



## DICHOTOMY IN ATWOOD'S WORKS

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**ABSTRACT**

Atwood uses Blake's contrasting mythological imagery and metaphorical language in "Double Persephone". She unveils the schizoid or double nature of Canada for man and woman in the society. She observes that Canadians came to develop ambivalent feelings toward their country. She later on finds dichotomy in Power Politics. She explores the relationship between sexual roles and power structures on exploration of personal relationships and international politics.

**KEYWORDS :** contrasting, imagery, unveil, ambivalent

Atwood born in Ottawa in November 1939, grew up in suburban Toronto and was a daughter of a forest entomologist. She was influenced by critic Northrop Frye and Blake's use of mythological imagery that we may find in her fictions and poems used much widely. She wrote "Double Persephone" (poetry) 1961, "The Circle Game" (poetry) 1966, "The Animals in That Country" (poetry) 1968, "The Edible Woman" (novel) 1969, "The Journals of Susanna", "Moodie" (poetry) 1970, "Procedures for Underground" (poetry) 1970, "Power Politics" (poetry) 1971, "Surfacing" (novel) 1972, "Lady Oracle" (novel) and some other works worth reading. She got involved in drama, journalism and debating. The critic Alex Clark says about her in the words, "What I admire in her novels is that, although subversion of genre is not uncommon these days, I think she does it in a very clever way: she makes the genre-busting stuff mirror the psychology of the characters. The genre she uses, and the way she subverts it, reflect aspects of those characters' own modes of constructing their reality or fictionalizing their own existence."

In *Double Persephone*, we find her using Blake's contrasting mythological imagery and metaphorical language. Poetry named "The Circle Game" generated widespread critical recognition. She searches the meaning of art and literature and the Gothic in *The Animals*. She pays her attention to the schizoid, that is, double nature of Canada for man and woman in the society. She observes that Canadians came to develop ambivalent feelings toward their country. She later on finds dichotomy in *Power Politics*. She has been interested in exploring the relationship between sexual roles and power structures on exploration of personal relationships and international politics. She investigated human relationship in the light of social codes of behavior. In "Surfacing" she focuses on the dichotomous nature of family relationships, cultural heritage, and self-perception. The novel takes into account relations between mothers and daughters and explores twentieth-century female identity by illustrating the monstrosity of the societal roles created by and for women. When we go through her novel "Life before Man" we find her dissecting the relationships between some characters. First character is Elizabeth. She is a married woman to have been mourning the recent death of her lover that is Elizabeth's husband, Nate, who is unable to choose between his wife and his lover. The second character is named Lesje. He is Nate's lover to have been working with Elizabeth at a museum of natural history. All these characters are emotionally isolated from one another. They are unable to take responsibility for their feelings as their relationships deteriorate.

In "The Handmaid's Tale" She depicted the dystopia of Gilead, a future America in which Fundamentalist Christians have imposed dictatorial rule. In a world being polluted by toxic chemicals and nuclear radiation most women are sterile.

Women gave birth to children who were forced to become Handmaids. Official surrogated mothers who enjoyed some privileges yet remained under constant surveillance. Almost all other women have been deemed expendable. The novel focuses on an imagined future, but the possibility of this kind of world is not to be discarded.

"Surfacing" has been regarded as an example of modern female Gothic for its depiction of an emotionally and socially repressed protagonist. The protagonist after she learnt of her father's disappearance from his cabin takes a harrowing trip with her lover and another couple to the wilderness. During the journey she confronts painful memories from her past and by moving beyond the "surface" of her emotions and allowing herself to truly explore her pain, she is able to free herself from it. We can say that "The Edible Woman" is described actually as proto-feminist where she describes that disorder in society has been widely politicized. She opines, "I didn't invent feminism and it certainly didn't invent me". "But I'm naturally sympathetic to it." Smith feels that "The Edible Woman was absolutely of its time, and yet every time someone reads it for the first time it's of their time, it's for them. And all her books, wherever you come across them, have the great power of their own time and also for now."<sup>1</sup>

Carmen Callil says that "like George Eliot, she connects women's lives to injustice and to politics generally; because being a very, very intelligent woman, or being any good sort of woman in our time, did give you a good sense of the underdog; that is unavoidable for our generation." The protagonist of the novel named *Surfacing* goes through an archetypal retreat to the irrational wilderness similarly as with her novels. She undergoes a transformation through contact with native and Québec cultures before she reintegrates into society.

Atwood understands this masculine urge very well indeed. She thinks that it is painful and agonizing about a lover's previous partners. It is the peculiar intensification of erotic desire predicated upon a kind of repulsed fascination being polluted by the knowledge. Oryx's past is one of rape and abuse, but that Jimmy, was indirectly one of the abusers and he watched the porn films made of Oryx's predicament avidly enough. Now he wants to keep using her to gratify his sexual desires. It is a good call by Atwood to leave us in Jimmy's position being unsure whether her anger at the way she was treated is buried too deeply to be retrieved or just isn't there at all. We find the description in the novel being cited in the words "We don't want to have sex with Oryx, but 'we' do nevertheless feel entitled to a good rummage around in her most intimate being. Of course she's only a fictional character; she's not 'real', actually I'm tempted to go with Snowman on this one." "Mmm", said Jimmy. He didn't want to get into what is real thing with *Crake*".<sup>2</sup>

Men judge women by criteria of 'sexiness' which is here being a strictly utilitarian category. The women are assessed only in terms of how useful they are in helping the male voyeur to crack one out. This isn't to say anything very original, but one of the more unsettling features of Atwood's novel. The problem is that it tends to 21<sup>st</sup> century life has leached all the joy from sex'. To be more specific, it encourages reader to engage in a kind of saloon-bar psychoanalysis. 'Jimmy didn't get enough love from his mum, that's why he sleeps with so many women.' Crake's mum collaborated in the murder of his father and then married his uncle, so that Crake brews up a planet-killing superbug to take revenge upon the whole world exactly as Hamlet did before him. Oryx and Crake is to do with parenting. Jimmy's relationship with his shallow Father and his too-deep damaged Mother seemed to me well-drawn; although there's no shortage of examples of that kind of thing in contemporary fiction. His relationship with his stepmother is handled in a sketchier manner, because by then Jimmy has moved from being a child into debatable adolescent land between childhood and adulthood. His coup de founder for the child Oryx neatly balances the immature selfishness of male sexual desire with a compromised but we should think it genuine parental urge to protect. That this urge is all tangled up with guilty sexual desire is another uncomfortable truth that Atwood recognizes.

The Handmaid's Tale is an urgent, personal, "female" document. It is the academics' "male" commentary on it is glib and condescends fatuous and self-serving. Atwood has said in interviews that she wanted to end *The Handmaid's Tale* on an optimistic note to indicate that the Republic of Gilead did not last forever and to provide the reader with "historical" information unavailable to Offer. It is very deflating and heavily ironic coda. Crake is the deranged idealist who wants to rid the world of human cruelty and destructiveness, though he doesn't himself believe in either God or Nature and would appear to be wholly amoral. In place of *Homo sapiens* Crake has created his new species of humanity who is simple, placid, dull-normal creatures and lacks any sense of ego, or humor.

The constraining mantle of post-apocalyptic genre is borne lightly by Atwood in *Oryx and Crake*. This kind of cautionary fantasies have become so popular in recent decades that revitalizing the form is a considerable challenge. Where there is an apocalypse, there must be an apocalypse-catalyst, or causer: the monomaniac Mad Scientist. Where there is such a villain, there must be a foil: the sensitive witness, the survivor who like Ishmael lives to tell the tale. There may even be a third person that is a love object. To them the two contend and in this case the former prostitute Oryx, whom Crake hires to educate the new breed of humans. She becomes for the Children of Crake the truly female figure. We get more emotionally felt and get emotionally involved with characters like Jimmy, Snowman and the elusive Oryx. We get more emotionally involved when the earth's entire population, billions of men, women, children, are dying. Such vast cataclysms leave us unmoved no matter how skillfully rendered by so trenchant and committed a writer as Atwood, though visual dramatizations, as in Steven Spielberg's recent remake of *The War of the Worlds*, can rouse the viewer to a visceral horror. It might seem to substitute for an emotional engagement. With its plethora of freaky forms *Oryx and Crake* suggests one of those unnerving Saul Steinberg drawings in which recognizable human figures are surrounded by bizarre cartoon characters, human and animal and geometrical, some of them here stick figures.

Early in *Moral Disorder*, in the ironically titled "The Art of Cooking and Serving," we return another time to the wilderness setting of *Surfacing*. The focus isn't now on an adult daughter who has lost her parents but on an eleven-year-old girl anxiously caught up in the mystery and dread of

her middle-aged mother's pregnancy. She is warned by her father. Her mother could become "very ill", the daughter takes over the most strenuous household tasks. The girl thinks: "He always thought I knew more than I knew, and that I was bigger than I was, and older, and hardier. What he mistook for calmness and competence was actually fright." Only after the baby's birth that the family has returned to the city. The girl is older; she rebels against her mother and the household duties that have shadowed her at the cusp of adolescence. Atwood's yet unnamed narrator is alert to "seductive and tawdry and frightening pleasures".

Atwood's narrator understands that her function is to tell stories and to make "legendary". It was once the stuff of ordinary life: "The stories she most wants to hear are about herself, herself when younger; herself when much younger." When the mother's memory at last fades, the narrator must evoke out of her own imagination an ending to the final story she has told her mother. What more eloquent and heartrending ending to this work of fiction published nearly thirty-five years after *Surfacing* is a final evocation of the wilderness site in northern Quebec. Here Atwood's father brought his family each summer: "Then they all climb up the hill, toward the Lab, and vanish among the trees."

## REFERENCES

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