(L0,31). For Joan herself,

escape becomes a mode of being, and takes the form of a flight into multitudinous selfhood.

Joan's proliferation of selves should not, I think, be seen as an essentially positive expression of creative energy, but rather as the failure to cultivate the basic singleness of being that is the necessary ground of autonomy. She is without an "existential pilot", and therefore comes to suffer from a nagging sense of unreality:

The difficulty was that I found each of my lives perfectly normal and appropriate, but only at the time. When I was with Arthur, the Royal Porcupine seemed like a daydream from one of my less credible romances...But when I was with the Royal Porcupine, he seemed plausible and solid. Everything he did and said made sense in his own terms, whereas it was Arthur who became unreal; he faded to an insubstantial ghost, a washed-out photo on some mantelpiece I'd long ago abandoned. Was I hurting him, was I being unfaithful? How could you hurt a photograph?(LO,261)

Joan's flight into multi-selves and into unreality also becomes, as is evident in the above passage, an evasion of her responsibility to make ethical choices. I am not arguing here that Joan's affair with the Royal Porcupine is wrong on the grounds that affairs are wrong, but that her failure lies in her inability to actively take an inner "stance" with respect to her relationship (e.g. "I affirm/choose this affair"); she is thus existentially flabby. Her tendency to drift into situations and roles instead of firmly stepping into them, is both a cause and a result of Joan's precarious sense of identity. Paradoxically, it is her inability to heartily say "I" that is at the root of her narcissism. The following passage from Kolbenschlag on the connection between mothering and identity, is particularly relevant to the situation depicted in Lady Oracle:

X

Ironically, although women have often been labelled as "narcissistic", their self-preoccupation can be better described as self-anxiety rather than true self-centredness. Self-worth and a firmly anchored sense of identity are the result of an early narcissistic intimacy with a mothering person, a symbiosis that should lead to individuation and separation. Unfortunately in the mother-daughter relationship, this process is frequently attenuated. Instead of a healthy self-centredness and resilient ego, the daughter is more likely to develop an intense self-preoccupation. This self-scrutiny is a neurotic narcissism, a compulsive, sustained observation of a false self [or, I may add, false selves] created to fill the void in identity--not a secure centeredness in a spontaneous self. In its most acute form, this psychological vacuum can produce a schizophrenic personality.²⁴

Joan's refusal to be herself, or to claim all of her separate selves in a gesture of unification, leads to her "death". Instead of absorbing the wisdom of Leda Spratt, who in her incarnation as E.P. Revele ("reveal") tells her that she must "avoid deception and falsehood" (LO, 205), or the wisdom of her own subconscious, which, through her automatic writing, is telling her to acknowledge the dark angry woman inside of her, she simply transforms herself again. When she leaves Arthur, the rare decisiveness she shows in initiating an action is undercut by the fact that she cannot even do the action as herself; she arranges her final and most elaborate deception, her escape to Terremoto, so that she again appears to Arthur to be something she is not (at least literally)--dead. It is supremely ironic, in light of Kierkegaard's definition of "ethical", that just before she marries Arthur, Joan worries that if she reveals her past to him, "he would find me unethical" (LO, 198). The real horror behind the masks that Joan wears is not in any of her roles *per se*, but in her compulsive escape from self. It is Joan's lack of self-control, the sense that she is not living her life, but that it

is being lived, that is repulsive: of both her excessive eating habits as a child, and of her later compulsion to write the *Costume Gothics* which perpetuate the myths about women that imprison Joan herself, she says, "I couldn't stop" (LO,30,72).

In light of the issue of mothering raised earlier, it is interesting that the one positive assertion of will that Joan does make, her heroic diet, is associated with Aunt Lou. For Joan, Aunt Lou embodies what some psychologists refer to as "the good mother"²⁵. Alive, Aunt Lou's "assurance and vitality"(LO,117) represent for Joan a different approach to life from her mother's sullen resentment, and dead, Aunt Lou continues to assert her presence through the terms of her will. It is in the context of the living Aunt Lou's acceptance and nurturing that Joan has her only moments of contentment and security as a child, and it is the motivation of Aunt Lou's will that allows her to see through an autonomous project even in the face of her mother's resentment.

"Formula femalehood" may be cultivated in the mother-daughter relationship, but it does not begin or end there; it arises out of a larger context of female socialization. The messages of Joan's society to her are perhaps best summarized in Joan's (unwittingly?) ironic comment that "[In] highschool...[m]y marks were reasonable but not so high as to be offensive"(LO,91). Atwood surely is ironic here, making a comment on the same kind of directives to women that Kolbenschlag humourously extracts from the pages of a popular teenage girls' magazine of 1965. The essential message, encoded in these different ways, is "do not achieve too much or seem too competent, do buoy up the ego of the

Other (i.e.the Male), do expend your energy in anticipating and then fulfilling his desires, and always be nice":

Smile and greet everyone. A friendly girl (you) is more fun to know.

Ask your favorite genius to help you with your homework. (Reward him with freshly baked cookies or brownies.)

Build his ego by asking him to explain a point he made in class.

Offer to type his term paper. In return, ask him to proofread yours.

Bring something complex to school: a camera, an exposure meter, a transistor radio. He'll enjoy instructing you in its use.

Compare grades with him- if you're sure his are at least as good as yours.²⁶

Kolbenschlag also quotes from a book of advice for teenage girls, affiliated with the same magazine, in which the author explains to her audience that "The mythological Amazons and Valkyries took what they wanted by sheer female force, but real women have had to learn to mask their aggressiveness"²⁷. The unintentionally ironic title of the book from which this comes is The Seventeen Guide to Your Widening World.

As I have noted elsewhere, the inevitable result of the suppression of ego-energy is covert aggression. At an early point in Lady Oracle, the alert reader perceives the potential danger in Joan's seeming amiability:

What he [Arthur] didn't know was that behind my compassionate smile was a set of tightly clenched teeth, and behind that a legion of voices, crying What about me? What about my own pain? When is it my turn? But I'd learned to stifle these voices, to be calm and receptive. (LO, 90)

And, like Sinclair Ross' Mrs. Bentley²⁸, perhaps the most famous of all passive-aggressive women in Canadian literature, Joan is

dangerous. She is not merely a victim of the expectations of men, but a victimizer in her turn. Towards the end of the novel, the dark lady who has been lurking in unacknowledged regions of Joan's psyche begins to surface (both as "Felicia" of Joan's latest novel and as "Lady Oracle"), and to wreak havoc. It is not the dark lady herself, but Joan's refusal to fully acknowledge her and accept her as a valid expression of anger, that is dangerous. She sees the angry lady within as an Other; she says of her that,

...it was as if someone with my name were out there in the real world, impersonating me, saying things I'd never said but which appeared in the newspapers, doing things for which I had to take the consequences: my dark twin, my funhouse reflection. She was taller than I was, more beautiful, more threatening. She wanted to kill me and take my place... (L0,252)

It is in Part Four, where this "dark twin" emerges but is not yet integrated with Joan's "daylight" self, that she causes others the most pain and inconvenience.

At the same time there are, in Part Four and Part Five, flashes of potentially healing insight. Joan's realization at the end of Chapter Twenty-Four that "I was not serene, not really. I wanted things for myself" (L0,255), is paradoxically a potential prelude to genuine relationship. A healthy egoism is necessary before an individual can go beyond the self, in a gesture of genuine interest in the other that is not based entirely on a narcissistic need to be reflected. Joan's conscious realization in Chapter Twenty-Five of her essential connection with her dead mother ("She'd never really let go of me because I had never let her go...she had been my reflection too long..." (L0,331)) does

not sweep away the psychological wreckage of the relationship; it appears however, that Joan is on the verge of releasing herself from the heteronomic compulsion to see herself as responsible for the happiness of others: "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,331). Joan's realization here stands in marked contrast to her earlier, socially condoned attitude about Arthur's depression that "the love of a good woman was supposed to preserve a man from this kind of thing, I knew that. But at these times I wasn't able to make ...[Arthur] happy. Therefore I was not a good woman"(LO,214),

For all of her various insights, however, Joan's grip on her autonomy remains, to the end, tenuous. One indication that her sense of self is precarious is that her "sexual politics" near the end of the novel are characterized by anger, suspicion, a preoccupation with her own state of being, and an exaggerated sense of the (male) Other's evil. This last is the extreme opposite to Joan's earlier romanticization of men; she never manages to demythologize the opposite sex altogether. All the men whom she has "loved" become, in the final analysis, the fictional "Redmond", death personified:

Cunningly, he began his transformations, trying to lure her into his reach. His face grew a white gauze mask, then a pair of mauve tinted spectacles, then a red beard and a moustache, which faded, giving place to burning eyes and icicle teeth... The flesh fell away from his face, revealing the skull beneath it; he stepped towards her, reaching for her throat...(LO,343)

It is not clear on the final pages of Lady Oracle, whether Joan has broken into a new psychic groove that will lead her further away from the state of heteronomy and towards a solid

sense of autonomy, or whether she has simply entered a new phase of an old pattern. Of Lady Oracle itself, we may ask the same question Joan herself asks about the next turn of events after her "death"--"a circle? a spiral?"(L0,312). There is no doubt that Joan gains some understanding of her situation. Her understanding, however, may be mostly intellectual. Her decisive declaration in Part Five that "from now on, I thought, I would dance for no one but myself"(L0,335), is somewhat undercut by the phrasing of the first sentence of the last paragraph of the novel, in which Joan says, after declaring her intentions of returning to confront the tangled situation she has left in Canada, that "Right now, though, it's easier [emphasis mine] just to stay here in Rome...(L0,345). This sentence takes us back to the second sentence of the first paragraph in the novel, in which Joan's fundamental problem, her chronic passivity, is summarized: "My life had a tendency to spread, to get flabby, to scroll and festoon like the frame of a baroque mirror, which came from following the line of least resistance [emphasis mine]"(L0,3).

Joan's relationship with the last man in the book (the journalist) is charged with ambiguity. It begins in displaced anger, as personal revolutions often do, but whether or not her subsequent attachment to him marks the beginning of a new approach to male-female relationship, is not clear. Joan begins to feel that the journalist is "the only person who knows anything about me"(L0,342); her feeling is attributable to the fact that this is the first man who has experienced her aggression directly, via the Cinzano bottle. Although

misdirected, this overt display of feeling may be seen as essentially positive. However, her comment that "I have to admit that there is something about a man in a bandage"(LO,345), reverberates with the same romantic, fetishistic, "seeking" quality as her earlier first impressions of the men whom she subsequently tried to polish into self-reflecting mirrors: we remember the Royal Porcupine about whom she initially says, "I found him attractive. Him or the cape, I wasn't sure which"(LO,241), and Arthur with his "dashing crew-neck sweater"(LO,165) and the aloofness which she finds "intriguing, like a figurative cloak"(LO,197). It is therefore with good reason, I think, that critic Frank Davey assumes the worst about the ending of Lady Oracle: "Lady Oracle's Joan Foster, who in her excessive sentimentality is a parody of Miranda, is about to repeat her habitual behaviour pattern of absurd trust followed by absurd distrust"²⁹.

In terms of its treatment of issues of feminine autonomy, identity, and relationship, The Edible Woman bears resemblance to Lady Oracle at many points. In her deceptiveness, evasion and fragmentation, Marian McAlpin is quite like Joan Foster. Both are prey to strong heteronomous impulses to abdicate from self-definition, and for both, there exist others only too happy to do the defining for them. Both are often alienated from their own real feelings and motivations, being consciously surprised by what they do, say, and even think. When Peter asks Marian about their marriage date, she hears "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...'"(EW,87). Marian's

relationship with Peter, like Joan's relationships with Arthur and her other lovers, is essentially narcissistic, rooted in the desire to be reflected, which can also be understood as the desire to be created or given meaning. In this connection, I again quote a passage earlier quoted from Lady Oracle, in which Joan reveals an awareness of what the nature of her stance towards her lovers and husband has been, and a passage from The Edible Woman in which Marian, though not aware of the implications of what she is saying, reveals a similar orientation towards Peter:

I felt I'd never really loved anyone, not Paul, not Chuck the Royal Porcupine, not even Arthur. I'd polished them with my love and expected them to shine, brightly enough to return my own reflection, enhanced and sparkling. (LO, 284-5)

[Peter:] "How do you think we'd get on as... how do you think we'd be, married?... A tremendous electric blue flash, very near, illuminated the inside of the car. As we stared at each other in that brief light I could see myself, small and oval, mirrored in his eyes. (EW, 80)

In her article, "'I'm stuck': The Secret Sharers in The Edible Woman", Ildiko de Papp Carrington has remarked perceptively of the scene from which the latter quotation is taken, in which Marian runs away from Peter but then accepts shelter from the storm in his car, that Marian "lets herself be rescued from the storm of life"³⁰. Carrington's thesis that the infantile, narcissistic and passive Duncan is in fact Marian's "secret sharer", is in many ways quite convincing; to put her argument into the present context, it could be said that Duncan, associated at so many points in the novel with images of death and inertia, is a projection of Marian's deathly heteronomous self. In its sense of will-lessness and regression, the following

remark of Duncan's is suggestive of Marian's own passivity in the months before her expected marriage, during which Peter tries to make her over, and she lets him: "They [his roommates] spend so much time fussing about my identity that I really shouldn't have to bother with it myself at all. In the long run they ought to make it a lot easier for me to turn into an amoeba" (EW, 209). And in a moment of panic at the hairdresser's, where Marian, at Peter's prompting, is having her hair done, she is associated with "amoebahood", through the imagery of a bizarre biological devolution:

When at last all the clamps and rollers and clips and pins were in place, and her head resembled a mutant hedgehog with a covering of rounded hairy appendages instead of spikes, she was led away and installed under a dryer and switched on. She looked sideways down the assembly-line of women seated in identical mauve chairs under the identical whirring mushroom-shaped machines. All that was visible was a row of strange creatures with legs of various shapes and hands that held magazines and heads that were metal domes. Inert; totally inert. Was this what she was being pushed towards, this compound of the simply vegetable and the simply mechanical? An electric mushroom. (EW, 218)

The character of Marian McAlpin's plight in The Edible Woman, like Joan Foster's in Lady Oracle, is a mixture of impulses and choices generated from within, and the pressures of external imperatives and influences generated from without. (Since external imperatives and influences are often internalized, the distinction between inner and outer causality is, of course, often difficult to discern.) In The Edible Woman, Atwood evokes particularly well the ambience of "formula femalehood" cultivated by the society in which Marian lives. It is true, as Frank Davey has noted, that the reader does not get as much insight in The Edible Woman as in Lady Oracle, into the familial situation of

the protagonist³¹. But it is not quite true, as Davey postulates on the basis of this lack of information about Marian's family life, that "the psychological perspective [of The Edible Woman] is shallow"³². In her depiction of the all-female atmosphere on the second floor of Seymour Surveys, and especially in her portrayal of the life orientation of the "office virgins", Atwood gives us great insight into the social-psychological conditions under which women in the 1960's forged their identities as females.)

In a chapter entitled "Snow White and her Shadow", Kolbenschlag makes the assertion that "By contrast [to men in groups of men] women are not so comfortable in groups [of women]--chiefly because it confirms and accentuates their identities as females, a class excluded from the dominant caste in our society"³³. There are some references made in Lady Oracle to the fact of Joan's general uncomfortableness with members of her own sex (e.g. "ever since Brownies I'd been wary of any group composed entirely of women, especially women in uniforms"(LO,85)), but it is in The Edible Woman that Atwood fully explores the subject of female peer relationship. Near the beginning of The Edible Woman, Marian comments upon the fact that she and Ainsley get along together "with a minimum of that pale-mauve hostility you often find among women"(EW). The following passage from Simone de Beauvoir's The Second Sex, quoted by Kolbenschlag, is an elucidation, I think, of the social-psychological reality that is expressed in Marian's early comment, and is also most illuminating as regards the lengthy,

but remarkably vivid passage from The Edible Woman that follows it, in which Marian feels literally smothered by femininity:

Women's fellow feeling rarely rises to genuine friendship...Women feel their solidarity more spontaneously than men; but within this solidarity, the transcendence of each does not go out towards the others, for they all face together towards the masculine world, whose values they wish to monopolize each for herself. Their relationships are not constructed on their individualities, but immediately experienced in generality; and from this arises at once our element of hostility... Women's mutual understanding comes from the fact that they identify themselves with each other; but for the same reason each is against the others.³⁴

She examined the women's bodies with interest, critically...[they were] similar in structure but with varying proportions and textures of bumpy permanents and dune-like contours of breast and waist and hip; their fluidity sustained somewhere within by bones, without by a carapace of clothing and makeup. What peculiar creatures they were; and the continual flux between the outside and the inside, taking things in, giving them out, chewing, words, potato-chips, burps, grease, hair, babies, milk, excrement, cookies, vomit, coffee, tomato-juice, blood, tea, sweat, liquor, tears, and garbage...

For an instant she felt them, their identities, almost their substance, pass over her head like a wave. At some time she would be--or no, already she was like that too; she was one of them, her body the same, identical, merged with that other flesh that choked the air in the flowered room with its sweet organic scent; she felt suffocated by this thick sargasso-sea of femininity. She drew a deep breath, clenching her body and her mind back into her self like some tactile sea-creature withdrawing its tentacles; she wanted something solid, clear: a man; she wanted Peter in the room so that she could put her hand out and hold on to him to keep from being sucked down. Lucy had a gold bangle on one arm. Marian focussed her eyes on it as though she was drawing its hard gold circle around herself, a fixed barrier between herself and that liquid amorphous other.(EW,171-2)

In light of the latter part of this passage, it is significant that later when Marian feels that she is "dissolving, coming apart layer by layer"(EW,228) in the bathtub before Peter's party, she puts her engagement ring back on her finger, "seeing the hard circle for a moment as a protective talisman that would keep her together"(EW,228). The irony here is of course, as

Catherine McLay points out, that "the engagement ring which she [Marian] sees as a 'protective talisman'...is in fact the centre of the spell which holds her...imprisoned"³⁵. By connecting each of them to the image of a gold ring, Atwood associates Lucy, one of the "office virgins", and Peter in the reader's mind; this association is to a purpose--together Lucy and Peter represent the values of the sexual status quo. The suggestions near the end of The Edible Woman that Peter the hunter and Lucy, who "trail[s] herself like a many-plumed fish-lure"(EW,110), will end up as a pair, should not in any way surprise the reader. Playing the same sexual game, both are hunters and hunted. Lucy as hunter sees sexual relationship in predatory terms, asking Marian at one point, "How on earth did you ever catch him [Peter]?"; Peter as hunter enjoys conquest, symbolized by his guns, and control, symbolized by the camera that Marian fears will "fix...[her] indissolubly in...[a] single stance, [so that she is] unable to move or change"(EW,256). Lucy as hunted (she may not be conscious of her status as prey) must submit to the unwritten imperative that woman allow herself to be shaped primarily by the expectations of the male to whom she commits herself in marriage, and before marriage by those of males in general; Peter as prey must submit to the expectation that men must inevitably, if reluctantly, "tie themselves down".

Perhaps The Edible Woman's most incisive comment on the sexual status quo, is Marian's articulation of what she perceives to be Len's thoughts:

And Len had looked at me that way because he thought I was being self-effacing on purpose, and that if so the relationship [with Peter] was more serious than I had said

it was. Len never wished matrimony on anyone, especially anyone he liked. (EW, 67-68)

In the above darkly humorous passage, there is implied an equation of direct proportion between the degree of commitment in male-female relationship, and the degree of woman's self-abnegation.

Seymour Surveys, with its "men upstairs" (EW, 12), and its anxious, insecure women below, may be seen as a metaphor for the whole society in which Marian tries to find some kind of viable identity. The Edible Woman, like Sylvia Plath's more sombre novel The Bell Jar (1963), is essentially the story of a woman's search for a well-fitting role. Atwood's "office virgins" and the whole gaggle of women on the second floor are reminiscent in their slightly caricatured vividness, of Betsy from Kansas and the other women staying at the ironically-named Amazon hotel in The Bell Jar. Ainsley, with her assertive sexuality, and generally defiant attitude towards conventional expectations, is somewhat like Plath's Doreen. (Also like Doreen, Ainsley is actually more conventional in the sexual roles she plays, than may at first appear.) And Plath's satiric depiction of the man-and-marriage fixation that prevails at the college dormitory where Esther Greenwood lives, has as its object the same set of sexual attitudes as Atwood's treatment of the "office virgins" and their reaction to the impending marriage of Marian to Peter:

Lucy handed the phone to Marian with a whispered 'It's the man', a little awed by the presence of an actual prospective groom at the other end of the line. Marian felt through the air the tensing of three pairs of ear-muscles, the swivelling of three blonde heads, as she spoke into the phone. (EW, 112)

The point of making these brief comparisons between

The Edible Woman and The Bell Jar is simply to emphasize that Atwood, like Plath who had written her novel only a few years earlier, is reacting to a particular social-psychological reality--the sexual status quo in North America in the 1960's. That Marian finds herself in a ego-suffocating relationship with Peter, therefore, does have a psychological context, though it is not the familial one that Frank Davey³⁶ would require to explain it, but rather a social one. In the months before her impending marriage, Marian floats passively towards the sexual status quo, condoned in this by society generally, and in particular by the office virgins, by Peter, and by her family, about whom we hear that "[t]heir reaction [to her engagement]...was...a quiet, rather smug satisfaction, as though their fears about the effects of her university education...had been calmed at last"(EW,178). Atwood uses the imagery of drifting in several places to underline Marian's existential flaccidity; one example occurs just a few pages after the narrative switches at the end of Part One from the first-person "I" to the third-person "she":

She could feel time eddying and curling almost visibly around her feet, rising around her, lifting her body in the office-chair and bearing her, slowly and circuitously but with the inevitability of water moving downhill, towards the distant, not-so-distant-any more day they had agreed on--in late March?--that would end this phase and begin another. Somewhere else, arrangements were being gradually made...She was floating, letting the current hold her up, trusting to it to take her where she was going.(EW,114-15)

The emergence of Joan Foster's "dark lady" from the depths of her psyche, is paralleled by Marian McAlpin's body's gradual refusal to eat. Both women see these reactions, at least initially, as arising from something "other" than themselves,

over which they have no control. That they would see their situations in this way is inevitable (at least from the point of view of "psychological realism"), given their habitual tendency to feel that things are happening or will happen to them, rather than that they are willful agents who make things happen.

How Marian and Joan respond to the emergence of their new, troublesome selves, is, on one level of analysis, the same--each makes an active gesture of some kind, requiring energy and imagination. Joan plans her "death"; Marian bakes her cake. Atwood herself has remarked of the meaning of Marian's cake-baking that, "Obviously she's acting, she's doing an action. Up until that point she has been evading, avoiding, running away, retreating, withdrawing..."³⁷. However, there is a fundamental difference between the two actions. Joan's is, as I have implied earlier, just another evasion of her fragmented self, which leads to further fragmentation, while Marian's is an attempt to face what she intuits to be the truth about her relationship with Peter. Nevertheless, on a further level of analysis, the two women are ultimately more similar than different, in terms of the kinds of issues I have been raising in this thesis.

Critic Catherine McLay, for one, has been overly optimistic about the ending of The Edible Woman, in saying that "no longer divided, in danger of disintegration, she [Marian] can detach herself from her cake-creation, and she joyfully attacks the carcass with a fork"(38). McLay ignores, or neglects to consider seriously the implications of what she herself quotes Atwood as saying about the end of the novel:

The tone of The Edible Woman is light-hearted, but in

the end it's more pessimistic than Surfacing. The difference between them is that The Edible Woman is a circle and Surfacing is a spiral...the heroine of Surfacing does not end where she began.³⁹

The implication of the last quoted sentence is that Marian does end where she began; and where she began is precisely "divided, in danger of disintegration".

Like Joan Foster, at the end of Lady Oracle, Marian has a tenuous grip on her new-found "autonomy" at the end of The Edible Woman. Like Joan, for whom all past lovers become "Redmond", death personified, Marian exaggerates her lover's evil, seeing Peter as one of a class of snipers, "waiting for their chance to aim from the upstairs window"(EW,284); such overprojection of malevolence indicates a degree of ontological insecurity. Nevertheless, there is a kind of triumph for her in Peter's hasty exit after having been presented with the cake-woman that Marian tells him is "what you really wanted all along"(EW,284). In her return in Part Three to the status of a first-person "I", and in her initial lack of interest in the manipulative Duncan ("I had more or less forgotten about him"(EW,289)), there is a seeming victory over the heteronomous self that thought, as Peter mounted the stairs towards the confrontation with the cake, that "if Peter found her silly...she would accept his version of herself"(EW,283). But this victory is undercut by what is revealed in the final scene with Duncan.

With his usual delight in casual, purposeless mindbending, Duncan says of Marian's assertion that Peter was trying to destroy her, "That's ridiculous...Peter wasn't trying to destroy you. That's just something you made up. Actually you were trying

to destroy him"(EW,293). Whether or not Duncan's remark has any truth at all in it, the crucial point here is that Marian immediately distrusts her version of reality, and leans towards Duncan's: "'Is that true?' I asked"(EW,293). Duncan continues to play at making speculations that he obviously has very little interest in the truth of:

"Search your soul," he said, gazing hypnotically at me from behind his hair. He drank some coffee and paused to give me time, then added, "But the real truth is that it wasn't Peter at all. It was me. I was trying to destroy you."

I gave a nervous laugh. "Don't say that."

"Okay," he said, "ever eager to please. Maybe Peter was trying to destroy me, or maybe I was trying to destroy him, or we were both trying to destroy each other, how's that?"(EW,293)

By here reminding us of Duncan's casual approach to truth (an approach which Marian has been the victim of many times), Atwood suggests that Marian's self-doubt at the end of The Edible Woman is not based upon some instinctive recognition of genuine insight on Duncan's part, but is rather rooted in the same heteronomous impulses that first compelled her towards marriage with Peter. The Edible Woman is, in fact, a circle. My argument above is based on the premise that we see Duncan, within the context of the final conversation between him and Marian, as a real "Other", and not only a projection of some aspect of Marian. As a real Other, Duncan's questioning of Marian's version of truth poses a challenge to her autonomy which she does not successfully meet. There is, of course, nothing to prevent us from seeing Duncan as both a distinct character and, as Carrington argues, a projection of an aspect of Marian; from the point of view of Duncan as Marian's heteronomous self, it is indeed true that, as Duncan

tells her, "I was trying to destroy you"(EW,293).

There is some support for my interpretation of the end of The Edible Woman, to be found in what I believe to be a sort of mise en abyme, or miniature summation of the novel, within the novel itself. Fish's discourse to Marian on Alice in Wonderland is not only Atwood's playful satire on the pompous academic propensity to make the literature fit the theory, but also provides some clues to the interpretation of The Edible Woman itself. As Fish mumbles on about Alice "trying to find her role...as Woman"(EW,200), the reader begins to recognize some of Marian's experience in his monologue. What Fish says of Alice, is also true of Marian: "One sexual role after another is presented to her but she seems unable to accept any of them, I mean she's really blocked"(EW,201). (For Marian, these sexual roles include those of the single career-woman with casual boyfriend, the coiffured, deferring doll of Peter's fantasy, and, in relation to Duncan, the "starched nurse-like image of herself she had tried to preserve as a last resort"(EW,276).) There is possibly, in Fish's description of the "dominating female role of the Queen and her castration cries of 'Off with his head'"(EW,201), a connection with Ainsley, whose one-track commitment to fulfilling her "deepest femininity"(EW,35) initially prompts her to negate male importance entirely; her comment that "The thing that ruins families these days is the husbands"(EW,34), is a verbal castration of men in general. Like Alice, Marian "does [not] respond positively"(EW,201) to this dominating Queen role. More than possibly, there is a parallel to Marian's visits to Duncan, in Fish's narration of Alice's visit to the Mock-Turtle: "you'll

recall she goes to talk with the Mock-Turtle, e shell and his self-pity, a definitely p character" (EW, 201).

By suggesting the above (and possibly othe between the Alice of Fish's monologue and Marian, us to pay particular attention to Fish's concluding remarks on the nature of Alice's journey of self-discovery, and his assessment of her ultimate progress:

And of course there's the obsession with time, clearly a cyclical rather than a linear obsession. So anyway she makes a lot of attempts but she refuses to commit herself, you can't say by the end of the book she has reached anything that can definitely be called maturity. She does much better though in Through the Looking Glass, where, as you'll remember... (EW, 201)

The ideas Fish raises here, of circularity, and of a search for identity that does not lead to maturity are, I would argue, indicators that point to the proper interpretation of the story of Marian herself. I further argue that if we not only replace the "she" of Fish's final comment, quoted above, with "Marian", but also replace Through the Looking Glass with Surfacing, a kind of inter-textual truth emerges. Whether or not Atwood had Surfacing in mind at the time of writing The Edible Woman, the fact remains that the "I" of Surfacing does achieve some kind of progress over Marian, in terms of the kinds of issues with which I have been concerned.

In speaking of "progress" or the lack of it here, I am aware that I am in some sense regarding the female protagonists of the different novels under examination as one person, or at least as similar enough to be discussed in the same terms. It is not that

the characters of Marian, Joan, and the "I" of Surfacing are indistinguishable as personalities, but that the issues with which Atwood is dealing through her portrayals of these women-- issues of identity, autonomy, the distorted view of the Other-- are the same. B.W. Powe remarks upon the similarity in tone of all of Atwood's narrators, but does so with a view to criticizing what he sees to be Atwood's "program"⁴⁰. For Powe, who demands a view of an essential, immutable "human nature" that persists through change, what he sees as Atwood's tendency towards a view of human being "as something infinitely changeable"⁴¹, is most disagreeable. Powe regards all of Atwood's novels as telling essentially the same story--"without exception", he says, "her characters are always getting ready to live. They encounter the void and then find a way out, which turns out to be some gesture of ambiguous action"⁴². He further on continues his diatribe against "becoming":

The insidiousness of the concept of becoming is that there is no centre. There is no reason to assume that Atwood's characters will not merely continue to become. In their shattering moment of insight, they do not recognize what they are, they get ready for the next step, the ultimate discovery of action. They are not finders, but seekers. Preparation; flight; escape; search; avoidance; insight under pressure; but what next?⁴³

Although I have some sympathy with Powe's concern for the resolute "I", for being that is not entirely flooded by new waves of becoming, I must disagree with his insistence that the plots of Atwood's novels are always the same. Her novels are, as I have suggested earlier, a dialogue about, to use Powe's language, being and becoming, self and otherness. And, of the three first novels that are the subject of this chapter, it is in the middle

one, Surfacing, that Atwood probes the most deeply (and economically) into the kinds of questions with which I have been concerned in relation to the other two novels already discussed. It is true that the "I" of Surfacing exits the novel at the point where she is about to re-enter civilization, having achieved some kind of insight, and that therefore she fits into Powe's list of Atwood heroines who, as he facetiously says, "are ready to begin, ab ovo, clean, fresh, and willing to become..."⁴⁴ But I must counter that depth of insight itself may be considered a valid measure of real being; Powe himself does not give us an alternate measure, only alluding somewhat mysteriously to the importance of "facing what we are"⁴⁵. And, at that, it may be argued that "facing what she is" is precisely what the story of the unnamed narrator of Surfacing is all about.

It is in Surfacing, more than in any of Atwood's novels, that the devastating effects of the heteronomous orientation towards life are realized; these effects extend beyond the narrator's own psyche to the world. Through the narrator's ultimate realization that "I have to recant, give up the old belief that I am powerless and because of it nothing I can do will ever hurt anyone"(S,206), Atwood makes one of her most profound statements about the nature of the heteronomous life--the "powerless", the passive, do have a horrible efficacy. Much has been made of Atwood's criticism in Surfacing of the consumptive, manipulative orientation towards life represented by the "Americans". But equally important, especially in light of the kinds of problems she raises in The Edible Woman and Lady Oracle, is Atwood's interest in the "victim's" complicity in her own victimization,

and the resultant evil. In both The Edible Woman and Lady Oracle, the female protagonists struggle with the problems of self-definition and autonomy, but it is only in Surfacing that the narrator has a genuine conviction of herself as fundamentally responsible for her actions; or, to rephrase the same idea, she achieves a sense of herself as agent, and not merely the object of agency. Surfacing resonates with a concern for the ethical that the other two novels lack. It is the unnamed narrator's conviction of responsibility that is the key, I think, to the reader's sense that something significant has happened at the end of Surfacing, that it is a spiral and not just a circle. When the narrator gives up what Barbara Rigney calls the "delusion of female innocence"⁴⁶, she regains her full personhood. Atwood herself has remarked of Surfacing's "I" that,

If you define yourself as intrinsically innocent, then you have a lot of problems because in fact you aren't. And the thing with her is she wishes not to be human, because being human inevitably involves being guilty, and if you define yourself as innocent, you can't accept that.⁴⁷

In ultimately accepting her guilt, and thus her humanity, the narrator also regains her power over herself and her ability to act.

Unlike Lady Oracle, in which the plot is actually woven out of the proliferation of Joan's lies and duplicities, Surfacing may be seen as the unravelling of the lies with which the narrator has protected herself from the truth about her abortion. And while Lady Oracle sees Joan's identities multiply, as she puts on mask upon mask, Surfacing is the story of a grand unmasking, of the peeling away of all the false, other-determined identities

that the self has allowed itself to assume.

As Surfacing progresses, and the narrator dwells more and more upon her past, we see that she has been coerced by, and participated in, some of the same sexual mythologies as Marian before her and Joan after her. (On the second reading of the novel, one sees that although the narrator at first distorts the facts of her past, she records much that is truthful about her feelings and the nature of her relationship with her lover.) From the following passages there emerges a sense of the narrator's past expectations and attitude with respect to her lover; like Joan and Marian she had, in falling prey to the myth of the significant male Other who gives life its meaning and direction, forfeited her responsibility for decision and self-creation:

I lean beside him, admiring the fall of winter sunlight over his cheekbone and the engraved nose, noble and sloped like a Roman coin profile; that was when everything he did was perfect. He said he loved me, the magic word, it was supposed to make everything light up, I'll never trust that word again. (S, 51)

For a while I was going to be a real artist; he thought that was cute but misguided, he said I should study something I'd be able to use because there have never been any important women artists. That was before we were married and I still listened to what he said, so I went into Design and did fabric patterns. (S, 56)

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 should have seen that it was no different, it was hiding in me as if in a burrow and instead of granting it sanctuary I let them catch it. I could have said no but I didn't; that made me one of them too, a killer. (S, 155)

It is important to realize that it is not the abortion itself that is ultimately the cause of the emotional anesthesia that characterizes the narrator for the first half of the novel; nor is it the ultimate cause of her descent into "madness". The root of these evils is the original heteronomous stance that divided

her from herself. As Rigney notes, "The abortion...is not a cause for but an effect of the protagonist's split psyche. If a completed self had been in control,...the operation never would have occurred"⁴⁸. Perhaps Rigney's statement should be qualified by saying that it is not simply that the operation itself "would not^{have} occurred" had an autonomous self been in control, but that the operation would not have reflected and emphasized the narrator's heteronomous flaw.⁴⁹; this qualification is necessary because it is conceivable that acts of abortion take place within the framework of autonomy. As the narrator comes to understand the horrific implications of her own heteronomous somnambulism, she links Anna, who is a kind of objective correlative for the state of feminine heteronomy, with an image of death. Anna, "a captive princess in someone's head"(S,177), wearing the make-up mask that keeps David's version of her in place, is described by the narrator as having "darkness in her eye sockets", and being "[a] skull with a candle"(S,177).

In the last long passage quoted from Surfacing, the narrator moves, within the space of a few lines, from the plea of external coercion in the case of the abortion ("he made me do it"), to the acceptance of her own guilt ("I could have said no but I didn't"). This movement may also be seen, in other terms, as the transition from heteronomy to autonomy, and is symbolically realized in the narrator's burning of those objects that represent to her the passivity that she has come to recognize as a source of evil. These objects include the commercial drawings that have compromised her integrity as artist, the gold ring

associated with her ex-lover, and even her childhood drawings of rabbits and eggs, with their "false peace"(S,190), which perhaps suggest the false innocence she has cultivated as an adult. That the narrator goes farther than this, slashing and burning all relics of the past, possibly finds its source in a conviction, on the narrator's part, of an essential falsity in herself, so that all objects associated with her past reek of inauthenticity and must, like the gold ring, "be purified"(S,189). Although there may be some truth in Barbara Rigney's argument that the narrator's burning and slashing is in fact the rejection of "the male world of logic"⁵⁰, I am not convinced that the polarization of values into the binary opposites "male" and "female", is particularly helpful; such polarization may even be a form of the rationalism that Rigney says Atwood rejects.⁵¹

After descending into the "madness" of her identification with nature, the narrator of Surfacing emerges into a kind of maturity that Joan Foster and Marian McAlpin never quite achieve. I have already dwelt on the importance of "I"'s acceptance of her fundamental responsibility for the abortion; connected with her awareness of the potential for evil in herself, is a realization that those around her are neither entirely good nor entirely evil. In the following passage from Surfacing, the narrator demythologizes the male lover who had, at different times, represented angelic and demonic extremes. This passage may be contrasted with the passages from (The Edible Woman and from Lady Oracle (already quoted) that follow it, in which Marian and Joan overidentify the men who have threatened their autonomy with the principles of evil and death; such overidentification

indicates, as I have implied elsewhere, a self that is not quite sure of its power over itself:

He was neither of the things I believed, he was only a normal man, middle-aged, second-rate, selfish and kind in the average proportions; but I was not prepared for the average, its needless cruelty and lies. (S, 203)

But there was something about his shoulders. He must have been sitting with his arms folded. The face on the other side of that head could have belonged to anyone. And they all wore clothes of real cloth and had real bodies: those in the newspapers, those still unknown, waiting for their chance to aim from the upstairs window. (EW, 284)

Cunningly he began his transformations, trying to lure her into his reach. His face grew a white gauze mask, then a pair of mauve-tinted spectacles, then a red beard and moustache, which faded, giving place to burning eyes and icicle teeth. Then his cloak vanished and he stood looking at her sadly; he was wearing a turtle-neck sweater... The flesh fell away from his face, revealing the skull behind it; he stepped towards her, reaching for her throat... (LO, 343)

I do not mean to imply above that there is no real danger posed by these male "others" to Atwood's female protagonists, but rather to point out that their ontic insecurities inevitably falsify, somewhat, their visions of men. In developing his thesis that Atwood's heroines are victimized by "patterns", which are "humanistic 'male' second-order imposition[s] on experience"⁵² Frank Davey asserts of the kinds of fictions into which these women translate their experience (e.g. Peter as sniper, etc.), that "While all these fictions contain symbolic and metaphoric truth--Peter is oppressive, the villagers in Surfacing indeed will not understand the narrator's nakedness--they also distort the very facts they illuminate"⁵³. He goes on to say that "Only when Surfacing's narrator can discard her fictions about her married lover can she see that '...he was only a normal

man...selfish and kind in the average proportions,..."54. Although I am somewhat uneasy with Davey's association of "pattern" itself with maleness (he claims to derive this association from Atwood's poetry), his point here about the protagonists' distorting fictionalization is quite valid.

It is indeed true of Marian McAlpin and of Joan Foster that, as B.W. Powe generalizes about all of Atwood's protagonists, they have "a wild terror of otherness", and that they "fear...human engagement"55. And although the unnamed narrator of Surfacing achieves a kind of maturity in her realistic assessment of her ex-lover and also in her ultimate realization that Joe "isn't an American"(S,207), she too remains fearful of contact, exiting the novel poised precariously between the alternatives of isolation and the possibility of intimacy with Joe: "To trust is to let go. I tense forward towards the demands and questions, though my feet do not move yet"(S,207). The issue of narcissistic separation versus intimacy, raised here at the end of Surfacing, is one with which Atwood will become increasingly preoccupied in her later novels.

Throughout most of Surfacing itself, the narrator remains decidedly narcissistic, cut off from others by the intensity of the battle raging inside her between falsity and truth. Although she has been living with Joe, she appears to have no desire to know him intimately; she constantly makes casual speculations about the state of his being: "Joe is swaying back and forth, rocking, which may mean he's happy"(S,54), "Joe grunts, I wonder if he's jealous"(S,70). The relationship has, in the language of Martin Buber, more of the "I-It" than the "I-Thou"56 quality. In

a feat of ambiguous syntax, Atwood has her narrator make the most chillingly objectifying comment on the second page of the novel that, "I'm in the back seat with the packsacks; this one Joe, is sitting beside me chewing gum and holding my hand, they both pass the time"(S,8). As the novel progresses, the narrator alternates between this stance of objectification which, to use Sartrean terminology, neutralizes the threatening presence of the Other, and fear of the Other's objectifying power, in which the desire to "counter-objectify" finds its source. When Joe asks the narrator to marry him, she mentally translates the situation into a sexual power game, robbing him of his individuality by grouping him with all men under the depersonalizing "they":

It was because I didn't want to, that's why it would gratify him, it would be a sacrifice, of my reluctance, my distaste...Prove your love they say. You really want to marry me, let me fuck you instead. You really want to fuck, let me marry you instead. As long as there's a victory, some flag I can wave, parade I can have in my head.(S,93)

When the narrator expresses reticence to marry, and Joe intuits her emotional distance from him, his reaction is not, as she had expected, anger, but unhappiness; for her such a reaction "was worse, I could cope with his anger"(S,93). Since anger is the response appropriately felt by a thwarted opponent in the power game she has in her head, and with which she is comfortable, it is no wonder that genuine unhappiness, an emotion that threatens to weaken, through empathy, the barriers between self and other, is so unwelcome: "He was growing larger, becoming alien, three-dimensional; panic began"(S,93).

Ultimately, Joe becomes the narrator's instrument of self-reconstruction; after their nocturnal copulation, orchestrated by

the narrator so that her lost child will "surface", she remarks that she is "grateful to him, he's given me the part of himself that I needed"(S,173). But although it is true that, as Annis Pratt remarks, "her [the narrator's] act of conception, self-initiated and self-contained, is one in which she is wholly central and authentic"⁵⁷, there is something disturbing about a state of autonomy in which the self can be "wholly central" even in the presence of the Other--such a state would seem to have something of the "American" in it. Autonomy need not be synonymous with narcissism; it is in fact the precondition of genuine relationship. As Kolbensschlag asserts, "Relationship makes it possible to believe in others in a way that confirms one's faith in oneself"⁵⁸. And in a state of genuine relationship, neither party can be "wholly central". Martin Buber goes even farther, making the substantiality of the "I" itself contingent upon its ability to participate in genuine relationship, that is, relationship whose object is not the appropriation or use of the Other: He who takes his stand in relation shares in a reality, that is, in a being that neither merely belongs to him nor merely lies outside him. All reality is an activity in which I share without being able to appropriate for myself. Where there is no sharing there is no reality...The I is real in virtue of its sharing in reality. The fuller its sharing the more real it becomes"⁵⁹. Too many critics have ignored or glossed over the problem of the narrator's relationship with Joe, in their exuberance over her newly-recovered (or newly-found) autonomy, and her transcendence of

oppressive structures. The fact is that it is not only the world and the people outside of her retreat in the bush, but also the narrator's long-cultivated narcissism that she will have to deal with if and when she moves out of hiding.

It is with the question of narcissism versus intimacy, posed at the end of Surfacing, that I turn away from Atwood's first three novels, and towards a consideration of her last three. It is by no means the case that the issues of autonomy and identity are no longer considerations in Atwood's later work, but the focus shifts somewhat, towards a preoccupation with intimacy and relationship. This shift is difficult to define, in light of the fact that autonomy and identity cannot be discussed outside of the context of relationship. But with Life Before Man, Bodily Harm, and The Handmaid's Tale, the pressing issues are no longer "who or what am I?" and "what does he/she want to make me into?", although these lurk always in the background, and sometimes surface as questions the characters ask themselves. Perhaps the best way to describe what does happen, is that in her last three novels, Atwood plunges her characters into the midst of life and relationships and, in different ways, explores narcissism at its limiting edges, rather than from its heart, where the "I" mutters to itself alone. B.W. Powe, whose comments are more generally valid as regards Atwood's first three novels, and less valid with respect to her later fiction, misses the important shift of emphasis in Life Before Man, generalizing that:

The only thing alive to her characters are their own minds and feelings. They are somnambulists. What we get from them, endlessly in each novel, are the precious convolutions of

thoughts and feelings and reactions: "How I feel about this", "What I'm thinking now", "My response to him", and "How these people are dangerous". We find priggish introspection, deflating parody, and the fear of human engagement...When they break down their breakthrough is to more self-consciousness...⁶⁰

It is true that almost all of Atwood's protagonists fear otherness, but in the later fiction Atwood explores the limitations of the Sartrean vision in which one either "sees" (objectifies) or "is seen" (becomes object). In Surfacing, where the embryonic beginnings of this exploration may be found, the narrator remarks that "My brother saw the danger early. To immerse oneself, join in the war, or to be destroyed. There ought to be other choices"(S,203). Atwood's later fiction seeks out those "other choices". In the last three novels, the symphony of eye imagery that infuses the early fiction plays on, but it is challenged by an increasingly voluminous undercurrent of hand imagery. Atwood's new preoccupation is with "touch"⁶¹.

Chapter Two

Although the female protagonists of The Edible Woman, Surfacing, and Lady Oracle are characterized by a fundamental narcissism, it is only in Life Before Man that Atwood first takes narcissism as her subject. The narrative structure of the novel--it rotates its focus from one of the three major characters to the next every few pages, each section being titled by the date and the name of the character focussed upon--serves the purpose of emphasizing the essential separation of each of the characters from the other. But somewhat paradoxically, in exploring the problem of narcissism, the novel's overall narrative voice becomes less narcissistic, so to speak, than the voices that emerge from the first three novels. The third-person narrative voice crosses and recrosses the boundaries of subjectivity, as it weaves in and out of three fully-realized consciousnesses. In this connection, the reason that Cathy and Arnold Davidson give for their assertion that the novel has "larger implications" than the first three, is significant: "an authorial preoccupation with a single self-preoccupied protagonist...has been superseded by a carefully controlled third-person narration which only rarely and unpredictably breaks into the first person"⁶².

In Life Before Man Atwood is concerned with, to borrow a phrase from my previous chapter, "narcissism at its limiting edges"; even though the characters in this novel rarely manage to communicate or to make meaningful connections with one another, they are observed as they hover just inside the circles they have drawn around themselves, afraid to step out but also afraid of the emptiness that awaits at the centre. There is some truth in

B.W. Powe's assertion that "every major character in every Atwood novel learns to go down, to make journeys into the interior, the mind, the soul, in order to re-discover and re-call consciousness and life...[and] the usual discovery...is that there is zero at the heart of darkness"⁶³. But what Powe fails to see, in his insistence on the sameness of all of Atwood's novels, is that in Life Before Man Atwood no longer accepts narcissism as a kind of "given", as she tends to in her first three novels, but points her finger at it and exclaims at its presence: "There is zero at the heart of darkness!". For the first time (with the exception of some hints of this new direction in Surfacing), narcissism as a problem is posed. By focussing his critique too closely on the self-involvement of Atwood's characters, Powe neglects the importance of the changes in judgemental perspective from which these characters are being viewed. There is, of course, nowhere in Life Before Man an exposition on the horrors of narcissism and alienation; but these horrors are precisely what the untranscribed voice behind the tri-partite narration is talking about. Atwood herself, in an interview for Atlantis, makes clear that in Life Before Man what is not on the page is equally as important as what appears, when she says that "you can deduce what is wrong with the society I depict by seeing not only what the people are doing but also what is missing. What is missing from these people?"⁶⁴.

Nate and Lesje are characters who are already, in many ways, familiar to the readers of Atwood's pre-Life Before Man fiction, in that the quality of their narcissism is strikingly similar to

that of their female predecessors, in particular Joan Foster. Both Nate and Lesje are heteronomous figures, much influenced by external authority, expectation and demand. Each suffers from extreme self-anxiety, self-preoccupation, and self-consciousness. And perhaps most importantly, both are essentially passive, allowing events to shape them rather than being the shapers of events. In an image that captures Nate's basic stance with respect to his whole life, Atwood has him, at one point, hovering nervously in the phone booth where he plans to call Lesje, "waiting for Superman to take over his body" (LBM, 27). The unconfident Lesje is Nate's female counterpart. Even her decisive action at the end of the novel, her secret discontinuance of birth control, is decisive only in the sense that it is self-conceived; she remains hopelessly enslaved by her compulsion to compete with Elizabeth and by her feelings of radical insubstantiality, planning a baby she is not even sure she wants because "if children were the key, if having them was the only way to stop being invisible, then she would goddam well have some herself" (LBM, 270). Nate shares Lesje's preoccupation with ontological frailty and diminution. As he dwells upon his increasing alienation from his family, his thoughts are couched in the language of insubstantiality: "Already his reflection in the mirror was fading, the house was forgetting him, he was negligible" (LBM, 181).

Both Lesje and Nate, like Marian and Joan before them, are obsessed by other people's visions of themselves; all of these characters look into human mirrors in order to see their own reflections, to acquire identity. Lesje is "addicted to Nate's

version of her"(LBM,247). Nate too is "addicted" to other people's versions of him, although he sometimes, as in the following passage, fails to understand that he is addicted, seeing his problem as originating from outside of himself:

Occasionally, though by no means all the time, Nate thinks of himself as a lump of putty, hopelessly molded by the relentless demands and flinty disapprovals of the women he can't help being involved with. Dutifully, he tries to make them happy. He fails not because of any intrinsic weakness or lack of will, but because their own desires are hopelessly divided.(LBM,33)

Like the female protagonists before him, Nate mythologizes the opposite sex, creating softly-lit romantic images of them in his head that always fail to materialize in the harsh light of reality. He recalls at one point his early relationship with Elizabeth, when he saw her as "a Madonna in a shrine, shedding a quiet light...holding a lamp in her hand like Florence Nightingale"(LBM,41). The failure of what he now sees to be this "ludicrous vision"(LBM,41) to become a reality for him, does not prevent him, however, from fantasizing in a similar and possibly even more absurd way about Lesje. If Elizabeth is far from nurse-like, the inept Lesje is even farther from being the powerful "bearer of healing wisdom, swathed in veils"(LBM,62) that Nate imagines she is. In his compulsive idealization of the lovers he "can't help being involved with", Nate is actually more like the female Joan Foster than Lesje who, although obsessed with Nate, has a more realistic vision of him. (Even at a very early point in their relationship Lesje recognizes that Nate is "too hesitant,...talks too much,...looks around the room at the wrong moments"(LBM,85).) And in terms of the existential "position"

Nate assumes at the end of Life Before Man, he is once again significantly similar to Joan. In the middle of the book, Nate has a moment in which he is caught in the tension between experiencing himself as agent and experiencing himself as an object of agency, when he wonders about his estrangement from his children: "Who has done this? How has he allowed it to happen?"(LBM,150). The same tension is revealed by Lady Oracle's Joan Foster in nearly the same words, when she wonders at her increasing alienation from Arthur, "Why am I doing this?...Who's doing this to me?"(LO,276). As Lady Oracle comes to an end, Joan expresses her intention to return to Canada in order to clean up the various emotional and situational messes she has left there, but falls back into her characteristic passivity when she says that, "Right now though it's easier [emphasis mine] just to stay here in Rome..."(LO,315). As the story of Nate ends in Life Before Man, he expresses a desire to take up politics, but retreats into a similar passivity: "One day he may go into politics, he's thought about it...But not yet, not yet"(LBM,287). Nate, like Joan, postpones activity that requires a gathering of personal forces into a strong centre of self, and subsequent engagement in the world. Both remain enclosed in that particular form of narcissism that finds its roots in passivity and heteronomy.

What most strikingly separates Nate from Joan and his other female predecessors is, of course, the fact that he is male. Because Nate alone represents his sex among Atwood's fully realized characters, this fact of his maleness demands some consideration. Cathy and Arnold Davidson are right to point out

that "the counterpointing of male and female paeans and complaints makes Life Before Man a more complex, a more polyphonic work than its predecessors. We do not have so much an extended battle of the sexes as seen only from one side"⁶⁵. But the Davidsons only very generally note that Nate has similarities to his female predecessors--they assert that like the earlier characters he is "ambivalently motivated by conflicting desires and doubts"⁶⁶--, without remarking upon the particulars that tie him to them in such an essential way. It is critic Frank Davey who unwittingly describes most completely and yet succinctly the qualities that connect Nate with Atwood's early protagonists, and with Kolbenschlag's "formula female". Davey actually rejects Nate as a candidate for participation in "femaleness", while accepting Chris as such a participant; these judgements are made on the basis of his [Davey's] abstract conception of femaleness as involving the transcendence of rigid social and personal structures⁶⁷. However, Davey's description of Nate is most significant within our present context:

Nate...seeks approval from all around him, and visualizes women, even the socially maladroit Lesje, as sources of order and competence for his unconfident self. His inability to control his life does not result from a commitment to 'underground' force; it results from his passivity, indecisiveness, and incompetence.⁶⁸

Davey's formulation of the male/female dichotomy he sees operating in Atwood's work is not rooted in any kind of biological determinism, as he makes clear when he says that this dichotomy "is a metaphor, rather than a literal distinction between men and women"⁶⁹. But neither are Davey's abstractions and generalizations necessarily rooted in social-psychological or

political realities about men and women or male and female roles, as Kolbenschlag's tend to be. Nate has strong female, qua "formula female", elements in his existential orientation towards self and others; these elements are described by Davey himself perfectly, though he does not associate them with femininity. My uneasiness with Davey's "gender-izing" of abstract qualities stems from the recognition of the propensity of metaphor to solidify into a kind of essentialism (e.g. "order is 'male'/unruliness is 'female'" so easily becomes "males are orderly/females are disorderly"); this essentialism, whether or not traditional poles of value are reversed (e.g. "order" now becomes negative, while "unruliness" becomes positive), erupts in the real world in new strains of sexual determinism. I must emphasize, therefore, that I am not arguing that Nate is "female" because he embodies some kind of universal female essence, as I conceive it to be; the value of the project of trying to "define femininity" is itself, I would suggest, highly questionable. Rather, I am pointing out that in Nate, Atwood has created a male figure who exhibits many of the tendencies of her earlier women, and who, like those women, embodies many characteristics of Kolbenschlag's "formula female". It is in this sense, and only in this sense, that I argue that the particular quality of Nate's narcissism is "female".

In terms of the quality of her narcissism, Elizabeth is an entirely new Atwood character. A forceful, self-contained presence, she is not preoccupied with the "identity crisis" that plagues every other major character in both Life Before Man

itself and in the earlier novels. Unlike Lesje who, when she shops, looks for "something that might become her, something she might become" (LBM,18), Elizabeth

doesn't glance into the store windows, she knows what she looks like and she doesn't indulge in fantasies of looking any other way. She doesn't need her own reflection or the reflections of other people's ideas of her or of themselves...She's hard, a dense core, that dark point around which other colours swirl. (LBM,49)

The story of Elizabeth, clearly, is not one of the struggle for autonomy or the search for identity. Elizabeth experiences herself as agent; this is clearly reflected in her thought that although it might be pleasant to let events arrange themselves, "events need help" (LBM,241). She is powerful, and her mere presence intimidating; both Nate and Lesje act out their existential retreats from Elizabeth in a strikingly physical way:

[Elizabeth] descends the stairs...Nate backs against the workbench. (LBM,184)

There's no other chair in the office...Elizabeth seems to fill all the available space. Lesje backs against a wall chart... (LBM,192)

The story of Elizabeth, however, is as much about, to again quote Atwood herself, "what is missing"⁷⁰, as about the space that Elizabeth fills.

Elizabeth has, in the wide metaphorical sense that informs all three of Atwood's latest novels, lost the use of her hands; she has lost "touch", or in the more popular phrasing, "lost touch". On the second page of the novel the following description appears, the first of a series running throughout the last three novels, in which hand gesture or position expresses the subject's stance in relationship:

She can't move her fingers. She thinks about her hands,

lying at her sides: she thinks about forcing the bones and flesh down into those shapes of hands, one finger at a time, like dough. (LBM,4)

As the novel progresses, it becomes increasingly clear that Elizabeth is incapable of genuine relationship. All of her adult associations consist of strategical, manipulative, or self-preserving "moves", and though she loves her children, she finds herself becoming remote from them after the suicide of her lover Chris: "She wants to be able to touch them, hold them, but she can't" (LBM,28).

Elizabeth's narcissism derives not from an existential anxiety about the substantiality of her self for others, but from her imprisonment in a monolithic tower of selfhood. Hers is the autonomy that, to use Kolbenschlag's terminology, fails to transcend itself. Atwood, ever conscious that existential realities and choices must be seen as existing within the framework of social and familial structures, reveals to us the horrific circumstances of Elizabeth's childhood against which such an impenetrable wall of selfhood was constructed. That Auntie Muriel is both one of these "circumstances" and the model for Elizabeth's own self, is one of the cruel ironies of the book. And that the cycle of alienation will perpetuate itself is clear; little Janet with her "hands decorously folded" (LBM,227) and her unusual self-containment is Elizabeth in miniature.

Elizabeth herself, for all of the "backbone" (LBM,122) she has inherited from Auntie Muriel, repeatedly suffers from existential encounters with insubstantiality. But these encounters are not of the same character as Lesje's and Nate's anxieties about the way they are being perceived and their importance, or lack of it, in

the eyes of others. Elizabeth's moments of nothingness overtake her most often when she is alone, and are experienced as cosmic gaps in the "real" world, trying to vacuum her into the blackness of people-less space: "She knows about the vacuum on the other side of the ceiling, which is not the same as the third floor where the tenants live...Into the black vacuum the air is being sucked with a soft, barely audible whistle. She could be pulled up and into it like smoke"(LBM,4). I here recall Buber's contention, which I mentioned earlier in my discussion of Surfacing, that the substantiality of human being is contingent upon its participation in genuine relationship; that is, relationship which is not founded upon the use or appropriation of the other, but upon a direct encounter with a living subjectivity. Elizabeth, with her hopelessly Sartrean vision of relationship as power struggle, and for whom almost all interactions are rooted in utility, is only half real, her flinty self-sufficiency notwithstanding. She is continually drawn towards the black space of non-being, not merely because her lover finally succeeds in gaining some control over her from beyond the grave, but because she is beginning to collapse into her own empty centre.

Elizabeth is, in Buber's terms, more an "individual" than a "person", her basic stance with regard to the other being one of "self-differentiation and appropriation" rather than "co-exist[ence]"⁷¹. The game of "Lifeboat" played at Elizabeth's dinner party on January 22, 1977, becomes a kind of objective correlative for Elizabeth's approach to human relations. While

Nate finds the game "unduly vicious"(LBM,139), Elizabeth easily accepts the basic premise of "Lifeboat", which is that each member of the stranded party must be judged fit to stay aboard or not, in terms of his or her practical usefulness to the group. The ethical premise of the game is that members are connected to one another only by an exchange of "goods"--various services or talents are traded for the right to life--, and not by a fundamental existential implication of each in the plight of the others. But it is not the game of "Lifeboat" itself that is the real showcase for Elizabeth's stance of self-differentiation. In Elizabeth's living room "Lifeboat" becomes the medium for social testing, in which poise, wit, and elegance are rewarded by social comfort, while physical clumsiness and verbal awkwardness are punished by the subtlest and most poisonous intimidation--the "outcast" in this game drowns not in imaginary water, but in social humiliation. Elizabeth, seeing herself, as always, as fundamentally separate from others, cannot empathize with Lesje's social failure; for Elizabeth, the "clown"(LBM,145) Lesje is only part of a configuration of circumstances that she, Elizabeth, must try to keep under her control. And this control that Elizabeth must so rigidly exercise upon those around her is, I think, a form of the "appropriation" that Buber cites as the other aspect, besides "self-differentiation", of individuality. She even tries to appropriate, to take for her own, Nate's affair with Lesje, by deciding to "give him permission, express interest, be helpful"(LBM,145). This basic stance of appropriation is expressed in a gruesomely literal form during the game of "Lifeboat", when Elizabeth says "I don't think we

should be kicking people out of this boat anyway...We should be saving them and eating them. Let's drag Nate back in"(LBM,139).

In the following passage, Buber comments on the ultimate existential emptiness of individuality:

This is its [individuality's] dynamic, self-differentiation and appropriation, each exercised upon the It within the unreal. The subject...may make as much as it likes into its own; in virtue of this it acquires no substance, but remains a functional point, experiencing and using, no more. None of its extensive and manifold being and none of its zealous "individuality" can help it to win substance.⁷²

Continually associated with images of blackness, emptiness, and negation, Elizabeth is, despite her very concrete presence for others and her sturdy "individuality", infested with nothingness. Interestingly though, it is in the story of Elizabeth that Atwood first begins to experiment with the idea that the salvation of the self lies in a strange and difficult connection with the other that may, perhaps, be named "empathy", or in the language of Bodily Harm, "massive involvement".

On the very last pages of the novel, in which Elizabeth walks through the Chinese Peasant Art Exhibit, China becomes a kind of metaphor for an ideal state of community. Elizabeth knows full well that "the people there do not invariably smile, do not all have such white teeth and rosy cheeks" and that "underneath the poster-paint colours, primary as a child's painting, there is malice, greed, despair, hatred, death"(LBM,291). But for Elizabeth, who "can't remember the last time anyone other than her children helped her to do something"(LBM,291), the ideal of community embodied in the pictures has an irresistible emotional appeal. It is the tantalizing vision of a place in which the

rituals of daily life are not merely survived but glorified, where there is "praise lavished on mere tomatoes, the bunches of grapes, painted in all their translucent hues...[a]s if they are worth it", that "touches her so that she's fumbling now for a Kleenex"(LBM,291). The last two lines of the novel, "China doesn't exist. Nevertheless she longs to be there"(LBM,291), both poignantly express Elizabeth's longings for the intimacy that she finds absent in her life, and also take us back, through the echo of the "Nevertheless" to what is perhaps the most significant passage in the book. In the scene in which Elizabeth goes to visit her dying Auntie Muriel in the hospital, the word "Nevertheless", repeated five times, becomes the strange pivot upon which Elizabeth swings momentarily from narcissism to a torturing intimacy.

The hospital scene is not only one of the most powerful in the novel, but also anticipates Atwood's more thorough treatment of the nature of empathy in Bodily Harm. In this scene Elizabeth regains, if only fleetingly, her ability to touch; she holds Auntie Muriel's "veined and mottled stumps...soothing them with her thumbs as in illness she has soothed the hands of her children"(LBM,260). The power of this scene derives from Atwood's successful conveyance of a very complex inner state, one poised precariously between disgust and the mysterious compulsion to heal, and to forgive. Atwood never once in this scene slips into maudlin sentimentality, nor does she rob Elizabeth of her complex humanity by imprisoning her in the two-dimensionality of pure, unremitting hatred and separation. What exactly does happen in the hospital room remains mysterious, but not ambiguous; it is

not that the reader is unsure about which among a possible number of emotions are being felt by Elizabeth, but that the repeated word "Nevertheless" is truly poetic, in that it resonates with a densely-packed meaning not easily rendered prosaically. It is not quite that Elizabeth forgives Auntie Muriel: "She will not forgive her. This is an old vow, an axiom. Nevertheless."(LBM,260). And it is not as if the urge to soothe flows easily, unimpeded by all of Elizabeth's accumulated anger and fear: "Sickness grips her. Nevertheless, Nevertheless, she whispers: It's all right. It's all right."(LBM,260). "Nevertheless" exists in the murky emotional space between hatred, disgust, and an irrepressible, if uncomfortable, sympathy. Elizabeth has no affection for Auntie Muriel, but she finds herself "loving" her, in the sense of that word in which it suggests a fundamental implication in the other's being. Elizabeth, knowing only too well the loneliness of the terminally self-sufficient, cannot help but be drawn to the dying woman whom she resembles in so many ways.

The hospital scene is not followed by any sort of dramatic reversal in Elizabeth's relationship to the world--she continues on her lonely course. At Auntie Muriel's funeral she is once again overcome by the insubstantiality of the world, and "falls through space"(LBM,277). Later she is grateful for the minimal fact that "She's managed to accomplish a house...a dwelling over the abyss"(LBM,278). There are no flowering relationships, no life-giving encounters with a "Thou". But the end of Life Before Man is not thoroughly evaluated in B.W. Powe's

comment that it reveals "nothing but the continuation of boring surfaces"⁷³. The novel ends, in fact, with desire--Elizabeth's vaguely-focussed but insistent yearning for something that lies beneath the surface of the brightly-coloured paintings in the Chinese Peasant Art Exhibit, beneath the surface of the ideology they represent: "China does not exist. Nevertheless she longs to be there."(LBM,291). And, as I have noted earlier, this last "Nevertheless" points the reader back to the scene in the hospital room; in both scenes, Elizabeth strains against the bonds of her narcissism, first in sympathy, then in desire. There is no conclusiveness about Life Before Man, at the end of which the three major characters remain fundamentally separate from each other, but in her treatment of Elizabeth, Atwood begins to experiment with the ideas that will obsess her in Bodily Harm.

In Bodily Harm, Atwood's central concern is with the individual's fundamental implication in the lives of other individuals. The novel is more overtly political than its predecessors, , but in Bodily Harm politics is not a separate issue from the question of the self's ability to enter into genuine relationship with the Other. The feminist contention that "the personal is the political" is an underlying premise of the story of Rennie Wilford, who must learn that "she is not exempt"(BH,301) from involvement either on the level of personal relationship, or in the political sphere, where models for personal relationship are implicitly forged. Rennie's initial impulse to see the brutalized Lora as an "it", unconnected with herself--"it's no one she recognizes, she has no connection with this"(BH,298)--has as its political counterpart the Canadian

government's desire to look away from the truth about the abuses of power to which Rennie has been witness. Personal and political levels of reality mirror one another in Bodily Harm, and on each level the fundamental choices are between narcissism and involvement, surfaces and depths.

The hand imagery that Atwood uses in Life Before Man reappears in abundance in Bodily Harm. In both novels hand gestures or positions become metaphors for states of soul, or the nature of relationship. In Bodily Harm the shaking of hands, for example, is a kind of parody of intimacy--Lora and Paul, lovers only technically, shake hands when Lora goes to live with Prince; Rennie shakes hands with the man from the Canadian government, imagined or real, who comes to persuade her to ignore the truth about St. Agathe and St. Antoine, and with whom she is now radically out of sympathy. The loss of hands in Bodily Harm suggests the loss of emotional touch. Rennie remembers her grandmother, emotionally remote, meandering about as a senile old woman looking for the hands she has lost--not the ones on the end of her arms, but "My other hands, the ones I had before, the ones I touch things with"(BH,57). Rennie herself has learned too well the lesson of her childhood, "how to look at things without touching them"(BH,54), and years of disuse have incapacitated her own hands; in this respect she resembles Elizabeth. The scene of Rennie's spiritual rebirth, in which she sits in the jail-cell with the pulp-faced Lora, has an ancestor of sorts in the hospital scene in Life Before Man, in which Elizabeth momentarily regains her ability to touch, and reaches out to the dying Auntie

Muriel.

Like the hospital scene, the jail-cell scene is not set against a backdrop of spontaneous friendship or affection. Rennie does not despise Lora in the same way that Elizabeth despises Auntie Muriel, but "she dislikes her"(BH,271) and feels that "they have nothing in common except that they're here"(BH,271). The importance of what they do have in common--their victimization--begins to become more clear to Rennie when she sees some prisoners outside of their window being beaten by men who look like they are enjoying themselves: "Rennie understands for the first time that this is not necessarily a place she will get out of, ever. She is not exempt. Nobody is exempt from anything"(BH,290). Even so, her reaction to Lora's beating is silence, and later she denies her connection with the bruised face, thinking that "it's no one she recognizes"(BH,298). Like Elizabeth, who is gripped by sickness at the spectacle of Auntie Muriel's suffering, Rennie "wants to throw up"(BH,298) when she looks at the more dramatic evidence of Lora's suffering.

But Rennie moves past her repulsion and detachment, forcing herself to act upon her realization that "there's no such thing as a faceless stranger, every face is someone's, it has a name"(BH,299). Her effort to pull Lora by the hand through the "invisible hole in the air" so that "something will get born" is "a gift, the hardest thing she's ever done"(BH,299). This taking of Lora's hand, and Rennie's subsequent simple verbal gesture of personification--"Lora", she says. The name descends and enters the body"(BH,299)--, are reminiscent of Elizabeth's taking of Auntie Muriel's hand, and her simple verbal gesture of soothing :

"Sickness grips her. Nevertheless, nevertheless, she whispers: It's all right. It's all right"(LBM,260). Both scenes are infused with a sense of the difficulty of, and yet the necessity for, a compassion that transcends disgust, dislike, and difference.

While Life Before Man remains inconclusive about the metamorphosing effects, if any, of the hospital room scene upon Elizabeth, Bodily Harm ends with the implication that whether or not Rennie is fantasizing about her release from St. Antoine, she is indeed "rescued" from her prison of narcissism. By allowing the victimized Lora to become real to her, not as object but as subject with a name, Rennie herself emerges from the unreality of the world of ever-changing trends, of the "Lifestyles" she had written about. In exchange for a lifestyle, she regains her life. Despite the fact that the scar from her mastectomy reminds her that "She doesn't have much time left, for anything", she focusses on her fundamental connection with, rather than separation from, the rest of the human race, when she realizes that "neither does anyone else"(BH,301). Her awareness of mortality, heightened by both her mastectomy and her time in the St. Antoine jail, actually revitalizes her--she is now "a subversive"(BH,300), who is "paying attention"(BH,301) to what is happening in the world she has started to feel a part of.

The fact that Rennie's psychic rebirth is precipitated by an encounter with a woman, and not a man, cannot pass without comment in light of the fact that Bodily Harm is so very much concerned with sexual politics and the victimization of women. Life Before Man moved away from the female-as-victim paradigm,

focussing instead, in its portrayal of Elizabeth, on a different social reality--that of the strong, self-sufficient woman imprisoned by an autonomy that has solidified into narcissism. Atwood herself has described Elizabeth this way:

Elizabeth is a strong character. She is very self-determined and she is very single. She is very alone. She doesn't have one good friend. She doesn't have anyone that's helping her. She's got her children and herself and really that's about it. Why do I depict such a thing? Well, I think it's the state of many strong women in our society. And I think the a lot of them are not in the Women's Movement, especially ones like Elizabeth of a certain age, who learns pretty early to distrust almost everybody. And certainly she distrusts women because women failed her in her own life. And men are fairly negligible to her. Men are her disappearing father and her negligible uncle and she uses them.⁷⁴

But once again in Bodily Harm, the issue of threatened feminine autonomy that informs Atwood's first three novels surfaces; this time, however, the emphasis is on the external forces that attempt to wrest woman's self-determining power from her, rather than, as in the first three novels, on the heteronomous compulsions of women themselves. It is certainly not that the issue of heteronomy disappears in Bodily Harm, for it is clear that Rennie partially internalizes, at the same time as rejecting, Jake's version of her sexuality. As Ildiko de Papp Carrington notes, "Like Peter in The Edible Woman, Jake wants his woman to resemble a prostitute. To make her do so, he buys Rennie 'wired half-cup hooker brassieres that squeezed and pushed up the breasts'. Rennie's internalization of Jake's way of seeing her as this artificially seductive image is shown in her intense self-consciousness about her scarred breast"⁷⁵. Nevertheless, the emphasis in Bodily Harm is on the external male imperative, as is suggested from the beginning of the novel by the epigraph that

Atwood chooses from John Berger's 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. (BH, epigraph)

In her article, "Another Symbolic Descent", Ildiko de Papp Carrington misunderstands Atwood's change in emphasis from female heteronomy to the facts of the external oppression of women (and men), when she implies that there is some kind of progression from the "untrue" belief of Surfacing's narrator that she may after all have power, to the "true" belief that informs Bodily Harm, which is that many people are powerless:

The protagonist of Surfacing urges herself to "give up the old belief" that she is "powerless...."(11) Now Atwood seems to have recognized that many people are powerless: it is not an "old belief", but an old fact. (76)

By ignoring the context in which her quotation from Surfacing is taken, Carrington seems to successfully support her argument; the fact is, however, that Surfacing's narrator is not powerless in the same way that Rennie is, trapped in her jail cell, or stalked by a man with a rope. In her eagerness to relate what Atwood says about power and victimization in Surfacing to what she says about power and victimization in Bodily Harm, Carrington fails to make the very important distinctions between the kinds of power and the kinds of victimization that Atwood is concerned with in the two novels. It is not a question of whether or not people have power, but of whether or not people have different kinds of power (psychological, physical) in different circumstances (psychological, physical). Surfacing's "I" has been oppressed both from within and from without. But although it is true that she has been psychologically victimized by men, Atwood makes it

clear that she (the narrator) must assume much of the responsibility for having allowed herself to internalize the imperatives and expectations of her oppressors. By portraying the narrator as beginning to emerge from her heteronomous sleep, Atwood suggests that the sleep itself does not have a completely deterministic character; there is an inner core of freedom that chooses whether or not it will submit itself to the heteronomous temptation. For that reason, I argue that Surfacing's narrator has in fact been more dangerous to her self than anyone outside of her has been. Rennie's victimization, though having strong elements of psychic cooperation in it (as in her relationship with Jake), has also the aspect of external impingement in the form of brute physical force. She is both stalked and imprisoned, neither of which she can be said to be "responsible" for in the same way that Surfacing's narrator is responsible for the abortion. That the jail cell where Rennie stays can also be seen as a metaphor for the narcissism from which she must release herself, does not detract from the fact that Bodily Harm is very much a novel about "physical violence"^{physical violence} in the real world. In the context of such physical impingement, perpetrated almost entirely by men, it is not surprising that Rennie's spiritual rebirth is precipitated by an involvement with a woman.

That a woman's presence defines, in Berger's words, "what can and cannot be done to her", is the assumption of many of the male characters in the novel. Bodily Harm opens with a scene in which Rennie comes home to her apartment to find two policemen there, who inform her that a man with a rope, now escaped, has been waiting for her. It is in this first section of the novel that

the paradigm for most of the male-female relationships in the book is revealed--woman is "seen", made object, while man is the "see-er", the molder of the object-woman into the shape of his own desire. In the days after the break-in at her apartment, Rennie feels that "she had been seen, too intimately, owned in some way she couldn't define...she began to see herself from the outside, as if she was a moving target in someone else's binoculars"(BH,40). Rennie's lover Jake is really just another incarnation of the man with the rope. Like the intruder's, his relationship to Rennie is one of "seeing" in its most chilling and extreme Sartrean sense; his sexual "playfulness" only thinly disguises his sadistic orientation towards her. Jake is, in fact, rather overtly associated with the man with the rope who climbs in Rennie's window, when she recalls his [Jake's] lunchtime habits at an earlier phase of their relationship:

Sometimes he would climb up the fire escape and in through the window instead of coming through the door, he'd send her ungrammatical and obscene letters composed of words snipped from newspapers, purporting to be from crazy men, he'd hide in closets and spring out at her, pretending to be a lurker.(BH,27)

What Jake finds most attractive about Rennie are the marks of his own power. He buys her "garters, merry widows, red bikini pants with gold spangles, wired half-cup hooker brassieres that squeezed and pushed up the breasts" in an attempt to make her over in the image of his desires: "The real you, he'd say with irony and hope"(BH,20). The art Jake chooses to decorate their bedroom--"a Heather Cooper poster, a brown-skinned woman wound up in a piece of material that held her arms to her sides but left her breasts and thighs and buttocks exposed"(BH,105)--is an

[objective correlative, of sorts,] for his vision of women in general, and also associates him with the business of pornography that Rennie investigates at one point.

Though not as obviously so, Paul is another incarnation of the male "see-er". Rennie recognizes that the telescope she finds in Paul's house "confers furtive power, the power to watch without being watched"(BH,218). Paul, like Jake, the intruder, and the invisible pornographers, views Rennie in terms of what can be done to her, or done by means of her, not only on the obvious political level, but also on the level of personal relationship. It is true that by re-awakening her sexual confidence, he "[gives] her back her body"(BH,248), and in this sense is a positive character, but it is also true that he sees her mostly in terms of what she is in relation to himself. When he tells Rennie to go back home, out of the way of the political troubles on St. Antoine, he couches his reasons for trying to send her away in the most insidious of all romantic cliches: "Maybe I want there to be something good I've done"(BH,234). Rennie immediately senses the implicit denial of her autonomy in Paul's apparently "noble" gesture: "Rennie feels she can make her own choices, she doesn't need to have them made for her. In any case she doesn't want to be something Paul has done. Good or otherwise"(BH,234).

It is through a further consideration of Atwood's portrayal of Paul that we may best come to understand the relationship between the two major themes of the novel--the victimization of women (and of people in general), and the necessity for "paying attention"(BH,301) to what lies outside the self. On one level of

analysis, Paul would seem to be "paying attention" to the world; his concern for the gruesome realities of oppression seems evident in his didactic tirade to Rennie on the difference between "issues" and empirical truth:

Paul puts a hand on her. "It's not that I've got anything against women...It's just that when you've spent years watching people dying, women, kids, men, everyone, because they're starving or because someone kills them for complaining about it, you don't have time for a lot of healthy women sitting around arguing whether or not they should shave their legs."

Rennie's been outflanked, so she retracts. "That was years ago", she says. "They've moved on to other issues."

"That's what I mean", says Paul. "Issues. I used to believe in issues. When I first went out there I believed in all the issues I'd been taught to believe in. Democracy and freedom and the whole bag of tricks. Those gadgets don't work too well in a lot of places...Issues are just an excuse [for] [g]etting rid of people you don't like..." (BH, 240)

Ildiko de Papp Carrington, though quite perceptive about the nature of many of the "surfaces" that Rennie must learn to see through, herself fails to see through the surface of Paul's tirade. This failure stems, I think, from the fact that Carrington detaches this speech from its context, not considering it in light of what Atwood shows us about Paul elsewhere. Seeing Paul's speech above as one of the methods "that Atwood uses for Rennie's re-education"⁷⁷, Carrington does not recognize, or at least does not consider important enough to articulate, that Paul's concern for the victimized is in fact itself as abstract as the "issues" he rails against; it is not so much that what Paul says above does not have some truth in it, but that his relationship to the empirical realities of power abuse is not one of commitment to change, but rather of exploitation of their dramatic potential. What really attracts him to the powerless is not their need, but his desire to exercise his own power in the

shape of "rescue" or "political uprising". This is made clear in Lora's story about Paul's rescue of the unfaithful wife whose husband, known for his mean reputation, tied her to a tree and covered her with cow itch; Lora recognizes the fact that Paul "wasn't being noble...he did it because it was dangerous; he did it because it was fun"(BH,215). Later, when Marsdon tries to hold Rennie and Lora on St. Agathe and Paul intervenes, Rennie comes to the realization that "she's an object of negotiation. The truth about knights becomes suddenly clear: the maidens were only an excuse. The dragon was the real business"(BH,258). And one suspects that for Paul, whose political allegiance, if any, is never quite clear to the reader, it is not ideological dragons themselves that are "the real business", but the excitement of the hunt. Rather than being Paul's fellow teacher in Rennie's education, as Carrington suggests⁷⁸, Dr. Minnow, the most positive male character in the novel, is actually a kind of foil for Paul. He fights the oppression that poisons his country, not for the thrill of adventuring, but because he finds himself genuinely implicated in its welfare. A "native" of his country in more than just a literal sense, Dr. Minnow's commitment to change is rooted in an uncomfortable, yet tenacious affection: "The love of your own country is a terrible curse, my friend," he says. "Especially a country like this one. It is much easier to live in someone's else's country. Then you are not tempted...[t]o change things"(BH,133).

Paul's relationship to others is decidedly of the "I-It" rather than the "I-Thou" type. His choice of words betrays his

basic stance toward the world, which is one of, to again quote Buber, "self-differentiation and appropriation" rather than "co-exist[ence]"⁷⁹. For Paul others, both men and women, are defined in terms of their instrumentality:

"Lora comes in handy[emphasis mine]," says Paul.(BH,243)

[Paul:] "But the police hanging around the airport are are something else. They'd seen Lora too many times, that was the sixth box we'd run through. We needed someone else...It's always better to use a woman [e.m.], they're less likely to be suspected.(BH,243)

"The boat got sunk, the general got shot," says Paul, "I've just replaced both of them [e.m.] but it took me a while."(BH,244)

The connection between the type of relationship that Paul has with the world, and the issue of the victimization of women is focussed in an expression Atwood uses quite frequently in the novel--"raw material". When Rennie prepares to do an article on pornography, she is asked by her editor to go to look at the "raw material"(BH,207) collected at the police station under the heading "Project P". It is the film of the woman with a rat coming out of her vagina that finally shakes Rennie out of her complacency, and leads her to recognize, at least subconsciously, that pornography of this sort is only a logical extension of Jake's attitude towards her. She returns home to find that she has lost her sexual appetite, telling Jake that she herself feels like "raw material"(BH,212). Her feeling is not specific to Jake-- she says to him that "Lately I feel I'm being used; though not by you exactly"(BH,212)--but finds its roots in a growing awareness of a kind of basic male stance towards women. This stance is one of self-differentiation and appropriation, that is, the "I-It" relationship described by Buber. Paul, who sees not

only women but the whole world in terms of the "I-It" relationship, as "raw material", cannot be significantly distinguished from the pornographers and abusers of political power that lurk in the pages of Bodily Harm. Incapable of genuine relationship, that is, relationship in which each party recognizes the subjectivity of the other, Paul has little to teach Rennie about what political involvement really means. He has nothing to do with the commitment to subversion that Rennie undertakes at the end of the novel; he is, in fact, a representative of the sexual and political status quo depicted in Bodily Harm, which is founded on the "I-It" relationship to the world, the relationship of non-implication. Repeatedly Atwood portrays Paul as uninvolved in personal relations: as Lora expresses it when she warns Rennie against Paul, "Just, don't get mixed up, is all. Not that he gets that mixed up with most people anyway" (BH, 221). If Paul is not overtly an oppressor of women, his stance toward the world, nevertheless, is precisely the framework in which the victimization of women, and of men, takes place.

It is in the context of the ethic of uninvolvedness, the failure to say "Thou", that victimization in general may flourish, for oppression depends upon the fundamental differentiation of the oppressor from those that are oppressed. Victimization cannot find a foothold in the "I-Thou" relationship, which Martin Buber describes thus: "Spirit is not in the I, but between I and Thou. It is not like the blood that circulates in you, but like the air which you breathe"⁸⁰. To injure the Other in such a relationship would be to injure the

self as well; to save the Other therefore, would be also to save the self. What Rennie learns in the jail cell with Lora, is how to say "Thou". In allowing Lora to become real for her, Rennie herself is rescued from a half-life of surfaces, fleeting values, and the "trends" that she used to write about. Her new-found political commitment is simply a logical extension of her new existential greeting to the Other. When Lora becomes real to Rennie, "issues" become real too, because issues find their basis in real human predicaments like Lora's. B.W. Powe fails to see the importance of the nature of Rennie's "vaguely leftist"⁸¹ political commitment, when he says that it

expresses the accepted cliches of the moment in certain intellectual-artistic circles, and avoids the risk of exploring and reevaluating human nature and human values. [Atwood] betrays her independence of mind for a contrived, cozy, and flattering self-image.⁸²

Reevaluating "human values", and more precisely, the paradigms for human relationship that have inhered in male-dominated societies, is precisely what Atwood is doing in Bodily Harm. And what is most significant about Rennie's political awakening is that she does not jump on a fashionable political bandwagon in order to give her life meaning; she gives "vaguely leftist" politics meaning by arriving at political commitment through revolutionary personal experience. Unlike fashionable "politics mongers", she does not expect politics to rescue her from her narcissism--she conquers her narcissism in the jail-cell with Lora, and finds that political involvement awaits. In this connection, Rennie may be contrasted with Joan Foster, who sees politics as a means to self-fulfillment, as that which will give her identity, rather

than, like Rennie, as a pressing set of problems that demand involvement by their importance. Joan's attitude is one of passive narcissism--she expects that Arthur's "issues" (as well as Arthur himself) will come to the service of her identity crisis: "I myself was bliss-filled and limpid-eyed: the right man had come along, complete with a cause I could devote myself to. My life had significance"(LO,172). Rennie's relationship with politics is neither passive nor narcissistic; her realization of the value of "massive involvement" prompts her to go out, so to speak, to meet political realities.

Although the ending of Bodily Harm is positive in that the problem of narcissism begins to find a solution, the fact remains that the issue of power abuse, and more particularly, the victimization of women, hangs like a black cloud over the entire novel. In her sixth and most recent novel, The Handmaid's Tale, Atwood is again much interested in sexual politics, and the nature of power structures in general. As in most of her novels, she is concerned with threats to feminine autonomy both from within women themselves and from without. And, like her last two novels, The Handmaid's Tale is suffused with Atwood's new preoccupation with "touch"; there is, in fact, reference made to hands on nearly every page. The pressing question that would seem to inform Atwood's newest novel is "under the alienating conditions of sexual and political tyranny, what kinds of relationships are possible?".

The Handmaid's Tale is an imaginative exploration of a near-futuristic state of sexual tyranny, quite different in nature from that which informs Bodily Harm. In the new novel, rape and

pornography have been replaced by a form of the Victorian "angel in the house" imperative. The Handmaids do, in fact, in their role as surrogate mothers, have sexual relations with the Commanders of their houses (attached to the bodies of the Commanders' Wives), but they are defined, officially, as having no sexual desire and are therefore the guardians of virtue. As Aunt Lydia puts it to her Handmaids-in-training, reiterating Victorian conceptions of normal male and female sexuality: "All flesh is weak...they [men] can't help it...God made them that way but he did not make you that way...It's up to you to set the boundaries. Later you will be thanked"(THT,43). The new regime of Gilead, in its emphasis on "traditional" values, is Atwood's creative projection into the future of current trends manifested by increasingly vocal anti-feminist groups and political conservatives. The character of Serena Joy, the once active public advocate of a return to "hearth and home" values, who, "taken at her word"(THT,44), is forced herself to assume the passivity she had urged, is a brilliant imaginative foray into the personal implications of the platforms of the very visible women who march in the foremost ranks of the Christian Right.

Although women in the new state are strictly protected from the kinds of sexual violence depicted in Bodily Harm, they are stripped of their autonomy in a new (old?) way. Each woman performs a necessary "female" function, rigidly defined and strictly enforced--"Marthas" do housework, "Wives" direct households, Wives' daughters marry Commanders and become Wives, "Econowives" marry and serve all the needs of poor men, "Aunts"

indoctrinate Handmaids, and "Handmaids" bear children for Commanders whose Wives are too old or not fit to perform that service. Femaleness, in the new state, becomes that which fulfills the (perceived) needs of men: "from each according to her ability; to each according to his needs" (THT, 111). In exchange for the relative safety of life in the new regime, and for a somewhat ambivalent respect granted them for their function as child-bearers for the state, Handmaids lose their rights to question authority, to choose, to evaluate--in short, to become "persons" in Tillich's sense⁸³ of that word. Aunt Lydia translates the heteronomous imperative for women into a species of liberty: "There is more than one kind of freedom, says Aunt Lydia. Freedom to and freedom from. In the days of anarchy, it was freedom to. Now you are being given freedom from. Don't underrate it" (THT, 24). "Freedom from", in the context of Gileadean society, means at one level relative physical safety, and at another level, not articulated by Aunt Lydia, freedom from freedom itself. The Gilead regime, attempting to amputate feminine autonomy at all levels, is the arena for the familiar Atwood dialogue between autonomy and an often seductive heteronomy.

And so the story of Offred, like the stories of most of Atwood's female protagonists, is filled with the language of the endangered Self--of seeing and being seen, of being and nothingness, of activity and passivity, of rebellion and complicity.

The metaphorical equation of sight with power that informs all of Atwood's novels, but especially Bodily Harm, is given a new

concreteness in The Handmaid's Tale: the Gilead police are named the "Eyes", while the Handmaids wear white wings around their faces "to keep [them] from seeing"(THT,8). Offred comments that the white wings not only hinder the Handmaids from seeing, "but also from being seen"(THT,8); this is true if "seeing" is limited to its suggestion of sexual objectification in the mode of desire, but it remains the case that the Handmaids are very much "seen" in a wider metaphorical sense. They are seen "Sartreanly", or made object, in that their roles are strictly defined and their capacities for self-transcendence (the realization of possibilities as yet unrealized) forcibly attenuated; on a more literal level of "seen", they are watched perpetually for subversive behaviour by the Eyes, their "families", and each other. Offred is only too aware of such surveillance, both existential and literal. Mentally reliving her time at the Training Centre and her lessons with Aunt Lydia, Offred recalls, accenting her articulation with eye imagery, that "We, sitting in our rows, eyes down, we make [Aunt Lydia] salivate morally. We are hers to define, we must suffer her adjectives"(THT,108). The pressure of being continually watched in the literal sense, implodes, at one point, into Offred's thought that "Will I ever be in a hotel room again? How I wasted them, those rooms, that freedom from being seen"(THT,48).

Most of the female protagonists in Atwood's novels exist in the tension between passivity and activity, struggling, not always successfully, to climb out of their quagmires of inertia, compulsion, conformity, or all three of these. Offred is no

exception. At one point she recalls her feelings, and those of the other Handmaids in the Red Centre, after Moira's escape; her recollection reveals the existential ambivalence that characterizes her throughout the novel:

...Moira had power now, she'd been set loose, she'd set herself loose. She was now a loose woman.

I think we found this frightening.

Moira was like an elevator with open sides. She made us dizzy. Already we were losing the taste for freedom, already we were finding these walls secure. In the upper reaches of the atmosphere you'd come apart, you'd vaporize, there would be no pressure holding you together.

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. Their power had a flaw to it. They could be shanghaied in toilets. The audacity was what we liked.(THT,125)

Near the end of The Handmaid's Tale, Offred reflects upon her story and wishes that "it showed me in a better light, if not happier, then at least more active, less hesitant, less distracted by trivia"(THT,251). But because the conditions under which women take up their existential stances are so extreme in The Handmaid's Tale (non-conformity to the rigidly-defined roles for women being punishable by severe beatings or death), Atwood provides us with two "foils" for Offred, in order that we may assess her perhaps more fairly than she herself does in the passage quoted above. Janine, utterly passive and complicitous, not even having true belief in the values of the regime to lend her an integrity of sorts, and Moira, radiating a forcefulness of personality and openly rebellious to authority, are the two opposite extremes between which the theatre of feminine autonomy is played out in The Handmaid's Tale. Offred, centre stage, is neither the heroine that she sees Moira to be, nor the "weak,

squirmy, blotchy, pink...newborn mouse"(THT,68) that Offred and her classmates cannot help seeing Janine as. Not as spectacular as Moira's attempted escapes from Gilead, Offred's midnight robbery of a flower from her Commander's living room is nevertheless the expression of a spirit not entirely crushed. As she creeps down the stairs on her way to the living room, Offred experiences herself for a rare moment as an agent, rather than an object of agency; remembering the moment, she associates herself with the horse, an animal suggestive of freedom and power: "Down past the fisheye on the hall wall, I can see my white shape, of tented body, hair down my back like a mane, my eyes gleaming. I like this. I am doing something, on my own. The active tense. Tensed."(THT,92).

Because the reader is shown such glimpses of Offred's potential for subversion, he or she must experience a degree of disappointment when Offred's obsession with Nick, whom she does not even know if she can trust, overshadows her concern for the underground resistance brought to her attention by Ofglen: "The fact is that I no longer want to leave, escape, cross the border to freedom. I want to be here, with Nick, where I can get at him"(THT,255). But the alert reader's response to this turn of events is more complex than pure disappointment, because in The Handmaid's Tale, any form of desire or "touch" is itself a form of subversion.

In the framework of a society in which women, and to a certain extent men, are seen in terms of their separate functions, in which fear drives a wedge between even those of the same class, and in which sexual desire is officially deemed "frivolity

merely"(THT,89), it is no wonder that Offred begins to see disconnection or separateness as the fundamental condition of things. In a passage which is perhaps one of Atwood's most accomplished, Offred expresses the radical disjointedness of her universe through a description of the physical world, as she recalls standing by the Wall on which hanged and white-sheeted criminals of state are displayed on hooks:

But on one bag, there's blood, which has seeped through the white cloth, where the mouth must have been. It makes another mouth, a small red one...

I look at the one red smile. The red of the smile is the same as the red of the tulips in Serena Joy's garden, towards the base of the flowers where they are beginning to heal. The red is the same but there is no connection. The tulips are not tulips of blood, the red smiles are not flowers, neither thing makes a comment on the other thing. The tulip is not a reason for disbelief in the hanged man, or vice versa. Each thing is valid and really there. It is through a field of such valid objects that I must pick my way, every day and in every way.(THT,31-2)

In such a context of separation, it becomes clear why the simplest act of relation--Offred touching Moira's two fingers through the hole in the bathroom wall at the Red Centre--, or even of collusion--Offred agreeing with Cora to sacrifice her morning egg in order not arouse suspicions about the plate Cora shatters upon finding her in the closet--, resonates with such intense importance in Offred's tale. So too, do the small surges of empathy that Offred experiences for Serena Joy, despite her resentment and suspicion of the older woman. She moves beyond the bounds of her own distaste for the "Ceremony", and manages to consider Serena's point of view, wondering "which of us is it worse for, her or me?"(THT,90). At one point, Offred even manages an empathy of sorts with her Commander, when she wonders what it

must be like "To be a man, watched by women...to have them watching him all the time... to have them sizing him up..."(THT,83), although her feelings towards him are necessarily ambivalent, seriously strained by the magnitude of his power over her.

The expression of sexuality, and especially female sexuality, becomes, in The Handmaid's Tale, a mode of rebellion against the established order. Because female desire is officially denied existence, the experience of it is actually a form of self-assertion, as well as being an expression of the ethic of "touch, implicitly rejected in nearly all of its forms by the state. Atwood links the ideas of "touch", female sexuality, and subversion, through the image of the flower. It is significant that on her midnight raid of her Commander's living room, during which she meets Nick and feels a surge of desire, Offred chooses to steal a flower from among the objects there; later, when she describes Serena Joy's "subversive"(THT,143) flower garden, redolent with life, and suggestive of femininity, desire, physicality, and irrepressible energy, the idea of female sexuality as active is firmly rooted in the reader's mind. Rather than the narcissistic passivity described by Freud, female sexuality is portrayed here as an outward-reaching, touching of the world:

Well. Then we had the irises, rising beautiful and cool on their tall stocks, like blown glass, like pastel water momentarily frozen in a splash, light blue, light mauve, and the darker ones, velvet and purple, black cat's ears in the sun, indigo shadow, and the bleeding hearts, so female in shape it was a surprise they'd not long since been rooted out. There is something subversive about this garden of Serena's, a sense of buried things bursting upwards, wordlessly, into the light, as if to point, to say: Whatever

is silenced will clamour to be heard, though silently. A Tennyson garden, heavy with scent, languid: the return of the word swoon. Light pours down upon it from the sun, true, but also heat rises, from the flowers themselves, you can feel it: like holding your hand an inch above an arm, a shoulder. It breathes, in the warmth, breathing itself in. To walk through it in these days, of peonies and pinks, makes my head swim...Goddesses are possible now and the air suffuses with desire. (THT, 143)

In a society in which female sexuality is officially synonymous with the pragmatic function of reproduction, the expression of physical desire becomes, for Offred, a way of saying "Thou". At one point she expresses in physical terms, something very like Buber's idea that the spiritual substantiality of persons is contingent upon their participation in relationship: "Can I be blamed for wanting a real body to put my arms around? Without it I too am disembodied" (THT, 97). And so while it is true that Offred's very physical relationship with Nick neutralizes for the time her tendencies towards overtly political subversion, it is, paradoxically, also true that it expresses a kind of subversion in itself. And it does, after all, require risk. The fact that we, as readers, never discover whether or not Nick is trustworthy, makes the ultimate evaluation of her choice of subversions most difficult. ^{Yes}

In the sense that it magnifies and explores in an imaginative way some current ideological trends, The Handmaid's Tale, like the more "realistic" Bodily Harm,^{is} a very political book. And also like Bodily Harm, Atwood's latest novel is concerned with the observer's implication in what he or she observes. In the last section of the book, entitled "Historical Notes on The Handmaid's Tale", Atwood parodies the academic narcissism that is expressed covertly in Professor Pieixoto's remark that

"Our job is not to censure but to understand"(THT,284). After journeying, via Offred's spellbinding tale, through the horrors of Gilead's oppression, hypocrisy, and underlying misogyny, Pieixoto's assertion that "we must be cautious about passing moral judgement upon the Gileadeans" because such judgements are "of necessity culture-specific"(THT, 284), strikes the reader with the incongruency Atwood desires. "Fair" in itself, Pieixote's comment here, within the context of what we have just witnessed, expresses less a liberal wish to allow for cultural difference, and more a failure to meet the "Thou" that speaks to him from history. His flight from her reality takes the form of a retreat into the space of academic "neutrality", where the use of "right" and "wrong" is considered rather gauche. To emphasize her concern with non-involvement, Atwood makes reference, within the framework of Pieixote's discourse, to Canada's political narcissism during the Gileadean regime; speculating on the possibility that Offred may have escaped to Canada, Pieixote notes that "the Canada of that time did not wish to antagonize its powerful neighbour, and there were roundups and extraditions of such refugees"(THT,292). This is, of course, the same Canada that appears in Bodily Harm--ethically anemic in its desire to avoid engagement and confrontation.

Seeing Offred's tale exclusively as an object of study, Pieixote performs on it a form of the "it operation" that makes possible such horrors as the Gilead regime. At one point in her tale, Offred remembers one such "it operation"--the transformation of the cat that Luke is forced to kill from "her"

to "it"--, and thinks that "That is what you have to do before you kill...You have to create an it, where none was before. You do that first, in your head, and then you make it real...So that's how they do it..."(THT,180). Atwood captures here, very simply, the essential narcissism of the stance of objectification--one does not meet the other, but creates in the other's place a static image "in [one's] head"; this image becomes, to borrow a phrase from Bodily Harm, the "raw material" upon which one exercises one's will.

By relating to Offred's story as "raw material" for detached historical study, Pieixoto commits a kind of academic murder somewhat analogous to Gilead's psychological murder of its women, who, stripped of their autonomy become "raw material" for the shaping wills of men. The "Historical Notes" section, therefore, is not merely a satire of academia "tacked on" to the end of the novel which conveniently fills in some factual details missing from Offred's tale; the insidious ethic of narcissistic disengagement that underlies Professor Pieixote's approach to history, is itself precisely the root of the organization and power relations of Gilead. In its concern for narcissism in its many forms--academic, political, and sexual, The Handmaid's Tale is a fully integrated work. And in its portrayal of the oases of intimacy and empathy present even in the arid landscape of separation, Atwood's latest novel is significantly linked with its two predecessors, Life Before Man and Bodily Harm.

Conclusion

The preoccupation with feminine autonomy and identity that heavily informs Atwood's earlier fiction, and persists throughout her later novels, is not a "dead issue" in the 1980s. In spite of the fact that a second wave of feminism has washed over our decade, the heteronomous imperative for women persists in our culture, finding its expression in literature, television, cinema, the school system, and the family. Helen Gurley Brown's bestselling Having It All (1982), is the new bible of heteronomy. The message of the book, which purports to help women achieve success in matters of love, sex, and finances, is essentially the same as that which underlies the advice to teenagers given in the 1965 copy of Seventeen magazine referred to in my discussion of Lady Oracle--a woman should conform to the image of her projected by the desires of men and in particular, The Man, who in return will give her identity and purpose. In the name of love, Gurley Brown offers a guide to expert self-effacement and "other-directedness", beneath the surface of which lies an essential narcissism; a woman does not genuinely "meet" the other, but plots to capture the interest of He who will make life meaningful:

Your general mood is that of "ready", pores open, accepting and tolerant of men, not "after them" only for marriage...but "after them" because they complete your life...

Rave about his brain. "What a brilliant idea"...

Research his life totally...from what he says, by talking to his friends, family, co-workers...

Whatever he tells you one day, remember to ask him about it the next. Make written notes after you see him if you need them to remember...

Listening is the best weapon ever forged for a woman to get through to a man. It just about takes the place of a gorgeous face or body or having to be too smart yourself...

Don't get into arguments...Argue with your cat...

Be selective about what you tell him...

Now all this stuff I've been telling you to do, I suppose, could depress a free-spirited girl. Certainly it doesn't sound like 1982. Manipulative! Obviously advice for nit-brains and women who do not truly love...Oh, come off it! Your honor is not going to be compromised and these are not cheap tricks; they are endearing and they work. And we are only talking about using them on the man who is a very Big Deal in your life...⁸⁴

It is precisely the view of male-female relationship that inheres in Gurley Brown's advice to women in 1982, that Atwood is interested in exploring the implications of in her early novels. There, she sometimes playfully, sometimes more sombrely, reveals an awareness of the dangerous effects on women themselves, and on those outside of themselves, of the heteronomous stance towards sexual relationship.

It is, in one sense, quite logical that Atwood moves from this preoccupation with feminine heteronomy and the struggle for autonomy, to an exploration of the problem of narcissism; narcissism is both an essential element of heteronomy, and a by-product of either a precarious or too-rigorous autonomy. Atwood's new concerns with involvement, the overcoming of narcissism, and the importance of "touch", reveal themselves in different forms in each of her last three novels. That all of these novels are "political" to some degree, is also quite logical; on the feminist principal that "the personal is the political", Atwood's recent concern with the reaching of the "I" beyond itself to the other, necessitates a concern with the political structures that both mirror and shape our personal relationships.

References and Notes

¹Atwood, The Edible Woman, 256. All other references to this work appear in the text.

²Atwood, Bodily Harm, 40. All other references to this work appear in the text.

³Atwood, The Handmaid's Tale, 83. All other references to this work appear in the text.

⁴Atwood, Surfacing, 133. All other references to this work appear in the text.

⁵Atwood, Lady Oracle, 86. All other references to this work appear in the text.

⁶Atwood, Life Before Man, 181. All other references to this work appear in the text.

⁷Powe, 127.

⁸Kolbenschlag, 26.

⁹Kolbenschlag, 24.

¹⁰Kolbenschlag, 25.

¹¹Kolbenschlag, 21.

¹²Kolbenschlag, ix.

¹³Paul Tillich, quoted in Kolbenschlag, 20.

¹⁴Powe, 127.

¹⁵Powe, 131.

¹⁶Powe, 131.

¹⁷Kolbenschlag, 11.

¹⁸Soren Kierkegaard, quoted in Kolbenschlag, 53.

¹⁹Kolbenschlag, 36.

²⁰Atwood, "The Curse of Eve--Or, What I Learned in School", in Anne B. Shteir, ed., Women on Women, 20.

²¹Kolbenschlag, 35.

²²Kolbenschlag, 39.

²³Kolbenschlag, 19.

²⁴Kolbenschlag, 40-41.

²⁵"The good mother" is a term used by some psychologists to describe the ideal or real figure who, in the eyes of the "child" (who may be an adult), possesses all of the qualities considered desirable in a mother (e.g. unconditional love), without any of those considered undesirable.

²⁶Kolbenschlag, 13.

²⁷Kolbenschlag, 13.

²⁸Mrs. Bentley is a character in Sinclair Ross' novel, As For Me and My House.

²⁹Davey, 59.

³⁰Carrington, "'I'm stuck': The Secret Sharers in The Edible Woman", 72.

³¹Davey, 67.

³²Davey, 67.

³³Kolbenschlag, 44.

³⁴Simone de Beauvoir, quoted in Kolbenschlag, 48.

³⁵Catherine McLay, "The Edible Woman as Romance" in Davidson, Arnold E. and Cathy N., eds., The Art of Margaret Atwood, 135.

³⁶Davey, 68.

³⁷Atwood, quoted in Catherine McLay, "The Edible Woman as Romance" in Davidson, Arnold E. and Cathy N., eds., The Art of Margaret Atwood, 137.

³⁸Catherine McLay, "The Edible Woman as Romance" in Davidson, Arnold E. and Cathy N., eds., The Art of Margaret Atwood, 138.

³⁹Atwood, quoted in Catherine McLay, "The Edible Woman as Romance" in Davidson, Arnold E. and Cathy N., eds., The Art of Margaret Atwood, 124.

⁴⁰Powe, 134.

⁴¹Powe, 134.

⁴²Powe, 130.

⁴³Powe, 130.

⁴⁴Powe, 129.

⁴⁵Powe, 134.

⁴⁶Rigney, 97.

⁴⁷Atwood, quoted in Rigney, 97.

⁴⁸Rigney, 97.

⁴⁹Dr. R. Hyman (McMaster University, Hamilton) suggested that this qualification be made explicit.

⁵⁰Rigney, 112.

⁵¹Rigney, 93 .

⁵²Davey, 57.

⁵³Davey, 66.

⁵⁴Davey, 66.

⁵⁵Powe, 136.

⁵⁶Martin Buber describes two basic "existential" stances that human being may take towards the world, and in particular, the Other--the "I-It" and "I-Thou" relationships. To radically oversimplify , it may be said that the former relationship involves an objectification of the Other, while the latter describes a genuine "meeting" or acute awareness of the Other as subject.

⁵⁷Annis Pratt, "Surfacing and the Rebirth Journey" in Davidson, Arnold E. and Cathy N., eds., The Art of Margaret Atwood, 153.

⁵⁸Kolbenschlag, 107.

⁵⁹Buber, 63.

⁶⁰Powe, 136.

⁶¹Dr. R. Hyman (McMaster University) uses this word frequently to suggest interpersonal connection.

⁶²Arnold E. and Cathy N. Davidson, "Prospects and Retrospects in Life Before Man" in Arnold E. and Cathy N. Davidson, eds., The Art of Margaret Atwood, 207.

⁶³Powe, 129.

⁶⁴Atwood, quoted in "An Atlantis Interview with Margaret Atwood", 210.

⁶⁵Arnold E. and Cathy N. Davidson, "Prospects and Retrospects in Life Before Man" in Arnold E. and Cathy N. Davidson, eds., The Art of Margaret Atwood, 208.

⁶⁶Arnold E. and Cathy N. Davidson, "Prospects and Retrospects in Life Before Man" in Arnold E. and Cathy N. Davidson, eds., The Art of Margaret Atwood, 208.

⁶⁷This conception is developed throughout Davey's Margaret Atwood: A Feminist Poetics.

⁶⁸Davey, 90.

⁶⁹Davey, 90.

⁷⁰Atwood, "An Atlantis Interview with Margaret Atwood", 210.

⁷¹Buber, 63-64.

⁷²Buber, 65.

⁷³Powe, 129.

⁷⁴Atwood, "An Atlantis Interview with Margaret Atwood", 210.

⁷⁵Carrington, "Another Symbolic Descent", 61.

⁷⁶Carrington, "Another Symbolic Descent", 60.

⁷⁷Carrington, "Another Symbolic Descent", 60.

⁷⁸Carrington, "Another Symbolic Descent", 60.

⁷⁹Buber, 63-64.

⁸⁰Buber, 39.

⁸¹Powe, 134.

⁸²Powe, 134.

⁸³Tillich, referred to by Kolbenschlag, p.20, describes "personality" as "being that which has power over itself"; a "person" in this context would be he or she who has power over him or herself.

⁸⁴Gurley Brown, 202-211.

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