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# Margaret Atwood's Divided Self

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**MARGARET ATWOOD'S DIVIDED SELF**

**A Thesis Presented**

**by**

**Katie M. Moss**

**to**

**The Faculty of the Graduate College**

**of**


**The University of Vermont**

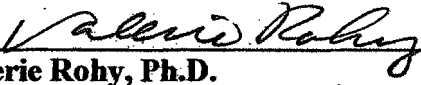
**In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of the Arts  
Specializing in English**

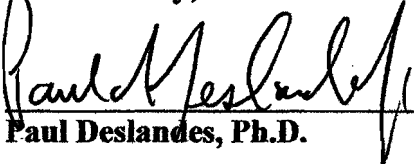
**May, 2011**


Accepted by the Faculty of the Graduate College, The University of Vermont, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, Specializing in English.

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## Abstract

“Margaret Atwood’s Divided Self” explores four novels by celebrated Canadian author, Margaret Atwood: *Lady Oracle*, *Surfacing*, *Alias Grace*, and *The Robber Bride*. Although others have discussed the reoccurring themes of disunity and duality in Atwood’s work, these explorations have not addressed some of her newest novels and have taken a very limited approach to reading and understanding Atwood’s theme of the divided self. This study opens up a literary “conversation” about Atwood’s theme of the divided self by examining the protagonists of these select novels by using different branches of theory and thought to fully explore this issue. To conquer their double or multiple identities Atwood’s protagonists in these novels must take two actions: 1) Accept their double/multiple identities as a part of themselves and 2) transcend this position and the resulting “hauntings” by their mothers (or their decision to choose a replacement female “mother” figure) by becoming mothers themselves. The introduction chapter “The Author as ‘Slippery Double’” explores Atwood’s position as a “slippery (divided) subject” between her writing/social and interior selves. Chapter one, “Canadian Women: Nature, Place, and the Divided Other in Atwood’s Works” explores the role of nature, place, and femininity in Atwood’s divided protagonists. Chapter two, “The Uncanny Double: Haunting Entities and the Divided Self in Atwood’s Fiction” contains the main argument and explores the role of the uncanny in Atwood’s works. Although I explore these four novels most thoroughly explored, this theme runs throughout Atwood’s entire body of work. Although I mostly use close readings of the primary texts, I also ground my argument in the work of theorists in several fields of thought including Sigmund Freud, Louis Althusser, George H. Mead, and Jacques Lacan.

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## **Introduction**

### **The Author as the “Slippery Double”**

As for the artists who are also writers, they are doubles twice over, for the mere act of writing splits the self in two.

-Margaret Atwood, *Negotiating with the Dead*

Margaret Atwood’s body of work extends from the mid-sixties to the present day. A prolific writer with more than thirty-five volumes of poetry, literary criticism, non-fiction, television scripts, children’s literature, stage plays, and perhaps most famously novels, Atwood continues to be one of today’s most influential writers. Atwood earned her undergraduate degree from Victoria College at the University of Toronto and her Master's degree from Radcliffe College and has since earned many honorary degrees and awards for her work. Born in Ottawa in 1939, she spent her early years in northern Ontario and Quebec with her parents and younger brother. Her father was a field entomologist and growing up in the Canadian bush greatly influenced her perceptions of nature and how people relate to it. Later, Atwood’s father became a university professor and the family moved to Toronto where Atwood’s sister was born.

A love of learning stemming from both reading and writing at a young age, as well as the practical life experience she encountered in the Bush, inspired Margaret Atwood to pursue higher education. Her graduate studies at Radcliffe College allowed her to experience living in America and to understand how others view Canada and Canadians like herself (Howells 3). Perhaps the personal division Atwood felt as a Canadian in an American university led to the inherent “dividedness” of her characters,

as she often discusses herself and writers in general as being “divided” entities. Although my specific argument concerning Atwood’s “divided self” dealing with these characters will be discussed shortly, I believe the best place to begin is to discuss the divided nature of the author and the reader as they pertain to Atwood’s work—and as they are both a significant part of the “novel” experience.

In her 2003 book, *Negotiating with the Dead: a Writer on Writing*, Margaret Atwood discusses her position as a writer, specifically in the chapter “Duplicity: The Jekyll hand, the Hyde hand, and the slippery double: Why there are always two” (29-57). In this chapter, Atwood admits to growing up in a “world of doubles” which was brought, in part, by the abundance of comic books showcasing the doubles and alter egos of super heroes (31). She argues that growing up in this world of doubles aided in the construction of her own self. She cites her two names, her nickname growing up and the one “on books,” noting that she is both people. Atwood argues that all authors have two bodies: one regular and a “shadowy personage who shares the same body, and who, when no one else is looking, takes it over and uses it to commit the actual writing” (35-36). This body is a doubly-occupied body, and its two hands often have opposing goals (37). This duplicity is often shown in Atwood’s various forms of work, in particular her poetry and fiction.

In *The Blind Assassin* (2000), the main protagonist Iris Chase’s sister commits suicide at a young age and becomes famous for her novel, “The Blind Assassin,” which is published posthumously. At the end of the novel, the reader learns that it is, in fact, Iris who wrote “The Blind Assassin,” and that the love affair described between the main

character and a hard-bitten young man, Alex, is actually describing Iris' own life. Iris does not entirely credit herself with writing the book, describing the process: "I thought of myself as recording. A bodiless hand, scrawling across a wall" (512) and:

[In a spiritual sense] you could say she was my collaborator. The real author was neither of us: a fist is more than the sum of its fingers. Laura was my left hand and I was hers. We wrote the book together. It's a left-handed book. That's why one of us is always out of sight, whichever way you look at it. (513)

This example shows the distinctions and the connections Atwood sees between the two hands, between the slippery double and its "regular" counterpart.

Writing has another important impact on the author along with her inherent division. Atwood describes the writing process in her address to several "Frequently Asked Questions" (the manuscript of which is showcased in her collection of papers at the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library):

When you are writing, the writing itself becomes your life. It changes you; you are not the same person by the end of the book that you were at the beginning. You learn things . . . and sometimes they are things that you would not have willingly exposed yourself to had you known what was coming (Papers 200:74.5).<sup>1</sup>

This experience is akin to at least two people "leading a double life" (5); however, the reader's experience with a novel (or other reading piece) is equally as interesting as the

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<sup>1</sup> For my citations from Atwood's papers at the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library at the University of Toronto, the notation will be as follows: The first number is the collection box number for the item, the second number is the particular folder within that box, and the third number is the particular number on the document as cited.



author's for Atwood. She sees the reader's journey as autobiographical because the reader enters into an imaginary world that is essentially his/her own creation. Although the reader is given material out of which to make this world, he/she will always see some part of his/herself in this world and in the protagonists.

My argument explores the dividedness of Atwood's characters which is built upon the experience of the "divided" reader and author connected to these characters through the text. As Sherrill Grace explains, for Atwood, this divided self is "not an individual ego, defining itself against its surroundings, but as a place or entity co-extensive with its environment. . . We are fluid and need not be locked into ourselves. . . The world we perceive is the world we create" (2). Grace argues that this view of the self leads to an unresolved duplicity and a "swinging back and forth between a solipsistic extreme, withdrawal into the self, and an absorption or submergence in objective reality, the false perceptions of others or the natural world" (3). Many of Atwood's characters are divided in this way, choosing to have a very private self that is extremely distinct from the self they present to others and society at large. Social psychologist George Herbert Mead discusses this issue in his "1914 Lectures in Psychology," arguing that "humans exist for ourselves as we believe we are regarded by others" and:

There are two kinds of selves. First, one has an immediate perception of oneself, as when hearing one's own voice one at the same time respond to these social stimulations. The self is relatively in the background and does not play a great part. The other self arises thus—we put ourselves in the place of others and in an

imaginary conversation we have to direct ourselves as we would direct others. It is for this self that imitation plays a larger part in life. (5)

So, as the reader is divided between his/her real and imaginary life/selves while experiencing a book, he/she is also innately divided. In short, all persons are divided, albeit in different ways. Problems arise from division when persons or characters do not accept this duality/multiplicity and are negatively affected psychologically. For Atwood, freedom comes from accepting duality or duplicity (Grace 3), but Mead argues that we must merge these “selves” into a single personality:

One may live in the company of the dead. They may constitute the most important selves. Or the other may be a supernatural being. When the situation is healthy, these may be merged into a single personality. When they are not merged, we have a dissociation of selves, and the cure involves bringing them together, becoming a self which can take the place of other selves. We are all persons of multiple selves, but all of these have their relation to the organic fundamental.

(71)

What Mead sees as this dead or supernatural part of oneself is often apparent in Atwood’s novels *Alias Grace*, *Lady Oracle*, *Surfacing*, and *The Robber Bride*. Many of Atwood’s protagonists are psychologically haunted by dead or distant persons from their past. These haunting entities are always present within their conscious mind, and the protagonists constantly refer to their frame of thinking, asking “What would [insert name] think about this/ do in this situation?” Atwood’s protagonists frequently construct these entities as mother replacements for their absent or abusive natural mothers. Often

working within a sort of Gothic framework, Atwood claims to at times write within the tradition of the psychological ghost story. She says: “You can have the Henry James kind, in which the ghost that one sees is in fact a fragment of one’s own self which has split off, and that to me is the most interesting kind and that is obviously the tradition I’m working in” (Grace 64). All of Atwood’s protagonists are not haunted by “ghosts,” but they are almost always divided between their own conscious and that of an “outside” entity. To conquer their double or multiple identities, these protagonists must take two steps: 1) Accept their double/multiple identities as a part of themselves and 2) transcend this position and the resulting “hauntings” by their mothers (or their decision to choose a replacement female “mother” figure) by becoming mothers themselves. They may take the actual role of a mother by bearing children, or they become “mothers” of their art/writing by producing their own creations/legacy in this way. If these steps are not taken, these women continue to be haunted and face friction connecting their inner divided selves to their outside worlds. To find their “singular selves,” Atwood’s protagonists must become successful “mothers.” This is the particular remedy for Atwood’s characters whose mothers play a large role in their dividedness; other characters (and other people) must find their own ways to heal this division.

In chapter One, “Canadian Women: Nature, Place, and the Divided Other in Atwood’s Works” I will examine Atwood’s characters as the divided Other due to their status as Canadian women and the role of Canadian fiction and womanhood in constructing the self. The combination of these two elements, to which Atwood refers as her “triple handicap,” affect Atwood as an author and as a person apart from her work

(Grace 10). Almost all of Atwood's protagonists are Canadian women and deal with these same issues. They are both marginalized as women (non-men) and Canadians (non-American). I will discuss the challenges associated with Canadian identity which Atwood argues is the challenge of the lack of one. Atwood is correct in saying, as other critics have also argued, that there is less of a unified identity for Canada than for other countries with more concrete social narratives; however, Canadians may also see themselves, as Robert Kroetsch suggests, as unified through disunity: free from the constraints of a distinct national identity and able to rejoice in the multiplicities of their identities and smaller culture groups (Kroetsch). Sherrill Grace argues that Atwood's work is "opening up a space beyond calamity, suggesting that new ways might be found to refigure the narrative of Canadian identity. . . . Canadians need to construct a new discourse of nationhood which represents cultural difference and interaction" (37). Both Kroetsch and Grace argue that Canada must create for itself narratives of its own country instead of continuing to be so influenced by other countries' narratives. Sherrill Grace also discusses the challenges associated with Atwood writing as a woman; these are really problems of representation of the double subject—"woman as writing subject and woman's exclusion from subjecthood when the female body becomes the subject of patriarchal discourse" (55). The issue of "being female" is an important part of one's identity and will also be discussed in Chapter One.

Another issue I will raise in Chapter One is the effect and relationship of nature on one's subjectivity. I have already mentioned Atwood's childhood relationship with nature; this close relationship is often explored in her poetry and as an important part of

Canadian identity. Nature is seen as both a dangerous outside force and a uniting part of one's own subjectivity; however one deals with this relationship determines his/her fate in many situations. In Atwood's poetry collection *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, for example, Susanna must submit to nature's oppressive forces to survive and gain her Canadian identity. Chapter One will set the tone for the second chapter by presenting the divided self that is the female protagonist of Atwood's work and will transition into my discussion of mothers and conquering this dividedness within the self in Atwood's works.

Chapter Two, "Double Consciousness: Haunting Entities and the Divided Self in Atwood's Fiction" contains my main argument, that Atwood's characters are often "haunted" by their mothers or mother replacement figures and they must become mothers themselves to fight this dividedness. I will focus on four novels in particular, *Lady Oracle*, *Surfacing*, *The Robber Bride*, and *Alias Grace*. Two of these novels (*Surfacing* and *Lady Oracle*) have been discussed to some extent by critics, but there is not as much of this criticism surrounding *Alias Grace* and *Robber Bride* because they are newer novels. All of these novels present characters and situations relevant to my argument—a new discussion within the context of criticism about Atwood.

Although she makes a different argument, Amelia Falco's article "Haunting Physicality: Corpses, Cannibalism, and Carnality in Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace*" sparked the idea for my study. Falco argues, "Haunting in *Alias Grace* is often is tied to the marginalization and oppression of women and the lower classes, in part by uniting the maternal body and the corpse into a singular abject entity" (772). This led to my discovery of connections between the mother, or the mother-substitute, and the corpse, or

entity that “haunts.” Freud and Lacan’s works are especially helpful in explaining the importance of the mother and the dividedness of the subject in this way. Finally, the conclusion chapter ties all of these ideas together and showcases the larger impact of my argument.

The following questions will be addressed throughout the chapters:

1. How is the “self” constructed in Margaret Atwood's works? (In particular, how does she represent the “disunity” or the “dividedness” of the self?)
2. How can one understand Atwood’s divided self through the theories of philosophers such as Freud, Lacan, Althusser, and George H. Mead?
3. What role does gender play in understanding the self in Atwood’s work, and how does this correlate with how Atwood’s background (and the background of her characters) as a Canadian influence the idea of “self” in her works?
4. What is the role of the mother and the aspect of the uncanny in Atwood’s works and how does this connect with one’s dividedness of self?

Although other critics have discussed the reoccurring themes of disunity and duality in Atwood’s work, they have not addressed some of her most recent novels and have taken a very limited approach to reading and understanding Atwood’s version of the self. With this study, I hope to open up a literary “conversation” about Atwood’s “divided self” that is more comprehensive (as compared to other critical arguments) in its understanding through using different branches of theory and thought to come to my conclusions. This new viewing of Atwood’s representation of the self is significant because instead of using one approach, my thesis will look at the self as defined by

several different branches of philosophy and thought. Though most of my analysis will involve close readings of the primary texts, I will also explore Atwood's work through the different viewpoints of: sociology, psychology and Marxist social theory. I hope to come to a broader conclusion about Atwood's divided self and how this self is important to understanding her work within the space of Canadian Literature. In short, I will discuss Atwood's self in ways that others have not, and I will discuss her more recent works that have not often been analyzed in this way. I have chosen this diverse range of theorists and ideas because the "self" has many definitions. The self is not easily definable; therefore, I must explore the extent to which many branches of thought and many different philosophers have approached the concept to come to the most complete understanding possible. Margaret Atwood's "self" is complicated and cannot be truly understood from only one branch of thought.

## Chapter I

### Canadian Women: Nature, Place, and the Divided Other in Atwood's works

This is a beauty  
of dissonance,  
this resonance  
of stony strand [. . .]

This is the beauty  
of strength  
broken by strength  
and still strong.

-A.J.M. Smith, "The Lonely Land"

In chapter two of *Survival*, titled "Nature the Monster," Margaret Atwood discusses the importance of nature in Canadian identity and Canadian Literature. She cites "Nature" poetry as not only being about Nature itself, but as about "the poet's attitude towards the external natural universe. That is, landscapes in poems are often interior landscapes; they are maps of the state of mind" (49). Atwood's own poems reflect these views, as we shall shortly discover, but they also affect the impact of Nature on "things" Canadian as a whole. Atwood cites the Romantic era of poetry as creating a certain idea about Nature as grand, beautiful, and a sort of Mother-figure to all, but after this period, Nature became something that was looked at and felt as a much "harsher" entity.



Atwood cites the two most popular ways Nature “dispatches its victims” in Canadian Literature as “drowning and freezing—drowning preferred by poets.” (55)<sup>2</sup> However, as Atwood argues, “Nature is a monster, perhaps, only if you come to it with unreal expectations or fight its conditions rather than accepting them and learning to live with them” (66). For Atwood, Nature is really about survival, whether it be externally responding to the elements of Nature in an appropriate way, or the internal struggle of a character because of nature’s influence. Atwood argues:

A preoccupation with one’s survival is necessarily also a preoccupation with the obstacles to that survival. In earlier writers these obstacles are external—the land, the climate, and so forth. In later writers the obstacles tend to become both harder to identify and more internal; they are no longer obstacles to physical survival but obstacles to what we may call spiritual survival, to life as anything more than a minimally human being. Sometimes fear of these obstacles becomes itself the obstacle, and a character is paralyzed by terror (either of what he thinks is threatening him from the outside, or of elements in his own nature that threaten him from within). (33)

Therefore, a character’s or person’s encounter with Nature is not only about a confrontation with outside forces, but also opposing forces within his own nature or “self.” Growing up in the Bush (rural region) of Canada, Atwood’s confrontations with

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<sup>2</sup> She herself favors near-drowning on many occasions in her fiction and poetry, such as the “Surfacer’s” close encounter with drowning- which leads to a discovery of herself- in one of her first novels, *Surfacing*.

nature are mirrored in many of her novels and short stories that take place there. Her novel *Cat's Eye* is especially semi-autobiographical in this way.

The Canadian view of Nature is also constructed by the impossibility of conquering it. The first Settlers faced this challenge; they and current residents continue to face the challenge of living and surviving in Canada's often harsh environments. "Unconquered" Nature is also construed as frightening because it unknown. Coral Ann Howells argues, "The myth of wilderness as empty space is of course a white myth, for the wilderness was not really empty; it was only indecipherable to Europeans, who came to the New World as explorers. . . . Within colonial discourse wilderness was presented as a space outside civilized social order and Christian moral laws, the place of mysterious and threatening otherness." Conversely, for some this wilderness opened up a "space of freedom from social constraints" (21). Nature, like many of Atwood's characters, is dual in its construction, and sometimes even produces dividedness itself.

Susanna Moodie was a European settler who came to Canada in the early to mid-1800s. Her writings (and those of her sister Catharine Parr Traill) greatly influenced both new settlers' and current Canadians' views on the true "essence" of Canada. Although Moodie's writings were at first extremely pessimistic (her sister Catharine Parr Traill's were much more optimistic), over time, they became more accepting of Canadian life and the Canadian landscape by accepting the environment surrounding her. Atwood's poems about Moodie were constructed after a dream, and they follow Moodie's mental and physical progression across her life and after her death. In many ways, as I will discuss

later, Moodie can be thought of as an excellent example of the “divided” Canadian citizen.

When Atwood’s imagined Susanna first arrives in Canada, she is extremely concerned about the fact that others view her as an “outsider.” Moodie says, “I am watched like an invader” (21). But Moodie also has a distinct preoccupation with nature. In many ways, she goes from seeing herself as completely separate from nature to becoming a part of it. “Looking in Mirror” describes Moodie’s new viewing of herself after living in Canada for some time. Moodie chants, “and instead my skin thickened with bark and the white hairs of roots/ My heirloom face I brought / with me a crushed eggshell/ among other debris” (24). At this point, Moodie is beginning to see her possessions as unimportant, and she is beginning to identify her body as part of Nature. Her identification with Nature is not necessarily perceived as a wanted change, however. In “Dream 1: The Bush Garden,” she is in a garden filled with strawberries only to find that when she picks them, her “hands / came away red and wet / In the dream I said / I should have known / anything planted here / would come up blood” (34). Although probably written with the Canadian Rebellion in mind because “1837 War in Retrospect” is the name of next poem, this “portrait” of Nature is not a happy one. Essentially, Nature brings death.

In one of Atwood’s earliest novels, *Surfacing*, the protagonist embarks on a journey back into nature near her childhood home. She is searching for her father, and brings along friends to help her do so. Her primary search, because her father is/was an “explorer” of sorts in the Bush, is essentially in the Canadian wilderness. A novel that

moves from external threat of nature to internal threat of oneself seamlessly (and constantly), *Surfacing* provides readers with a protagonist who, like Susanna Moodie, must become a part of Nature to understand and accept herself. After a near-drowning experience that allows the “Surfacer” to remember parts of her past she has buried deep within her subconscious, she essentially becomes one with Nature. She has appeased the nature “gods” and they accept her. At the end of the novel, she goes to the water one last time, which now accept her as “part of the land” (178). She narrates:

When I am clean I come up out of the lake, leaving my false body floated on the surface, a cloth decoy; it jiggles in the waves I make, nudges gently against the dock. They offered clothing as a token, formerly; that was partial but the gods are demanding, absolute, they want all.” (178)

Tied to the theme of Nature in Atwood’s works is the idea of clothing as either separate from or as extremely important in the making of one’s identity; however, in this case, the Surfacer wants to separate herself from her clothing completely so that she can truly be a part of Nature. She has found herself at the end of the novel by communing with the natural world and what she calls the “gods” of Nature.

In one of Atwood’s most recent novels, *Oryx and Crake*, she constructs a world where our general conceptions of “Nature” have been turned upside down. Unlike her dystopian novel *The Handmaid’s Tale* where construction of society, sexuality, and law are the prominent changes in the new dystopian world, *Oryx and Crake* creates an extremely frightening new environment or concept of “Nature.” In a sense, it is Nature to the “extreme.” Throughout the novel, Atwood warns her reader of the ills of genetic

splicing, scientists “playing God” by creating animals and plants, and separating ourselves from what Nature inherently gives us as humans. With Crake’s destruction of the world and almost all human life as “Snowman”/Jimmy and the rest of the world (or the very small amount left) knows it, Atwood asks her reader to consider what Nature would be like if re-created by us. Crake creates a super-race of “Crakers” who survive on leaves and are genetically altered to be peaceful people, among other things. However, Jimmy/ “Snowman” is left with the memories of the world left behind—with the polluted oceans, rampant disease, and lack of provisions. In short, Atwood creates a Nature which is completely disconnected from Jimmy and any other humans left behind and shows us how frightening that possibility would be. In the spirit of Canadian authors gone before, Atwood discusses the “Monster” Nature by showing it at its most extreme.

In sum, Atwood’s version of Nature can be dangerous, but when accepted, can also connect a person with his/her sense of “self” or unravel his/her true identity. It is only when we try to overrule or conquer Nature ourselves that we become divided from it. Susanna Moodie is representative of a “typical” Canadian citizen in regard to Nature. In her afterword for *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, Atwood argues:

If the national mental illness of the United States is megalomania, that of Canada is paranoid schizophrenia. Mrs. Moodie is divided down the middle; she praises the Canadian landscape but accuses it of destroying her..... She claims to be an ardent Canadian patriot while all the time she is standing back from the country and criticizing it as though she were a detached observer, a stranger. Perhaps that is the way we still live. We are all immigrants to this place even if we were born

here. . . . and in the parts unknown to us we move in fear, exiles and invaders.

This country is a thing that must be chosen—it is so easy to leave—and if we do choose it we are still choosing a violent duality. (62)

So, Atwood argues that to live in Canada is to be divided between the known and the unknown because Canada, unlike the United States for example, lacks a cohesive national identity. This is in part due to its great size, but also to the way it is separated and because of its spatial, social, and economic relationship to the United States. The country is also divided within itself due to the role of Britain in Canada's history and the deep French influences in Quebec.

In her short essay, "Through the One Way Mirror," Atwood argues that while Canadians have their noses pressed up to the glass that is the United States, constantly scrutinizing or praising our every move, most Americans are not altogether concerned about what Canadians are doing "up there." On maps in grade school, American children see Canada as merely a blank space (no provinces marked) above the United States and learn little to no Canadian history, except where it directly affects the United States. Canadians, however, see the U.S. as an important neighbor, soaking up our history and interested in current social and political affairs. In *Surfacing*, the protagonist shows some of her anger towards Americans, complaining:

It doesn't matter what country they're from, my head said, they're still Americans, they're still what's in store for us, what we are turning into. They spread themselves like a virus, they get into the brain and take over the cells and the cells change from the inside and the ones that have the disease can't tell the

difference. . . . If you look like them and talk like them and think like them then you are them, I was saying, you speak their language, a language is everything you do. (128-129)

Atwood notes this lack of “Symbol” or identity for Canadian culture and replaces it with the symbol of “survival” (as she so aptly names her book). She cites Canada as being a “collective victim” and goes on to argue that in the “Basic Victim Positions,” objective experience is to blame for one feeling he/she is a victim. To get past this, one must be a creative “non-victim” and remove the “internal causes of victimization. . . [and] accept your own experience for what it is, rather than having to distort it to make it correspond with others’ versions of it” (38-39). Although she gives this solution, Atwood also notes that one can never get to this point unless the entire society’s position changes (if he/she is in a “victimized” society). An author, however, is in “Position Four [the passing of the victim stage] at the time of writing” (40). So, perhaps Atwood sees Canadian authorship as a way to combat (and eventually overcome) Canada as an “Other.”

One of the most “telling” works dealing with the concern of Canadian national identity is Atwood’s novel *Alias Grace*. Grace Marks is the protagonist of the “story,” which is actually a re-telling/ re-imagining of a true story of a 19<sup>th</sup> century murderess. In the tradition of other Canadian authors, Atwood joins her storytelling with already-present accounts of past Canadian heroes/ important figures. By doing this, Atwood and other Canadian authors in some way “build-up” the Canadian national identity by exposing those less versed in Canadian history to some of its important figures. Like

many of Atwood's characters, Grace is a living duality. She is divided from her country more by her (supposed) crime and her public image, than by her status as an Irish immigrant, however. Grace speaks of the prison Governor's wife's home meetings, saying:

The reason they want to see me is that I am a celebrated murderess. Or that is what has been written down. When I saw it I was surprised, because they say Celebrated Singer and Celebrated Poetess and Celebrated Spiritualist and Celebrated Actress, but what is there to celebrate about murder?" (23)

Grace at this time of narration is not very affected by these accounts, but at the time of her murder trial she is upset by being described in many contradictory ways: as an idiot, as a very proper girl, as beautiful, etc. She questions the validity of these statements, asking "And I wonder, how can I be all these things at once?" (23). Atwood clears Grace's name in her account, accusing her of being doubly "possessed" by her childhood friend Mary Whitney (who actually commits the crimes while occupying Grace's body), and one has to wonder if Atwood intentionally creates a Canadian cultural hero by doing so.

This Canadian cultural hero must be distinctly separate from anything American according to Shannon Hengen's (not so plausible) argument in *Margaret Atwood's Power: Mirrors, Reflections, and Images in Select Fiction and Poetry*. She equates power as American/male and love with Canadian/ female arguing that the latter must "win out" and that a female protagonist must connect with her Canadian foremothers (or actual mother) for redefinition and change within themselves and (hopefully) eventually



Canadian culture. While the argument seems a little incomplete because of the lack of plausible connections between it and the text, Hengen does point out an important aspect of Atwood's fiction: the search for a new metanarrative for Canadian culture. Hengen's assertion of some of Atwood's Canadian male characters as being entrapped in "pathological narcissism" due to their "Americanization" (54) seems stretched, however.

A large part of Margaret Atwood's desire to be a writer seems to have come from her desire to be a *Canadian* writer. In *Negotiating with the Dead*, she recalls her discovery of Canadian Literature. She says:

Through literary magazines, and also through some of my professors, who wrote for them, I discovered a concealed door. . . Outside, to the uniformed observer, there was no life to be seen; but if you'd found the door and managed to make your way inside, all was furious motion. There was a whole microcosm of literary activity going on, as it were, right under my nose. It seems that poets did exist, in Canada . . . They denied they belonged to these [Canada] schools, and then attacked other poets for being in them; also they attacked the critics, most of whom were their fellow poets. (22)

Atwood, like many other Canadians, was unaware of Canadian Literature throughout her adolescence because she was not exposed to in school. Through her works of fiction, and through *Survival* and other critical texts, Atwood has opened up a space for Canadian writers, even though at the time she began in the 1950s, "if you were a Canadian writer you were assumed by your countryfolk to be not only inferior, but pitiable, pathetic, and pretentious" (67). As one of the most prolific and best-selling authors of our day,

Atwood seems far from all of these attributes, and it is due in part to her that the attitude about Canadian women writers (and Canadian writers in general) has changed for the better.

With her emphasis on Canada-centered plots, explorations of the internal consciousness of Canadian characters in her poetry, short-stories, and fiction, as well as her literary criticism, Margaret Atwood's ties to her Canadian heritage are both apparent and important to who she is as a writer and to understanding the stories and subjects that she writes about. Although Atwood is not always kind in her creations of her country and its people, she is always sure to point out that these flaws are due to an important "lack" in the Canadian identity—a lack she has and continues to fill. Although Atwood and her characters are internally divided as Canadians and as outside of the force of nature, they are also divided as women, or "non-male," in a society that continues to favor masculinity.

Atwood is often placed in the category of "feminist" author and is ambivalent about this categorization. In her address to "Frequently Asked Questions," Atwood's manuscripts on the topic show a carefully constructed and controlled answer. There are many crossings out and notes scattered all over the page, showing that Atwood is both concerned about the image she presents concerning her stance on feminism and perhaps unsure as to where she actually does stand on the issue of being a "feminist" author (Papers 200: 74.10). Although many critics do refer to Atwood as a feminist, others like Coral Ann Howells cite Atwood's hesitations about the definition of feminism and what it means to be a feminist writer (19). Perhaps, some critics argue, Atwood's leanings are

more towards discussing “power politics” (also the name of one of her volumes of poetry) between men and women (Howells 7). Atwood’s position on feminism is an important one because it leads into the discussion of women being divided subjects simply because they are female.

As in the United States and other countries, women fought and continue to fight a long and hard battle towards equality. Canadian women, with their “triple handicap,” are disadvantaged in two (or more) ways. As Roberta Hamilton explains in her work,

*Gendering the Vertical Mosaic: Feminist Perspectives on Canadian Society:*

Feminists have disagreed profoundly about the nature of the Canadian state, and about just what might be expected from this sociopolitical set of relations in terms of remedy for past injustice and inequality. Despite these disagreements, feminists have continually pressured the state for change. In the early twentieth century, the women’s movement campaigned for suffrage, rights to property and child custody, and access to politics, education, and professions. The second wave has struggled for birth control, abortion, daycare, equity in employment and pay, and the end to violence against women and to discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. (7)

Throughout these struggles, as in the struggles of all women’s movements across the world, women strive to change their circumstances to those more equal with men, or, in the cases of second and third wave feminisms, to evaluate all persons’ circumstances and to strive for equality in all forms. To fight this dissonance is also to challenge the division women feel from the masculine, hegemonic order of society.

Whether they are internally divided by nature through their encounter with its harsh realities, divided as persons from Canada (a marginalized country), or divided as women in a society based on conventions of masculinity, Atwood's protagonists are faced with obstacles outside of themselves to form one complete "self." Already internally divided based on these factors, many of Atwood's protagonists are also psychologically divided by inhabitation of / haunting by outside entities. These forces, however, can be conquered, as can the multiple personalities these women often take on.

## Chapter II

### The Uncanny Double: Haunting Entities and the Divided Self

#### in Atwood's Fiction

No hints or facts, I didn't know when it had happened. I must have been alright then; but after that I'd allowed myself to be cut in two. Woman sawn apart in a wooden crate, wearing a bathing suit, smiling, a trick done with mirrors; only with me there had been an accident and I came apart. The other half, the one locked away, was the only one that could live; I was the wrong half, detached, terminal.

-Margaret Atwood, *Lady Oracle*

Throughout Margaret Atwood's body of work, the self is constructed as a complicated individual, often one that is divided into two or more personalities or entities (doubles). New discussions have been articulated concerning the Double such as Eric Daffron's article, "Double Trouble: The Self, the Social Order and the Trouble with Sympathy in the Romantic and Post-Modern Gothic," where he explains the idea of the Double emerging from Gothic Literature, and argues that it is the product of a social phenomenon and a way for the Romantics to channel their trouble with representing sympathy (75). Arguments like Daffron's are quite compelling; however, I will be focusing on the traditional psychoanalytic view. This view usually stems from Freud's famous essay "The Uncanny" which sees the Double as a return of the repressed.

A concept first introduced by Ernst Jentsch in his 1906 essay, "On the Psychology of the uncanny," The term is expanded upon by Freud: "It is undoubtedly related to what

is frightening, to what arouses dread and horror; equally certainly, too, the word is not always used in a clearly definable sense, so that it tends to coincide with what excites fear in general ” and is “that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar” (*Uncanny* 123). The uncanny is linked to the double in that:

It is marked by the fact that the subject identifies himself with someone else, so that he is in doubt as to which his self is, or substitutes the extraneous self for his own. In other words, there is a doubling, dividing and interchanging of the self. And finally there is the constant recurrence of the same thing — the repetition of the same features or character-traits or vicissitudes, of the same crimes, or even the same names through several consecutive generations. (*Uncanny* 141-142)

As Freud points out, his understanding of the ‘double’ was shaped by the work of Otto Rank (1914). Rank discusses the connections which the ‘double’ has with reflections in mirrors, with shadows, with guardian spirits, with the belief in the soul and with the fear of death” Freud adds that this “‘double’ was originally an insurance against the destruction of the ego, an ‘energetic denial of the power of death’ . . . and probably the ‘immortal’ soul was the first ‘double’ of the body” (*Uncanny* 142).

The female protagonists in *Lady Oracle*, *Surfacing*, *The Robber Bride*, and *Alias Grace* all come in contact with the uncanny in various ways—most specifically in the form of the spirit of their dead mothers. For Freud, many instances of the uncanny connect with one’s childhood:

When all is said and done, the quality of uncanniness can only come from the fact of the 'double' being a creation dating back to a very early mental stage, long

since surmounted— a stage, incidentally, at which it wore a more friendly aspect.

The 'double' has become a thing of terror. . . (*Uncanny* 148)

The double then, is really a return of the repressed (something once familiar/known), and is therefore indicative of the dividedness within us all. We are divided between who we were and what we experienced as children and who we are today. Freud also notes that “many people experience the [uncanny] feeling in the highest degree in relation to death and dead bodies, to the return of the dead, and to spirits and ghosts” (*Uncanny* 148). For Atwood’s protagonists, these spirits are often their mothers.

Diana Wallace challenges the masculine mindset of Gothic novels and explores female writers’ Gothic novels in her article “Uncanny Stories: The Ghost Story as the Female Gothic.” Wallace argues that The Female Gothic (a tradition with which *Lady Oracle* is often linked) is perhaps a place in which within which:

women writers have been able to explore deep-rooted female fears about women’s powerlessness and imprisonment within patriarchy, and the *déréliction* (to borrow Luce Irigaray’s term) which is the result of their exclusion or abandonment outside the symbolic order. This state of *déréliction* renders women ghost-like: they are ‘nowhere . . . never in touch with each other, lost in the air like ghosts.’ (57)

Atwood’s protagonists, as discussed in Chapter One, are outside of this symbolic order (are the Other) due to their status as Canadians and as women. This connection between the uncanny, the Double, and woman as Other is further exaggerated when one considers the part of the mother in the protagonist’s viewing of the uncanny. Wallace argues that

although the presence of the undead mother is frighteningly uncanny in the Male Gothic, this motif is also present in the Female Gothic and presents even greater complications. She repeats Tania Modleski's argument that the uncanny may be even stronger for women because it is more difficult for women to separate from their mothers, even though they often have a fear of becoming like them (59). She states:

The imagery of pregnancy and childbirth here suggest that a further reason for a fear of male sexuality is what it leads to – not just the terrors of childbirth but also its potential to transform the woman into her mother, repeating her life (and death). (62)

Although the uncanny plays an important part in Atwood's work, Freud's theories do not always seem applicable. Atwood has stated her belief that "the ego does not exist, and that the self is 'a place in which things happen . . . where experiences intersect'" (Grace 106). Atwood's "self," therefore, cannot be solely examined through Freud's viewing of the self—which is often pointed out as "missing the mark" on the development of the female self. Freud's Oedipus model, as he admits, works better for males. For a long time, Freud named women's desire for the male organ "penis envy" (Hamon 1) and argued that, although he was unsure, he thought girls matured in much the same way as boys, but instead of turning away from the mother for a female substitute, they turned to the father, and then to an appropriate male substitute. Freud also argues that to heal the conflict they have experienced with their mothers completely, women must have children to substitute for their lack of a penis. Alcira Mariam Alizade explains Freud's stance:



This mother-daughter conflict, which is both oedipal and pre-oedipal in nature, influences how the patient will come to see herself as a mother. She will tend to look on her children—real or symbolic, present in actual fact or only a future prospect—as penis-babies, as substitutes for her absent manliness and as narcissistic extensions of her self. (7)

Although Freud's argument has often undergone scrutiny by the feminist community, it is helpful for understanding Atwood's work. The formation of the ego and the self as informed by psychoanalysis helps us understand how individuals' ideas of themselves are constructed. When Atwood's "self" encounters the uncanny, especially the dead mother, she is "haunted" by the factors that aided in the construction of herself, and she is often split into two or more personalities through this process.

One of the most apparent examples of the uncanny and the Female Gothic in Atwood's work is *Lady Oracle* (1976). Her third novel, *Lady Oracle* follows Joan Foster, a closet writer of Gothic fiction (under a pseudonym), an acclaimed author for a book of poetry (under her own name), and an executor of her own (fake) death. Joan experiences a turbulent childhood with a mother who is extremely controlling as she constantly battles with her weight and her social relationships. Throughout her life, she has a variety of romantic affairs with men, constructing different (and secret) selves in each instance. Keeping all of these selves separate and under control becomes an issue for Joan, who must now deal with the decision she has made to leave her multiple "lives" behind.

Atwood herself refers to this novel as an "anti-Gothic" where she is "examining the perils of gothic thinking" by casting "real" characters in traditional Gothic roles (like

Joan the writer) then explains that “when you find out that the real people don’t fit these two-dimensional roles, you can either discard the roles and try to deal with the real person or discard the real person” (Fee 67). Margery Fee explains that Joan does this by “simply kill[ing] off anyone who is in the way of a satisfactorily romantic outcome” (67). Joan’s female characters either become mad, die, or both. While Joan’s fictitious characters’ fates are easily resolved, her own life is more difficult to navigate.

But hadn’t my life always been double? There was always that shadowy twin, thin when I was fat, fat when I was thin, myself in silvery negative, with dark teeth and shining white pupils glowing in the black sunlight of that other world. While I watched, locked in the actual flesh, the uninteresting dust and never-emptied ashtrays of daily life. It was never-never land she wanted, that reckless twin. But not twin even, for I was more than double, I was triple, multiple, and now I could see that there was more than one life to come, there were many. (*Lady* 246)

Joan’s many selves have been a part of her life since her childhood. George Herbert Mead examines the most basic of these divisions (between the self that she knows and the self that others see) in his discussion of the individual and the social self.<sup>3</sup> Although seemingly everyone faces this sort of division, Joan’s and many of Atwood’s other female protagonists experience this division in a distinct and extreme way.

Joan’s division of self perhaps begins when she faces problems with her weight as a child. She first realizes this weight “problem” while she is involved in Miss Flegg’s dance class. Unlike the other girls who are thin and agile, she is round and has trouble

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<sup>3</sup> See Introduction Chapter, pages 4-5.

fitting into the costumes. With Joan's mother's insistence, Miss Flegg gives Joan the "special" task of being a mothball while all of the other girls are beautiful butterflies. Extremely distressed, Joan quits dance class, and her war with her mother begins. Joan explains:

. . . I was eating steadily, doggedly, stubbornly, anything I could get. The war between myself and my mother was on in earnest; the disputed territory was my body. . . I reacted to the diet booklets she left on my pillow, to the bribes of dresses she would give me if I would reduce to fit them. . . . I swelled visibly, relentlessly, before her eyes, I rose like dough, my body advanced inch by inch towards her across the dining-room table, in this at least I was undefeated. (*Lady* 69-70)

This adolescent fight with obesity continues to haunt Joan even after she has lost the weight. Often, this is through being haunted by a person she calls "The Fat Lady." The Fat Lady is a woman from the Canadian National Exhibition—an event Joan attends with her Aunt Lou every year of her childhood. Joan is never actually allowed to see this exhibit featuring the Fat Lady, but she continues to fantasize about it the rest of her life. In high school, Joan uses the Fat Lady fantasy to deal with her own life as a good-natured but sexually ignored female. She narrates one of these fantasies:

The crowd burst out laughing. . . But the Fat Lady, oblivious, began to walk carefully out onto the high wire, while the band played a slow, stately melody. At this the crowd stilled, and a murmur of dismay arose. It was obvious this was a dangerous thing for her to be doing, she was so enormously fat. . . . Then, just

before the bell went and the period was over—this was the trick—she would step to safety on the other side and the people would rise to their feet, the roar of their voices her tribute. (103)

Joan gives this Fat Lady not her own face, but the face of another overweight girl at her school. She considers how her husband Arthur would analyze this fantasy, and concludes that he would focus on the destructive attitudes of society, but Joan notes, “But it’s still not so simple. I wanted those things, the [Fat Lady’s] fluffy skirt, that glittering tiara. I liked them” (*Lady* 103). She also knows, however, that this episode is only a few minutes of the Fat Lady’s life. Her real life is full of “sit[ting] in her over-sized chair with her knitting and be[ing] gaped at by the ticket buyers” (*Lady* 103).

The Fat Lady continues to insert herself into Joan’s life as an adult as well—usually during intense moments. In a moment of high stress, while contemplating telling her husband Arthur about her affair with The Royal Porcupine, an eccentric artist whose real name is Chuck Brewer, Joan “sees” the Fat Lady skating along with the figure skaters Arthur is watching on television. “The Fat Lady skated onto the ice. I couldn’t help myself. It was one of the most important moments in my life, I should have been able to keep her away, but out she came in a pink skating costume, her head ornamented with swan’s down” (273). The Fat Lady continues to make appearances in similar traumatic times of Joan’s life.

Joan’s adult construction of herself (despite these fantasies) does not involve her former “fat” self. She makes an extreme effort to hide this former self from Arthur and explains that she does not want Arthur to understand her. She says, “I went to great

lengths to prevent this. Though I was tempted sometimes, I resisted the impulse to confess. . . my early life and innermost self would have appalled him. It would be like asking for a steak and getting a slaughtered cow” (215). In her dreams and fantasies, however, Joan often confronts this former self that has left her divided. She elucidates:

What [Arthur] failed to understand was that there were really only two kinds of people: fat ones and thin ones. When I looked at myself in the mirror. . . . The outline of my former body still surrounded me. . . . I wanted to forget the past, but it refused to forget me; it waited for sleep, then cornered me.” (214)

Joan hides many parts of herself from Arthur, including her authorship of Gothic novels, but Arthur and her other lovers also have multiple personalities. The Polish Count works under the pen-name Mavis Quilp, and the Royal Porcupine destroys his eccentric self to become the more “normal” Chuck Brewer to impress Joan. In short, all of the characters in *Lady Oracle* embody double, if not multiple, personalities.

Joan’s adolescent overweight self divides and haunts her throughout the rest of her life, and her mother does as well—even before her death. Joan’s mother continuously verbally and physically abuses her throughout her childhood, calling her names, tricking her into eating cakes coated with laxative icing, and even stabbing her in the arm in a moment of lost control (*Lady* 124). She relies on her control of Joan and her body to give her own life fulfillment and meaning. Hendrika Freud describes this phenomenon with a term she calls *sympiotic illusion*. Sympiotic illusion is “a matter of the mother providing the child with love on condition that he or she surrender to her wishes. That the mother’s equilibrium depends on her satellite remains hidden” (11). In this kind of relationship, the

mother must be convinced that she is indispensable to the child for his/her well-being. In Joan's case, her mother feels this tie to her project of making Joan into a thin, narcissistic reflection of herself. Margery Fee argues that Joan sees her mother as inexorably tied to the construction of her multiple selves:

Joan sometimes seems to believe that our identities are completely determined by our parents and our culture, and that thus we are in Atwood's terms, victims. . . . Sometimes she moves to the other extreme, apparently believing that she can make up her own identity, regardless of her past, just as she composes the identities of her characters. This view of the individual as "self-made" is a powerful one in our culture. But, in fact, as with most of the dualisms Atwood presents, the reality is somewhere in between the two extremes. We do, to a certain degree, construct our own identities, but we have to work with the materials made available to us by our past and culture. Further, identity is not formed once and for all in childhood, or at any other stage of growth, but is constantly revised and reformulated in reaction to social forces. (37)

Although Fee argues that Joan sees her mother as part of the reason she has constructed these multiple selves, she also claims that for Atwood, one's childhood is only a part of the way her character or "self" is constructed. Although Fee's argument about Atwood's self seems to be plausible, the impact of the mother on Atwood's female characters is undeniable. Like many of Atwood's other female characters who are abused as children, Joan is haunted by her mother and her mother's memory.

Joan's first encounter with her uncanny spectral mother happens when her mother is still alive. Joan attends a spiritual meeting with her Aunt Lou where deceased spirits are encouraged to contact the living. Leda Sprott, the leader of this spiritual group, sees Joan's mother standing behind her and says that she has an urgent message. Joan is confused because her mother is still alive and learns that her mother's "astral body" (a spiritual as opposed to material body that "could float around by itself, attached to you by something like a long rubber band") is the entity that is trying to speak to her, but she is unwilling to listen. She explains: "I particularly didn't like the thought of my mother, in the form of some kind of spiritual jello, drifting around after me from place to place. . . . Nor did I want to hear that she was concerned about me: her concern always meant pain, and I refused to believe in it." (*Lady* 111-112)

This encounter is not the only one that Joan has with the spirit of her mother, astral or otherwise. She also appears near the time of her death in London (where Joan lives after she runs away from home) and near the end of the novel when Joan feels like she is being plotted against and has nowhere left to run. At both points her mother appears "dressed in her trim navy-blue suit with the tight waist and shoulder pads, and her white hat and gloves. Her face was made up, she'd drawn a bigger mouth around her mouth with lipstick, but the shape of her own mouth showed through. She was crying soundlessly. . . mascara ran from her eyes in black tears" (333). The last time she sees her mother is somewhat different, however. Her mother beckons for Joan to join her, and Joan realizes what has united them over the years:

She'd never really let go of me because I had never let her go. It had been she standing behind me in the mirror, she was the one who was waiting around each turn, her voice whispered the words . . . life was her curse. How could I renounce her? She needed her freedom also; she had been my reflection too long. What was the charm, what would set her free? If someone had to come back from the Other Side to haunt me, I thought, why couldn't it be Aunt Lou? . . . 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. (330)

Joan often does not understand why she is haunted by her mother instead of her Aunt Lou—who she frequently wishes and daydreams is her own mother (88). She, in many ways, uses Aunt Lou as a sort of “mother substitute”—receiving emotional support and motherly advice. Joan is haunted by Lou in a different way, however. As a Gothic Romance writer (a profession she keeps mostly hidden) Joan adopts the pen-name Louisa K. Delacourt, her aunt's full given name. She also uses this name when she runs away from home and begins to fashion a new identity for herself. Shannon Hengen argues, “From these two characters [Joan's mother and her Aunt Lou] arose Joan's identity, an identity suspended between opposites: a part of Joan is given to romantic indulgences while another favours duplicity and self-denial” (69). Thus, Joan is divided between two mother figures as well.

Joan must face her divided self in the Gothic Romance she constructs after her forged death. Fiction meets reality when Joan writes her character Felicia as meeting all of her former husband's wives; however, the reader realizes that this is in fact



representative of Joan when one woman is fat and wearing wings (*The Fat Lady*) and Felicia utters “Arthur—“ the name of Joan’s husband (341-343). In her article “*Lady Oracle: The Narrative of a Fool Heroine,*” Clara Thomas argues that

Joan’s past, and her past selves, still beckon and threaten her, but now that she recognizes them as her own self-devised ‘embraces of bondage’ she can also recognize and act in her own area of choice. . . . Joan did not rid herself of her past by her faked suicide, but she did engage in the process of responsibility that she now knows she must engage in. (172)

Although critics are divided on whether or not Joan conquers her divided self and overcomes her victimhood (Fee 74), she is certainly at least on the path to doing so; however, this dividedness will always be a part of her because of her relationship with her mother. As Sonia Mycak explains, “[the] threat of symbiotic union with the mother is made clear and then echoed through the interchangeable identities of Joan and her fictional characters, and the mimetic construction of textual realities” (75). After the final confrontation with her mother, Joan accepts her past as part of her dividedness, but although she considers, she does not wish to become a mother herself (like the protagonist in *Surfacing*) to heal this division. She seems aware of the “return of infant to mother”—a deep identification with her own mother through the birthing of a child (Mycak 97). She narrates: “I wanted children, but what if I had a child that turned out like me? . . . Even worse, what if I turned out to be like my mother? (*Lady* 213). Instead, she explores and heals her dividedness through another “child” of sorts—her writing. Like

Atwood herself (and her other writer/artist protagonists), Joan is a “slippery subject”—divided between her writing self and her non-writing self.

Unlike Joan in *Lady Oracle*, the Surfacer in Margaret Atwood’s second novel, *Surfacing* (1972), finds a way to heal her division. Although her encounter with the uncanny is perhaps just as profound as Joan’s, however, the novel is not usually labeled as Gothic. *Surfacing* is a novel about place. Often compared alongside Margaret Atwood’s *Survival*, which surveys Canadian Literature and its forms, *Surfacing* has been labeled a distinctively Canadian novel. Following an unnamed narrator (I and others have labeled the “Surfacer”) through her interior journey within herself and her external journey to the place of her childhood, *Surfacing* has often been seen as the protagonist’s personal/spiritual/or rebirth journey. Atwood points to this motif of an internal journey while facing external struggle as part of Canadian “survival” in her book by the same name.

*Surfacing* is made up of three parts: the first is told in the present tense, and although she makes distinct observations, the Surfacer is very much situated in the Now—her past is not considered as influential in her present life. In the second part, the narrator begins to explore her past and initiates her mental crisis. Part three returns to the present tense through the narrator’s exploration of delusions and visions and is situated in the present tense narration. By the end of this process, the narrator comes to a present in which she no longer ignores her past completely, but in which her “self is renewed and the past accepted and thus outgrown” (Woodcock 33). *Surfacing* is Atwood’s only novel written to date where the protagonist is unnamed. This causes not only confusion for the

reader, but showcases the “Surfacer’s” lack of self-identity. Throughout the novel, she must rediscover this identity by completing her “re-birth” journey.

Annis Pratt argues in her exploration of the novel that “the solitary world of the psyche is a process which feminist theoreticians are beginning to recognize as a transformational in both the individual and the collective sense” (Davidson 139). Pratt explains that in Feminist, Jungian-based criticism, the rebirth journey can involve a renewal “without any change in being” where the personality is only renewed for its improvement (not in its essential nature), or it may involve an “essential transformation” or total rebirth” for the individual experiencing the journey. The Surfacer, we shall see, is part of the latter group, as she transforms completely.

Although I will not explain all of the steps of the rebirth journey as the Surfacer experiences them, one phase stands out as applicable to my argument: Phase III: “Confrontation with Parental Figures.” As Pratt explains,

[In] women’s rebirth fiction this confrontation most often takes place with memory figures rather than with actual persons, and constitutes an experience which belongs both to the realm of subconscious or societal experience and to the powerful mother-and father-images haunting the deepest reaches of the unconscious. It is thus a key phase if the hero is to complete the full plunge to the nadir of her unconscious, and frequently becomes an *agon* or terminal struggle if unsuccessful. (143)

Atwood has been cited as saying that *Surfacing* is meant to be read as a ghost story (Woodcock 63), and perhaps this is plausible as the Surfacer encounters the ghosts of her

parents, uncanny and otherwise (memory-related). The Surfacer first encounters “ghosts” of her parents through experiencing memories of them, by encountering their old “things” as she explores her childhood home. These memories are not unpleasant ones. Unlike Atwood’s other protagonists, the Surfacer is not verbally or physically abused by her mother—although her mother does seem to have died prematurely. The Surfacer explains, “We came to have faith in her ability to recover, from anything; we ceased to take her illnesses seriously, they were only natural phases, like cocoons. When she died I was disappointed in her” (35). She admits that when her mother died she kept waiting for “word of some kind, not money but an object, a token” (36). Her discovery of her mother’s leather jacket (which Anna often borrows) when she enters the house reminds her that she must keep looking for this token from her mother and her father.

Shortly after her father’s nearly disintegrated body is found in the lake, the Surfacer realizes what her mother has left for her—her childhood scrapbooks. She narrates:

The picture was mine, I had made it. The baby was myself before I was born, the man was God. . . That was what the pictures had meant then but their first meaning was lost now like the meaning of the rock paintings. They were my guides, she had saved them for me, pictographs, I had to read their new meaning with the help of the power. (158)

Though she receives these tokens, the Surfacer also experiences uncanny hauntings from her mother and father. After her mental breakdown where her past memories (including an aborted child and crafted husband) are exposed to her, the Surfacer sees her mother:

“She is standing in front of the cabin, her hand stretched out, she is wearing her grey leather jacket. . . . She must have sensed it, my fear” (182). She also sees her father as a wolf, but then realizes, “I see now that although it isn’t my father it is what my father has become. I knew he wasn’t dead” (186).

Atwood is very clear about her view of the dead. She notes that dead people “persist in the minds of the living. There have been very few human societies in which the dead are thought to vanish completely once they are dead. . . . Most societies assign these dead souls to an abode, and sometimes to several abodes” (*Negotiating* 159). She also notes that: “The unrequested arrival of a dead person is seldom good news, and may indeed be distinctly alarming” and “. . . although the dead have negative powers, they have positive and protective ones as well. Consider Cinderella’s dead mother, purveyor of ballgowns and glass slippers” (*Negotiating* 160).

The Surfacer cannot continue to be haunted by her parents, however. She must accept both her past and her dividedness of self through accepting her parents and the nature gods she has been worshiping as mere memories. She says:

My brother saw the danger early. To immerse oneself, to join in the war, or to be destroyed . . . No gods to help me now, they’re questionable once more, theoretical as Jesus. They’ve receded, back to the past, inside the skull, is it the same place. They’ll never appear to me again, I can’t afford it; from now on I’ll have to live in the usual way, defining them by their absence. . .” (189)

The Surfacer not only says these things about the gods. She also knows she must extinguish the uncanny aspects of her parents. She burns their things in the hope of “clear[ing] a space” (177).

Sherrill Grace sees the Surfacer is being haunted in a different, albeit similar, way. She argues that “the parts of the narrator’s self that have ‘split off,’ her *dopplegangers*, are her aborted baby and her parents. She will not be free of these ghosts until she recognizes them and readmits them into her psychic and emotional life” (109). Grace then points out that the Surfacer meets this *doppelganger* when she “meets herself” in the water during her crucial dive” (explained in Chapter 1) in which she re-discovers the parts of herself that she has repressed. As Grace explains, “By the end of *Surfacing*, the narrator has succeeded in her quest; she has found what she needs to begin a new, complete and free life” (109). She does this through, essentially, impregnating herself.

At the moment of her impregnation, which she orchestrates by choosing the time she knows is right, the Surfacer narrates:

He trembles and then I can feel my lost child surfacing within me, forgiving me, rising from the lake where it has been prisoned for so long, its eyes and teeth phosphorescent; the two halves clasp, interlocking like fingers, it buds, it sends out fronds. (162)

Through this impregnation, the Surfacer not only heals herself and the memories she has of her aborted child; she also heals her divided self. Her two halves, that of her old self and her new self, are now safe to re-join. She must accept this duplicity to become one “true” whole. She later says, “It might be the first one, the first true human; it must be

born, allowed” (191). Becoming a mother is the only way that she can heal and forgive herself.

In Atwood’s *Alias Grace* (1996), the protagonist Grace Marks not only has a rip within her psychological self—but within her body as well. The novel is a re-telling of the story of Grace Marks, a real nineteenth-century Canadian woman who was tried and found guilty of assisting James McDermott in the murder of two people, her employer Thomas Kinnear and his mistress (another housemaid) Nancy. These murders were the most sensationalized story of the mid-1800s in Canada, and accounts of the trial and aspects of Marks's life were well publicized. Atwood was first attracted to the story of Grace Marks through Susanna Moodie’s *Life in the Clearings* as she describes settling in Canada. Atwood follows Moodie’s life as she re-tells it in her volume of poetry *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*.<sup>4</sup> Moodie wrote about seeing a wildly crazy Grace Marks in an institution. One of Moodie’s most famous statements is a re-telling of Grace Marks’ confession to Kenneth MacKenzie. She relays Grace’s supposed words: “Since I helped McDermott to strangle [Nancy] Montgomery, her terrible face and those horrible bloodshot eyes have never left me for a moment. They glare upon me by night and day, and when I close my eyes in despair, I see them looking into my soul. . . .” (*Alias* 347).

In real life, Grace Marks, a sixteen-year-old Irish immigrant, was sentenced to life imprisonment for her role in the murder (which was never fully defined or proven). Grace is argued to have been jealous of Nancy, who was having an affair with Kinnear and also had more power in the house in which they were both working. Grace herself claimed

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<sup>4</sup> See Chapter One, pages 13-14, 16.

various interpretations of her involvement in the murders, including one in which she states that she could not remember what happened on the day of the murders and another in which she claims to have been temporarily possessed by a dead childhood friend of hers. Atwood takes up this latter story in *Alias Grace* where Grace is haunted by her childhood friend Mary Whitney. She also explored Grace's story in different ways previously in a television screenplay she labels "Grace Marks" (1973-1974), which became a film titled *The Servant Girl* (1974), and a stage play titled *Grace* (1979).

In the television version, Grace is "haunted" by Hannah (a stand-in for Nancy) who she purposefully helps to kill, and continues to see her face after her death (as in Moodie's account). Grace says that she and Hannah are the same person because they are both "dying daily." Hannah will not leave Grace alone because she knows Grace helped to kill her and that she is glad she did so (Papers 200: 86.3). The stage play "Grace" is closely based on Moodie's account of Grace Marks—which Atwood seems to endorse at the beginning of her writing career. Moodie's own voice is evoked in this version; she narrates her past with Grace as she has experienced it in the beginning of the play. At the play's conclusion, she also adds in her voice within a 20<sup>th</sup> century framework, bringing the issue of Grace's credibility into the present. Atwood's drafts of the play all vary slightly, fluctuating in the amount of inclusion of Moodie's voice. In the play version, Grace does not know about Nancy's murder until after it happens, and she begs McDermott not to kill Mr. Kinnear. The end is the same as the television screenplay except that Grace is repentant about her actions. She says, "I shouldn't have killed Hannah. She was the same as me. Hannah isn't the one I should have killed;" however,



Grace does not take a consciously active role in these murders; McDermott does almost all of the “work” and there seems to be a progression towards the dividedness in Grace apparent in the later novel (Papers 200: 86.6). Though Atwood’s interest in Moodie seems to accept her testimony in these older works, by the time Atwood writes *Alias Grace* her faith in Moodie’s account has seemed to dwindle. She discusses this wavering in *Alias Grace* through a conversation between the fictional characters of Dr. Simon Jordan (who comes to examine Grace psychologically in the novel) and Rev. Verringer (who petitions for Grace’s freedom). Simon argues, “The public will always prefer a salacious melodrama to a bald tale or mere thievery. But you can see that one might have one’s reservations also about the bloodshot eyes” to which Verringer replies, “Mrs. Moodie. . . has stated publicly that she is very fond of Charles Dickens, and . . . of *Oliver Twist*. I seem to recall a similar pair of eyes in that work, also belonging to a dead female called Nancy. . . Mrs. Moodie is subject to influences” (*Alias* 190).

Atwood’s progression from taking Moodie’s statements as true to a choosing one of Grace’s stories as true is important because it shows a transition from Grace as an externally haunted person (by an uncanny, ghost-like entity) to a possession by a similar being. Grace embodies doubleness and schizophrenic dividedness in a way that Atwood’s other protagonists do not. Lorna Hutchinson describes this possession with the word *dédoublement* (a form of dissociation of personality, doubling, or splitting up—also used to describe a dual personality) and connects Grace’s narration to this as well because we are unable to tell when her true “self” is actually speaking—or if she is inhabited by Mary Whitney at the time of speaking.

This *dédoublement* is problematic for Grace because her voice cannot be trusted—the reader never knows when Grace’s voice is actually hers. Hutchinson explains:

But because Grace passively submits to *dédoublement* and is affected (or overcome) by it, she becomes part of a process in which she is indistinguishable from the agent: Grace embodies both subject and object, I and thou, self and other. (Moreover, Grace is also affected by her own action when she is made to bear the consequences of murder.) Therefore, although Grace is passive when the consciousness of Mary Whitney inhabits her mind, she nevertheless sustains the principal effects of the action of *dédoublement*. She shares her voice, her thoughts, her body with an external (become internal) agent. Apart from the hypnosis scene (during which some participants remain skeptical as to its authenticity), the two beings are indistinguishable to those who keep company with Grace. (48-49)

In this hypnosis scene at the end of the book, witnesses experience hearing Mary Whitney’s voice from Grace’s body. This hypnosis is questionable, as is Grace’s narration in general. The reader must ask if Grace fabricates this story for her own purposes or if this voice actually from another dead, possessive entity. As discussed in chapter one, Grace seems to construct different versions of herself and has different versions constructed about her. Is she a mild-mannered quilt seamstress who is ignorant of the crimes she has committed, or is she a calculating, deceitful murderess? Characters and doctors throughout the novel think of her in both ways, and her narrative is certainly

constructed. She narrates while relating a psychological examination with Dr. Jordan involving vegetables and thinking about quilt patterns she would create: “But what I say to him is different. I say, I don’t know, Sir. . . .I said this last this last thing to be mischievous. I did not give him a straight answer, because saying what you really want out loud brings bad luck, and then the good thing will never happen” (98). The line between Grace’s internal thoughts and external speech seems to be a distinct one throughout the novel.

Marxist critic Louis Althusser’s concept of interpellation describes the process by which ideology addresses the (abstract) pre-ideological individual and successfully producing him or her as a subject. Althusser argues against the classical definition of the subject as cause and substance; for him, the situation always precedes the subject (individual or collective), and the subject is “always-already interpellated [a subject]” (174-176). He argues:

The category of the subject is constitutive of all ideology, but at the same time and immediately I add that the category of the subject is only constitutive of all ideology insofar as all ideology has the function (which defines it) of constituting concrete individuals as subjects. In the interaction of this double constitution exists the functioning of all ideology, ideology being nothing but its functioning in the material forms of existence of that functioning. (171)

In other words, Althusser sees all people as already having subjecthood simply because they are always *already* a part of society. Being talked about before birth and then entering into a world where everything is based on ideology (and the societal Ideological

State Apparatuses which perpetuate these ideologies), everyone is already a subject, where he/she recognizes or is recognized by others as one. Althusser goes on to give examples about how we show that we recognize the subjecthood of others:

To take a highly ‘concrete’ example, we all have friends who, when they knock on our door and we ask, through the door, the question ‘Who’s there?’ answer (since ‘it’s obvious’) ‘It’s me’. And we recognize that ‘it is him’, or ‘her’. We open the door, and ‘it’s true, it really was she who was there’. To take another example, when we recognize somebody of our (previous) acquaintance (re)-connaissance) in the street, we show him that we have recognized him (and have recognized that he has recognized us) by saying to him ‘Hello, my friend’, and shaking his hand (a material ritual practice of ideological recognition in everyday life – in France, at least; elsewhere, there are other rituals). (172)

Because we are always already subjects, we “constantly practice the rituals of ideological recognition, which guarantee for us that we are indeed concrete, individual, distinguishable and (naturally) irreplaceable subjects” (172) Within the structure of the prominent Ideological State Apparatus of the prison, Grace constructs her own image of subjecthood within this system while her image is constructed by it as well. She is always already a subject, but Grace tries to construct how she appears to others, as well as how she narrates her life and possible crimes. Dr. Jordan narrates, “Her strongest prison is of her own construction” (363).

Grace’s life does not begin in prison; her family is made up of Irish immigrants—a mother who dies of sea-sickness and child-bearing on the journey to Canada, an

overbearing and alcoholic father, and an assortment of younger siblings. Grace goes outside of the home to work as a young teenager and eventually breaks away from her family altogether due to her father's pleas for money used for alcohol. Due to her lack of familial connections and loss of her mother, Grace searches for a sort of "mother-replacement" to fill these gaps. Grace finds this in Mary Whitney, a girl a few years older than her at one of her places of employment. Mary Whitney is a good friend to Grace, and they become very close; however, Mary gets into trouble when she becomes pregnant by their employer's son on one of his visits home from college. Mary decides to get an abortion, which goes horribly wrong and eventually results in her death. Amelia Delfaco makes the connection between the uncanny and Mary's death arguing: "After she dies of a botched abortion, Mary becomes a spectre, occupying the liminal space of the undead, narratively marginalized to the realm of fantasy or psychosis" (775). Instead of passing into some plane of non-existence, Mary inhabits Grace, taking over her body when she wishes. Grace is unaware of these sequences, although she often has hazy dreams involving her possessed actions.

Mary's deadly abortion is part of a theme of the threat of bearing children throughout the novel. Unlike Atwood's other novels, such as *Surfacing*, in which having a child can be a healing experience, in *Alias Grace*:

pregnancies are rarely successfully carried to term. Mary's deadly abortion and Nancy's murder (narratively constructed as at least in part due to her transgressive pregnancy) emphasize the mortal peril of reproduction, stressing the dangers from within and without. In each case it is a woman's

reproductive ability itself that precipitates her violent death. In fact, corpses in the novel are predominantly female, including Grace's mother (with her pregnancy-like swelling caused by a tumour), Mary, and Nancy. (Defalco 777)

Though this argument from Defalco holds truth, it is missing one key component:

Grace's possible pregnancy at the end of the novel. Released from prison, Grace meets Jamie Walsh (a neighboring boy two years her junior at the time of the murders) and they get married. Despite her old age (she is almost 46 at the time of her narration), she explains in a letter to Dr. Jordan:

. . .I'd thought I was well past the time for child-bearing. But unless I am much mistaken, I am now three months gone. . . It is hard to believe, but there has been one miracle in my life already, so why should I be surprised if there is another one? Such things are told of in the Bible; and perhaps God has taken it into his mind to make up for little for all I was put through at a younger age. (459)

Placed in a letter about forgiveness towards herself and others, these statements give an indication that although perhaps still internally "doubled/possessed," Grace is on the path to tranquility by bringing a life into the world. This is an especially healing factor when many consider her to have taken the lives of others.

Atwood's novel *The Robber Bride* provides a glance into something she rarely shows the reader in her work—a supportive community of women. Lives torn apart by a manipulating, treacherous, beautiful woman called Zenia, Tony the professor of History, Roz the successful businesswoman, and Charis the flower-child yoga instructor bond together to support each other through the loss and betrayal of their husbands. Shortly

after the novel begins, the women hold one of their monthly lunches at a fictional restaurant/ bar in Toronto named *Toxique*—which is exactly what Zenia is in the women’s lives before and *after* her false (constructed) death. During this particular lunch, the women glance Zenia (who they believe to be dead) in the mirror near their table. The narration follows Tony’s point of view at this point in the story: “Tony feels a chill. The door must have opened. She looks up, and into the mirror. Zenia is standing here, behind her, in the smoke, in the glass, in this room. Not someone who looks like Zenia: Zenia herself. It’s not a hallucination” (34).

This is not the only time the women of the book see Zenia in the mirror. Zenia often takes the form of their family members, strangers, or themselves. Charis often encounters Zenia in the form of her daughter Augusta, who she does not quite understand. The narrator voices:

It was only Augusta, but that’s not what Charis thought. She thought it was Zenia . . . . Zenia, who had been dead for five years. He worst thing, thinks Charis, was that she’d confused Zenia with her own daughter, who is nothing like Zenia at all. . . . The worst thing was that she hadn’t really been all that surprised. (51)

While Charis sees her daughter as Zenia, Tony and Roz often see her as parts of their own body, as well as reflected in mirrors and their environments. One of Roz’s dreams gives us a glimpse of her thoughts: “Sometimes she has a dream about Zenia . . . re-assembling herself from the fragments of her own body after the bomb explosion [Zenia’s fake death]: a hand, a leg an eye” (78). Roz also feels Zenia in the objects surrounding her at work and otherwise (104). She tends to see Zenia in more material

ways than the other two. For Tony, Zenia is not an uncanny “reflection” or something “material,” she is a haunting presence that will always be a part of her and Wes’ relationship. Tony is the only woman who has retained her husband despite Zenia’s considerable interventions, and she must try to control her husband’s and her own memories of Zenia. When Zenia returns, Tony is particularly afraid that her husband Wes will be involved with Zenia again.

Jacques Lacan uses what he calls the “Mirror Stage” to describe the process of development one goes through to become a subject and a part of the Symbolic order (the social world of intersubjective relations, knowledge of ideological conventions, the acceptance of law, and the ability to act with others through language). He explains:

This event can take place . . . from the age of six months, and its repetition has often made me reflect upon the startling spectacle of the infant in front of the mirror. Unable as yet to walk, or even to stand up, and held tightly as he is by some support, human or artificial . . . he nevertheless overcomes, in a flutter of jubilant activity, the obstructions of his support and, fixing his attitude in a slightly leaning–forward position, in order to hold it in his gaze, brings back an instantaneous aspect of the image. (Lacan 3-4)

With this event, the baby becomes integrated into the society surrounding him. He sees an image of himself that he both recognizes as himself and as the “Other.” He might even become obsessed with this “specular image” of himself, resulting in Narcissism (love of self). In other words, the “self” the baby sees is an idealized self. He sees it as anticipatory of stages of development he will soon reach and he assumes an identity



“derived from the *discrepancy* between a present and an ideal self—and *that* is what is recognized with such jubilation. Henceforth the real self for the subject is the one in the mirror . . .” (Johnson 57). The baby identifies with this form he sees as whole, and his sense of his “self” will always be dependent on the Other after this experience. For the rest of his life he continues to be “fragmented” and searching to make himself into the idealized self (Johnson 58-59).

Roz, Charis, and Tony often see Zenia surrounding them in mirrors, and because they wish to be more like Zenia, many times what they see is a representation of that once-viewed “ideal self.” Jean Wyatt argues that the protagonists desire this because they see Zenia as a “being complete with the object a<sup>5</sup> whose drive energies are intact” (22) and therefore experiences “unlimited jouissance” (32). For Wyatt, “Zenia functions as a double for the protagonists—not in the usual sense of the subject’s mirror image, but in Lacan’s more specific sense of the uncanny double who incarnates the fundamental fantasy, the fantasy of the subject completed by the object a” (32). Lacan’s uncanny is quite different from Freud’s; for Lacan, the uncanny comes from an encounter with another subject who embodies their *objet a*, as opposed to Freud’s uncanny which comes from the outside world and was once known but is now repressed (Wyatt 34). This form of the uncanny is often experienced in the novel, as is Freud’s view of the uncanny in the

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<sup>5</sup> *Obj[c]t a* is an object of unattainable desire that designates both what symbolizes Lacan’s “lack” and also the lack itself. This object is not that towards which desire tends, but rather the cause of desire. Desire is not a relation to an object but a relation to a lack.

returning of the repressed. Often what these women repress is their tortured childhoods; all of these women are neglected or abused by their mothers as children and form new/different selves because of these experiences.

One of Tony's coping mechanisms for dealing with abandonment by her mother is her second language, which consists of speaking and thinking words backwards. The narrator, of whose identity we are always unsure, explains "She could speak it in her sleep, and sometimes does" (20). Tony's language is not only a route of escape for her- it can also be dangerous: "It's her seam, it's where she's sewn together, it's where she could split apart. Nevertheless, she still indulges in it" (20). Tony sees this language as "archaic," and this appeals to her as a history buff. There are Tony herself is backwards. She is left handed, and she feels an intense separation because of this. At the beginning of the novel, we see her grading papers: "Today she marks quickly, today she's synchronized. Her left-hand knows what her right hand is doing. Her two halves are superimposed: there's only a slight penumbra, a slight degree of slippage" (9). Tony also creates a new identity for her future husband, West, whose given name is Stewart.

Tony's relationship with her mother is not something is she is comfortable relating. After she finds Zenia-who constructs her into a different social being- to be her "mother substitute" in college, however, she begins to "open-up" about her past. She has problems at first because the memory of her mother is composed of "shiny fragments. Every once in a while Tony takes out the pieces and arranges and rearranges them, trying to make them fit" (150). Throughout her early childhood, Tony's mother is emotionally detached, only showing her affection when she is intoxicated. Eventually, she deserts

Tony and her father, Griff, and Tony essentially raises herself. She speculates when she gets older that she might have a twin that died because she is left-handed. She imagines her twin *Tnomerf Ynot* (her name backwards) “was a good deal taller than Tony herself. Taller, stronger, more daring” (153). Tony’s relationship with her mother becomes more stable once she is dead. Tony guards her ashes on a shelf where she can make sure she “stay[s] put” (129). Tony does have an uncanny experience, however, when Zenia - who she believes to be her mother - climbs into her dorm window one night. Tony thinks, “She’s comes back to exact retribution, but for what?” (190). For Tony, Zenia and her mother are reflections of each other: dangerous and controlling in their own ways.

Tony knows that to conquer Zenia, she must become like Zenia. Unlike the other two women, she does not have children to rely on—although she does have West. At the end of the novel, when Zenia’s after-resurrection antics have angered and again destroyed all of the women, Tony constructs a plan to murder her: “Tony knows that she herself is not a decent person, she’s known that ever since childhood. . . . she has another self, a more ruthless one, concealed inside her. She is not just Tony Fremont, she is also *Tnomerf Ynot*,. . . and in theory, capable of much that Tony herself is not quite up to” (447). Although Tony’s plan falls through, she does confront Zenia verbally. Instead of caving in and repeating the pattern of destruction Zenia began with her husband and herself long ago, Tony resists her persuasiveness and leaves her hotel room. When Zenia actually dies at the end of the novel, Tony is the one that keeps her ashes. Like her mother’s ashes, Tony desires to keep them in their “place.”

Charis' "double" is much more active in tragic situations than Tony's "double." Born with the name Karen to a mother who expects too much of her and physically abuses her, Charis constructs a new reality for herself with her new name; however, Karen often comes back (like many of Atwood's uncanny spirits) for retribution. Charis' relationship with her daughter is also a complicated one, although not a negative one. Like many college age women, Augusta (who has herself added an *a* to her given name August) feels disconnected from her mother, who seems so different from her in many ways. By the end of the novel, they realize the positive aspects of their relationship, but Charis constantly refers to her daughter's criticisms of her slovenly ways. She tells her mother to clean better and more often, to straighten her shoulders, and to be more organized in general. Charis loves her daughter, but she is confused by these things.

However strained their current relationship, Augusta's appearance in Charis' life did, in a way, make her whole after Zenia causes her husband (Augusta's father) to leave and rips Charis' life apart. During her pregnancy, Charis thinks of "the baby inside her [as] Karen again, unborn, and with Charis watching over her she would have a better chance. She would be born to the right mother, this time" (304). While the other two characters try to leave their past behind, Charis sometimes is unable to do that because her childhood self "Karen" returns. Charis split from "Karen" at a traumatic point in her life—when she is raped by her uncle: "He splits her in two right up the middle and her skin comes open like the dry skin of a cocoon, and Charis flies out" (290). After this, she decides to take on Charis' identity because Charis is stronger. ". . . Karen is in storage. Charis only remembers when she takes Karen out, from the suitcase under her bed where

she has put her” (293). Karen comes back when Charis gets pregnant, when Zenia leaves the first time with Charis’ husband, and at the end of the novel. In the last situation, the reader may even question if Karen/Charis is Zenia’s killer. Charis imagines Karen doing the exact act that kills Zenia: “[Karen’s] been waiting all the time, all these years, for a moment like this, a moment when she could get back into Charis’s body and use it to murder. She moves Charis’ hands towards Zenia . . . . she pushes her backwards, right through the balcony door. . .” (474). Though it is unclear to readers who kills Zenia, Karen is certainly a possibility.

Roz also has a desire to kill Zenia when she blackmails Roz through her son with whom she pretends to have an affair. Roz, however, seems to be the best prepared to deal with Zenia. As the president of a company, she is used to dealing with female relationships, although the first time Zenia is around she does destroy Roz’s marriage and her husband takes his life. Roz Grunwald also starts off her life with a different name (Rosalind Greenwood), but her last name is changed by her family due to her father’s shady business dealings. Roz is divided between her early childhood life of growing up with a mother she can never please and a father who is absent because of the war and her other, wealthier life where she is shunned for being of a different culture. Like Charis, Roz seems to draw strength from her daughters. She thinks, “They are so wonderful!” and “She gazes at them with ferocious love. *Zenia*, she thinks, *you bitch! Maybe you had everything else, but you never had such a blessing. You never had daughters*”(85). Her daughters often provide emotional support, as did her son when he was younger. She is very worn down by her role as a mother and company president; however, and she often

wishes to be someone else: “—sometimes she would like to be Zenia” (435). Roz’s experience of the uncanny is more like Lacan’s use of the term instead of Freud’s; she sees Zenia as embodying her own *objet a*— as showcasing her own lack.

Though Roz, Charis, and Tony are complicated and “doubled” characters, Zenia is the most complicated character of all. She constructs multiple identities and versions of her childhood (in all of them she is abused in some way like the protagonists), as well as her adult life experiences. Coral Ann Howells argues Zenia “seems to be real but she has a double existence for she belongs to two different fictional discourses, that of realism and of fantasy” (81). Like all of the protagonists of Atwood’s novels, Zenia has multiple identities.

## Conclusion

I am the older one now, I'm the stronger. If she stays here any longer she will freeze to death; she will be left behind, the wrong time. It's almost too late.

I reach out my arms to her, bend down, hands open to how I have no weapon. *It's all right*, I say to her. *You can go home now*.

-Margaret Atwood, *Cat's Eye*

*Cat's Eye* is just one of Atwood's many other works containing characters with divided natures which I am unable to discuss due to time and space restrictions. In this work, the main protagonist, Elaine Risley, a middle-aged acclaimed artist narrates in retrospective her life and the problems she faces with moving into the future and conquering the double consciousness imposed upon her by her childhood friend Cordelia. Elaine's healing comes from her own creative "child" (art) much like Joan in *Lady Oracle* does with her writing (*Cat's Eye*). Another novel of interest not discussed at length is Atwood's first novel *The Edible Woman*. This novel introduces the reader to Marian who is divided between her "thinking" self and the self she presents to society which threatens to consume her.

These themes of the divided/doubled subject are not only apparent in Atwood's fiction works, but in her poetry and other works as well. Atwood's divided self has often been discussed in various ways; however, this is the first attempt to connect absent or abusive mothers and this dividedness, as well as the solution many of these protagonists find to heal their dividedness by becoming mothers themselves.

My argument has incorporated the ideas of several theorists and several branches of thought. What can be learned from these theorists collectively is that the self is a complicated entity. Whether one is “doubled,” “haunted,” or secure in his/her subjecthood, the self can (and has) been described and interpreted in various ways. This work has explored many of these views, and it has opened up new ways to think about the self and the divided self in Margaret Atwood’s works. What is related, most importantly, is the role of the mother in the division of Margaret Atwood’s protagonists—a division which is healed by acceptance of duality/multiplicity of self and by embracing motherhood in some form. I have argued that everyone is divided, not only fictional characters, according to theorists such as George H. Mead, Louis Althusser, and Jacques Lacan, although we must find our own “wholeness” in different ways. Even as I write this now, I am doubled—torn between my social self and my “academic” writing voice. As Atwood explains of her own writing:

That was then, this is now, you never step twice into the same paragraph, and when I typed out that sentence I wasn’t myself. Who was I then? My evil twin or slippery double, perhaps. I am after all a writer, so it would follow as the day the night that I must have a slippery double—or at least a mildly dysfunctional one—stashed away somewhere. . . . this other person—the one credited with authorship—is certainly not me. (*Negotiating* 35-36)



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