THE POLITICS OF RELATIONSHIPS:

AN EXAMINATION OF MARGARET ATWOOD'S *THE EDIBLE WOMAN*,

*SURFACING, AND SURVIVAL*

by

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Abstract

In her poetry and novels, Margaret Atwood explores political realities in the relationships between women and men, and to a significant degree her insights into power-patterns are shaped by an awareness of the ways in which people are trained by their society from childhood to hold one set of attitudes toward women and another toward men. Her portraits of women and men, and of the relationships between them, demonstrate how this double standard has destructive consequences for both sexes, among them the suppression, denial and eventual atrophy of feeling, resulting in relationships governed not by love but by subtle power-games which are characterized by insensitivity and ruthlessness and in which men hold the advantage.

In Survival, Atwood offers a "map" of Canadian Literature, and emphasizes the number of victims to be found therein and the extent to which survival is a preoccupation with Canadian writers. An inconsistency is apparent here, for, although she touches upon sexism, she does not explore the ways in which sex-role conditioning encourages women to play victim roles. Atwood's own analysis of politics in woman-man relationships in the novels and poetry is inconsistent with this omission in Survival; the failure in that book to deal with the realities of sexism in Canadian literature indicates that Atwood's analysis of sexism is incomplete.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## Introduction

The Edible Woman;
- Relationships Among Women; Marian and the Enemy......1
  - Marian's Relationships with Men......................18
  - Marian and Her Self.............................32

Surfacing;
- The Unnamed Protagonist and Joe......................37
  - David / Anna....................................42
  - Man vs Woman....................................47
  - Woman to Woman..................................55
  - The Protagonist vs Herself.......................62

Survival.............................................67

A Selected Bibliography
INTRODUCTION

The fact that Margaret Atwood is a woman, writing in Western society in the second half of the twentieth century, has been considered in this thesis as being of central importance to her work and its reception. Canada in 1974 is still a patriarchy, with a long patriarchal tradition, and the most recent upsurge of feminist rebellion has yet to make real changes in the structural underpinnings of that society; modern capitalism as we know it, for example, would no longer exist if women were entirely liberated, depending as it does upon the unpaid or low-paid labour of women. What this means is that Atwood, a member of an oppressed group, writing books about contemporary Canadian society, cannot in my opinion be read without reference to the analyses of the Women's Liberation Movement and the feminist writings of other periods; hence the bibliography includes a large number of these. It may be argued that to read Atwood with an eye to political considerations is to do her a disservice, to fail in sensitivity to her art. But as Survival clearly indicates, Atwood herself regards such political realities as the economic and cultural domination of Canada by the United States as of direct relevance to Canadian art and artists. Art does not exist in a vacuum; it both reflects and perpetuates values; and just as a black Southerner would be unable to give full credit for artistry to a racist author, so it becomes impossible for a modern feminist to be oblivious to sexism in art. On the subject of the radically altered feminist consciousness, Margret Andersen says:

Indeed it is sometimes quite painful to be a
feminist. When you cannot see Hamlet any-
more without giving much of your attention
to Ophelia and to the cavalier way in which
she is treated by both her father and her
lover;...when Camus suddenly is no longer
flawless in your eyes because of his failure
to see woman other than in her relationship
to man, then, indeed, something quite grave
has happened...I used to admire Henri Peyre
for his work, I still do, but it is an admir-
ation mixed with disillusion and regret.¹

This is not to claim that Atwood is sexist; only that to read any
author of either sex without an awareness of whether their work
implies an acceptance and therefore a perpetuation of sexist at-
titudes is, ultimately, to contribute to a system that oppresses
half its members.

In "Radical Feminism" Bonnie Kreps distinguishes between

...(1) the largely economically oriented
(usually Marxist) segment which sees liber-
ation for women as part of a socialist revo-
lution; (2) liberal groups like the National
Organization of Women...working for some
kind of integration of women into the main
fabric of society; and (3) radical feminism,
which chooses to concentrate exclusively on
the oppression of women as women and not as
workers, students, etc...Its basic aim could
fairly be stated as, "There shall be no char-
acteristics, behaviour, or roles ascribed to
any human being on the basis of sex."...we
must fight the myth of the so-called 'female'
character;...the corrupt notion we now call
'love', which is based on control of another
rather than on love for the growth of another;
we must fight the institutionalization of the
oppression of women - especially the institu-
tion of marriage...Radical feminism is called
'radical' because it is struggling to bring

¹ Margret Andersen, Comp., Mother was not a person: (Montreal:
about really fundamental changes in our society.2

The third analysis, radical feminism, is the one on which I have based my comments about the politics of relationships in The Edible Woman, Surfacing, and Survival.

Of primary importance in my approach to Atwood is the belief, rising both from Atwood's work and from my own experience, that feelings and emotions are of profoundly significant to human life but are tragically underestimated, denied and downgraded in patriarchal society, where logic and reason, supposedly male attributes, are held to be superior to feeling; where rational intelligence is regarded as more worthwhile and admirable than intuition. Everywhere in society the denigration and suppression of feeling is evident, even in marriage, the family, and personal relationships, where some feeling at least is permitted and expressed. The so-called negative emotions - pain, sadness, fear, anger etc. are socially unacceptable and therefore denied and suppressed; but at the same time, according to certain contemporary psychiatrists like Arthur Janov, our capacity for feeling positive emotions is diminished. And without the ability to experience love and joy, none of the directions that human beings take to find happiness, peace or fulfillment can lead to those goals.

In The Primal Scream Arthur Janov discusses the damage inflicted on people by the suppression of feeling and describes neurosis as ...symbolic behaviour in defense against excessive psychobiologic pain. Neurosis is self-perpetuating because symbolic satisfactions cannot fulfill real needs. In order for real needs to be satisfied, they must be felt and experienced. Unfortunately, pain has caused those needs to be buried. When they are buried, the organism goes into a continuous state of emergency alert. That alert state is tension... This emergency alert is necessary to ensure the infant's survival; if he were to give up hope of ever having his needs fulfilled, he might die. The organism continues to live at any cost, and that cost is usually neurosis - shutting down unmet bodily needs and feelings because the pain is too great to withstand.3

Unfulfilled needs supersede any other activity in the human until they are met. When needs are met, the child can feel. He can experience his body and his environment. When needs are not met, the child experiences only tension, which is feeling disconnected from consciousness. Without that necessary connection, the neurotic does not feel. Neurosis is the pathology of feeling. Neurosis does not begin at the instant a child suppresses his first feeling, but we might say that the neurotic process does. The child shuts down in stages. Each suppression and denial of need turn the child off a bit more. But one day there occurs a critical shift in which the child is primarily turned off, in which he is more unreal than real, and at that critical point we may judge him to be neurotic. From that time on, he will operate on a system of dual selves; the unreal and real selves.4

Janov states: "The major reason I have found that children become neurotic is that their parents are too busy struggling with unmet infantile needs of their own."5 He does not explore in depth and


5 Ibid., p. 27.
detail the connections between pain inflicted upon infants by their parents and a society which assumes that if a woman has the necessary reproductive organs she is not only qualified but also obliged (in order to prove herself as a woman) to have children; and this madness persists despite the threats presented by overpopulation to the survival of the human race.

Nor does Janov attempt to assess the connections between neurotic children and other aspects of motherhood in the patriarchy, such as the fact that although occupations like teaching or healing people are rewarded in our society by both money and respect, the occupation of raising people is unpaid, unrewarded, since it is taken for granted that any idiot can do it. No one would dare to suggest that love is sufficient remuneration for a doctor, lawyer or teacher. Moreover, raising a child is a full-time occupation in the true sense of the word, since children can not be left alone at all during their infancy and only for short periods of time during their later childhood. Nor does Janov wonder if there would be fewer neurotic children and unfeeling adults if women had full and unquestioned control over their bodies. However, despite the failure to explore the connections between pain, tension, neurosis, the oppression of women, and sex-role conditioning, Janov does provide a thoroughgoing analysis of the dynamics and effects of the denial and suppression of feelings and needs, and that analysis, though it unfortunately lacks full consciousness of sexism, has been of use in my discussion of Margaret Atwood.

The peculiarities of sex-role conditioning result in the paradox that although patriarchal society operates primarily for the bene-
fit of men, in this area it ends up oppressing men more, perhaps, than women, who are allowed and even expected to be emotional. Expressions of grief or tenderness in little boys or men are regarded suspiciously as possible symptoms of effeminacy, an even more reprehensible tendency in males (according to patriarchal conditioning) than so-called masculine traits like independence and sexual aggressiveness are in women. Yet women too are taught that the suppression of certain emotions like anger is desirable, even necessary. And so in contemporary North American society, sexism, capitalism, racism, and ageism converge to produce generation after generation of people who in early childhood learned that it is necessary to bury feeling in order to survive and who are therefore to some degree lacking in the capacity to love, to experience happiness, and to empathise with other people's pain. In her novels Atwood explores this lack in human beings, and explores some of the connections between sex-role stereotyping and people's inability to feel.

Because my perspective has been so strongly influenced by radical feminism and Primal Theory, most of the critical material which deals specifically with Margaret Atwood was of minimal direct relevance to this thesis. Many of the reviews and articles are tainted with sexism, even when they are congratulatory; A.W. Purdy, for example, quotes a section of 'The Wereman' and then exclaims:

Why, that Moodie bitch! I say. There isn't a scintilla, not a jot or milligram of affection for anyone but herself...This I say, knowing Atwood meant to convey something quite different...that humans are undefined as such, they waver into hate and love like ghosts...Whereas I, becoming a vicarious female while reading the poem, growl soprano-bass that Moodie should have rushed after her husband into the dark forest, at least she should have if she gave a single damn...
But she didn't and that's one reason why Moodie is not quite human...
On the other hand, I guess most Victorian women felt themselves to be only sexual objects (or so books tell me, and also certain Victorian female survivals)...6

All this in response to a few lines in which a husband gets blotted out in a forest. Purdy's protest, qualified by a rather lukewarm afterthought, his inability to see the poem as, possibly, a wish-fulfillment fantasy, an expression of the kind of hatred or indifference which many women rightly feel, in patriarchal marriage, toward their husbands, is an indication that he has at best a marginal understanding of what goes on in the minds and hearts of women. One is reminded of Atwood's cool voice commenting, in a statement to the American publishers of Power Politics, on its reception:

In general, response divided rather neatly along sex lines, women greeting the book with recognition, men with fear; ten years ago women would probably have ignored and men dismissed it. Women, both critics and ordinary readers, spoke of the book as though it was about them, about the way it was; for them it was realistic. Men tended to use adjectives like 'cruel' and 'jagged' and to see it either as a display of perversity on my part or as an attack, a conspiracy, a war or an inhumane vivisection of love, nasty and unfair as cutting up a puppy.7

Purdy's review of The Animals in That Country contains the same bias:

But these are not "women's poems", not in the way that term is generally applied, anyhow. Certainly


7 Joan Larkin, "Soul Survivor," rev. of Surfacing, by Margaret Atwood, Ms., May 1973, p. 35.
not about babies, kitchen sinks and ding-dong husbands.\textsuperscript{8}

Purdy, like any other man or woman raised in the patriarchy and not deeply committed to purging themselves of sexist brainwash, suffers from that conditioning. Despite what feels, in the first review, like personal affection and professional respect, he does say some rather odd things: "...(besides, she's a woman, even though highly intelligent)"

Len Gasparini is even more blatant than Purdy:

Atwood seems concerned with tonal effect, and she occasionally sounds like a nasal switchboard operator in a city above sea level..."Part of a Day" displays feminine conceit, the result of a decadent democracy. Her poetic platform is too sophisticated; she echoes the typical close-phrase cultism of Avison & Levertov. Words are charms on a bracelet in their realm, and I forgot to include MacEwen.\textsuperscript{10}

George Jonas' remarks require no comment to reveal their sexism:

Miss Atwood's novel does lend itself to a kind of journalistic reduction to a crusading work for the right of women to casually copulate, then zip up their pants and leave, the way men have traditionally been doing;


\textsuperscript{9}A.W. Purdy, "Atwood's Moodie," rev. of The Journals of Susanna Moodie, by Margaret Atwood, Canadian Literature, No. 47, Winter 1971, p. 84.
or even to a book-length commiseration with female holders of the high academic distinction of a B.A. who discover that the world does not automatically reward their trained minds with a meaningful and glamorous career. This of course is not what the book is about, and Miss Atwood will undoubtedly be able to cope with those who admire her work for the wrong reasons. 11

It is an interesting pattern, in all the articles mentioned above, that sexism manifests itself despite the fact that the articles generally are full of real respect and admiration for Atwood's work.

Among the most helpful of the reviews were Joan Harcourt's "Atwood Country", Phyllis Grosskurth's "Victimization or Survival", Joan Larkin's "Soul Survivor" and Frances Davis' review in The Dalhousie Review, all of which deal with *Surfacing* with depth and sensitivity.

Opinion on the issue of American imperialism, so strong a theme in Atwood, is divided: Morris Wolfe takes it for granted as a serious question in *Survival*, while Don Gutteridge pokes fun at her treatment of it, and totally misunderstands her suggestion that Canadian artists become more politically aware and less apathetically prone to early Victim positions and

...try more consciously to create myths we can live with, ones that will have important political consequences. What can be said of such a foolish suggestion? As one of our finest poets, Margaret Atwood simply knows better. Myths are disclosed, not promulgated. 12


It's true. She does know better:

Even the things we look at demand our participation, and our commitment: if this participation and commitment are given, what can result is a "jail-break", an escape from our old habits of looking at things, and a "re-creation", a new way of seeing, experiencing and imaging — or imagining — which we ourselves have helped to shape. 

The Politics of Relationships:
'The Edible Woman' and 'Surfacing'

I. Relationships among Women: Marian and The Enemy

An examination of the relationships among women and between women and men in *The Edible Woman* reveals that the question of power is a crucial factor in the way the characters relate to one another.

The opening chapter suggests, subtly but clearly, that the relationships Marian MacAlpin has with the other women in the novel - her roommate Ainsley, the landlady, and the women with whom she works - have certain elements in common, such as habitual concealment of feelings as a way of disguising vulnerability. As Ainsley and Marian ride to work on the bus, Marian reflects:

"...Ainsley and I don't have much in common except the lady down below. I've only known her since just before we moved in...on the whole it's worked out fairly well. We get along by a symbiotic adjustment of habits, and with a minimum of that pale-mauve hostility you often find among women." ¹

She goes on to describe the "see-saw arrangement" that they have about housework, mentioning certain potential conflict areas, then observes, "By such mutual refrainings - I assume they are mutual since there must be things I do that she doesn't like - we manage to preserve a certain frictionless equilibrium." (p. 16)

The impression here is of a rather superficial, lukewarm

¹ Atwood, Margaret, *The Edible Woman*, McLelland and Stewart, Toronto, Ont. 1969.
relationship based on lack of understanding and openness, which seems adequate for both women but which leaves no room for the sharing of feelings. But the key phrase is "with a minimum of that pale-mauve hostility you often find among women." With this vivid image Atwood not only describes a chronic emotional condition in conventional relationships among women but also focuses on the habitual denial of feelings, both in Marian herself and in her contacts with other people, especially women. If Marian's snide unspoken observations about Ainsley are any indication, there is a considerable degree of "pale-mauve hostility" between them, only it is kept more or less hidden, since to reveal it would no doubt invite retaliation. "Ainsley raised her almost non-existent eyebrows, which hadn't been coloured in yet that morning." (p. 12) "She had on her orange and pink sleeveless dress, which I judged was too tight across the hips." (p. 14) This automatic concealment of feelings is coupled with and intimately related to the shifts in the balance of power between the two women. At breakfast, Ainsley "had a hangover, which put me in a cheerful mood." (p. 11) "I got so caught up in being efficient for Ainsley's benefit while complimenting myself on my moral superiority to her that I didn't realize how late it was until she reminded me." (p. 12) Marian's sense of having the advantage on this occasion assumes the form of a pseudo-maternal solicitude, an acceptable disguise for her satisfaction at being healthier and hence more powerful.
Later in the day, as they walk from the subway station to Clara's house, Marian considers various subjects she could talk about with Ainsley, and both of these - the Pension Plan and the disaster of matrimony which has overtaken Peter's friend Trigger - relate directly to what Marian is really feeling: fear and uncertainty about her future. But she is blocked by the conviction that Ainsley will be amused or uncomprehending, so she resorts to enquiring about Ainsley's health, but Ainsley isn't having any; "Don't be so concerned, Marian," she said, "You make me feel like an invalid." I was hurt and didn't answer." (p.30)

Although Marian habitually dissimulates, and, on occasion, manipulates people for her own ends, she is indignant when Ainsley, disguised as an adolescent, appears at the Park Plaza Bar where she is having drinks with Peter and Len Slank. "I was furious with Ainsley. She had put me in a very awkward position. I could either give the game away...or I could keep silent and participate in what amounted to a fraud." (p. 67) "I knew that if I interfered I would be breaking an unspoken code, and that Ainsley was sure to get back at me some way through Peter. She was clever at such things." (p. 68) To Marian, a deception of this sort is unethical, though she readily participated in a similar deception of her landlady, when Ainsley masqueraded as a young innocent girl - "On this occasion I had even got her to wear gloves." (p.15)

Though Marian had been unable to summon up sufficient emotional energy to be entertaining and supportive with Clara, she is now full of protective morality about Len Slank, despite the fact that he is less than admirable in his dealings with women, and even insults her personally, as well as other members of her sex.
Marian and Ainsley share a mutual mistrust of one another's motives and plans. When Ainsley announces her intention to have "an illegitimate child in cold blood" (p. 42), as Marian describes it, Marian feels cynical and unsettled. Ainsley responds in a similar way to her announcement of her engagement to Peter. "Well, if I were you I'd get married in the States, it'll be so much easier to get a divorce when you need one. I mean, you don't really know him, do you?...I don't think you know what you're doing." (p. 84) Moreover, they regard one another's activities as morally disreputable; "...neither was to interfere with the other's strategy, though it was understood that each disapproved of the other's course of action on moral grounds." (p. 122)

Between Marian and her landlady the exercise of power is much more obvious. Alan Dawe in his Introduction to the novel points out that "...even the most comic...scenes of The Edible Woman have an element of terror to them." (p. 5) On her way to work, Marian descends the two flights of stairs between her apartment and the front door as if she is moving through a danger zone, making it "safely" down the first flight and avoiding the objects on the landings and walls as if they represent some real peril, which in a sense they do, being symbolic of the landlady's territorial advantage as well as of the rather sinister pressures of tradition. "...I could hear the child performing her morning penance at the piano. I thought I was safe. But before I reached the door it swung silently inward upon its hinges, and I knew I
was trapped. It was the lady down below. She was...carrying a
trowel/ I wondered who she'd been burying in the garden." (p.13)
Like Marian, who does not simply announce her intention to go to
work immediately, the landlady has "an indirect way of going about
things." (p.13) During the exchange that follows, the landlady
smiles "sweetly" and Marian smiles repeatedly, although she is be­
ing accused of almost setting fire to the house. After she escapes
to the bus stop she tells Ainsley "She got me in the hall." (p.14)
and Ainsley's reaction suggests that the landlady avoids her and
confronts Marian not because the latter is "more respectable" but
because Ainsley is more likely to express anger. In Marian's rec­
collections of the day they rented the apartment, the same elements
of emotional camouflage are present. Marian hides her feelings
just as Ainsley says she chooses clothes, "as though they're a
camouflage or a protective colouring, though I can't see anything
wrong with that." (p.14)

The incident with Mrs. Grot and the Pension Plan (p.20-21) focuses
on certain factors which will be operative throughout the rest
of the novel: Marian's fear and dislike of older women, her sense
of powerlessness in her dealings with them, which is at least in
part the result of disguising her feelings - "I signed, but after
Mrs. Grot had left I was suddenly quite depressed; it bothered me
more than it should have." (p.21) - and, significantly, her un­
certainty about her future and the resulting fear: "A pension. I
foresaw a bleak room with a plug-in electric heater. Perhaps I
would have a hearing aid, like one of my great-aunts who had never
married. I would talk to myself; children would throw snowballs
at me. I told myself not to be silly, the world would probably blow up between now and then..." (p.21) In this passage Atwood evokes the fear of lonely poverty-ridden old age with chilling accuracy; the bleakness, lack of warmth and love, sensory deprivation and potential craziness; and beneath the humour is a distinctly ominous note.

The dry, offhand, devastating portrait of the three office virgins (p.22) expresses Marian’s and Ainsley’s disdainful sense of superiority to them and contains some hint of "pale-mauve hostility", though this is muted, probably because the three artificial blondes with saccharine names are potentially not very threatening, being so pathetic. In this brief hilarious description of the conversation of five women at lunch, Atwood suggests the mistrust, animosity and competitiveness between women trained to relate to one another only as antagonists in a genteel, deadly battle for position on the pecking order of feminine desirability.

Both in her personal life and at work Marian’s exchanges with women are indirect, ambiguous; she either initiates these manoeuvres and sets their tone, or tacitly assents to them by participating without objection. She is perfectly well aware that Mrs. Bogue adopts a certain facade for purposes of manipulation - "Mrs. Bogue has a friendly, almost cosy manner which equips her perfectly for dealing with the interviewers, and she is at her most genial when she wants something." (p.25) but she
goes along with this out of guilt - "My lateness that morning had given her leverage." (p.25) Similarly, when Lucy asks her to write a letter for her, Marian is aware that "She was playing on my sympathies." (p.28) Again she goes along with it, and sits down to write a reply to a customer who had complained of finding a housefly in a box of raisin cereal. "The main thing, I knew, was to avoid calling the housefly by its actual name." (p.28) This comical incident of the housefly among the raisins is symbolic of the exchanges between Marian and the other women characters in the novel, which tend to be superficially sweet with unpleasant and discordant elements. Even when Marian encounters a woman who is reasonably honest, as Clara is, she hedges and dissimulates. Again she allows herself, out of guilt, to be talked into doing something she doesn't really want to do - she is "conscious of having neglected her." (p.28) Then she proceeds to manipulate Ainsley into accompanying her. In the washroom she meets the three office virgins:

"Going out to-night, Marian?" Lucy asked, too casually. She shared my telephone line and naturally knew about Peter. She
"Yes," I said, without volunteering information. Their wistful curiosity made me nervous." (p.29)

Again, a superficially trivial exchange masks envious curiosity, covert rivalry, animosity - and, on Marian's side, vanity. She does not simply say that she's going with Ainsley to a married friend's house for dinner, but maintains her advantage by allowing them to think she's going out with Peter.

With humour and remarkable economy, Atwood has presented four different encounters between women, which, though apparently
trivial, are characterized by deviousness, manipulation, exploitation and insincerity, as well as a single episode - the raisin and housefly problem - which is symbolic of them all.

Marian seems to perceive and relate to women less as individuals than as representatives of her own alternatives; she is not sure she wants to become a Mrs. Bogue, she feels threatened by Mrs. Grot and the Pension Plan, and she is so preoccupied with Clara's appearance and chaotic life that she finds it impossible to be warm and supportive towards her. It is significant that she is not conscious of seeing Clara as the embodiment of a possible future for herself; she and Ainsley both take refuge in feelings of superiority; "Clara simply had no practicality, she wasn't able to control the more mundane aspects of life, like money or getting to lectures on time." (p.36) "She should get organized." (p.38) Yet she defends Clara when Ainsley attacks her, and is annoyed that her roommate cannot see Clara's position, which, in fact, is all that Marian herself sees.

On her way to visit Clara at the hospital, Marian "wondered whether they would be able to produce, between them, thirty minutes' worth of conversation." (p.127) It is true that she is alienated from Clara by her own guilt, but there is more to it than that. On the subject of having a baby, she thinks, "Of course it was something she had always planned to do, eventually; and Peter had begun to make remarks with paternal undertones. But in this room with these white-sheeted outstretched women the possibility was suddenly much too close. And then there was Ainsley." (p.129) "More and more,
Clara's life seemed cut off from her, set apart, something she could only gaze at through a window. "What are you going to call her; she asked, repressing a desire to shout, not quite sure whether Clara would be able to hear her through the glass." (p.129) Marian herself has erected the pane of glass in a strenuous but only partly successful attempt to deny any relationship between Clara's life and her own intention to marry Peter. She is employing a standard psychological dodge, 'It can't happen to me', and distracts herself from her real feeling of indifference toward babies (she doesn't go to see Clara's baby and is totally uninterested in Ainsley's pregnancy) and reassures herself by saying, "And there's no reason why our marriage should turn out like Clara's. Those two aren't practical enough, they have no sense at all of how to manage, how to run a well-organized marriage." (p. 102) By means of all this side-stepping of her own fear, Marian in effect denies herself the benefit of a learning experience with Clara, who is remarkably honest most of the time. Marian is the victim of one of the most effective and destructive teachings in sexist society: that only men are really capable of educating women. When Ainsley asks Joe about Len Slank, he remarks that Len is "really a friend of Clara's." (p.35) "But what do you think of him? Ainsley asked, as though appealing to his superior intelligence." (p. 35) Marian is the dupe of the subtle yet powerful notion that men are somehow more aware and intelligent than women; she is more interested in the motives and complexities of men, she is suspicious and mildly contemptuous of women, and she denies the relevance of women's experience to her own safety, thereby cutting herself off from a
crucially important area of knowledge, especially at this point in her life when she is beginning to worry about her future. At the same time, she denies the validity of her own feelings, perceptions and experience as a woman, for if one invalidates and denies the experience of the group one belongs to, then inevitably, to some extent, one invalidates and denies one's own experience. Complacently Marian assures herself, "Boor Clara, she was the last person whose advice would be worth anything. Look at the mess she had blundered into; three children at her age. Peter and she were going into it with far fewer illusions. If Clara had slept with Joe before marriage she would have been much better able to cope afterwards." (p.131) (This last is a blatant rationalization; since only Clara's problems appear to be sexual; insofar as babies are sometimes the result of sex, it is difficult to see how Marian can believe that sex before marriage could have mitigated the difficulties.) In her determination to recognize no connection between Clara's life and her engagement to Peter, Marian feels only embarrassment when Clara expresses love for Joe; and although objectively it can be said that romantic idealistic love is not a particularly sound basis for marriage, Marian's common sense attitude toward Peter is chilling because it is based wholly on rational motives and is much more akin to the sensible attitude one could adopt when buying a house or a car (as his is to her) than to love of any variety. People often feel more warmth and closeness in friendship than Marian and Peter do in their engagement, yet Marian, involved as she is in her denial of feelings, her own and other people's, manages to ignore the fact that Clara and Joe
might have more going for them than she and Peter.

As she leaves, Marian inwardly continues her evasion of Clara;

"It struck her as she went out that door that there had been something in Clara's manner, especially in the slightly worried twist of her eyebrows once or twice, that had expressed concern; but concern about what exactly, she didn't know and couldn't stop to puzzle over. She had the sense of having escaped, as if from a culvert or cave. She was glad she wasn't Clara." (p.132)

And yet, significantly, she turns to Clara in her anxiety about not being able to eat certain foods, and this, like her guilt about not being supportive and understanding enough, is an indication that at some level she is aware of Clara as a person, even though not much of that awareness operates in her behaviour towards her. As it happens, Clara's response to her question, "Am I normal?" is conventional enough; in fact, it reveals one of the reasons for women's mistrust of one another. Clara tells her that she'll get over it (which is exactly what Millie said (p.24) when Marian expressed anxiety about the Pension. Plain) and though Marian feels temporarily reassured, this is the same kind of denial as telling a child that her problem is just a phase. During this conversation, Clara is seated in the playpen with her daughter Elaine. She tells Marian that Elaine doesn't like the playpen and that she's helping her get used to it, which is not unlike what she then proceeds to do with Marian, who is experiencing her body's symbolic rejection of Peter, marriage and motherhood. From inside the ostensibly innocent playpen, which is symbolic of the prison of her role of wife and mother, Clara tells Marian that she'll get over it, just as she probably tells Elaine that she'll get over not liking the playpen, her prison.
At Peter's party, a conversation takes place between Marian and Joe which very clearly demonstrates the differences between Marian's responses to women and men. Joe analyzes Clara:

"I worry about her a lot, you know...I think it's a lot harder for her than for most other women; I think it's harder for any woman who's been to university. She gets the idea she has a mind, her professors pay attention to what she has to say, they treat her like a thinking human being; when she gets married, her core gets invaded...Her feminine role and her core are really in opposition, her feminine role demands passivity from her..." (p.235)

He goes on to propose a solution: "Maybe women shouldn't be allowed to go to university at all; then they wouldn't always be feeling later on that they've missed out on the life of the mind." (p.236)

What Joe has just said is, in fact, appalling; he has described what amounts to the destruction of a human being, and, as the solution to a disaster which overtakes many women, he suggests that women should not be 'allowed' to go to university. Yet Marian, who knows Clara well enough to realize that what he has said - that her "core" has been "invaded" - is true, and who has herself experienced guilt about Clara, is reassured by a glimpse of Clara on the other side of the room making an emphatic gesture, and wonders "whether Joe had ever told Clara her core had been invaded." (p. 236), as if Clara wouldn't notice unless Joe brought it to her attention. Marian fails to respond even to Joe's telltale use of the word "allowed". Instead, "She wanted to reach out and touch him, reassure him, tell him Clara's core hadn't really been destroyed and everything would be all right; she wanted to give him something.
She thrust forward the plate she was holding. "Have an olive", she said." (p.236) Marian's reactions and behaviour in this passage are characteristic; she is prevented by her attitude toward women from identifying with Clara and feeling compassion and concern for her, and, even when Joe describes explicitly the effect of marriage and motherhood upon many women, she fails to make the connection between that danger and her engagement to Peter. Her emotional energy is channelled by sexist attitudes toward the man; it is for him that she feels compassion and concern, even though Clara needs support more than Joe does. And, typically, Marian does not express her feelings, but instead offers him an olive.

Nowhere in the novel is Marian's feeling of revulsion toward women more explicit than in the description of the Christmas office party. Seen through Marian's eyes, the women are absurd, rather disgusting, and inane. They are hypocritical - 'From time to time one of another of the ladies would shriek, "Oh, Dorothy, I just have to try some of your Orange-Pineapple Delight!" or "Lena, your Luscious Fruit Sponge looks just scrummy!"' (p.162) Apparently, Marian's feelings of disgust and dislike are shared by the other women, for they remember happier days; "...there was a memory, fast fading to legend, of...far-off days when the men upstairs had come down, and they even had drinks...Mrs. Gundridge had volunteered earlier that afternoon that it was a lot comfier this way anyhow, just all us girls here together, a comment which had produced glutinous murmurs of assent." (p.163) Conversation is superficial; it revolves around "ailments and bargains", children, homes and furnishings, and the "nasty habits" of husbands. Then, triggered by the word
"immature", Marian begins to look more closely at the women around her, seeing them in terms of their varying degrees of ripeness, like fruit or vegetables. "You weree green and then you ripened; became mature. Dresses for the mature figure. In other words, fat." (p.166) "They were ripe, some rapidly becoming overripe, some already beginning to shrivel; she thought of them as attached by stems at the tops of their heads to an invisible vine, hanging there in various stages of growth or decay..."(p.166) Gazing at the women's bodies, Marian sees their grotesque and hideous aspects; and she has a moment of panic as she realizes that she is a woman too, not unlike the women she is looking at with so much loathing. It is significant that her reaction to this is to want Peter to appear and rescue her from this "thick sargasso-sea of femininity." The moment of panic is broken by Mrs. Bogue's announcement of Marian's engagement, implicit in which is the announcement that Marian will lose her job; "Newly-weds, she had been heard to say, were inclined to be unstable." (p.168) At this place of work, as at most others, the usual rhythms of a woman's life, including marriage and childbearing, are a liability.

There is no significant change in the quality of the relationships between the women throughout The Edible Woman. Marian and Ainsley continue to interact in the emotional climate of cool critical mistrust which is almost inevitable in a situation where the people involved see one another only as potential rivals. The only scene where they are seen together in any sort of co-operative effort is before Peter's party when Ainsley
puts Marian's makeup on for her. Here the two women are more or less united in making Marian look unreal, as though the only pressure sufficient to bring women together is the occasional need to assist one another in disguising themselves to look like the stereotypical plastic woman of magazine covers and billboards, which, according to sexist mythology of the twentieth century, is, to men, the most desirable woman. While they are involved in dressing for the party, the landlady arrives to castigate Ainsley about Len Slank's overnight stay, and Marian feels no inclination to be supportive of Ainsley, but "felt safely remoted from this new complication." (p.224) As it happens Ainsley does not really need her support, anyway; she is strong partly because she can express her anger freely. At no point throughout the novel is there any indication of warmth or understanding between the two women; the most amiable feeling Marian has toward her roommate consists of being "pleased with her for justifying my superstitious belief in her ability to take care of herself." (p.279), which is ironic because what Ainsley has done is found someone to take care of her.

The office virgins, seen from Marian's perspective, continue to epitomize a particularly transparent and pathetic pursuit - single-minded husband-hunting - which Marian and Ainsley are also involved in, but which they nevertheless manage to feel superior to. Marian never does identify with Clara; her last contact with her in the novel is a telephone conversation during which Clara expresses concern over Len's regressive behaviour. After she
hangs up the phone, Marian reflects coolly that "...she had sounded more competent than usual." (p.280), and the implications of this, beneath the humour, are chilling; one is reminded of Duncan's warning - "Florence Nightingale was a cannibal, you know." (p. 200)

In fact, nowhere during the convention is there any sign of honesty or mutual understanding between any of the woman characters. Their exchanges are characterized by subtle power-games, mutual mistrust and rivalry. At Peter's party, the pattern is clear. When the three office virgins arrive, one by one, "each seemed annoyed that the others had been invited." though during the work week they always seem to be together. They exchange the standard social remarks, which are totally insincere - "Each of them said in a peculiar tone of voice that Marian should wear red more often." (p.232) and spend the rest of their time in misery over the mating game. "Every time there was a knock at the door the three office virgins swivelled their heads towards the entrance; and every time they saw another successful and glittering wife step into the room with her sleek husband, they turned back, a little more frantic, to their drinks and their interchange of strained comments." (p.233) The party continues in this vein. At one point Marian glimpses Peter and Lucy talking in the bedroom, and when Peter sees her he smiles guiltily. Marian thinks how touching and pathetic it is of Lucy to try for Peter: "After all Peter was off the market almost as definitely as if he was already married." (p.238) When Len pours beer over Ainsley, "Several of the soapwives trotted over, uttering throaty cooing noises, eager to share
the spotlight by helping," (p.24) - not, of course, to offer sympathy or help.

What emerges from all this is a comic portrait of Woman, devastating in its satire and realism, but with relatively little clear indication as to why the women behave so execrably towards one another. Moreover, because the relationships between the women are undeveloped, what is implied is that this is the state of affairs with women, period. But the situation Atwood is describing is the result of conditioning in sexist society, which trains women from an early age to believe they are inferior, and should have as their primary goal in life the acquisition of husband and children. Among the effects of this conditioning, along with discrimination at work and in the media (which Atwood touches on briefly) is an inability among most women to perceive themselves and one another as worthwhile individuals, and to develop close human relationships with each other, which would be a form of strength. This weakens women both personally and politically. So a question arises: since novels are also conditioning agents, is it enough simply to record, even satirically, the conditions of sexist society? If a reader is unaware of the reasons for the women's behaviour towards one another and is infected with that subtle unconscious contempt which sexism instills in people toward women, would The Edible Woman not confirm his/her opinion of women - that they are a silly, contemptible lot who converse about trivia, despise one another, and care only about clothes, men, and babies?
11. Marian's Relationships with Men:
In her relationships with women, Marian habitually conceals her feelings, and her emotional dishonesty also operates in her relationships with men, especially Peter. But in her relationship with him, the concealment of her emotions is not merely an attempt to conform to an image of sensible efficient femininity but becomes a dangerous habit which results in a dishonest, mutually exploitive relationship and, ominously, an inability on Marian's part to know what her feelings really are. This emotional dishonesty and its result, the paralysis of an inability to discern genuine emotion, is also characteristic of Peter. When he asks why she never cooks a meal, she feels hurt and resents his unfairness, for although she enjoys cooking she has deliberately refrained, because he might feel threatened: "I was about to make a sharp comment, but repressed it. Peter after all was suffering. Instead I asked, "How was the wedding?'" (p. 64) Similarly, when she runs away from him the first time, "He was annoyed but he wasn't going to make a fuss." (p.74) It is no coincidence that they get engaged immediately after their only real fight, which is brought about with the help of fatigue, alcohol, and a thunderstorm. It is the closest they ever get to one another, but even here they express their anger indirectly, avoiding the real issues and aiming for vulnerable spots, motivated not by any urge to resolve conflict and increase understanding but by the desire to inflict punishment. Peter accuses her savagely of rejecting her femininity, which, along with the comparison to Ainsley, is
felt by Marian as "a vicious goad." (p. 80) She retaliates by accusing him of rudeness (though her anger at him actually is rooted in fear, legitimately caused by the perception of him as a predatory hunter - an insight which she hastily rejected, then reacted to, by running away from him twice and by burrowing under Len's bed, like the small animals Peter enjoys hunting and killing - all of which leads, not accidentally, to his proposal and her acceptance of marriage.) Her fear and anger emerge as an attempt to deflate him: "Unintentional bad manners was something Peter couldn't stand to be accused of, and I knew it. It put him in the class of people in the deodorant ads. He glared quickly over at me, his eyes narrowed as though he was taking aim. Then he gritted his teeth together and stepped murderously hard on the accelerator." (p.81)

But Marian's repressed fear eventually expresses itself anyway, in a self-destructive manner. She and Peter are in a restaurant having dinner. They are both "ravenous" and Marian at first is feeling serene. But her serenity is shattered by a conversation about children and discipline in which it becomes clear that Marian's opinions, based on compassion, understanding and love, are diametrically opposed to Peter's, which are punitive and cruel. She remarks, "You'd teach them not to drive around mowing down other people's hedges, I suppose." (p.148), and though this elicits a self-indulgent chuckle from Peter, Marian's fear of him begins again to rise: "She looked intently at Peter, trying
to see his eyes...his face was now in shadow...She wondered why restaurants like this one were kept so dark. Probably to keep people from seeing each other while they were eating...observing one's partner too closely might dispel the aura of romance that the restaurant was trying to maintain. Or create. She examined the blade of her knife." (p.148) She thinks about his recent tendency, which makes her uneasy, to stare at her "as though if he looked hard enough he would be able to see through her flesh and her skull and into the workings of her brain." (p.149) "He wanted to know what made her tick." (p.150) She watches him eat, reminded of Moose Beer commercials, and thinks about the young boy who shot nine people from an upstairs window: "a removed violence...a violence of the mind, almost like magic." (p.151) The reverie, actually a series of connected and totally legitimate fears, continues; it is very real to Marian because in her own way she is also trying to consume Peter; she thinks about diagrams of beef cattle, and at this point, having identified with both carnivore and victim, she finds she cannot eat her steak. Having denied her feelings of fear and guilt, mistaking them for affection, she discovers that her body has suddenly developed a will of its own, but, still denying and concealing her own reality, she tells Peter she isn't hungry, and takes refuge in a You-Tarzan-Me-Jane sex-role subterfuge: "She meant to indicate by her tone of voice that her stomach was too tiny and helpless to cope with that vast quantity of food. Peter smiled and chewed, pleasantly conscious of his own superior capacity." (p.152) It is not surprising that her feelings have
been forced to take such drastic action, for whenever she witnesses uncontrolled expression of emotion, Marian feels embarrassed, threatened, or, as when Len breaks down and reveals the reason for his horror at Ainsley's pregnancy, "coldly revolted? they were acting like a couple of infants. Ainsley was getting a layer of blubber on her soul already, she thought: aren't hormones wonderful. Soon she would be fat all over. And len...had behaved like a white grub suddenly unearthed from its burrow... a repulsive blinded writhing..." (p. 160)

Eventually, the practise of neither acknowledging nor expressing her emotions reduces Marian herself to such a state that her grip on reality begins to loosen and she is perpetually vulnerable to her suppressed fear of Peter, marriage, the feminine role, and starvation. She has invited some of her friends to Peter's party, and is apprehensive about telling him: "Suddenly she felt totally without her usual skill at calculating his reactions in advance. He had become an unknown quantity...blind rage and blind ecstasy on his part seemed equally possible. She took a step away from him and gripped the railing with her free hand; there was no telling what he might do." (p.226)

Marian's fear of Peter, both as a hunter armed with guns and cameras and as a husband full of expectations which have already elicited from her behaviour which she does not recognize as her own, is based not only upon her perceptions of people but also upon her suppressed knowledge of herself, for, if Peter sees her
as an object to be consumed, she sees him in the same way.
"Ainsley had once called him 'nicely packaged', but now Marian decided that she found this quality attractive... The sense of proud ownership she felt at being with him... caused her to reach across the table and take his hand." (p. 146-7) This is reciprocal, a mutual, unspoken, and carefully-disguised agreement to relate to one another not as feeling people but as objects, to be used, consumed: "He was treating me like a stage-prop, silent but solid, a two-dimensional outline." (p. 71)
"The relief of being stopped and held, of hearing Peter's normal voice again and knowing he was real, was so great I started to laugh helplessly." (p. 74) However, Atwood does not hold Peter and Marian wholly responsible for their mutual exploitation and attempted destruction of one another as individuals; everywhere in the novel are signs that they are responding to the pressures of a society in which even love and mating are polluted by materialism and the inhuman images of advertising. She makes it clear, moreover, that in this system men are more powerful than women. Seymour Surveys is run by men; hunters and lawyers are more powerful than housewives. And though Marian is to some degree aware of this system and its significance to her own life, she is so busy controlling her feelings to conform to the nurse-like role model which she has chosen to emulate, that she is, at first, powerless to fight back. When Peter comes over the morning after they get engaged, she serves him coffee solicitously and they talk: "He sounded as though he'd just bought a shiny
new car. I gave him a tender chrome-plated smile; that is, I meant
the smile to express tenderness, but my mouth felt stiff and bright
and somehow expensive."(p.88) "I could feel the stirrings of the
proprietary instinct. So this object, then, belonged to me."(p.90)
Later, at the party, she looks in his clothes closet (she is unusually
aware, throughout the novel, of external details: his appearance,
clothes, apartment building, furniture): "She realized that she was
regarding the clothes with an emotion close to something like re-
sentment. How could they hang there smugly asserting so much invis-
ible silent authority? But on second thought it was more like fear.
She reached out a hand to touch them, and drew it back: she was al-
most afraid they would be warm." (p.229) Yet, despite her disguise
as the efficient capable nurse, ministering to the little boy in
Peter and the invalid in Duncan, Marian at some level is aware of
what's happening. When Duncan remarks, "Florence Nightingale was a
cannibal you know," her reaction is one of guilt and fear: "My
calmness was shattered. I felt mice-feet of apprehension scurry-
ing over my skin. What exactly was I being accused of? Was I ex-
posed?" (p.100) And at the close of the book, when Duncan raises
the subject of Peter's attempted destruction of Marian, he remarks,
"That's ridiculous...Peter wasn't trying to destroy you. That's
just something you made up. Actually you were trying to destroy
him." I had a sinking feeling. "Is that true?" I asked. "Search
your soul," he said." (p. 280).

In fact the only difference between what Peter was trying to do to
Marian and what Marian was trying to do to Peter was that he, be-
cause he is a man in a male-dominated, male-oriented system, seems to have more power and is therefore more dangerous; and that Marian has a slight advantage in being closer to her emotions, even cut off from them as she is.

All their acquaintances are skeptical about their engagement; Ainsley and Duncan express their reservations frankly (he tells her that "it sounded evil to him but that she seemed to be managing very well." (p.184); Clara seems to regard it as a prudent step, and only the office virgins are impressed - for the wrong reasons. In fact their relationship is totally devoid of love, which is a serious lack but which Atwood conveys in a hilariously comic fashion at first; "I smiled back at him...and he brought his other hand over and placed it on top of mine. I was going to bring my other hand up and place it on top of his, but I thought if I did then mine would be on top and he'd have to take his arm our from underneath...I squeezed his arm affectionately instead." (p.65)

They both view marriage with an eye to practicality. Peter says, "Most women are pretty scatterbrained but you're such a sensible girl"...I wasn't sure what to say - "You're very sensible too" didn't seem appropriate. He put his arm around my shoulders, and we sat in what I hoped was a blissful silence." (p.89) Marian carefully conceals her inability to eat because she's afraid she isn't normal: "This was why she was afraid to tell Peter; he might think she was some kind of freak, or neurotic. Naturally he would have second thoughts about getting married; he might say they should postpone the wedding until she got over it. She would say
that, too, if it was him." (p.204) If they had been married, they could appropriately have rewritten their marriage formula to read not 'In sickness and in health' but "In normalcy only'.

But beneath the empty space where something at least resembling love should be, there is an emotion which is even more sinister than lack of love; and that is mutual contempt. Marian is scornful of the machismo traits in Peter; while he makes love to her in the bathtub she wonders what men's magazine fantasy he is acting out this time. She makes silent snide remarks to herself about his clothes, apartment, social behaviour and values, personal habits, fears and friends. Sometimes it is a tolerant, amused, condescending contempt; more often it is flat cold contempt. Peter as viewed through Marian's eyes is a pompous ass. At first she treats him like a child who needs to be 'handled' and 'distracted'; she takes for granted the necessity to manipulate him. Similarly, he treats her patronizingly, indulgently. His attitude to women generally - that they are rather like large children - is implicit in his reproach: "Ainsley behaved herself properly, why couldn't you?" (p.80) His analysis of Marian's misbehaviour is that she is rejecting her femininity. As they sit in his car during the storm he says, "'It's a good thing I didn't let you walk home', in the tone of a man who has made a firm and proper decision. I could only agree." (p.82) Marian's growing tendency to agree with Peter's analyses of her is one excellent reason for her to fear him. The next morning, when he asks her when she wants to get married, a very
ominous thing happens: "My first impulse was to answer, with the evasive flippancy I'd always used before when he's asked me serious questions about myself, "What about Groundhog Day?" But instead I heard a soft flannelly voice I barely recognized, saying, "I'd rather have you decide that. I'd rather leave the big decisions up to you." I was astounded at myself. I'd never said anything remotely like that to him before." (p.90) Soon she begins to let him make other decisions for her; soon he begins to treat her like his personal slave. When she asks him a question which to her is very serious - Am I normal? - "He laughed and patted her on the rump... 'I could use another drink,' Peter said; it was his way of asking her to get him one..."And while you're up, flip over the record, that's a good girl.'"(p.207) Marian is turning into a combination of child-wife-sex-object-slave; in short, an ideal traditional wife. Her repressed sense of herself as victim is perfectly valid. Even after she bakes the edible woman,"...if Peter found her silly she would believe it, she would accept his version of herself."

The relationship between Marian and Duncan is different in almost every aspect from the relationship between her and Peter. For one thing, Duncan consistently declines to be made into a figure in one of her sexist fantasies. Whenever she assumes the role of competent nurse, Duncan refuses to participate in the game: "I had a twinge of irritation. I had been feeling compassion for him as a sufferer on the verge of mental collapse, and now he had revealed the whole thing as a self-conscious performance."(p. 54) "I felt calm, serene as a stone moon, in control of the whole white space of the laundromat. I could have reached out effortlessly and put
my arms around that huddled awkward body and consoled it, rocked it gently...he said in a soft dry voice, "I can see you're admiring my febrility. I know it's appealing, I practise at it; every woman loves an invalid. I bring out the Florence Nightingale in them...But be careful...hunger is more basic than love. Florence Nightingale was a cannibal, you know." (p.99-100) When she leaves Peter's party and follows Duncan to the laundromat, he warns her that he not only doesn't need to be rescued but has no intention of rescuing her. (p.247)

But Marian is persistent; even after his repeated warnings she attempts to affirm the nurse-image part of her identity by playing sexual social worker, but when she tries to get him to join in her fantasy by asking, 'How was it for you?' he declines again, in no uncertain terms: "You want me to say it was stupendous, don't you? ...That it got me out of my shell. Hatched me into manhood. Solved all my problems...Sure you do, and I could always tell you would. I like people participating in my fantasy life and I'm usually willing to participate in theirs, up to a point. It was fine; just as good as usual.' The implication sank in smoothly as a knife through butter...The starched nurse-like image of herself she had tried to preserve as a last resort crumpled like wet newsprint.' (p.264)

Another game which Duncan refuses to play is hide-and-get-lost with emotions. While he does not exactly express emotion, he does at least talk about his feeling, which makes Marian uncomfortable:
"...all this talking, this rather liquid confessing, was something I didn't think I could ever bring myself to do. It seemed foolish to me, like an uncooked egg deciding to come out of its shell: there would be a risk of spreading out too far, turning into a formless puddle." (p.99) At first she responds by donning her "starched nurse-like image" but that doesn't work, since Duncan is apparently equipped with antennae that alert him to her attempts at role-playing. The result is that they make at least a start at relating to one another honestly, directly. When they give each other warmth and comfort in the snowy park (p. 171-2) they exchange very few words, but the contact is genuine.

Duncan's meticulous if offhand honesty about his feelings and motives also serves to place their mutual exploitation on a conscious level, where it is considerably less dangerous than the attempt to devour one another's identities in which Marian and Peter are involved. Marian and Duncan are aware that they are using one another but they are not pretending otherwise; whereas Marian and Peter are unsuccessfully mimicking love: "Thus, when he would murmur... 'You know, I don't even really like you very much', it didn't disturb her at all because she didn't have to answer. But when Peter, with his mouth in approximately the same position, would whisper, 'I love you' and wait for the echo, she had to exert herself."(p.183)

This is not to imply that Atwood is presenting Duncan as Marian's rescuer, or that her relationship with him is an alternative to her relationship with Peter. The Edible Woman is open-ended; no
'happy ending' or final resolution is offered, though perhaps Duncan's visit to Marian's apartment at the end of the book may be misleading from some perspectives just because it is conventional: young woman breaks with unsatisfactory fiancée but gets new lover, consolation prize. There is plenty of evidence that Atwood did not intend such an interpretation; for example, Fish's analysis of *Alice in Wonderland*: "...she goes to talk with the Mock Turtle, enclosed in his shell and his self-pity, a definitely pre-adolescent character...So anyway she makes a lot of attempts but she refuses to commit herself, you can't say that by the end of the book she has reached anything that can be definitely called maturity. She does much better though in *Through the Looking Glass*, where, as you'll remember..." (p.194) Duncan is the Mock Turtle, and Marian spends time with him, but when he calls, after the key scene with Peter and the edible woman-cake, she reflects, "I was surprised; I had more or less forgotten about him." (p.277) The resolution takes the form of strong indications that it will now be up to Marian to achieve greater self-awareness; and while the next stage of her growth might conceivably take the shape of a relationship with Duncan (now that he is bereft of his 'parents' and seems to feel the need for a replacement parent-figure), there are signs that if this happens, Marian at some point will be compelled to deal with certain tendencies of her own - for example, she is merely amazed and amused at "the extent to which he could ignore her point of view..." (p.189) and she is not dismayed when he makes derogatory remarks about women - "Hey, why do you have a crummy job like this? I thought only fat sloppy housewives did that sort of thing." (p.55). Whether it happens or not is not
the point of the novel anyway: "When he arrived I was finishing the windows...We hadn't cleaned them in a long time and they had got quite silted over with dust, and I was thinking it was going to be curious to be able to see out of them again. It bothered me that there was still some dirt on the outside I couldn't reach: soot and rainstreaks...I didn't hear Duncan come in...I got down from the chair, rather reluctantly - I like to finish things once I've begun them and there were still several windows left uncleaned."

(p.278) The apartment-cleaning parallels the process of regaining control over her life; Marian is restoring psychic and emotional order as well as domestic cleanliness. By asserting and affirming the validity of her own feelings, however symbolically, in her relationship with Peter, Marian has gained access to her own strength.

In general, her position vis-à-vis men is indicated early in the novel in the description of the power structure at Seymour Surveys:

"The company is layered like an ice-cream sandwich, with three floors: the upper crust, the lower crust, and our department, the gooey layer in the middle. On the floor above are the executives and the psychologists - referred to as the men upstairs, since they are all men...Below us are the machines...Our department is the link between the two: we are supposed to take care of the human element...As market research is a sort of cottage industry, like a hand-knit sock company, these are all housewives working in their spare time and paid by the piece. They don't make much, but they like to get out of the house." (p.19)

In effect, Marian assents to her subservient position in relation to men; at her job, she is aware of the hierarchy and comments on it, but takes no action against a system which offers her very few choices and which promises a future so bleak that she develops a motive for marriage: the need to elude the Pension Plan.
In fact she goes as far as to actively assist in the process of divesting herself of self-determination. She tends to let men make decisions for her, even with Duncan who doesn't conform to any masculine stereotype. "What are we going to do now?" she asked, conscious of the plaintive tone in her own voice. She felt helpless to decide. He was more or less in charge. After all, he was the one with the money." (p.249)

Marian takes no action against the system which discriminates against her, and is apparently so deaf and blind to sexism that she maintains a friendship with Len Slank, although his attitudes and behaviour toward women are unmistakeably those of a male chauvinist pig. Not only does Marian value this friendship (more than she values her relationships with Clara and Ainsley) but she experiences conflict about whether or not she should warn him when Ainsley chooses him as the father for her proposed child. Her protectiveness of Len and supportiveness of Peter - both attitudes that she does not feel toward her women friends - are inappropriate and self-defeating. Yet secretly she is scornful of men. Her dry tongue-in-cheek descriptions of the crisis of Trig- ger's marriage (pp. 27 and 64), the beer-drinkers she interviews for Seymour Surveys (p.45-47), Peter's men's magazine fantasies (p.60), the Western movie (p. 124) and the Moose Beer advertising campaign - all contain a very amused disrespect for the cult of masculinity - an attitude which she keeps discreetly hidden, most of the time.
Marian and Her Self;

Basically, The Edible Woman is Marian's story; none of her relationships with the other characters is as important as her relationship to herself. Twice in the novel she is accused of rejecting her femininity; affected by pressures from both without and within, she is weakened and fragmented by a gradual process of alienation from self. The novel concludes as she begins the process of re-integration.

The first sentence of the book reveals three essential aspects of Marian's character: uncertainty about herself ("I know I was all right..."), and the need to check up on the state of her inner self; the fact that usually she feels 'stolid', which the Encyclopedia Britannica defines as "having or expressing little or no sensibility"; and her assumption that an emotionless state is a healthy one. Within the next few pages Atwood also discloses that her ego is bolstered if she gets the chance to mother or nurse someone, as she does the hung-over Ainsley, and that she suffers from fear, and therefore needs to feel safe.

When Marian's anxiety is reflected symbolically in a nightmare in which her feet dissolve and her fingers turn transparent (p. 43) she terms it a dream and records no emotional reaction. Her uneasy doubts about her identity begin to increase; the more she behaves without reference to her feelings, the more prone she is to panic and to visions of herself disintegrating. As Peter makes love to her in the bathtub she contemplates the shower curtain and runs through a variety of possible explanations for his behaviour: "Or maybe - and the thought was chilling - he had intended it as an
expression of my personality...did he really think of me as a lavatory fixture. What kind of a girl did he think I was?" (p. 62) So alienated is she from her own feelings that, in the bar when Peter and Len slip into a Hemingwaysque camaraderie based on hunting and bloodshed and machismo (in which the victim is referred to, significantly, with the feminine pronoun), she is unaware that she's crying until "a large drop of something wet had materialized on the table near my hand. I poked it with my finger and smudged it around a little before I realized with horror that it was a tear. I must be crying then!" (p. 70) Her conviction that to feel and express emotion is a sign of vulnerability is so deeply-rooted that, at once, "Something inside me started to dash about in dithering mazes of panic" (p. 70) just like a hunter's victim. In the washroom cubicle she notices that "The roll of toilet paper crouched in there with me, helpless and white and furry, waiting passively for the end." (p. 70) Very soon after this, she runs away from Peter, is caught, crawls into "a private burrow" under Len's bed, and generally behaves like a hunted animal. Having acted out this interpretation of their relationship, they get engaged. Marian at some level of her being makes a choice: to be a victim. But the next morning "my mind was at first as empty as though someone had scooped out the inside of my skull like a cantaloupe and left me only the rind to think with...My clothes were scattered over the floor...like fragments left over from the explosion of some life-sized scarecrow, and the inside of my mouth felt like a piece of cotton wool stuffing." (p. 83)
That same morning she has a brief glimpse of herself as a shiny expensive new car that Peter has just bought (p. 88) and hears herself speaking in a "soft flannelly voice" she "barely recognized" (p. 90). She feels anxious in the laundromat when Duncan comments on her "exposed" appearance without her work clothes (p. 93) and is careful to assume her nurse-disguise is response to his "liquid confessing" (p. 99). Her two dolls are significant in the context of her alienation from herself (p. 103) - the older one, dark, like Marian, is "stuffed with sawdust" and has "head, hands and feet of a hard woody material." (p. 103) Towards the end of the novel she has the nightmarish impression that "By the strength of their separate visions they were trying to pull her apart." (p. 219)

Soon after she gets engaged, Marian's estrangement from herself is reflected in the shift from first to third person narrative; she has the impression of drifting along purposelessly, gets farther and farther from her feelings, becomes more and more vulnerable to panic, and, in the restaurant with Peter, finds herself unable to eat. Her trip to the dress shop and the hairdresser's signify a further step into unreality; buying andress for Peter's party, "She didn't think it was really her, but the saleslady did. 'It's you, dear,' she said, her voice positive." (p. 208) and Marian buys the dress. Looking at women under hairdryers, she thinks, "Was that what she was being pushed towards, this combination of the simply vegetable and the simply mechanical? An electric mushroom." (p. 210)
Sitting in the bathtub she is seized by panic that she might dissolve, and, dressed for the party, she looks at her arms in the mirror and though they are "the only portion of her flesh that was without a cloth or nylon or leather or varnish covering,... even they looked fake, like soft pinkish-white rubber or plastic, boneless, flexible...Annoyed with herself for slipping back towards her earlier panic, she opened the cupboard door to turn the mirror to the wall... (p.229) When Duncan arrives he says, "You didn't tell me it was a masquerade...Who the hell are you supposed to be?" Marian let her shoulders sag with despair."(p.239) But her sense of disintegration and loss of identity is activated to a terrifying degree by Peter taking pictures: "No!" she screamed... She sensed her face as vastly spreading and papery and slightly dilapidated; a huge billboard smile, pulling away in flaps and patches, the metal surface beneath showing through." (p.244) "Once he pulled the trigger she would be stopped, fixed indissolubly in that gesture, that single stance, unable to move or change." (p.245)

When her attempt to salvage a shred of her former identity by acting as sexual nurse to Duncan fails, she is gripped by "the cold energy of terror. At this moment to evoke something, some response...was the most important thing she could ever have done, could ever do, and she couldn't do it. The knowledge was an icy desolation worse than fear."(p.254) As it turns out, Duncan takes the initiative, admonishing, "It isn't something you can dispense, you know."(p.254) The next morning she is unable to
eat anything at all; running downhill with Duncan, "She had a vision of the red dress disintegrating in mid-air, falling in little scraps behind her in the snow, like feathers." (p.260) But the escapade of Duncan has accomplished the destruction of her "last resort...the starched nurse-like image of herself." (p.264) and the next day she presents Peter with an edible woman. She confronts the reality of their relationship and forces him to confront it too, and the engagement is broken. She begins to think of herself in the first person again, regains her appetite, cleans her apartment, and, in general resumes her stable, efficient identity. For this reason she is not completely out of danger at the end of the book when Duncan wanders in wondering what will become of himself. She still has a perilous tendency to accept men's versions of herself, and, having just extricated herself from a relationship with a rescuer-from-chaos who turned out to be a carnivorous hunter, she is perhaps in danger of playing a cannibalistic Florence Nightingale to Duncan's emaciated pre-adolescent Mock Turtle, though we are given to understand that "She does much better in Through the Looking Glass." (p.194)
Surfacing

The Unnamed Protagonist and Joe

Like The Edible Woman, Surfacing focusses on a crisis in the life of the central character; the unnamed protagonist's relationship to herself is the most important one in the book. Her relationships with the other characters are in some ways less important and in others more important than are Marian's in The Edible Woman; the cast of characters is much smaller, personal relationships are less detailed, but the politics of relationships in Surfacing are less subtle. The power wielded by David over Anna is more direct, for example, and depends less upon her tacit consent, and Anna's hostile jealousy of the protagonist is more naked. So is terror; the panic which is revealed only in flashes behind the comic mask in The Edible Woman is much more central to Surfacing, more dominant in the narrator's consciousness and in the novel as a whole. Of the two novels, Surfacing is the more powerful, the more sombre and profound, because the protagonist, propelled by loss and death (her parents' her child's, her own) moves farther into her pain, is more aware of her atrophied feelings, submits more fully to her insanity.

In the mechanical Americanized world of the city where Joe and the nameless woman, David and Anna live, those who have become mechanical, in the sense that they are cut off from their bodies and feelings, are more powerful. Although they are usually men, the protagonist herself is one of them; in the novel's two man-woman relationships, David and the protagonist are in control because they do not love, cannot love, fail to feel.
I'm trying to decide whether or not I love him. It shouldn't matter, but there's always a moment when curiosity becomes more important to them then peace and they need to ask; though he hasn't yet. It's best to have the answer worked out in advance: whether you evade or do it the hard way and tell the truth, at least you aren't caught off guard. I sum him up, dividing him into categories: he's good in bed, much better than the one before: he's moody but he's not much bother, we split the rent and he doesn't talk much, that's an advantage. When he suggested we should live together I didn't hesitate. It wasn't even a real decision, it was more like buying a goldfish or a potted cactus plant, not because you want one in advance but because you happen to be in the store and you see them lined up on the counter. I'm fond of him, I'd rather have him around than not; though it would be nice if he meant something more to me. The fact that he doesn't makes me sad: no one has since my husband. A divorce is like an amputation, you survive but there's less of you.  

This passage occurs early in the book, and outlines with sharp clear strokes certain crucial facts: she is so far from feeling love for Joe that she tries to decide with her mind whether she loves him or not, mainly because she doesn't want to be caught 'off guard' when he asks her, doesn't want to lose balance, control. A clue is given as to why she cannot love, but a hidden clue; no one has meant much to her since her husband and the divorce, as she describes them. They are tolerable in this guise; her lover and abortion are not. She has suppressed not only the pain of the events which caused the split, the 'amputation', but also any true recollection of what those events were:

I rehearsed emotions, naming them: joy, peace, guilt, release, love and hate, react, relate; what to feel was like what to wear, you watched the others and memorized it. But the only thing there was the fear that I wasn't

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alive; a negative, the difference between the shadow of a pin and what it's like when you stick it in your arm...they've discovered rats prefer any sensation to none...They slipped the needle into the vein and I was falling down, it was like diving, sinking from one layer of darkness to a deeper, deepest; when I rose up through the anaesthetic, pale green and then daylight, I could remember nothing." (p.111)

Again analyzing her feelings for Joe, she reflects that

"Everything I value about him seems to be physical; the rest is either unknown, disagreeable or ridiculous. I don't care much for his temperament, which alternates between surliness and gloom, or for the overgrown pots he throws so skillfully on the wheel and then mutilates...Their only function is to uphold Joe's unvoiced claim to superior artistic seriousness; every time I sell a poster design or get a new commission he mangles another pot." (p.57)

The element of competition is strong between them and crops up even over trivia; "I had to use a lot of energy just to keep us pointed straight, because Joe didn't know how to steer; also he wouldn't admit it, which made it harder." (p.85) In their conflict about marriage, Joe capitulates by saying, "I give up, you win." (p.124)

But shortly after she 'remembers' giving birth to her child (what she is actually remembering is the abortion; her memories are mixed, part true and part self-protective self-destructive inventions) she begins to be more sensitive to what she is doing to Joe:

"I should have realized much earlier what was happening, I should have got out of it while we were still in the city. It was unfair of me to stay with him, he'd become used to it, hooked on it,...When you can't tell the difference between your own pleasure and your pain then you're an addict. I did that, I fed him unlimited supplies of nothing..." (p.84)
When she tries to explain why she won’t marry him, she realizes that her reason "...was true, but the words were coming out of me like the mechanical words from a talking doll, the kind with the pull tape at the back; the whole speech was unwinding, everything in order, a spool." (p.87)

Later, when Anna is sympathetic and says, "You must feel awful," she moves forward in the direction of self-knowledge: "I didn’t feel awful; I realized I didn’t feel much of anything, I hadn’t for a long time." (p.105)

The protagonist is cut off from feelings as she feels she cut her child off from life. She can’t feel; when Joe describes accurately what she thinks of him, "His face contorted, it was pain; I envied him." (p.107) As the novel progresses, the tension between Joe and the woman increases, as do her pain, self-awareness, and love. At one point she identifies with David:

"David is like me, I thought, we are the ones that don’t know how to love, there is something essential missing in us, we were born that way, Madame at the store with one hand, atrophy of the heart. Joe and Anna are lucky, they do it badly and suffer because of it: but it’s better to see than to be blind, even though that way you have to let in the crimes and atrocities too. Or perhaps we are normal and the ones who can love are freaks, they have an extra organ, like the vestigial eye in the foreheads of amphibians they’ve never found the use for." (p.137)

On the last page of the novel, after her regeneration through insanity, terror, hunger, and, we are asked to believe, conception, the protagonist watches Joe as he stands on the dock calling her; this time she is not trying to decide with her head if she loves him or not: "I watch him, my love for him useless as a third eye or a possibility." (p.192)
Joe is a possibility not because he knows how to feel and can assume the stereotyped role of the father-teacher, but because he is 'unformed', not hardened into a mechanical 'American' yet:

For him truth might still be possible, what will preserve him is the absence of words; but the others are already turning to metal, skins galvanizing, heads congealing to brass knobs, components and intricate wires ripening inside." (p.159)

Words as vehicles of logic, the enemy of love, have become the tools and weapons of the mechanized American-dominated world in which the trees die of cancer, wars occur, and genitals join while the individuals attached to them destroy each other. Of the four main characters, David and Anna talk most; Joe says very little, the protagonist speaks mostly in her own mind, rarely communicating her thoughts and feelings to the others. Joe is animal-like in his physical appearance, and animals, as the vanished father pointed out, are more trustworthy than people. Moreover, although he does not seem to value her feelings or want to know about them - "What impressed him that time, he even mentioned it later, cool he called it, was the way I took my clothes off and put them on again later very smoothly as if I were feeling no emotion. But I really wasn't. (p.28) - he does love her, he does seem to be able to feel that. As in The Edible Woman, no final resolution is offered at the end of Survival; boy and girl do not necessarily live happily ever after. Instead, a new direction opens up:

If I go with him we will have to talk,...we can no longer live in spurious peace by avoiding each other, the way it was before, we will have to begin. For us it's necessary, the intercession of words; and we will probably fail, sooner or later, more or less painfully. That's normal, it's the way it happens now and I don't know whether it's worth it or even if I can depend on him...But he isn't an American, I can see that now...." (p.192)
David/Anna

At the beginning of the novel, the protagonist sees David and Anna as a couple, symbolic of the possibility that marriage is feasible and love exists, despite clues that between the two people in this marriage there is contempt, dislike, cruelty. When Anna sings in the car, David turns on the radio, but they are between stations so he whistles to shut her up. (p.9-10)

For his film-making effort, Random Samples, she feels contempt: "...she laughs about it behind his back, she calls it Random Pimples." (p.10) Though David seems impervious to her contempt - he laughs or jokes when she puts him down - she is infected by his contempt of her, and contributes her own dislike of self to their combined endeavour to put her down: "...I told her she should wear jeans or something but she says she looks fat in them." (p. 111) She apologizes for herself: "They must fuck a lot here, Anna says...Then she says, "Aren't I awful." (p.13) She is pathetic in her need to preserve her make-up mask: "Anna says in a low voice, 'He doesn't like to see me without it'... I glimpse the subterfuge this must involve, or is it devotion: does she have to sneak out of bed before he's awake in the morning and out of it at night with the lights out?" (p.44)

Later, as the characters, deprived of their habitual distractions, begin to show themselves more and more clearly, Anna reveals her genuine fear of David: "I forgot my make-up, he'll kill me." "He wants me to look like a young chick all the time, if I don't he gets mad." "He'll get me for it. He's got this little set of rules. If I break one of them I get punished."
"He watches me all the time, he waits for excuses. Then either he won't screw at all or he slams it in so hard it hurts." (p.122)

At one point towards the end of their week on the island, the protagonist sees through her own wish-projected picture of the marriage:
'I remembered what Anna had said about emotional commitment: they've made one, I thought, they hate each other; that must be almost as absorbing as love." (p.138) But at the beginning, when their defences are still strong, the realities of the relationship are still hidden by their 'quick skits' (p.44,63) performed only in public under the pressure to appear lovingly married, normal, sane — though even at the beginning there are clues: "Somebody break me out a beer," he says. Anna brings him one and he pats her on the rear and says, "That's what I like, service." (p.36) When the protagonist asks Anna how they manage to stay married, Anna replies facetiously, to cover her own suspicion, but honestly without knowing it: "We tell a lot of jokes." (p.47)

It is obvious that David is in control; when he decides he wants to stay on at the cabin, Joe's assent is enough. He overrides Anna's objection by using her guilt against her and by a veiled threat, and does not even consult the protagonist, who, significantly, also submits to his decision, despite a strong desire on her part to leave. When this happens "He gives me a quick look, triumphant and appraising, as though he's just won something, not a war but a lottery." (p.71)

One demand which Anna refuses to fulfill, however, is that she use the Pill: "David wants me to go back on, he says it's no worse
for you than aspirin, but next time it could be the heart or something. I mean, I'm not taking those kinds of chances." (p.80) When they copulate, Anna's sounds are pleas and "Then something different, not a word but pure pain, clear as water, an animal's at the moment the trap closes." (p.82)

Anna's buried rage and hatred surface more and more often as the period of their isolation lengthens; her contemptuous comments become sharper, both those directed at David and those about him addressed to the protagonist, especially after David begins to make lecherous remarks about her in front of Anna, who feels more and more threatened and desperate. (p.98-99) In the brief argument about 'Women's Lib', David's reaction, though superficially facetious, nevertheless reveals Anna's fear as legitimate: "'None of that Women's Lib,' David said, 'Or you'll be out on the street. I won't have one in the house, they're practising random castration, they get off on that, they're roving the streets in savage bands armed with garden shears.'" (p. 110-111) Although this seems absurd, it is only an exaggerated version of what he really fears; "...she's trying to cut my balls off." (p.137) Then he adds an insulting remark about women, about a course "...for the housewives how to switch on the T.V. and switch off their heads, that's all they really need to know." (p.112) and when Anna reacts with anger he switches to a disguised reference to her stupidity - "Goose Anna in the bum and three days later she squeals" and then distracts her by drawing attention to her appearance: "Cheer up, you're so cute when you're mad." (p.112) Her legitimate anger denied, trivialized, "Anna smiled at him as though he was a brain-damaged child." (p.112), in short, reverts to the acceptable Yole
of indulgent if contemptuous mother-sex-object-victim-slave.

David's real nastiness and corruption are finally fully revealed in the scene on the dock. (p.134-136) He threatens and coerces by using physical force until Anna takes off her bikini for Random Samples, where she will be included "beside the dead bird" (p.134). When she articulates the truth - "You're trying to humiliate me," he again denies her feelings, turns it against her: "What's humiliating about your body, darling?... That's pretty stingy of you, you should share the wealth: not that you don't." (p.135) When Joe objects, he falls back on the wife-as-possessed-object argument. He calls her "twatface" and when she comes out of the lake she is crying: "Her pink face was dissolving, her skin was covered with sand and pine needles like a burned leech." (p.136) - a reminder of how the protagonist's brother, as a child, tortured leeches by throwing them into the fire.

When they describe their feelings toward each other, separately, to the protagonist (p.98-99, 138), it is apparent that all they have left is contempt, hatred, power games; but Anna sees farther than David: "It used to be good, then I started to really love him and he can't stand that, he can't stand having me really love him. Isn't that funny?" (p.123) The protagonist, sensing that when Anna says love she means need, sees farther still:

They know everything about each other, I thought, that's why they're so sad; but Anna was more than sad, she was desperate, her body her only weapon and she was fighting for her life, he was her life, her life was the fight; she was fighting him because if she ever surrendered the balance of power would be broken and he would go elsewhere. To continue the war. (p.153-4)
But they are re-united when they discover a common enemy, the protagonist, who has incurred David's hatred and wrath by not letting him screw her, and Anna's because he thought he wanted to; also because the protagonist wouldn't: "...she resented me because I hadn't given in, it commented on her." (p.154) Hatred for a third person re-unites them, takes their minds off their self-hatred and hatred of each other, temporarily at least; and the protagonist sees this clearly enough; when they tell her her father is dead she is on guard against their united attacking front. (p.157-8)
**Man vs Woman**

*Surfacing* explores themes of exploitation and victimization in the relationships not only between individual women and men but also between ruling groups such as Americans, Anglo-Saxon Canadians and men in general, and their victims, respectively, Canadians, French-Canadians, Indians, and women; and also between Man and Nature, which includes all living creatures under his domination - white birches, herons, animals, women. This web or chain of oppression forms a closely-interlocked pattern in the novel, and of all its aspects, the political relationship between men and women in general is one of the most fully developed and savagely condemned. The theme is introduced with small subtle touches early in the book, and swells in volume and intensity as the book progresses, both as it is explored specifically between individual characters and as it is developed generally, between Man and Woman.

Early in the story, Paul asks, "'Your husband is here too?'...

'Yes, he's here'...What he means is that a man should be handling this; Joe will do as a stand-in. My status is a problem, they obviously think I'm married. But I'm safe, I'm wearing my ring..." (p.23) What he also means is that she, a woman, is too fragile and puny to handle it herself, whereas a man, owing to his superior strength, would be able to rise to the occasion. In short, the kind of condescending protective chivalry which has encouraged women to remain weak, helpless and dependent all their lives.

When she remembers a scene with her 'husband' another facet of the same attitude-pattern is revealed:...'I'm talking and his mouth turns indulgent..." (p.23) and later, in another flashback,
a direct connection is made between the attitude and how it affects the lives of women:

For a while I was going to be a real artist; he thought that was cute but misguided, he said I should study something I'd be able to use because there have never been any important woman artists. That was before we were married and I still listened to what he said, so I went into Design and did fabric patterns. But he was right, there never have been any. (p.52)

No wonder, with that kind of encouragement. The attitude of the fake husband not only toward the protagonist but also toward women in general, is not uncommon:

After the murder, the slaughter, he couldn't believe I didn't want to see him anymore; it bewildered him, he resented me for it, he expected gratitude because he arranged it for me, fixed me so I was as good as new; others, he said, wouldn't have bothered." (p.145)

The pattern is traced from childhood to present; lying in what was her bedroom as a child, the protagonist looks at the pictures on the walls: "Ladies in exotic costumes, sausage rolls of hair across their foreheads, with puffed red mouths and eyelashes like toothbrush bristles: when I was ten I believed in glamour, it was a kind of religion..." (p.42) She thinks of paper dolls with "paper dresses no protection against the icy wind" and "interminable changing of costumes, a slavery of pleasure." (p.43) In fact, the protagonist's career, suggested by her lover and controlled by her boss, a male publisher, includes work which perpetuates the myth that feminine worth equals plastic 'beauty'. When Anna looks at her drawings of a fairytale princess for a children's book, she asks,

'Did you believe that stuff when you were little?...I did, I thought I was really a princess and I'd end up living in a castle. They shouldn't let kids have stuff like that.' She goes to the mirror, then stands on tiptoe, checking her back to see if it's pink. (p.58)
The juxtaposition of word and act here is ironic, for even if Anna no longer believes the fairytale, she is still trying - desperately, pathetically - to live out the legend. Her white bell-bottoms, her makeup and dedicated sunning, her fear and anger - all testify to the fact that she still believes it:

'Is my nose peeling?' she asks, rubbing it. From her handbag she takes a round gilt compact with violets on the cover. She opens it, unclosing her other self... performing the only magic left to her.

Rump on a packsack, harem cushion, pink on the cheeks and black discreetly around the eyes, as red as blood as black as ebony... She takes her clothes off or puts them on, paper doll wardrobe...

Anna sits, darkness in her eye sockets, skull with a candle. (p.165)

The childhood scrapbooks illustrate the childhood myths of masculine and feminine: for the brother, violence, aggression, conflict, death-machines - "explosions in red and orange, soldiers dismembering in the air, planes and tanks", (p.90), swastikas, flame-throwers, trumpet-shaped pistols, ray-guns; and for the sisters, "ladies, all kinds: holding up cans of cleanser, knitting, smiling, modelling toeless high heels, women's dresses clipped from mail order catalogues, no bodies in them." (p. 91)

Yet along with the pressure, during childhood, to value the paper images of feminine 'beauty', was another pressure; to despise the reality. Neither David nor Anna, apparently, can endure her real face, naked of makeup. Breasts to be acceptable should be "brassiere-shaped" (p.25) In the village store the protagonist notes that

The old priest is definitely gone, he disapproved of slacks, the women had to wear long concealing skirts and dark stockings and keep their arms covered in church. Shorts were against the law, and many of them lived all their lives beside the lake without learning to swim because they were ashamed to put on bathing suits. (p.25)
The actual body is disgusting: 'cunt' and 'twatface' are aimed as insults, and David's way of humiliating Anna is to force her to be filmed without clothes. When the protagonist remains behind on the island and strips herself of civilization in order to receive messages from her dead parents, she looks into the mirror and thinks:

They would never believe it's only a natural woman, state of nature, they think of that as a tanned body on a beach with washed hair waving like scarves; not this, face dirt-caked and streaked, skin grimed and scabby, hair like a frayed bathmat stuck with leaves and twigs. A new kind of centrefold. (p.190)

Other childhood influences, designed to turn girl humans into inhuman ladies and boy humans into inhumane men: "...in school it was worse for a girl to ask questions than for a boy." (p.97)

"A lady was what you dressed up as on Hallowe'en when you couldn't think of anything else and didn't want to be a ghost; or it was what you said at school when they asked you what you were going to be when you grew up, you said 'A lady' or 'A mother', either one was safe..." The protagonist's brother had a 'laboratory' in which small creatures died (p.131); she rescued them once but

He was so angry he was pale, his eyes twisted as though he couldn't see me. 'They were mine,' he said. Afterwards he trapped other things but changed the place; this time he wouldn't tell me. I found it anyway but I was afraid to let them out again, Because of my fear they were killed. (p.131)

(The protagonist thinks of herself as an accomplice, and suffers an accomplice's guilt, when David fishes for sport and when she remembers the abortion, but not, significantly, when David and Joe humiliate Anna on the dock.)

Her recollection on her childhood 'vision of Heaven' makes vivid the contrast between herself and her brother:
I didn't want there to be wars and death, I wanted them not to exist; only rabbits with their coloured egg houses, sun and moon orderly above the flat earth, summer always, I wanted everyone to be happy. But his pictures were more accurate, the weapons, the disintegrating soldiers, he was a realist, that protected him. (p. 131)

The brother's assertion of ownership of the creatures in the jars in his 'laboratory' is echoed by Joe when David comments on the protagonist's 'meat ass' and he replies 'You can have it'. (p.90) and by David when Joe objects to his treatment of Anna: "Shut up, she's my wife". (p.135) When the searchers come to the island to look for the protagonist, she runs away: "They can't be trusted. They'll mistake me for a human being, a naked woman wrapped in a blanket; possibly that's what they've come here for, if it's running around loose, ownerless, why not take it." (p.183)

A direct link is pointed out between a world which includes Hitler and boyhood scrapbooks with rayguns, and individuals in that world who can neither feel nor love and are therefore capable of perpetuating the horror: in bed, both Joe and the protagonist are impotent to comfort the other:

...we were both afraid of failure; we lay with our backs to each other...Romance comic books, on the cover always a pink face oozing tears like a melting popsicle; men's magazines were about pleasure, cars and women, the skins bald as inner tubes. In a way it was a relief, to be exempt from feeling. (p.112)

While the protagonist and Anna weed the garden they exchange opinions about the Pill, and Anna echoes the feeling of many women when she says, "'Bastards...They're so smart, you think they'd be able to come up with something that'd work without killing you. David wants me to go back on, he says it's no worse for you than aspirin..." (p.80)

The feelings of fear and vulnerability which women have when they realize that their bodies and lives are controlled by men, for whom
men's interests take priority, are expressed indirectly when Anna says that sometimes she thinks David would like her to die. The subject of birth control triggers in the protagonist's mind a flashback to her abortion:

...they shut you into a hospital, they shave the hair off you and tie your hands down and they don't let you see, they don't want you to understand, they want you to believe it's their power, not yours. They stick needles into you so you won't hear anything, you might as well be a dead pig, your legs are up in a metal frame, they bend over you, technicians, mechanics, butchers, students clumsy and sniggering practising on your body, they take the baby out with a fork like a pickle out of a pickle jar. After that they fill your veins up with red plastic. (p.80)

The Women's Liberation Movement represents the primary potential for change in the mutually destructive relationship between the sexes, yet none of the characters understand it; David reacts superstitiously, with fear and blustered threats in the guise of humour (p.110), Anna grasps certain realities but is unable to act on them, and the protagonist avoids the issue with an ambiguous remark: "I said, 'I think men ought to be superior.' But neither of them heard the actual words; Anna looked at me as though I'd betrayed her and said, 'Wow are you ever brainwashed', and David said 'Want a job?' and to Joe, 'Hear that, you're superior.' (p.111) She does not clarify her remark, nor does she give Anna any support when she says,"I'll join if you will." (p.111)

When David accuses the protagonist of hating men, she moves a step closer to understanding how she lost her ability to feel and to love: "...I realized it wasn't the men I hated, it was the Americans, the human beings, men and women both. They'd had their chance but they had turned against the gods..." (p.154) She also reveals, inadvertantly, that she herself is infected with the same poison she hates in them: "...I wanted there to be a machine that could make
them vanish, a button I could press that would evaporate them..." (p.154) But although both she and Anna are polluted too, it is true that, except for them, all the representatives of logic, of Americanism, of the exploitation and destruction of Nature and life itself in the novel, are male. In fact, all the men in the novel are carriers of death: her father (p.186), Joe (p.146-7), her lover, Mr. Malmstrom and the other Americans, the Americanized Canadians, and especially David: "Second-hand American was spreading over him in patches, like mange or lichen. He was infested, garbled, and I couldn't help him: it would take such time to heal, unearthish him, scrape him down to where he was true... More than ever I needed to find it, the thing she had hidden, the power from my father's intercession wasn't enough to protect me, it gave only knowledge and there were more gods than his, his were the gods of the head, antlers rooted in the brain. Not only how to see but how to act." (p.152-3)

And, after she finds her mother's legacy, she does act; she releases the images trapped as Random Samples in David's film: tree, fish, heron, woman, (p.166) just as she released the creatures trapped by her brother years ago. So as to destroy the film completely and secure their release, she lets the film fall into the lake, which is "blue and clear as redemption". (p.15) Later it occurs to her, "Anna's soul closed in the gold compact, that and not the camera is what I should have broken." (p.175) Before woman can be really free the destructive self-image peddled by capitalists must also be destroyed.

Later, when she sees the being by the garden, what her father has become or what she is, she realizes that "logic excludes love." (p.186)
In *Surfacing*, Woman is seen as closer to feelings, life and Nature than Man. But rather than using this view as a justification of women's oppression, Atwood affirms these traditionally feminine qualities and suggests that they are essential for survival, both of individuals in their personal lives and of humankind itself. There are three passages which, when placed side by side, suggest that love, feeling, caring for life - traditionally the 'emotional intuitive' ghetto to which women have been relegated as a means of excluding them from most human activity - may be the only way to withstand the infestation of 'second-hand American':

"Do you realize," David says, "that this country is founded on the bodies of dead animals? Dead fish, dead seals, and historically dead beavers, the beaver is to this country what the black man is to the United States. Not only that, in New York it's now a dirty word, beaver. I think that's very significant." (p.40)

"That's what they should have put on the flag instead of a maple leaf, a split beaver; I'd salute that."

"Why should it be split?" I said, It was like skinning the cat, I didn't get it.

He looked exasperated. "It's a joke," he said, and when I still didn't laugh, "Where've you been living. It's slang for cunt." (p.119)

"If we could only kick out the fascist pig Yanks and the capitalists this would be a neat country. But then, who would be left?"

"How?" I say. "How would you kick them out?"

"Organize the beavers," David says, "chew them to pieces, it's the only way." (p.39)

All of these pronouncements are David's and therefore suspect; but the connections are there nonetheless, and moreover they are consistent with the rest of the book.
Like Marian and Ainsley in *The Edible Woman*, the protagonist of *Surfacing* and Anna neither know each other well nor feel the need to develop their relationship: "She's my best friend, my best woman friend; I've known her two months." (p.10) There is, in fact, a subtle undertone of contempt in the protagonist's flat dry descriptions of Anna's appearance and behaviour (p.43, 163) - which is not surprising in a society that trains both men and women to regard women with contempt. The protagonist remains aloof from Anna, rejecting her sympathy with an inner observation that reveals her contempt:

"Are you okay?" she says.

"Sure," I say; the question surprises me.

"I'm sorry he wasn't here," she says mournfully, gazing at me out of her round green eyes as though it's her grief, her catastrophe.

"It's all right," I tell her, comforting her...(p.37)

To reveal grief and confusion, which the protagonist has been feeling, would be to reveal vulnerability: the protagonist maintains an appearance of strength and control by reversing the emotional current so that she ends up comforting Anna.

Later in the novel she again rejects an offer of intimacy from Anna, and again her inner monologue reveals contempt: "I think she wanted us to exchange more confidences, she wanted to talk about her other diseases, but I kept on weeding." (p.81) Although Anna's offer of a feminist alliance is made half-jokingly (p.110), it also is rejected by the protagonist, whose evasive response is misinterpreted.
and who does not trouble to correct their error. In fact, Anna's timid gestures in the direction of Women's Liberation occur throughout the novel; she probably would join, with a bit of encouragement, and it could safely be taken for granted that it would be good for her. But lacking any strongly-developed feminist ethic, the two women become antagonists as soon as David begins to make suggestive comments in the protagonist's direction.

Her guilt and sense of complicity in the atrocities perpetrated by boys and men on living creatures does not extend as far as Anna. In the brutal scene on the dock when David abuses and humiliates Anna, the protagonist makes no move to defend her: "The canoes were there and I needed one of them but it was too dangerous." (p.134)

I wanted to run down to the dock and stop them, fighting was wrong, we weren't allowed to, if we did both sides got punished as in a real war...after a while I never fought back because I never won. The only defense was flight, invisibility. I sat down on the top step. (p.135)

When Anna climbs up the hill to the cabin, crying, the protagonist again fails to offer sympathy or warmth, and when she asks David why he did it, she realizes that her reason for asking is selfish: "I realized it wasn't for Anna I was asking, I wasn't defending her; it was for myself, I needed to understand." (p.137)

At first, Anna expresses not contempt toward the protagonist but warmth, until David starts to play his little game. Then she becomes hostile and aggressive. In the kitchen where they are doing dishes she tells the protagonist that if David makes a pass at her, it has nothing at all to do with her; "She raised her head, smiling, friendly again. 'I thought I should warn you so you'd know if he grabs you or anything it won't have much to do with you, it's all about me really." The protagonist reflects, naively, "...It
was kind of her, thoughtful; I knew in her place I wouldn't have done it, I would have let her take care of herself. My Brother's Keeper always reminded me of zoos and insane asylums." (p.99)

Having allowed herself to be manipulated into a position hostile to the protagonist, Anna becomes vicious. At dinner of the day when David humiliates Anna and makes his futile ugly attempt to seduce the protagonist, she watches them at war:

I didn't want to join. "It's not what you think," I said to Anna. "He asked me to but I wouldn't." I wanted to tell her I hadn't acted against her.

Her eyes flicked from him to me. "That was pure of you," she said. I'd made a mistake, she resented me because I hadn't given in, it commented on her. (p.154)

(But that is probably not the only reason for Anna's failure to be impressed or placated: for her it's a hollow offering, since she is no doubt aware that it required no great effort on the protagonist's part to refrain.)

Her cold viciousness is expressed callously, in the form of a joke, on the day they leave the island. David is talking pompously about Random Samples and Anna:

"There's part of a reel left," Anna says. "You should get her, you got me but you never got me." She looks at me, fumes ascending from her nose and mouth...

He assesses me. "Where would we fit her in though? We don't have anyone fucking yet; but I'd have to do it", he says to Joe, "we need you running the camera."

"I could run the camera," Anna says, "and you could both do it," and everyone laughs. (p.165)

Yet when the protagonist unwinds the film and lets it spiral into the lake, in a symbolic attempt to liberate the living creatures whose souls have perhaps been captured by camera or gun, Anna makes no move to stop her. She warns, "You better not do that...
they'll kill you.' "'They'll get you.' "But she doesn't interfere, she doesn't call them. (p. 166) Despite her hostility toward the other woman, she doesn't tell them until after the protagonist has made her escape, and then only to avoid being punished as an accomplice. It is the only moment of anything resembling co-operation and understanding and sisterhood throughout the novel.

Like the portrait of the relationship between Ainsley and Marian, the portrait of that between the protagonist and Anna exhibits on a personal level the chronic mistrust, mutual destructiveness and rivalry which weaken women economically and politically. Unable to form strong lasting bonds with one another, they neither seek nor find support and strength in one another, which increases their vulnerability and availability as victims, both in personal relationships and in society as a whole. No alternative pattern is suggested in either novel, and it is only because of the contrast with alternatives in the Women's Movement that the lack is noticeable.

The relationship between the protagonist and her mother is sketched in only a few pages, yet like a pebble dropped in a pond its meaning moves throughout the entire book. It is the strongest force which makes *Surfacing* what Stanley Fish would describe as a self-consuming artifact, its final meaning a refutation of itself. What Atwood attempts to accomplish by means of stylistic changes toward the end of the novel is, more successfully achieved, in my view, in the connections between the protagonist's relationship with her mother, her own dilemma of numb no-feeling, and her interim 'solution' to that dilemma, which is the result of guilt and conflict about her abortion. The resolution, another pregnancy, can scarcely be taken seriously, for a number of reasons: you cannot atone for the
death of one child by conceiving another unless the children are felt to be nothing more than an extension of yourself, in which case such a resolution is suspect because of what it implies about your love for them; moreover, in simple practical terms, it is difficult to imagine a happy or even adequate outcome of a situation in which a woman romantically decides to reproduce, on her own, in a society such as the one of which the protagonist is a part. One cannot avoid a depressing vision of the two of them living in a basement apartment on welfare.

The connection between the protagonist's feelings about her mother and her attempt to conceive is direct and unmistakeable. After her descent into the lake where she sees her father's body, which she immediately denies by interpreting the sight as a vision of her dead child, and after her rejection of Joe as another male symbol of death, she reflects:

It would be right for my mother to have left something for me also, a legacy. His was complicated, tangled, but hers would be simple as a hand, it would be final. (p.149)

Then, after her enervating contact with David's foulness:

More than ever I needed to find it, the thing she had hidden; the power from my father's intercession wasn't enough to protect me, it gave only knowledge and there were more gods than his, his were the gods of the head, antlers rooted in the brain. Not only how to see but how to act. (p. 153)

Her mother's legacy is a childhood drawing:

On the left was a woman with a round moon stomach: the baby was sitting up inside her gazing out...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 meanings 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...First I had to immerse myself in the other language. (p.158)
Her first act after this is to mate with Joe in a deliberate attempt to conceive.

On the island, one of the visions which allow her escape from her shell of numbness and guilt is the vision of her mother feeding the birds. And after the vision of her father, she finally dreams, ending the long period when she had not had dreams and had felt their absence as a lack:

During the night, I had a dream about them, the way they were when they were alive and becoming older; they are in a boat, the green canoe, heading out of the bay. (p.188)

She has arrived at an acceptance of their deaths and of the fact that they were, after all, human:

Our mother, collecting the seasons and the weather and her children's faces, the meticulous records that allowed her to omit the other things, the pain and isolation and whatever it was she was fighting against, something in a vanished history, I can never know. They are out of reach, they belong to themselves, more than ever. (p.190)

In my opinion, of the protagonist's visions and the acts which result from them, her mother's legacy and her attempt to conceive are the only ones which do not ring true. This, along with the simple obvious objections to pregnancy as a cure for anybody's ills, leads me to the conclusion that *Surfacing* offers no more than *The Edible Woman* - an interim resolution to some of the conflict, very strongly qualified by the implication that not even an interim resolution to any conflict can be supplied by words on a page; that any final truth, like love or beauty or wisdom, is
ultimately unapproachable through the medium of words.
The Protagonist vs Herself

The central relationship in *Surfacing* is between the nameless protagonist and herself. Early in the novel, she remembers Anna's reading her palm, and her question:

"Are you a twin?" I said No. "Are you positive", she said, because some of your lines are double." Her index finger traced me: "You had a good childhood but then there's this funny break." (p.8)

When Anna remarks that she was lucky her marriage was childless, she thinks about the baby she 'abandoned':

I have to behave as thought it doesn't exist, because for me it can't, it was taken away from me, exported, deported. A section of my own life, sliced off from me like a Siamese twin, my own flesh cancelled. Lapse, relapse, I have to forget. (p. 48)

In her search for the moment of the break, which she has forgotten in a futile attempt to protect herself from pain, she goes through childhood relics in the cabin, one of them a photo album:

It was no longer his death but my own that concerned me; perhaps I would be able to tell when the change occurred by the differences in my former faces, alive up to a year, a day, then frozen. The duchess at the French court before the Revolution, who stopped laughing or crying so her skin would never change or wrinkle, it worked, she died immortal. (p.107)

But the search is unsuccessful:

No hints or facts, I didn't know when it had happened. I must have been all right 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, I read it in a comic book; 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. I was nothing but a head, or no, something minor like a severed thumb; numb. At school they used to play a joke, they would bring little boxes with cotton wool in them and a hole cut in the bottom; they would poke their finger through the hole and pretend it was a dead finger. (p.108)
One of the symptoms of the split in the protagonist is the conviction that it is necessary and desirable to suppress emotion:

I'm starting to shake...I'll start crying, that would be horrible, none of them would know what to do and neither would I. I bite down into the cone and I can't feel anything for a minute but the knife-hard pain up the side of my face. Anaesthesia, that's one technique; if it hurts invent a different pain. I'm all right. (p. 13)

Anaesthetizing herself by inventing different pains is, in fact, exactly what she has done: husband and abandoned child for exploiting lover and aborted fetus. As in The Edible Woman, where the other characters praise Marian for her sensibleness and control, in Surfacing the characters praise or encourage the protagonist's lack of feeling. Anna is the only one who is potentially receptive, and the protagonist rejects her offer to share feelings. Joe is impressed and relieved when she maintains her 'cool'. (p. 16, 159, 160) But this process of self-numbing by substitution becomes habitual, so that when she catches a glimpse of her father's corpse in the lake, she sees instead her dead baby; and when the body is found she reacts instead to the threat presented by Anna and David.

When she sees an external symbol of what she does to her own experience and emotions, she makes, in effect, the same excuse as Marian's. Ainsley's observation that she chooses clothes as camouflage:

Underneath the bar itself is a crudely carved wooden fish with red and blue dots on it, intended possibly for a speckled trout; on its leaping back it supports the fake marble surface...and the regulation picture, scrolled gilt frame, blown-up photograph of a stream with trees and rapids and a man fishing. It's an imitation of other places, more southern ones, which are themselves imitations, the original someone's distorted memory of a nineteenth century English gentleman's shooting lodge, the kind with furniture made from deer antlers...But if this succeeds why shouldn't they do it? (p.28)
Later, close to the end of the novel, she sees Anna as

...a seamed and folded imitation of a woman who is also an imitation, the original nowhere, hairless lobed angel in the same heaven where God is a circle, captive princess in somebody's head. She is locked in...(p.165)

Women who are in the control of men like David, who will punish Anne one way or another if he sees her ageing human face free of makeup, have become unreal, half dead, their souls trapped in gold compacts. When the protagonist begins to learn 'how to act', one of those acts is to turn the mirror in the cabin to the wall.

As the novel unfolds, the protagonist becomes more and more aware that by substituting invented pains for real ones she has in fact almost destroyed her capacity to remember accurately, to experience directly, to dream, to feel, to love. She envies Joe his ability to dream - even nightmares are better than no dreams.(p.43)

She finds it difficult to be away from distractions: "I don't want to stay here, I want to go back where there is electricity and distraction. I'm used to it now, filling the time without it is an effort." (p.51) Moreover, it is hard for her to assert herself, affirm her own desires: when the men decide to stay at the cabin, without consulting her, she gives in without an argument, against her own strong inclination and with no good reason to submit. When David gives her a 'triumphant and appraising' look he is responding to someone who has behaved like a victim.

But the isolation of the island, the intensification and clarification of the politics of relationships, the mounting evidence of damage done to life and nature by mechanization and American-
ization, and the pressure of her parents' deaths— all make it more and more difficult for the protagonist to avoid confronting herself as well as the others. Gaps begin to open in her 'wall of logic', her defenses against pain:

I have to be more careful about my memories, I have to be sure they're my own and not the memories of other people telling me what I felt, how I acted, what I said; if the events are wrong the feelings I remember about them will be wrong, too, I'll start inventing them and there will be no way of correcting it, the ones who could help me are gone. I run quickly over my version of it, my life, checking it like an alibi; it fits, it's all there till the time I left. Then static, like a jumped track, for a moment I've lost it, wiped clean; my exact age even, I shut my eyes, what is it?...I refuse to panic, I force my eyes open... (p.73)

She becomes increasingly aware of the extent to which she and the people with her are mechanical, shut off from their bodies and emotions, shut off from life. (p.76) "Canned laughter, they carry it with them, the midget reels of tape and the On switch concealed somewhere in their chests, instant playback." (p.77)

I didn't feel awful; I realized I didn't feel much of anything, I hadn't for a long time...At some point my neck must have closed over, pond freezing or a wound, shutting me into my head; since then everything had been glancing off me... (p.106)

As awareness of herself rises, her defenses fall; finally, she divests herself of all of them, and the visions that come restore her ability to act, to feel (grief, fear, finally love), to dream and remember, until finally— "This above all, to refuse to be a victim. Unless I do that I can do nothing. I have to recant, give up the old belief that I am powerless and because of it nothing I can do will ever hurt anyone. (p.191)

When Claude and Joe arrive she moves behind the trees, "not running away but cautious" (p.192) Flight— from others or
from her own experience and feelings - is no longer possible. 

By ceasing to deny the lost part of herself, the part which she deliberately numbed in order not to feel pain, the only part that could live, she has regained the power of feeling and love.
Survival

After The Edible Woman, Surfacing, and the poetry, in all of which the politics of relationships between men and woman are not merely explored but coolly dissected in such a way that oppressor-victim psychology and behaviour patterns are revealed, stripped of romantic illusion, Survival raises certain questions, for it focusses on the victim obsession in the Canadian psyche, as it is revealed in Canadian literature, but with relatively scant emphasis upon the sex-stereotyped victim condition and psychology of Canadian women which is so dominant a theme in the novels.

At the conclusion of the introductory section, "What, Why and Where is Here?" Atwood articulates some of her reasons for writing Survival:

What a lost person needs is a map of the territory, with his own position marked on it so he can see where he is in relation to everything else. Literature is not only a mirror; it is also a map, a geography of the mind. Our literature is one such map, if we can learn to read it as our literature, as the product of who and where we have been. We need such a map desperately, we need to know about here, because here is where we live. For the members of a country or a culture, shared knowledge of their place, their here, is not a luxury but a necessity. Without that knowledge we will not survive.

But half of the people in Canada are women, and, as the analyses and demands of the Women's Movement clearly show, women are lost, oppressed and victimized in ways unique to women (though there are similarities between the status and psychology of women and those of other oppressed groups.) In fact it could be argued that the oppression of Canadian women as women has been the primary shaping factor of our lives, and that our oppression as Canadian citizens is secondary. In any case, the result is that we have been and
are oppressed; that half of the people whose victim experience Atwood discusses in *Survival* are victims not only of British and American imperialism but of male domination as well. Atwood is not unaware of this:

Position Two: To acknowledge the fact that you are a victim, but to explain this as an act of Fate, the will of God, the dictates of Biology (in the case of women, for instance) the necessity decreed by History, or Economics, or the unconscious, or any other large general powerful idea. (p.37)

Just as Canadian culture has been dominated by British and American culture, so human culture of most if not all nations has been dominated by the vision and voice of men. Atwood refers to one aspect of this situation in her mention of Alice Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women*:

The protagonist, Del Jordan, has secret ambitions as a writer...the culture is bent on stunting or destroying them, and the situation is compounded by the fact that the potential writer is a woman. (p. 93)

Such direct references to the situation of the female half of the Canadian population do not occur as frequently as do examples of the subtle attitude that allows that situation to exist: "I don't talk much about my work in this book because I happen to believe that an author is perhaps his own trickiest critic." (p.14)

All through *Survival* the masculine pronoun is used to refer to the writer, the artist, the critic, the reader or the student, just as "man" and "mankind" are used to refer to humanity in general. There is one paragraph in which the subtle hidden message in this usage - that Man is indeed primarily male, and woman some kind of peripheral creature who does not really qualify for full membership in the human race - is made explicit:
As George Grant points out in the quotation at the beginning of this chapter, attitudes toward Nature inevitably involve man's attitude toward his own body and toward sexuality, insofar as these too are seen as part of Nature. It doesn't take too much thought to deduce what 'Nature is dead' and 'Nature is hostile' are going to do to a man's attitude towards his own body and towards women. (p.63)

It is puzzling to read, in a book entitled Survival written by a woman who is also an artist, paragraph after paragraph in which the hypothetical Canadian artist is always a man (Chapter Nine, 'The Paralyzed Artist'). Only once is the artist a woman: "Let us suppose that a man or woman appears on the face of the earth who for reasons unknown decides to become a serious artist." (P.181) But she disappears: "Let us further suppose that the artist... sees himself as a man with a vision communicable in words or images which he wishes to make accessible to others." (p.181) Gradually, after a sufficient number of sentences containing this message, even the alert reader who consciously objects to and is on guard against this habit finds herself thinking of the artist as male. It is just by such subtle, ostensibly innocuous, endlessly repeated messages as this that the oppression of women has been rationalized by society and internalized by women. In this instance the hidden message is that an active, productive, creative individual is most likely to be a man.

It is not unreasonable to expect that Atwood, as a writer who is also a woman, and a woman aware of sex discrimination at that, would be sensitive to the meanings of words and to how those meanings affect people's attitudes towards the world and other people and themselves. It would have been interesting had she used she/he, hers/his etc, but the most illuminating technique would have been the consistent use of the feminine pronoun, not
as reverse sexism but as a series of small jolts designed to notify
the reader that his/her expectations were based on the widely ac-
cepted but offensive assumption that words like Mankind and Man in-
clude, on equal terms, Woman.

In Chapter Ten of *Survival*, Atwood examines images of women in Can-
adian literature. What makes this chapter strange, coming from the
pen of a woman aware of sex discrimination, is the almost-unquestion-
ing acceptance of Robert Graves' three mythological categories of
Woman, which, taken together, "constitute the Triple Goddess, who
is the Muse, the inspirer of poetry; she is also Nature, a goddess
of cycles and seasons." (p.199) The three categories, as Graves de-
fines them, are "the elusive Diana or Maiden figure, the young
girl; next the Venus figure, goddess of love, sex, and fertility;
then the Hecate figure, called by Graves the Crone, goddess of the
underworld, who presides over death and has oracular power." (p.199)

Atwood's comment on these stereotypes is this:

Simone de Beavoir and others after her have objected to the
tendency in literature to make Woman-Nature metaphors or
equations. Their objections are based on the kinds of lim-
itng mystiques about women such metaphors foster, and are
no doubt legitimate within certain boundaries; but these are
the kinds of patterns literature makes - literature created
by women as well as men - and in literature itself they
cannot be avoided. Let us suppose then Woman is Nature, or
Nature is a woman. (p.200)

This is the only reference to any comprehensive feminist analysis,
which is very strange in a book that explores the Victim theme and
which was written by a woman whose first novel was mistakenly
assumed to be a product of the Women's Movement. It is unsettling
that Atwood should add, "literature created by women as well as
men", as if the fact that women have acquiesced to their oppression
could possibly legitimize that oppression.

Graves' three categories and the Triple Goddess which they unite to form are not in themselves blatantly discriminatory; the feminist objection to them would be based on what they exclude, for they categorize and stereotype women according to sexual characteristics. This tendency to describe and define women primarily according to sexual functions has always had widespread and, for women, sinister repercussions in society, and is rightly one of the attitudes which Women's Liberation struggles to change. Sexuality is only one aspect of a human being, and when it is used to limit an individual to a destiny chosen by external agents and enforced upon that individual without her/his consent, or, in many cases, knowledge, then it has become a weapon used against the individual.

"I remember wondering, after first reading Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel*, why most of the strong and vividly-portrayed female characters in Canadian literature are old women." (p.14) In suggesting reasons for this, Atwood makes little mention of the fact that, in general, writers (being mostly male) have rarely come up with "strong and vividly portrayed female characters" at all, which is not surprising if one accepts the proposition that most fictional female characters have been stereotyped creatures viewed through prejudiced eyes. And, since most male writers have tended to be sidetracked by and preoccupied with the sexual facets of their female characters, a reasonable explanation for the preponderance of Hecates in Canadian literature would be that only when a woman is old can she be seen as somewhat
human, because, since our society denies the sexuality of older people, especially of older women, it is only then that it ceases to be a distraction. This would apply not only to male writers but also to female writers, since women who have entered traditionally male territories such as literature have tended to be male-identified and male-oriented, with the result that their perceptions have resembled those of men instead of exploring and affirming those of women. (There have, of course, been exceptions to this: Simone de Beavoir and Doris Lessing are examples, and in Canada Alice Munro, Jane Rule, Constance Beresford-Howe, Atwood and others are breaking away from traditional male-defined ways of experiencing and describing the world.)

Atwood observes that Hecates "are often seen as malevolent, sinister or life-denying, either by themselves or by other characters in their books." (p.199) She goes on to explain this by examining the Woman-as-Nature, Nature-as-Monster metaphors, but it is also relevant to consider the hatred and contempt with which patriarchal society treats women (and which women also feel towards other women, having accepted and internalized the Thou Shalt Be Inferior commandment). This is certainly relevant to the high incidence of destructive old women in Canadian fiction, not only because women in general are treated with contempt in this society but also because older women, who have lost one sexual function (reproductive ability) and are presumed to have lost another (the desire and capacity for sexual intercourse) are even more scorned and ignored than young women (who are at least sexually exploit-able).
Atwood goes on to say, "Diana-Maidens often die young. There is a notable absence of Venuses...What can account for this?" (p.199) In her reply she touches upon the brutal repression of female sexuality which has been so obvious a part of the oppression of women generally. It's not unreasonable to suggest that Diana-Maidens die young because their society prefers them virginally dead to sexually alive, mature and active; after all, despite the so-called sexual revolution and a general loosening of inhibitions in North American life, sex is still suspect, especially for women. Nip 'em in the bud, so to speak. And, since the Diana-Maidens rarely get to grow up, it's not surprising that there's a dearth of Venuses.

Venus traditionally provides two things, sexual love and babies. There is a strange tendency in Canadian literature to split these functions apart, to have the sexual love department presided over by whores, or by easy and therefore despised women, and to reserve the babies for Diana figures, nonentities or even Hecates. This tendency is just as evident, if not more so, in the literature of French Canada as in that of the rest of the country...Jean le Moyne notes this pattern in his essay 'Women and French-Canadian literature' and connects the dead young beloveds and unattractive 'mature' women with the taboos set up by identifying 'wife' always as 'mother'. (p.2-6)

It is likely that the reason referred to here - "Something that looks like a real Venus figure makes an appearance in Callaghan's The Loved and the Lost - though even here, neither author nor central character can decide whether or not she's really a Virgin Mary - but her society can't tolerate her and she's murdered." (p.206) - is the real reason. Canadian society can't tolerate Vanuses; the penalties for such tendencies are severe enough to discourage them from making an appearance.

Another question raised is: "Are there any real women? Or rather, are there any women in Canadian literature who appear to be leading normal married lives, having children who are not dead, or Gothic
The assumption that real woman equals wife and mother, that normal life for a woman necessarily includes marriage and children, is no longer a safe one. Dr. Phyllis Chesler in *Women and Madness* and Dr. Jessie Bernard in *The Future of Marriage* present considerable evidence that married women with children in American society are more likely to be unreal, in the sense of being neurotic, than not, and in this regard there is no evidence that Canadian society is any different. Atwood touches on the widespread chronic despair of housewives when she says, referring to the two women who do lead such 'normal' lives, "But neither seems to be enjoying life much, their children are a drain or a worry, their husbands are hostile, uncommunicative, or not there." (p.209)

Atwood is silent on the subject of the collective victim experience and psychology of women in her discussions of fictional female characters who suffer from the effects of sexism in their society, usually unbeknownst to them and their creators. In her description of the freak-collector in *Five Legs* (p.81) of the masochist in *A Stranger and Afraid*, (p.158) and in the chapter on Indians, no emphasis is placed on the pressures in society which result in distortions of women's humanity. Similarly, in Chapter 11:

...the marital choices open to Maria are significant. Each of the men represents a way of life; one offers escape to the United States; one a repetition of the static farm life - hard work and child-bearing - that has exhausted Maria's mother; the third might have combined dynamic growth with continuity of cultural values, but Nature the Monster kills him in the forest. Maria finally chooses to remain, marry the second, and become an incarnation of her mother; and a chorus of earth-spirit, ancestral and heavenly voices backs her up. The bleak and confined life inside the wall is preferable to the threatening emptiness that lies outside it. (p.218)
Atwood discusses Maria's entrapment in the context of French-Canadian culture; but Maria's entrapment as a French-Canadian is compounded by her entrapment as a woman, for whom life-alternatives are limited to marital possibilities, which, though representative of different life-styles, nevertheless amount to no choice at all, since marriage itself is implied by each and the role of women in traditional marriage is rigidly defined. The same double oppression is apparent in the situations of Indian women in even more extreme form.

Later in the same chapter, Atwood touches upon a recurrent theme in Quebec literature:

An almost standard Quebec vision of death is the vision of the dead baby (or dead babies); it's a fantasy often indulged in by mothers or grandmothers, and it's hard to tell whether they are torturing themselves with it or enjoying it, or both. (p.223)

Atwood interprets the vision as springing from the French-Canadian psyche:

This obsession with death is not very cheering, but neither is it precisely morbid; it is simply an image that reflects a state of soul. What it says is that the Quebec situation (or the Canadian situation) is dead or death-dealing, and therefore genuine knowledge of it must be knowledge of death. It is also an image of ultimate sterility and powerlessness, the final result of being a victim.(p.224)

All the examples of the vision that Atwood cites are taken from books written by women, which seems as relevant as the fact that they are found in French-Canadian literature. It seems not unlikely that a woman condemned by church fathers and a male Pope to spend most of her adult life in pregnancy, post-partum depression, or slavery to the endless, thankless, unpaid, monotonous round of mundane tasks which life with children necessitates, would indulge in fantasies of dead children, thereby further victimizing herself through self-imposed guilt, an appropriate
emotional state for victims. But the guilt in this case would be an after-effect, or, to adopt Atwood's tone, a fringe benefit, for the fantasy itself would probably be motivated by a feeble and misdirected desire for freedom. This is a savage indictment of a system which robs what is potentially one of the most profound and tender love relationships between human beings of its joy and transforms it instead into a parasite-host relationship.

The conclusions of *The Edible Woman* and *Surfacing* provide a clue to the question: Why, in a critical book about the survival of the Canadian identity, is the issue of women's victimization not dealt with more fully and directly, especially when this issue is so strong a theme in the novels and poetry?

At the end of *The Edible Woman*, Marian is no closer than at the beginning to an awareness that her relationships with women lack trust, warmth, depth, and love; she does not realize that this lack weakens and impoverishes her. Nor is she conscious that her attitude toward women includes contempt, revulsion and suspicion, and that this weakens and impoverishes her even more since she is herself a woman. The same is true of the end of *Surfacing*, although there the protagonist moved slightly forward toward such an understanding; both her relationship with her mother and her destruction of Random Samples in a symbolic attempt to liberate Anna indicate that she is approaching a sense of identification with women. But it is likely that it is just this lack of a sense of identification with women that prevents Atwood from emphasizing the connections between sexist patterns in Canadian literature and the sexist system from which that literature springs.
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