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Ph.D English	2003
TITRE DE LA THÈSE / TITLE OF THESIS:	
Casting Shadows: A Study of Madness in Margaret Atwood's Novels	

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Casting Shadows: A Study of Madness in Margaret Atwood's Novels

by

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Thesis submitted to
the School of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
Ph.D. degree in English Literature

University of Ottawa
Ottawa, Canada

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Abstract

Madness is a recurrent aspect of Margaret Atwood's novels to date and represents perhaps her most discomforting challenge to the reader who is implicated as co-creator, interpreter, and participant of the fiction. Her novels question the binary of normality and madness by situating madness both in the margins and foreground, thereby exposing "normality" as a tendentious construct designed to obscure contemporary Western society's psychic imbalance caused by fear of the unknown within the self. This dissertation employs a psycho-social method of investigating madness with a concurrent assessment of reader-involvement strategies, mediated through a theoretical framework based on C. G. Jung, R. D. Laing, and Wolfgang Iser.

The particular areas of investigation include: Atwood's comical representation of psychology as a prominent undercurrent of popular culture in *The Edible Woman*, and her contrasting serious -- even threatening -- portrayal of normative limits as social constructs in *Bodily Harm*. With regard to the individual, *Lady Oracle* exhibits the role of fantasy in psychic balance and posits the protagonist as an unlikely manifestation of "normality." Although still focused on the individual, *Life Before Man* represents the converse: the capacity for fantasy is lost in the dissociated condition of "normalized" characters. The Jungian process of individuation is studied through the projection of one's shadow figure in *The Robber Bride*. Finally, Atwood's most direct and strategic implication of the reader in determining the variable boundaries of (in)sanity is examined in *Alias Grace.* Ultimately, Atwood's presentation of madness insists on the reader's involvement and situates her/him in a position of potential self-recognition.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to my supervisor, Gerald Lynch, for his indefatigable encouragement, guidance, and willingness to accommodate the shifting winds of my "mad" project. Thank you for being a true mentor.

Thank you as well to my examiners, John Moss, David Staines, and K. P. Stich from the University of Ottawa for their insightful remarks on the project. A special thank you to Magdalene Redekop of Victoria College, University of Toronto for taking time to provide such detailed response and for helpful comments made at the defence.

My colleagues and friends have provided instrumental support in numerous ways over the last several years. I appreciate each of you so much.

Finally, I would like to thank my family without whom this project would not exist. Thank you to my immediate and extended family in Thunder Bay, who have all been such cheerleaders and have endured my years of books, books, books. Special thanks to:

my parents, Yrjö and Marja-Leena Pylväinen,
Allan and Cara Pylväinen who provided me with such wonderful nephews, Christopher and Erik,
and my Finnish Mumma, Alli Järvimäki.

Thank you to my family in Ottawa, who became part of my life along the way:

my in-laws, Douglas and Elizabeth Trigg
Russell and Elaine Trigg and my Ottawa nephews, Evan and Bradley,
Mark and Heather Trigg,
and, most of all, my husband, Michael, who joined me on my quest and provided unfailing support in every way possible – including technological. Thank you for being there.

For my parents, Yrjö and Marja-Leena Pylväinen,

who have always believed in me.

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Preface

Each of Margaret Atwood's ten novels from *The Edible Woman* (1969) to *The Blind Assassin* (2000) contains mad figures who range from shadowy peripheral characters to the protagonist herself.[1] The constant presence of these figures forms an important part of Atwood's presentation of society. That is, the different shades of madness are not only integral to the development of Atwood's novels but, perhaps more significantly, they offer an oblique criticism of the society that both creates and condemns such a condition; this criticism extends from the fictional society to the "real" one occupied by the reader. The reader recognizes the novel's social condemnation even as Atwood's use of ambiguities and gaps simultaneously implicates her/him in that very culture by requiring decisions about outcomes or judgments about the psychic balance of characters. Assumed innocence or lack of responsibility is condoned neither in Atwood's characters nor in the reader; Atwood asserts, "if you are defining yourself as innocent, you refuse to accept power. You refuse to admit that you have it, then you refuse to exercise it" (Gibson 24). All of this, she maintains, is self-delusion: "being human inevitably involves being guilty, and if you define yourself as innocent, you can't accept that" (Gibson 22). That is, the premise of Atwood's model of "Basic Victim Positions," which is delineated in *Survival* (36-39), extends to her characters and the reader; the individual is held equally responsible for the acts of denying, excusing, acknowledging, or rejecting one's condition. There is no position which precludes human responsibility -- not even inaction. Rather than being safely removed from responsibility, Atwood's reader is doubly complicit; s/he not only fills in gaps by interpreting ambiguities but also undergoes an

[1] Atwood's eleventh novel, *Oryx and Crake* is scheduled for release in Canada on 22 April 2003 -- immediately following the completion of my study -- and so is not considered here.

unconscious self-recognition through the characters' process of self-realization or, in Jungian terms, individuation.

Atwood's novels depict the mutable nature of psychological categorization and strategically destabilize these designations by revealing them to be social constructs. In an early essay, she has observed that "[i]nsanity is the possession of, or by, a version of reality not shared by one's society" ("Four" 58). This premise is also foundational to her representations of madness in each of her novels. That is, Atwood suggests that a condition termed "insanity" does indeed exist but contends that it is another reality, not necessarily a false one. This view implicitly questions the construction of reality itself as tenuous and self-determined; such a problematization is unsettling, and Atwood's characters consistently struggle with radical destablizations of their world. The characters' struggles for self- and social-determination is coupled with Atwood's careful structuring of the novels to confront the reader with these same uncertainties. Notably, Atwood remarks that fiction is an effective means of examining and representing "*social* paradigms," observing that such representation may occur either consciously or unconsciously:

> [f]ar from thinking of writers as totally isolated individuals, I see them as inescapably connected with their society. The nature of the connection will vary -- the writer may unconsciously reflect the society, he [or she] may consciously examine it and project ways of changing it; and the connection between writer and society will increase in intensity as the society ... becomes the 'subject' of the writer. ("Mathews" 148)

Following from these views, I would argue that Atwood's representation of society and the madness within it are most effectively and comprehensively studied in her novels, where the fullest development of a society occurs. Thus the following chapters of this study will investigate this fictional representation of madness in Atwood's novels to date to show how they explore and challenge conventional notions of (in)sanity, reality, and individuality.

The introduction outlines the psychological context of the term "madness" and the concepts of "mental illness" or, conversely, of "sanity." Particular attention is given to the surrounding controversy in order to establish the mutable, constructed nature of such designations. Notably, this controversy exists within the psychological profession itself and, consequently, extends to related examinations of "normality" and "madness," including the present literary-critical study of Atwood's novels. Within this psychological context, the introduction establishes the theoretical framework: a psycho-social theory with reader-involvement strategies based on the concepts of C. G. Jung, R. D. Laing, and Wolfgang Iser. The particular Jungian concepts outlined here include the tripartite structure of the psyche -- shadow, anima, and persona -- and the self, which is comprised of both unconscious and conscious elements of the psyche. The vast, autonomous nature of the unconscious is a focal point, with explanations of its intrusive, compensatory capabilities through dreams and projection. Particular emphasis is placed on the process of individuation and Jung's belief in its necessity, especially in contemporary Western society where "normality" is a state of severe alienation from the unconscious.

Atwood mirrors this tenet of "normal" dissociation and challenges to it in her characters' attempts at self-realization. Her portrayal of the interaction between "sane" characters and their "insane" counterparts creates two levels of interpretation: first, the frighteningly real exploration of self that occurs for the protagonist through this interaction collapses the boundaries between self and other, mind and body, fantasy and reality, conscious and unconscious. Second, by revealing links between the characters, which occur through projection, the interaction exposes the artificiality of these psycho-social labels (sane/mad); consequently, the characters and the reader are confronted with the need to recognize and accommodate the unconscious rather than relying on tendentious designations of "normality." Ways in which Jung's work is better suited to this project than Freud's are also specifically discussed. Thus, this Jungian-based psychological approach should in fact prove the continued significance of psycho-social

constructs to Atwood's fictional societies, constructs which transcend the confines of the text to implicate, at times unexpectedly, even the postmodern reader who is accustomed to challenging both social and textual boundaries from various theoretical perspectives. At the very least, this psychological model offers a much-needed corrective to the dominant feminist readings of the past few decades (which is not to question the contribution of such criticism).

The introduction also outlines how the work of popular (somewhat notorious) 1960s psychologist R. D. Laing both complements and challenges Jung's views, further illuminating Atwood's fictional presentation of madness. Laing provides a way of reading the socially created and often falsely attributed dichotomies between sanity and madness, conventional distinctions that consistently appear in Atwood's characterization of society. Yet their presence is not indicative of Atwood's endorsement of binary concepts but reveals the instability of the boundaries between seeming opposites. The relevance of Laing's work for this reading is clarified by demonstrating some of the common misconceptions held by his challengers and by re-establishing focus on his foundational concept of alienation or dissociation. The goal of this study, however, is not to catalogue Atwood's adherence to a particular psychological theory (either Jung's or Laing's) but rather to demonstrate how the novels challenge conventional categories and the confines of the text itself through reader-text interaction to implicate the reader in the fictional critique of madness. This latter action occurs through strategies of reader involvement and her/his internalization of the challenges within the text. Here, Iser provides a way of conceiving the vital role of the reader; his views, as they directly reflect the impulses evident in Atwood's novels, are also outlined in the introduction. The ensuing chapters ultimately show how Atwood's presentation of the mad figure serves as a link between text and reader, forcing the reader out of complacency into direct contact with her/his assumptions and enabling the reader to transfer this assessment of norms from the novel to "reality." In an attempt to avoid repetition or the loss of significant parallels between

novels that could accompany a chronological approach, this study is selective and orders the novels on the basis of the various functions of mad characters and aspects of madness included in each novel. Consequently, chapters one and two examine pairs of novels in order to emphasize the diversity of Atwood's representations of madness, whereas each of the remaining two chapters focuses on a single novel, enabling a more detailed complementary examination of relevant concepts.

Chapter one examines the fictional construct of normative reality and the mad figure as a peripheral character to show how the margins and the marginalized are significant in Atwood's construction of society. *The Edible Woman* (1969) is analyzed as Atwood's comic representation of popular psychology, emphasizing its pervasive presence in contemporary Western society. In contrast to the majority of critical studies of the novel, this discussion concentrates on the marginalized characters as sites for investigating madness. In *The Edible Woman*, Atwood draws attention to society's casual employment of psychological terminology and concepts while also problematizing the influence of such discourse on the conception of normative behaviour. Through the protagonist Marian McAlpin's interaction with these characters, the reader observes her construction of "normality" and wavering uncertainty regarding the parameters of these boundaries. Thus, through a comic representation, Atwood suggests the constructed, tenuous nature of "normality" or, conversely, of "madness"; moreover, she implicates the reader through the act of interpretation as part of the society which determines these limits.

Chapter one continues with a complementary examination of *Bodily Harm* (1981) as a serious study of norms as constructs. Through the character of Rennie Wilford, Atwood examines normative limits in two locales: Canada and the Caribbean. This duality enables Atwood to compare and contrast norms, thereby emphasizing their context-dependent nature. Rennie's small-town background significantly affects her ability to assess limits of behaviour within her familiar Western context. This situation is

intensified by her removal into the unfamiliar where Rennie's expectations and assumptions are shattered. As the reader witnesses Rennie scrambling to make sense of her experiences, s/he is confronted by the artificiality and provisionality of segregational categories, such as Us and Them, Self and Other, as well as Normal and Abnormal. More directly than in *The Edible Woman*, Atwood implicates the reader of *Bodily Harm* as a determinant of normative limits, thereby challenging the assumptions and expectations of the reader's assessments in the fiction and in her/his own world.

Chapter two considers another pair of novels --*Lady Oracle* and *Life Before Man* -- shifting the reader's focus away from the broader social context of madness to a specific assessment of the modern individual's psychic condition. In *Lady Oracle* (1976), Atwood represents Joan Foster as a comical and extreme figure of "normality." Critics typically consider Joan to be a "manic" figure who has lost her grip on reality and veers dangerously into fantasy. This chapter seeks to challenge that interpretation by assessing Joan as an extreme representation of the modern condition of "normality": the divided self. Joan's forays into fantasy are viewed as connections with her irrational side and thus as positive attempts to recognize her unconscious -- that part of the psyche suppressed by the "normal" condition. Joan's dreams and the manifestations of her animus in the male figures of the novel are explored as autonomous intrusions of the unconscious psyche. Atwood strategically challenges the reader to align her/himself with this unlikely representation of the "normal" condition by revealing the potential for positive outcome -- although any goal of integration remains unrealized in the novel.

Chapter two also considers *Life Before Man* (1979) as a representation of the alternative to Joan Foster's psychic condition. This novel details the necessary outcome of rejecting fantasy, the irrational, and the unconscious by representing the problematic dissociation of modern "normal" characters. By focusing on Elizabeth Schoenhof, this chapter reveals a shadowy generational link to insanity and Elizabeth's determination to exclude the irrational by maintaining rational control over herself and her imagination.

Despite her desperate attempts at suppression, Elizabeth's consciousness faces intrusions of the unconscious as manifestations of noise and waves of darkness. Atwood portrays the extent of Elizabeth's dissociation -- or conscious rejection of the unconscious -- by removing the element of fantasy from this character and displacing it onto Lesje Green. This chapter examines Lesje's fantasies of the prehistoric era for their positive potential and considers their gradual elimination as a decidedly negative result of her "normalization." Thus, in contrast to Joan's fascination with fantasy and the unconscious, Elizabeth and Lesje represent the outcome of a fully dissociated psyche wherein consciousness alone is recognized; through this extreme, "normality" becomes a form of "madness." Through this pairing of novels, the reader is confronted with extreme figures on the psychic spectrum, thereby challenging her/his designations of "normality" and psychic balance.

Chapter three intensifies this focus on the modern divided condition by centering on one novel while examining two elements of "madness" therein. In *The Robber Bride* (1993), Atwood further investigates the generational link of madness in the figure of Karen, who becomes a Laingian divided self, taking on the identity of Charis. Moreover, Atwood introduces her most extreme representation of the shadow figure in the character of Zenia. Zenia is depicted as a manifestation of the unconscious not only of Charis but of the two other protagonists, Tony and Roz. Through this triad of women, Atwood creates an intense portrayal of the shadow as an act of projection, emanating from each character's unconscious psyche. Consequently, Zenia assumes varying personae and each character -- Charis, Tony, and Roz -- is confronted with the compensatory aspect of her own imbalanced psyche. This chapter investigates each woman's individual confrontation, recognition, and accommodation of her own unconscious, figured in Zenia. Through this accommodation, the women achieve a renewed sense of self and of relationship with each other. Moreover, Atwood confronts the reader with the shadow figured in this act of projection -- a process which is replicated through the actions of

reading and ideation. Consequently, the reader is situated to choose her/his response to this representation of psychic dissociation, thereby determining whether such a confrontation will enable self-realization to transcend the novel's confines.

Finally, chapter four is a culmination of the examination of madness on the part both of characters within the novel and of the reader. Through a study of *Alias Grace* (1996), this chapter reveals Atwood's most direct and strategic implication of the reader in determining the boundaries of madness. The novel presents the reader with the enigmatic figure of Grace Marks, a condemned murderess and madwoman, whose actual mental condition is suspect. The reader joins Dr. Simon Jordan, an idealistic young psychologist, in attempting to form an accurate assessment of Grace. Through this process, the reader necessarily formulates opinions on the boundaries of sanity and passes judgment on the characters. Interestingly, Atwood inverts the psychic assessment as Grace becomes a manifestation of Simon's anima, thereby complicating the reader's ability to trust blindly in the "expert" opinion. However, any condemnation on the part of the reader of the society and the "experts" is dangerous, for the reader thereby simultaneously condemns her/himself. Ultimately, s/he is forced to navigate a complex psychic terrain, contending with manifestations of the unconscious, somnambulism, amnesia, and Grace's selective rendering of her history as she attempts to retain agency by inverting the madwoman's relegation to silence into silences that speak through suggestiveness. This chapter demonstrates that any assessment of madness is necessarily based on partial blindness and so the fluctuating boundaries of madness are necessary to accommodate further discoveries of the unknown realms of the psyche.

Although the following discussion emphasizes the broad range of madness in Atwood's novels, this study makes no attempt to argue that the movement of Atwood's mad figures from the margins to the center of her novels is representative of an increasing importance in or to social structure. Conversely, their consistent presence and shifting location illuminate various ways madness is viewed in and treated by society; both the

characters and the reader are representative of these social views. That said, it is notable that the critical reader, no less than the author, is dependent on and reflective of her/his social context. In Atwood's words,

> [n]ow, we know there's no such thing as value-free novel writing. Creation does not happen in a vacuum, and a novelist is either depicting or exposing some of the values of the society in which he or she lives.... But it sometimes escapes us that the same is true of criticism. We are all organisms within environments, and we interpret what we read in the light of how we live and how we would like to live, which are almost never the same thing.... ("Writing" 418-19)

Critical judgments will change as social values change; more particularly, how Atwood's readers view her characters' psychological states will also vary historically and according to social acceptability. Ultimately, the socially-influenced perception of the reader -- rather than the society in the fiction -- is the determining factor both of norms and of ideals since the reader assesses the representation of society in the fiction but need not agree with those standards. Through this interactive process of reading, the reader becomes directly involved with the characters' attempts at individuation and may enter a concurrent process of self-realization. This transferral results from the reader's confrontation by the unconscious as it is represented in the novel as well as her/his recognition of unstable social and psychic categories -- an instability which is not limited to the novel but which implicates the reader and her/his assumptions. Such reader complicity is particularly evident in Atwood's novels, which purposely transcend their fictional societies to involve the reader through gaps and ambiguities in determining the accepted psycho-social boundaries of the created -- and by extension, of the actual -- society. The reader becomes the only arbiter of hope, and a necessarily limited one at that, for a social condition that otherwise would be distressingly bleak.

Introduction

Shackled by Preconceptions of "Madness"

I

Psychological, Literary, and Critical Contexts

"Madness is ... the last gasp of the powerless."

-- Marta Caminero-Santangelo (94)

One of the most influential and pervasive readings of madness in literature is Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's 1979 study, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination,* which posits the madwoman as "the *author's* double, an image of her own anxiety and rage" (78). While their study focuses on the mad*woman* character in fiction, the authors do extend their assessment of madness to include both genders; Gilbert and Gubar claim that "the mad character ...[as] a figure of rage" is one not to be ignored but that "her (or his) fury must be acknowledged not only by the angelic protagonist to whom s/he is opposed, but, significantly, *by the reader as well*" (*Madwoman* 78). Their reading is a revealing one. Perhaps an obvious but nonetheless noteworthy contribution that Gilbert and Gubar make to a literary approach to madness is acknowledging the mad figure's significant role both to the fictional society, as typified in the protagonist, and also to contemporary society in relation to both author and reader. This split recognition is a critical one for a literary study of madness, in keeping with the postmodernist tendency to question assumptions and to push beyond boundaries -- even the boundaries of the text itself. In effect, there is much similarity between the unconventionality of madness and the conventions of postmodernism.

Postmodernism, as defined in *The Canadian Postmodern*, exhibits these characteristics of social context, the challenge of boundaries, and reader involvement;

Linda Hutcheon claims that "[w]hat postmodernism has done is show how the 'natural' is in fact the 'constructed', the made, the social. In addition, it is never free from an intimate relation with power.... This is a literature that questions and challenges" (12). While postmodernism's main challenge has been to the traditional distinctions between types of art, Hutcheon makes clear that this tendency to question assumptions has had other important implications for literary studies: "other boundaries are being challenged too, including those between genres, and even those between art and what we call life or 'reality'" (*Canadian* 78). In such challenges to convention, "readers can be implicated directly" as they engage in the process of meaning-making that constitutes reading (Hutcheon, *Canadian* 84). The emphasis, then, is on recognition of the constructed nature of the text and the process of this construction. The fictional and the "real" individual must recognize and acknowledge the mad figure, suggesting the fundamental social and cultural nature of the construction of madness, and pointing to the significant role of the reader in the textual exchange. While persuasive in its rendering, Gilbert and Gubar's view of madness and its function in literature nevertheless seems to perpetuate the perception of madness as a condition that can be neatly categorized -- as a manifestation of rage and as the opposite to the moral protagonist who represents the social norm. Such a representation is indeed too neat, simultaneously invoking the stereotypical perception of madness as abnormality (that is, as not adhering to the social norm) and, by extension, of normality as sanity, yet leaving the categories themselves unchallenged. The assumption that madness is readily identifiable is one with which several other disciplines, including psychology, take issue; this dissention is evident in the historical variations in constructions of mental health -- that is, in the changing models of what constitutes "madness."[1]

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[1] See Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*; Phyllis Chesler, *Women and Madness*; Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *For Her Own Good*; and Denise Russell, *Women, Madness and Medicine* for a sample of overviews of the medical and historical developments of models of "madness."

The very questioning of the assumption that madness is readily identifiable points to the crux of the issue: "madness" is a fluctuating category. That is, madness is a category constructed and imposed by others on to the "other," the figure who does not conform to the social norm. The main challenges to the validity of such categorization and to the medical model itself, as Jane Ussher also notes (*Women's* 6), have been issued by feminists and a group of psychological revisionists who became known as "antipsychiatrists," the most prominent of whom is R. D. Laing.[2] Yet even outside this group whom some dismiss as out-of-date radicals, the psychological and more medically-oriented psychiatric profession continue to contest these easy categorizations of sanity and madness. Questioning the validity of these terms signifies that they comprise an area of interpretation and thus an area of potential protest both from within and without the profession as these interpretations collide. Moreover, the internal debate over what constitutes madness has direct implications upon an examination of madness in any other field, including the literary. A recent psychological study entitled *Women, Madness and Medicine* exemplifies such internal challenges. In this text, Denise Russell highlights the American Psychiatric Association's attempt to move away from the model of "mental illness" to that of "mental disorder" in the third revised edition of *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-III-R); Russell speculates that, in fact, this discursive shift may be "a reflection of the longstanding failure of psychiatry to answer the conceptual challenge posed by the anti-psychiatrists" or, at the very least, that it is an extension of the psychiatric domain (28).

What might appear at first glance to be a token conciliatory gesture actually signals a significant shift in the history of categorizing madness. First, madness remains in the medical model; despite the terminology, it is still perceived as an illness that needs professional medical care. Second, this discursive shift draws attention to the power of language and so to the category or label of "madness" itself. Ironically, in the view of

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[2] R. D. Laing will be discussed more specifically in the next section of this introduction.

some psychologists, our medically sophisticated era, where manuals such as the DSM-III-R carefully delineate the various specific types of mental "disorders," has ameliorated the more general term "madness" by excluding it from the classification system. Jane Ussher remarks that "[t]o use the term 'madness' is to recognize the meaning attached to the perception of illness or dysfunction in the psychological domain -- the stigma attached -- and to avoid entering into the discourse of the experts" (*Women's* 11). Such an attempt to sidestep the issue is, however, problematic, for as Russell asserts, even if the label of madness is more generic, the stigma is as potent and as devastating: "it does matter if someone is classified as mentally disordered or sane, and if that classification depends to a large extent on certain subjective factors then it should be seen as a problem" (35-36). Thus, it is the very dichotomy of madness as the counterpoint to sanity that makes the label, in any form, invariably detrimental -- particularly when such a label is an unstable construct.

The increasingly specific and medical psychological discourse seems to conceal this opposition and can be deceptive in its artificial and artificially precise classifications. Despite attempts to anaesthetize the current description of questionable mental states by employing a politically correct terminology of "disorders" rather than "illnesses," the pervasive difficulty with a "definition [that] appears so clear-cut and medical" is its seeming stability and specificity (Russell 28). Russell contends that "beneath its crystal-clear appearance lies a nest of value judgements, and, if one does not happen to share the same values, different decisions will be reached about whether a mental disorder exists or not" (28). It is not difficult to understand how such a seemingly subjective distinction rendered by a male-dominated profession in a patriarchal society would raise the ire of feminist critics. Not surprisingly, some of these critics employ the views of antipsychiatrists in their arguments. Barbara Hill Rigney, for example, draws directly on the views of R. D. Laing in her study *Madness and Sexual Politics in the Feminist Novel* to challenge the dichotomy of madness and sanity as a false construct: "[s]anity and

insanity, then, are designed as polarities only by a society, largely masculine in its assumption of power, whose own 'sanity' depends on such distinctions" (62). This is a serious charge, but one that bears the light of scrutiny.

Rigney's representation draws out two interdependent aspects of the madness label. First, madness is sanity's opposite only because society constructs it as such; second, the existence of madness is vital to the preservation of sanity as this "abnormality" is defined according to deviations from the social norm. This being the case, one must consider what the terms "sanity" and "normality" actually designate. Michel Foucault's *Madness and Civilization* analyzes the social nature of madness and elucidates its uneasy coexistence with "humanity." He argues that as societal structures changed, the mad were edged out of contact with the masses; it was "so difficult ... to determine the place madness was to occupy... [or] to situate madness in a social sphere that was being restructured" (240). Consequently, Foucault maintains, asylums were instituted under the guise of offering appropriate medical attention to those individuals categorized by "humanity" as "mad," but in reality to contain them; this era was deceptively termed "that happy age when madness was fully recognized" (241). Such cant, however, smacks of insincerity and hints at the questionable motivations shadowing this practice of segregation. Institutionalization was a convenience and madness a condition arbitrarily determined by the ruling social class. This condition has not changed, nor can it as long as these power relations continue; psychologists who maintain that abnormality has a shifting nature view it as a construct:

> behaviour which is at odds with that of the ruling élite will be deemed 'mad'. This can act to stigmatize particular social groups, such as women, blacks or the poor -- or those deemed outside, the 'alienists'. Yet what each society deems to be alienists differs, as is illustrated by cross-cultural analysis.... Outsiders and aliens maintain the cohesion of social groups and play an important part in defining the identity of the in-group, defining what is normal behaviour. The 'Other' is needed to define the 'One'. Through defining what is mad, we denote what is sane, what is 'normal', a process carried out by psychiatrists, and other social control experts, who negotiate reality on behalf of the rest of society. In fact, it is the fear of the fall into madness which

> determines our need to position the mad person as being fundamentally different from ourselves.... By making groups out as different, as deviant, as mad, we can affirm our own normality, or even ascertain what it is. Thus the boundaries between 'normal' and 'abnormal' are an important part of the maintenance of society itself, of sanity and order. (Ussher, *Women's* 138, 140)

This differentiation of normality from madness by negative definition (that is, by defining normality not by its inherent characteristics but by the absence of characteristics ascribed to madness, by its "not-madness") underlines the fear factor and the social control function of categorization.[3] The goal of preserving a comfortable distance, also a function of asylums as noted by Foucault, extends to the social application of the very label of madness itself. And, perhaps too obvious to observe, the normal/abnormal, sane/mad construction is definitive of the binary thinking that is said to be characteristic of patriarchal systems.

Ironically, these efforts to maintain a sizable comfort zone between sanity and madness and to delineate the symptomology of madness have created a self-conflicting situation. On the one hand, madness is "medicalized" and labelled as the identifiably abnormal. On the other, the symptoms are vaguely described in the DSM-III-R, the lists of included behaviors are broad-sweeping, and the list itself is continuously changing (Russell 72-73, Thiher 225). As a result, any identified type of madness nearly negates itself as a recognizable category. Perhaps the most convincing example of this phenomenon involves the designation of schizophrenia, the category that is held to be most representative of "real" madness and thus frequently forms the basis of assessments and challenges issued by antipsychiatrists and feminists.[4] Whereas the broad symptom

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[3] The social control function of "madness" is the aspect most heavily attacked by feminist critics. See, for example, the studies by Phyllis Chesler, Elaine Showalter, and Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English.

[4] Phyllis Chesler's distinction between genuine and non-genuine madness specifically posits the label of schizophrenia as the marker of "genuine madness." (This assessment of Chesler is also made by Denise Russell, p. 113.) More extensively, R. D. Laing's challenges of "madness" all focus on those labelled as schizophrenics; significant observations include: a dissatisfaction with psychological terminology (*Divided* 17), the lack of objective criteria to determine so-called "schizophrenia" (*Sanity* 12, 17-19), "schizophrenia" as the most disputed psychological condition (*Sanity* 16), and changes in the assumptions of "schizophrenia" (*Politics of Experience* 102-105).

span is a cause of concern for those in the psychiatric field on the diagnostic level, the situation is worse than it appears. Not only is there "a problem in definition and diagnosis" of schizophrenia (Russell 72), but there are also categories of "schizophrenic-related disorders." Soloman Snyder, for example, describes "borderline schizophrenics" as those whose "thinking is a bit vague; they experience episodes of feeling strange and confused under stress and are never very happy" (88). Regarding this category, Russell observes, "[m]any, perhaps most, people in Western culture answer to this description. How do we separate such people from normal people not suffering from a disorder?" (76). It is a telling question and one that remains unanswered. Still, as if Snyder's label were not inclusive enough, S. S. Kety's study further expands this sub-category to include the designation of "uncertain borderline schizophrenic" (qtd. in Russell 76). The implications of such generalizations upon already vague symptoms are truly frightening, but perhaps less obviously, the fact that the "diagnosis" of madness lends itself so readily to extension hints at its own instability and underlines its constructed nature.

With such a disturbing expansion of categorical "madness," the validity of the category itself must be questioned, as it has been.[5] Moreover, if "normal" people are not immediately separable from "schizophrenics," to think, act, and legislate as if these positions were polarities seems less than convincing. In fact, many in the psychiatric field hold the opinion that rather than two discrete states of being, normality and madness differ only in degree. Proponents of this opinion include, perhaps surprisingly, Sigmund Freud and C. G. Jung. Juliet Mitchell, a feminist Freudian revisionist, outlines his position: "time and again, during his life, Freud had to point out that so-called 'normality' is only relative and is itself 'neurotic', 'pathogenic', 'psychotic' and so on. Indeed, the very nub of his work was the elimination of an absolute difference between abnormality and normality" (10-11). Jung asserts a strikingly similar view:

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[5] Both Laing and Russell recommend abolishing the categories of sanity and madness.

> neurotic phenomena are not by any means the exclusive products of disease. They are as a matter of fact *normal occurrences pathologically exaggerated*, and therefore just more obvious than their normal parallels. One can indeed observe all hysterical symptoms in a diminutive form in normal individuals, but they are so slight that they usually pass unnoticed. In this respect, everyday life is a mine of evidential material. (*Symbols* 78)

This modern shift in thinking is fundamental to the understanding of madness. If one perceives "neurotic behaviour" as "an exaggerated manifestation of the same mental process [as normal behaviour]" (Mitchell 18), as did Freud and Jung, then madness shifts from a position juxtaposed to normality to occupy a parallel one. Granted, the position remains an extreme on the behavioural scale, but the movement away from an opposition is nonetheless a significant one.

Such a view also makes the negative definition of normality (that is, the "not-mad" designation) an impossibility; instead, normal behaviour must be determined by degree rather than dissociation. And thus the fundamental connection between these degrees of "humanity" can be acknowledged. This is the very connection that, in Foucault's rendering, asylums sought to abolish and, by extension, the psychiatric profession perpetuates today. Madness and sanity continue to be categories constructed to isolate certain behaviour patterns and to maintain the illusion of difference. Madness *is* a social construct, as the antipsychiatrists have relentlessly contended (Ussher, *Women's* 6). This tendentious construction deeply disturbs feminist psychologist Jane Ussher, who describes her own situation as one of seemingly irreconcilable differences: "[h]ow could I practise as a clinical psychologist -- as an 'expert' in madness -- yet also be aware that the very concept of madness itself can be questioned; and that 'madness' serves to glorify and mystify the expert whilst dismissing the person deemed 'mad'?" (*Women's* 7). But even after one accepts that madness is a construct and, consequently, that it is unstable, the issue of voice remains problematic.

How can one condone the relegation to the margin and thereby the silencing of the mad figure that inevitably accompanies a focus on the label of madness, a label

constructed by privileged others? Foucault contends that "[m]adness deals not so much with truth and the world, as with man and whatever truth about himself he is able to perceive" (27). If a truth about self -- either the individual or human nature -- can be perceived through madness, the significance of the mad figure having a voice is critically germane. To return to Gilbert and Gubar's rendering of the madwoman in literature, one sees that she not only has a voice but confers that voice on the female author and even extends her sphere of influence to include the reader. In this sense, their view of the mad figure seems to address Ussher's concerns about silencing, and indeed, many feminist literary critics have followed Gilbert and Gubar's interpretation, reading madness as a sign of protest -- a protest largely directed against being dismissed and silenced.

Marta Caminero-Santangelo's recent study, *The Madwoman Can't Speak: Or Why Insanity is Not Subversive*, offers a summary of the current situation; she observes that

> [t]he madwoman has come to stand all but universally in feminist criticism for the elements of subversion and resistance in women's writing. Sandra Gilbert and
> Susan Gubar's famous reading of Charlotte Brontë's Bertha Rochester ... popularized the reading of the madwoman as closet (or attic) feminist: madness signified anger and therefore, by extension, protest. The treatment of female madness by feminist literary theorists and critics has been largely unchanged ever since. In its most extreme form, this interpretive model reads madness, whenever it appears in
> women's texts, as a willed choice and a preferable alternative to sanity for women. (1)

Although this now typical reading grants the madwoman a voice, the voice of protest, it seems to restrict the function of madness in the novel to that of rebellious rage. Further, there is undeniable danger in extrapolating this view to that extreme position which romanticizes madness as "a preferable alternative." Yet even in a less radical sense, Caminero-Santangelo counters that madness is distinctly not an avenue of freedom but one of self-delusion and even further restriction. That is, she argues that such readings are "fundamentally misguided" (4) and definitely do not grant the madwoman a voice: "insanity is the final surrender to [dominant] discourses, precisely because it is

characterized by the (dis)ability to produce meaning -- that is, to produce representations recognizable within society.... As an illusion of power that masks powerlessness, madness is thus the final removal of the madwoman from any field of agency" (11-12). Caminero-Santangelo directly challenges the perception of madness as protest, and instead posits it as self-delusion: "[m]adness is not rage or even hate but hopelessness" (17). In this view, the voice given to the madwoman by Gilbert and Gubar is actually a scream of silence because it remains unintelligible to the society that made it a necessary response in the first place. This is a view closely aligned with those both of the antipsychiatrists and the feminists who initially challenged the psychiatric rendering of madness. More importantly for present purposes, moving away from a reading of madness as rage opens a fresh avenue to explore the mad figure in literary texts, an exploration which emphasizes social context while resisting the impulse to glorify madness -- even if indirectly -- as an empowering stance.

Such a broadening of focus in literary studies of madness coincides with the persistent questioning of assumptions that characterizes postmodernism. Not only is the term and concept of "madness" itself under interrogation, as in the psychological field, but the approaches of interrogation are themselves similarly undergoing scrutiny in postmodern readings. That said, and bearing in mind Hutcheon's claim that "women's writing in particular has led the way in the new explorations of (and against) borders and boundaries" (*Canadian* 78), it is not at all surprising that women's literature is often the focal point of analysis in contemporary literary studies on an international as well as a national level. Caminero-Santangelo's 1998 study exemplifies the focus on post-World War II American women's literature. She "focus[es] on narratives that deal explicitly with the issue of female madness" in order to challenge the positioning of the madwoman as a figure of resistance (9). While this study offers many useful insights, it also exemplifies two inherent problems. First, the necessary process of selection that is foundational to such a broad study seems still to fall into the trap of seeking an all-

inclusive function for the madwoman in literature, that is, of perpetuating the image of madness in literature as a static symbol. Second, this study collapses the views of the antipsychiatrists in order to dismiss them.

In such a presentation, the madwoman becomes an even sadder figure, deluded into a position of non-agency and so silenced, rather than demonstrating a way to escape or at least to protest her confinement through acts of rage. Caminero-Santangelo attempts to circumvent the typical readings of madness by basing her study on the arguments of the antipsychiatrists in order to shift her focus from the "mad" individual as having "something wrong" to evaluating the social situation instead. Without doubt, this is an important shift of perspective but, unfortunately, it is rendered ineffective by a common misreading; Caminero-Santangelo obscures the fact that the claims of those labelled "antipsychiatrists" are far from being uniform. Although the movement began in the 1960s with R. D. Laing's *The Divided Self*, by the 1970s David Cooper and Thomas Szasz had transformed Laing's attempt to make the behaviour of the schizophrenic intelligible within the particular social, familial context into more radical, specific claims that the family is the cause of madness in the individual.[6]

This difference may seem inconsequential but is, in fact, a substantial one. Since Laing was not attempting to find a cause, his focus was on the individual's current position within the social context, on the ways that the experience of self and the methods of coping with this label of "schizophrenia" were both understandable, and even normal, under the particular circumstances. His phenomenological studies make no attempt to argue for or against genetic predispositions or for any other causal factor, but focus solely on the present situation. As Juliet Mitchell observes, Laing focuses on the present rather than on the past: "Laing... claims that the schizophrenic is fighting for the right to exist -- but he makes this fight take place *in the present* and it is a fight on behalf of a hidden

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[6] See Introduction (especially pages 1-8) in Bob Mullan's interview with Laing, *Mad to be Normal*, for a useful summary of Laing's position vis-à-vis that of his colleagues and of his challengers.

'true self' against a compliant 'false self'" (266-67). The insights he offers, based on an approach that seeks to understand rather than to label an individual, create a useful starting point for a literary study of madness that seeks to move outside of current readings. The difficulty, as Caminero-Santangelo's work exemplifies, is not in using Laing as a basis for challenging psychological designations and posited stability, but in combining his views with more radical claims of causality, such as those put forth by Cooper and Szasz. Investigations of causality seem more suited to debates in the medical and psychological fields than in the literary. Like many others, Caminero-Santangelo begins with Laing but conflates his views with those of antipsychiatrists in general and makes no apparent distinctions therein (82-93). As a result, her argument focuses more on how madness functions as social control (through the illusion of empowerment) rather than on how the behaviours themselves are intelligible without necessarily being "mad" reactions.

Taken together, these two areas of concern with *The Madwoman Can't Speak* -- attribution of a single function for the madwoman and reliance upon a distorted causal reading of Laing -- are also reflected in the social nature of madness. If madness is a position of extreme degree on a scale of human behaviour (regardless of whether it is opposed to normality or an extreme version of it), then it seems that to study madness in isolation removes it from the very context that is necessary for an understanding of its positioning. "Social context" is not a static condition and so to remove the mad figure from the literary social context seems distinctly counter-productive. The scale of human behaviour can only be assessed as presented in the world of the text and so the degrees of behaviour must also be examined therein. It is arguable that a study of the mad figure can only be undertaken with any degree of accuracy within a study of the other modes of behaviour within the text. If one is to examine the concept of madness in its extreme form, then it must be contextualized among the various labels of divergence from normality as represented in the literary text. Consequently, I suggest that a critical study

of madness is most useful not solely based on literary texts that explicitly discuss or display madness but based on texts that both explicitly and implicitly portray states of madness within a social context. This methodology alone will focus appropriate attention on the social implications of "madness" and "normality." To stabilize the social context to an extent and to further minimize a tendency to seek a generalized role for madness, I suggest the useful strategy of focusing on a single author's representation of human behaviour. Admittedly, focusing on a single author does not entirely eliminate variations in social context since each narrative creates an individualized society; nevertheless, an author's perception of the norms of human behaviour are likely to maintain a relative degree of consistency. Although minimal, even this level of continuity is necessarily absent in a multi-author study.

In all of these respects, Margaret Atwood's fiction provides a rich field for the study of madness. Not only has Atwood been hailed as "an astute observer of the mass culture and cultural trends" (Bouson 5), but her work also covers the period from the 1960s to the present, spanning the era in which both the feminist and antipsychiatry movements took hold. To focus on madness in Atwood's fiction is not coincidental, for it is a pervasive aspect of her work, as is indicated by Lee Briscoe Thompson's assessment that "almost all of Atwood's poetry and fiction" presents "the view of life as a series of small, uncertain battles on the fringe of madness" (111). Thompson is not the only critic to recognize this impulse in Atwood's writing; however, among the critics who have commented on Atwood's fascination with madness or on the significance of insanity in her texts, no one has comprehensively explored these areas. For example, in her 1978 study, *Madness and Sexual Politics in the Feminist Novel: Studies in Brontë, Woolf, Lessing, and Atwood,* Barbara Hill Rigney argues that the exploration of madness forms the basis of one of Atwood's novels:

> Charlotte Brontë in *Jane Eyre*, Virginia Woolf in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Doris Lessing in *The Four-Gated City*, and Margaret Atwood in *Surfacing* all depict

> insanity in relation to sexual politics and state that madness, to a greater or lesser degree, is connected to the female social condition. Each novel presents a criticism of a patriarchal political and social system, a universe dominated by masculine energy, which, in itself, manifests a kind of collusive madness in the form of war or sexual oppression and is thereby seen as threatening to feminine psychological survival. Most of these novels depict a female protagonist who, in spite of such oppression, achieves a superior sanity and at least a relative liberty in the assertion of self. (7)

Whereas Rigney views the exploration of madness from an exclusively feminist perspective (being typical in this aspect of the criticism) and studies the significant effect on the protagonist, insanity is glorified here as a means of achieving freedom and agency. Thus, as a study of madness, Rigney condones the image of empowerment predominant in feminist literary interpretations. Although the dominant reading, this nonetheless is still only one view. Atwood also uses the degrees of human behaviour that comprise the scale of sanity as a tool for psychological characterization and as a means of transcending textual boundaries to implicate the reader in her created societies. Rather than viewing the protagonist's encounters with madness as a journey towards gendered wholeness and the goal of "a mother within the self" (Rigney, *Madness* 11-12), it proves useful to look at how Atwood uses "mad" figures to depict unacknowledged aspects of self that extend both to other characters and also to the reader.

In fact, some critics, including Rigney, seem to posit the idea of insanity as a given, as a paradoxically stable fictional construct and an unquestioned assumption in relation to Atwood's work, yet they offer no comprehensive analysis to prove the point. Instead, the assertion is used as a starting point for examining other aspects of her work. While Rigney's 1978 publication precludes commentary on Atwood's later novels, when she revisits the topic in her 1987 study, *Margaret Atwood*, the discussion of madness is still limited to a single novel: *Surfacing*. Regardless, it is clear that Rigney recognizes the significance of insanity as an underlying theme in the later works: "[p]ervasive in the novel [*Life Before Man*], as in the poem ['A Night in the Royal Ontario Museum'], is a sensation of panic at the possibility of madness, of being 'dragged to the mind's /

deadend'" (83). Despite this claim, Rigney's study never further investigates madness in novels other than *Surfacing,* an omission that is rather surprising in a study dedicated to Atwood's work. Similarly, Karen F. Stein's recent assessment of Atwood's complete works, *Margaret Atwood Revisited* (1999), includes madness as a key feature in a useful catalogue of Atwood's fictional interests. Like much of the critical interest in the psychological aspect, Stein's flows from her study of *Alias Grace* (1996): "the novel epitomizes central Atwood themes: ... the slipperiness of identity, doubling of characters and plot, ... the vexed questions of sanity and insanity, narrative authority, the protagonist as trickster/storyteller, and the teller's control of her story" (103). Again, despite this acknowledgement of significance, Stein's study proceeds to focus on other areas, neglecting madness completely. Perhaps it is the slipperiness -- the provisionality or shifting contingencies -- of the subject of madness itself that makes obviously discerning critics shy away from further exploration.

Madness is, then, a recognized element of Atwood's oeuvre, and the very fact that it seems to be unquestionably accepted as such suggests that it is worthy of closer critical attention. Atwood's novels present a variable, relevant model of madness that reflects its social (and through *Alias Grace*, its historical) changes. In contemporary Western society, it is disturbing to note that the range of psychiatric interest has expanded considerably; Ussher notes that "whilst the early psychiatrists concentrated on the classic syndromes of schizophrenia, hysteria and melancholia, their twentieth-century counterparts widened their definitions of madness to include the neurotic disorders, including depression, anxiety and phobias within their remit.... The new diagnostic categories could include almost anyone" (Ussher, *Women's* 98). The broadness of the field, as Ussher's final understated comment suggests, holds serious social implications, for the stigma of madness looms over everyone. In this respect, Atwood's fictional society reflects this inclusiveness and fear of "contagion"; notably, the madness displayed in her fiction varies both in degree and type. Some characters are literally labelled "insane" while others

exhibit more muted forms of mental imbalance that might be called "neurotic disorders"; a sampling of the degrees of madness represented in Atwood's novels includes: clinical insanity (that which is institutionalized), withdrawal, hallucination, inability to distinguish fantasy from reality, spirit "possession," as well as the astonishingly common contemporary afflictions of anorexia nervosa and depression, the latter of which has been identified as "the most common psychiatric diagnosis in the twentieth-century Western world" (Russell 51). The inclusiveness, diversity, and extreme range of "diagnoses" in the actual psychological conception of madness are therefore closely paralleled in Atwood's fictional representations of society.

Atwood's work also provides suitable subject matter for a study of madness in its postmodern tendency to question categories and assumptions.[7] The conflation of psychological categories that constitute madness, which Ussher outlines above, signals a disturbing trend and an area ripe for interrogation. Such an extreme broadening of definition makes the designation of madness nearly meaningless on the one hand; however, the label itself still retains its stigma and detrimental consequences so that, on the other hand, being categorized as mad remains a fate to be avoided -- and this avoidance is becoming increasingly difficult. So, it is not surprising that such inclusiveness as the label "madness" is acquiring would fall under the scrutiny of postmodern writers. While she does not specifically argue for such, Stein's observations identify Atwood as one of these writers: "[h]er writings question, challenge, and disrupt the conventions of both literary traditions and social strictures as well as Western philosophical dichotomies (binaries) such as fact/fiction or rational/irrational" (4). Sherrill E. Grace makes a strikingly similar assessment, while specifying that Atwood's work presents these artificially constructed binaries in a distinctly negative light: "Atwood identifies human failure as acquiescence in those Western dichotomies which

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[7] That Hutcheon devotes a full chapter of *The Canadian Postmodern* to Atwood indicates how well her work exemplifies the postmodern sensibility.

postulate the inescapable, static division of the world into hostile opposites: culture/nature, male/female, straight line/curved space, head/body, reason/instinct, victor/victim" (*Violent* 5). Conversely, the world is neither static nor easily divisible into opposites, and Grace argues that Atwood recognizes this complexity: "Atwood is not simply rejecting duality but working with it, from it" (*Violent* 4). As postmodern criticism might state, Atwood both uses and abuses the convention, inverting it for her own effect.[8] That she does not merely challenge or discard the dichotomies demonstrates Atwood's ability to integrate the norms and perspectives of the real world in order to challenge that same world from within the world of the novel.

The discipline of psychology is essentially a study of the process by which individuals assimilate and evaluate the world with which they are in contact. Psychology (and one could make this observation of sociology or of any other discipline dealing with human behaviour) formalizes the procedures, labels them, and then proceeds to assess them for how well and where they fit on the scale of human behaviour. That said, human perception provides the foundation of this science and, ironically, the act of perception tends to hide its inherent complexity by creating neat categories which minimize the task of assimilation. Atwood reveals in an interview that she is well aware of this complexity: "[w]e are great categorizers and pigeonholers in our society, and one reason is to put people safely into pigeonholes and then dismiss them, thinking we have thereby summed them up" (FitzGerald 139). Yet even Atwood's phraseology here suggests the deceptive nature and underlying motivations of perception which offers at best a partial view; often this view is used as a catch-all to avoid having to look beyond the superficialities. Part of what Atwood does through the exploration of perception in her work is to peel back some of the blankets of comfort and complacency in her readers. Her work jars reader expectations and challenges their assumptions, partly through questioning the

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[8] Other critics who specifically identify Atwood as postmodern include John Moss (*Paradox* 164-65) and Eleonora Rao (*Strategies* xii-xiii).

designations of "normality" and "abnormality" in mental states and human behaviour. Further, Alice Palumbo has recently asserted that as a whole the novels provide a place where "Atwood examines boundaries, the ease with which they can be crossed, blurred, or eliminated, and the anxiety this produces in her protagonists" (73). In this view, the postmodern challenge of boundaries is directly linked to the mental state or "neurotic" condition of Atwood's protagonists. This is an interesting connection, particularly since Palumbo recognizes that these characters are often "at war with themselves and their environments" in their attempts to attain self-realization, and that the methods of attempting to gain this awareness often involve great risk as the protagonists struggle to assimilate "contradictory impulses, some more socially acceptable than others" (73). The social pressures of conformity, categorization, and strictly labelled divisions of normality run directly counter to such a process of self-realization.

Yet Atwood's protagonists undergo precisely this process in the course of the narrative; part of their self-realization involves recognizing and evaluating the assumptions and categorical constructs of society. That is not to say that all of her protagonists achieve a sense of "wholeness" or of conventional "self," for the postmodern text disallows such constructs. Hutcheon argues that, on the contrary, Atwood's work "question[s] the very nature of selfhood as it is defined in our culture: that is, as coherent, unified, rational" (*Canadian* 144). The significant fact here is that her characters are in a process of grappling with their understanding of themselves with particular attention to their mental state -- as Hutcheon's inclusion of rationality as a category that Atwood challenges in her work also seems to suggest. Interestingly, the characters must acknowledge their mental state on two levels -- as defined by self and as defined by society -- which may involve the difficult acceptance that these two definitions do not neatly coincide. It is even arguable that as Atwood presents the situation, the case in which these definitions do not match is more common and clearly more interesting. Certainly Atwood has conceded, as a writer, to being drawn to the unusual: "I find a lot of

behavior very strange. Therefore, worth pondering" (Hancock 213). In fiction, "the unusual" involves a character's disturbed psyche, or as Atwood suggests, the novel is not worth reading; she remarks, "[s]how me a character totally without anxieties and I will show you a boring book" (Hancock 206). Thus Atwood draws attention to a link between "strange" behaviour and the characters' psyches, suggesting that the characters recognize their "abnormal" stance and may be attempting to reconcile their behaviour with what is socially acceptable. The "strange" behaviour seems to produce anxieties -- anxieties at least in part caused by a sense of dissociation with the surrounding society's norms and expectations. As a result, the characters grapple with their anxieties and "neurotic" behaviours and so find themselves simultaneously evaluating their outward actions and their mental states. In other words, they are struggling with self-realization in what is, without exception, a challenging social environment.

This disconnectedness between inner self and outer "reality" is one of the crucial points in evaluating madness, as any understanding of "normality" must involve an understanding of one's relative position in society as well as a degree of self-knowledge. Some argue that the state of madness can only be accurately diagnosed by the self and the subjective experience of self; labels, such as the broad-sweeping generalizations of "madness" outlined above, are then meaningless despite their very real social implications. For example, in Peter Kramer's view, "madness [is] understood not as difference from others (the supposedly 'mad' subject often accepts such differences without difficulty) but as difference from 'self'" (qtd. in Caminero-Santangelo 39). As Caminero-Santangelo observes, Kramer's approach suggests the potential for a conception of oneself that differs from the social norm, and this understanding of self -- though differing from what her feminist reading posits as the socially constructed and necessarily gendered subject -- still retains its standing as a subject (39). More obviously, Kramer's construction of divergent views of "normality" implies that a thorough

understanding of what constitutes the "self" has already been achieved.[9] However, Atwood's characters tend not to portray this stable self-awareness, but rather the self in flux or in the process of self-discovery. In her characterizations, this process involves working through various levels and types of anxieties -- that is, discovering and evaluating the "madness" within.

Atwood's novels reveal in two primary ways that these characters are undergoing a process of self-realization involving assessment of their mental condition. First, Atwood's novels portray characters who display ontological insecurity; second, the characters struggle with irrationality. In terms that clearly allude to *The Edible Woman*, J. Brooks Bouson contends that on a general level all of the characters share the same complex: "[s]uffering from a deficient sense of self, Atwood's characters are subject to the terrors of disintegration anxiety: to the 'fear of being nothing'; the discovery of the 'blank lady' within; the anxiety that the 'core' self has been 'invaded.'" Further, Bouson asserts that this anxiety is created by the disjunction between what the character experiences or desires to have recognized as self and what is socially expected: "[h]er characters may fear the loss of the self through immersion in socially constructed female roles.... Or they may imagine that they are damaged or defective in some essential way as they struggle against the cultural codes that define and confine them" (11). While Bouson is decidedly focused on the feminist position, her observation is equally valid in a reading of madness. The same social pressures of conformity are in place and, as a result, the same individual struggle exists to establish a comfortable acceptance of the defined self. Perhaps surprisingly, rather than glorifying the postmodern play with multiplicity and so suggesting an acceptance of fragmentation in face of this patriarchal thrust to contain and limit the female self, Bouson tempers the discussion with Jane Flax's caution that "'[t]hose who celebrate or call for a "decentered" self seem self-deceptively naive and

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[9] A view similar to Kramer's essentialist position is held by American psychoanalyst Heinz Kohut and is succinctly described by J. Bouson Brooks (pp. 10-11).

unaware of the basic cohesion within themselves that makes the fragmentation of experiences something other than a terrifying slide into psychosis'" (qtd. in Bouson 11). Flax suggests several interesting points about self-awareness and postmodernism here, the most relevant of which is the equation of fragmentation or complete loss of self with a severe form of madness. By extension, then, to avoid madness, one must possess -- even if unknowingly -- a secure sense of self, which makes possible a questioning of social constructs or expectations. Atwood situates her characters at various points in the process of self-realization, all questioning their ontological and social (as it were) security.

The second indication that this process of self-assessment specifically involves the mental state of Atwood's characters is the fact that they grapple with the need to accept the irrational. While Western society deifies rationality, Atwood's characters -- most obviously the protagonist of *Surfacing* -- are confronted with seemingly irrational experiences that they must assimilate. Some critics examine how Atwood's use of language in both poetry and fiction demonstrates this move beyond rationality through her characters' frequent inability to express themselves. Linda W. Wagner, for example, asserts that in addition to the characters' struggle with language, Atwood "often comments on the ineffectuality of purely rational knowledge" (82). Thus Atwood's work displays the movement outside of conventional limits of rational thought and behaviour through a symbolic break in discourse as well as through direct statements. Similarly, in *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, Stein locates "poems [that] warn of the dangers of unmitigating reason and urge acceptance of the irrational, however unsettling and perilous that may be" (23). Stein's assessment is notable in two respects, suggesting that Atwood paradoxically places "reason" in the same category as "madness" -- that is, as socially constructed, variable, and containing hidden perils -- and that her work presents examination of the irrational as worth the inherent risks. Much like the questionable nature of madness and sanity as polarities, here what is labelled "irrational" is posited in a Laingian fashion as the "sane" approach to gaining knowledge that exists beyond the

boundaries of reason or the ego-conscious, thereby challenging the acceptance of and reliance on binaries. By exposing the limits of rationality, Atwood issues this challenge to her characters and to the reader to confront the unknown and, thereby, to engage in self-realization.

Ironically, such challenging of categorical distinctions during the process of self-realization creates binaries of its own, for the individual so engaged runs counter to social norms and thus occupies a position opposed to society. On the personal level, facing the irrational involves assimilating the known elements of self, the conscious, with the unknown elements, the unconscious. C. G. Jung terms this process "individuation," a startling and revealing assessment of the self.[10] In Jung's view, the "self" differs from the "ego" since the latter is constituted by the conscious elements only; this, he argues, is a distinction that few people recognize: "[m]ost people confuse 'self-knowledge' with knowledge of their conscious ego-personalities. Anyone who has any ego-consciousness at all takes it for granted that he knows himself. But the ego knows only its own contents, not the unconscious and its contents" (*Undiscovered* 5).[11] Jung's claim is an important one for the present study because the direct result of this lack of awareness means that "the so-called normal person possesses only a limited degree of self-knowledge" (*Undiscovered* 4). Moreover, Jung's assessment calls attention to the unstable, and perhaps even arbitrary, designation of "normality." In this view, rather than being a suspicious, damnable activity, pushing beyond artificial social constructs is laudable and is, in fact, the only path to real self-knowledge. Jung clearly indicates that to be content with the "norm" is necessarily to remain ignorant of the unconscious; he remarks that "[p]eople measure their self-knowledge by what the average person in their social environment knows of himself, but not by the real psychic facts which are for the most

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[10] A fuller explanation of Jung's concept of individuation is included in the second part of this introductory chapter.

[11] It is important to note that Jung's use of masculine pronouns and referents as inclusive terms reflects common practice in his era. I have avoided modifying these to gender neutral terms throughout my study in order to preserve grammatical clarity.

part hidden from them" (*Undiscovered* 5). Normality, then, is a state of half-truths that diverts attention from the unknown by masquerading as self-awareness. Indeed, the premise not only of Jung's argument for self-discovery but of psychology as a whole is that the degree of this awareness must be contested, for there are mysteries in the functioning of the human mind beyond what is consciously known and that are worth investigating.[12]

It takes a degree of courage and resistance to social conformity to pursue these unknown aspects of the human psyche, for such a process requires moving beyond the rational and, in society, irrationality is linked to madness. Jung contends, however, that "[f]or the sake of mental stability and even physiological health, the unconscious and the conscious must be integrally connected and thus move on parallel lines" ("Approaching" 37). That is, mental health can only be attained and preserved not by lapsing into the half-aware state of "normality" but by assimilating these two areas of the psyche. Yet to do so means facing the acceptance of the irrational, or on a broader level, recognizing that what society labels "madness" exists within each individual, for this state is an extreme form of so-called normality. Perhaps it is actually a suspicion of the existence of this irrational element that causes the pervasive fear of madness. Ussher argues that the presence in society of this fear of contagion potentially holds deep implications: "madness, although we joke about it and fear *real* contact with it, leaves us all with a sense of loss and a sense of foreboding. For we recognize something of ourselves in the mad. And we don't know the answer to the question of madness, but turn away from it lest we find that the path which takes us there is one we are on ourselves" (*Women's* 4). This seems a frightening prospect indeed, and Ussher's characterization of avoidance tactics points to a double bind. On the one hand, contemporary Western society still does not understand and so cannot deal appropriately with madness; on the other hand, fear prevents or at least limits

[12] While psychologists share the belief in the existence of the unconscious in the human psyche, it is equally true that the nature and function of this unconscious are intensely debated. Freud and Jung exemplify two of the major conflicting views; these are discussed in the following section of this chapter.

the extent one will pursue the unknown dimensions of the self where answers are potentially to be found. Thus the fear is not of the mad individual so much as of "lapsing" into what is perceived as an abnormal state of illness; that is, to extend the medical terminology, we fear contagion while we already unknowingly carry the latent disease.

Jung's concerns about ignoring the unknown or the unconscious psyche remain relevant to contemporary psychologists such as Ussher. In Jung's assessment, the fear of madness limits knowledge on two levels: the individual and the psychological profession. One of the main problems that he identifies is that society -- both as a whole and within the profession of psychology -- devalues the psyche on the basis of "panic fear" of what might be uncovered "in the realm of the unconscious" (Jung, *Undiscovered* 27). This suppression of the psyche is linked directly to an inability to accept the irrational and has serious consequences. "It is this fear of the unconscious psyche," Jung asserts, "which not only impedes self-knowledge but is the gravest obstacle to a wider understanding and knowledge of psychology. Often the fear is so great that one dares not admit it even to oneself" (*Undiscovered* 28). This latter observation is critical, pointing to the pervasive lack of self-realization and a knowledge limited by fear. One method of containing this fear is to construct rigid artificial boundaries that keep madness at bay while comfortably distancing oneself from it. Ussher agrees that this remains the case, contending that the "need to position the mad person as being fundamentally different from ourselves" is motivated by society's "fear of the fall into madness" and is used to maintain social order (*Women's* 140). Yet indulging that fear is exactly what keeps the individual and Western society in a benumbed state of ignorance and false security; any remedy for this condition then will be "abnormal" in the sense that it is opposed to contemporary social norms.

That a remedy to such resistance is both desirable and necessary seems obvious. What is equally clear is that such a remedy can only begin at the level of the individual. Consequently, Jung's process of individuation offers a viable alternative, one that recognizes that since society can only exist in individuals, self-realization is crucial for

social development. This same interdependency is evident in Atwood's representation of society; other critics have also recognized this Jungian impulse -- to focus on the individual as the core of social change -- as an aspect of Atwood's work.[13] Jes Simmons, for example, offers an extensive Jungian study of individuation in *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*. Simmons presents this self-realization process as Moodie's only method of healing (147) and emphasizes that although "[s]he dies without ever achieving individuation," that "it is her reaching, her struggle, which Atwood celebrates" (150). Since individuation is an ongoing process in which further unknowns are continually discovered, to expect completion runs counter to its very definition. In fact, this limitlessness results from the nature of the unconscious. Jung remarks that "[t]here is little hope of our ever being able to reach even approximate consciousness of the self [which includes the conscious and the unconscious levels of the psyche], since however much we may make conscious there will always exist an indeterminate and indeterminable amount of unconscious material which belongs to the totality of the self" (*CW* 7.2.2). Unlike the ego, the depths of the unconscious psyche can never be plumbed completely. As P. W. Martin helpfully observes, "'individuation is not a "once and for all" achievement but a continuing activity'"; he notes that what distracts one from that process of self discovery is "what Jung calls 'the participation mystique,' the 'condition of identification with the collective situation where a man instead of being himself is merged in the mass'" (qtd. in Simmons 149). Clearly, then, there is a struggle between the individual and the influence of the mass.

This mass social mentality draws one away from introspection and self-assessment, yet the quality and very existence of that society are entirely dependent on those individuals. Jung's remarks on this paradoxical situation are telling: "[h]appiness and contentment, equability of mind and meaningfulness of life -- these can be

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[13] While the recognition of Jungian concepts in Atwood's work tends to form a limited aspect of critical discussions, Coomi S. Vevaina's *Re/Membering Selves: Alienation and Survival in the Novels of Margaret Atwood and Margaret Laurence* is a notable exception.

experienced only by the individual and not by a State, which, on the one hand, is nothing but a convention agreed to by independent individuals and, on the other, continually threatens to paralyse and suppress the individual" (*Undiscovered* 60). Thus, the individual becomes increasingly important as a locus of change and development. Jung recognizes that society itself is a construct.[14] Elsewhere, Jung emphasizes that human perception encompasses more than is consciously recognized, noting that "[t]here are...[also] unconscious aspects of our perception of reality" ("Approaching" 5). However, these unconscious aspects go unrecognized by the majority, for Western normality is restricted to ego-consciousness. Somewhat paradoxically, then, Jung insists on a broad view of reality but circumscribes it to the individual, claiming that "[t]he individual is the only reality" ("Approaching" 45). That said, it is essential for the individual to come to a healthy understanding of her/his unconscious, for it affects her/his perception and actions; nevertheless, this goal of self-realization is utterly opposed to social norms and mass mentality.

Feminist critics, such as Phyllis Chesler, see this opposition of self-realization and social structure as particularly directed against women. However, Chesler also acknowledges that the fear and dismissal of madness are largely based on a refusal to recognize the unknown part of the psyche; she asserts that "[m]adness is shut away from sight, shamed, brutalized, denied, and feared. Contemporary men, politics, science -- the rational mode itself -- does not consult or is not in touch with the irrational, i.e., with the events of the unconscious" (26). Thus, although one might argue convincingly for how

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[14] Interestingly, the basis and development of Jung's psychological theories can be seen to exemplify the high value he places on individualism over mass mentality. This tenet is reflected not only in his divergence from Freud but, more fundamentally, in his shift from biological determinism to self-determinism. As Richard I. Evans notes, through individuation Jung shifted his point of view from biological determinants of one's mental condition to social factors and finally to a spiritual view of self-responsibility -- that is, the belief that the individual is "an ultimately self-determined spiritual being that transcends the biological forces acting on man" (*Jung* 12). However, Evans is careful to add that Jung's views recognize the complexity of human behaviour and the interplay of these three factors -- biological, social, and spiritual -- among others. Nonetheless, Jung's focus remained on the individual's potential to create change and to choose self-development in the face of social resistance.

women are equated to "the irrational" and so dismissed, the crux of the issue is that it is dissociation from the unconscious, which is perpetuated by fear, that maintains the artificial social boundaries which affect both genders. The principles of fear and exclusion, or of definition by opposite, which characterize the accepted limits of normality can also be observed in the construction of gender boundaries.

Atwood's fictional societies reflect the inherent difficulties of her characters' existence in such a social milieu -- particularly, of characters who challenge the "reality" prescribed by these constructs. As Klaus Peter Müller observes, "Atwood... emphasizes that reality is far too complex for simple answers, even though these are often provided by society. Authentic seeing is connected with the awareness of the dominant factors involved in any construction of reality. These factors include much more than just the visible facts, namely, the things people have in their minds" (233). Arguably, the aspects of reality often omitted in literary representations are, as Jung suggested they are in the "real" world, the unknown aspects of the psyche which civilized society consciously avoids in favour of more comfortable and somewhat simplistic constructs. This limited perspective is often replicated in literary criticism which ignores Atwood's focus on the unconscious and her exploration of "madness." In such a restrictive social situation, any means of addressing the issue of madness will face societal resistance and so feminism -- following Chesler's early example -- would seem an appropriate method of inquiry; however, it bears remembering that any single perspective has limitations and feminism has been the dominant form of Atwood criticism to date.[15]

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[15] Sonia Mycak's *In Search of the Split Subject* argues directly against feminism, identifying it as a limiting line of enquiry. She defends this view and her own method more directly in "Psychoanalysis, Phenomenology, and The Novels of Margaret Atwood: A New Critical Approach"; within this article, one of Mycak's main criticisms is that in many feminist readings, "generic social movements are analysed at the expense of investigations into the construction of each protagonist's particular and individual psyche" (137-38). Conversely, she argues that "psychoanalysis acknowledges unconscious processes and compulsions which rational thought belies. This acknowledgment of the unconscious and dynamic model of the psyche whereby this unconscious is in an active relationship with the ego or conscious parts of the self is particularly productive in the case of Atwood's characters who often seem not to be in full control of their own actions or driven by irrational demands. Thus, the psychoanalytic approach allows for a focus upon

At this juncture, two key issues which form indirect challenges to my method must be clarified before delineating this argument further: criticism of Atwood's focus on the psychology of her characters and, perhaps more significantly, the claim that she presents a gendered vision of liberating multiplicity. While Frank Davey suggests the former may be problematic, his criticism is directed at Atwood's critics rather than at the author herself. He notes that Atwood's "immediate goal is not to change society but to change the individual woman -- often minimally -- to survive with some integrity in that society" through the character's "source of healing power ... the personal unconscious" (*Margaret* 59). The difficulty, in Davey's view, is not in Atwood's focus but it arises when critics misinterpret Atwood's work, "confuse the character's fiction with the author's fiction, [and] mistake novels which deconstruct archetypes for novels which confirm them. Ultimately they mistake Freudian novels, which root personal liberation in a cathartic acknowledgement of the subconscious, for Jungian ones" (*Margaret* 67). Davey's remarks suggest the classic misinterpretation that Jung's work continues to face among even the most incisive critics, whereby Jungian criticism is erroneously limited to archetypal criticism and all other psychoanalytic views are attributed to Freud.[16] Interestingly, Davey's own argument often coincides with Jungian views and even suggests the concept of individuation.[17] Ultimately, the Freudian focus of Davey's

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intra-subjective as well as inter-subjective relations and a good look at what goes on within a character's mind" ("Psychoanalysis" 140). Notably, Mycak's use of the term "psychoanalytic" excludes Jung.

[16] By contrast, in her discussion of madness, psychologist Jane Ussher specifically acknowledges Jung's relevance and influence as a form of "psychoanalytic therapy practised today" that is distinct from the Freudian model, observing that "it is important to note that psychoanalytic thinking has had enormous effect on the culture of Western society -- and particularly on the current discourse of madness" (*Women's* 111-12).

[17] Particular examples of a false dichotomy between Jung and Freud and of Jungian elements in Davey's own analysis in *Margaret Atwood: A Feminist Poetics* include the following:

Davey argues that *The Edible Woman, Surfacing, Lady Oracle,* and *Bodily Harm* are all structurally "closer to that of Freudian psychotherapy than to that of Jungian archetype" in the representation of a quest for understanding one's repressed unconscious (72-73). However, he limits Jung to archetypal criticism, failing to acknowledge that Jungian individuation also requires a confrontation with the unconscious but the "repressed" contents are less limited in scope and can not all be known. In short, he conflates the "repressed" with the "unconscious" (112).

criticism is not hostile to Atwood's psychological presentation of character; although firmly anti-Jungian, nonetheless, Davey's remarks clearly demonstrate the intensity of psychological focus in Atwood's fiction.

By contrast, Larry MacDonald vehemently attacks Atwood herself for what he views as erroneous, undermining, and dangerous "cultural assumptions which inform [her] work" (121). These, MacDonald argues, are the result of the "psychologism" which Russell Jacoby identifies as a serious problem in contemporary culture and defines as "'the reduction of social concepts to individual and psychological ones'" (78 qtd. in MacDonald 128). On this basis, MacDonald maintains that Atwood is "relentless in her reduction of all social evil to psychological disruption" (122), thereby issuing a serious accusation against Atwood's focus on the psyche of her characters. MacDonald insists that focusing on the individual and her/his "psychic wounds" is not only reductive but actually compounds social problems since the individual "healing" comes at the expense of ignoring the collective origin of the problem (122). Apparently, MacDonald would have one believe that the individual and the social are mutually exclusive conditions that are entirely incompatible.

In tracing the source of Atwood's views, MacDonald finds that "[a]ll these roads lead to Jung" (130). If MacDonald credits Jung with the influence of authority, it is only

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His description of Marian's cake as "the medium of symbol, image, and iconic gesture" (77) and the maze image of the personal unconscious (113-14) are entirely compatible with Jungian readings -- even archetypal ones (see Jung, *Symbols* 65-67, 107-23).

Similarly, although Davey posits Freudian cathartic breakthrough as Atwood's goal (67), he also admits that the characters in *Life Before Man* "refuse the deconstructive cathartic act.... Their insights into themselves are thus restricted to conventional language, to the rational, and are never transmitted to their irrational selves" (85). This condition of purblind normality is exactly what Jung identifies as the modern condition (*Undiscovered* 4-5).

Davey even mentions that the lack of knowledge of Marian's childhood and adolescence in *The Edible Woman* is highly problematic and the "psychological perspective is shallow," for "[w]e are given no understanding of the source of Marian's fears, projections, and transferences" (67-8). Unlike Freudian analysis, Jungian analysis is not dependent on childhood causal factors and so rather than seeking causes, it seeks to discover what the unconscious (re-)actions reveal about the present. Atwood's omission of the earlier aspects of Marian's life, then, forces the reader to engage in understanding the character's psychological position and also forces a focus on the present and future as opposed to the past -- a focus which coincides with a Jungian view and contradicts a Freudian one.

to demonstrate how destructive such influence can be. He dismisses psychology as narcissistic, subjective and limiting (130). In this respect, MacDonald is an extreme example, and he seriously misreads Jung. Rather than being selfish and socially destructive, Jung emphasizes that the goal of self-realization is to enable an individual to function fully and effectively in relationships, and so, in larger society (Storr 21-22); he even asserts that "[i]t would ... be very much in the interest of the free society to give some thought to the question of human relationship from the psychological point of view, for in this resides its real cohesion and consequently its strength" (*Undiscovered* 57). Moreover, Jung maintains that regarding "society" as a nebulous entity allows for complacency, a tendency that is countered by the recognition that society is comprised of individuals; in this sense, the individual is society. Atwood concurs, clearly stating that each individual must accept responsibility for her/himself in order to accept social responsibility. "If you define yourself as innocent," Atwood explains, "then nothing is ever your fault -- it is always somebody else doing it to you, and until you stop defining yourself as a victim that will always be true. It will always be somebody else's fault, and you will always be the object of that rather than somebody who has any choice or takes responsibility for their life" (Gibson 13). While Atwood and Jung suggest that the perception of self as individually responsible is necessary for social integration and makes possible social responsibility, MacDonald suggests the opposite. He affirms that individuals must be socially responsible without indulging in undue self-analysis; in his view, there seems to be no complementarity or mutual influence. Such binaries of external/internal, social/individual seem questionable in their artificiality and oppose Jungian views of the need for integration as well as Atwood's consistent challenging of such binaries.[18]

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[18] Sherrill Grace's *Violent Duality* may be the most extensive analysis of Atwood specifically based on this claim.

MacDonald's misreading, then, is not only of Jung but, more directly, of Atwood.[19] He argues that Atwood's emphasis on psychology results in a simplistic view of society -- an "ideological rejection of man as a political being" -- and he claims to prove that she "retreat[s] from a materialist interpretation of history into the unchallenging confines of subjectivity" (127). On the contrary, Atwood has repeatedly claimed that everything social is political: "[b]y 'political' I mean having to do with power: who's got it, who wants it, how it operates; in a word, who's allowed to do what to whom, who gets what from whom, who gets away with it and how" ("End" 353). Further, she emphasizes that the author is directly implicated in presenting the politics of society:

> By 'politics' I do not mean how you voted in the last election, although that is included. I mean who is entitled to do what to whom, with impunity; who profits by it; and who therefore eats what. Such material enters a writer's work not because the writer is or is not consciously political but because a writer is an observer, a witness, and such observations are the air he breathes. They are the air all of us breathe; the only difference is that the author looks, and then writes down what he sees. What he sees will depend on how closely he looks and at what, but look he must.
> ("Amnesty" 394)

Since Atwood is making such claims, it seems unlikely that she considers herself immune from the political side of humanity or that she would present her fictional societies with such an absence. MacDonald, however, goes so far as to claim that Atwood's novels "are high-toned versions of the pop-psychological self-help books that are abundantly available on the paperback racks of any drugstore or train station" (134). The irony with which Atwood treats pop-psychology, which will be examined in chapter one of my

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[19] In the course of proving his argument, MacDonald confuses Atwood with her narrator in *Surfacing* -- precisely the problem Davey notes in *Margaret Atwood: A Feminist Poetics* of critics who "confuse the character's fiction with the author's fiction" (67). MacDonald cites a passage, attributes the narrator's claim to Atwood, and then condemns the author for short-sightedness: "[R]eason itself is under assault. 'The trouble,' Atwood tells us repeatedly, 'is all in the knob at the top of our bodies' (*Surfacing* 83). ... But if we rail against reason in general, if intelligent and concrete thought becomes the enemy, as it clearly is in the novels under discussion, then it follows that the irrational must be glorified as an attractive alternative" (136). Conversely, MacDonald disparages acceptance of the irrational to any extent.

study, seems to escape MacDonald entirely -- as does the ironic and satiric tone in general.[20]

Through this focus on psychology and its "beguiling surfaces" (122), MacDonald claims that Atwood's readers are being both duped and offered an escape from social responsibility. He states that she "deflect[s] attention away from the political and economic imperatives of history" (143), offering in exchange "empty depth" (142). Moreover, in novels such as *Bodily Harm*, MacDonald insists that her readers are not required to engage with the specifics of the political situation but are "let off the hook; good liberal intentions from afar will suffice" (141). In his view, the reader is encouraged to "learn to live, not exactly *within* history (for history is often evil and we do not want to be accused of complicity) but *alongside* history" (142). Many critics radically disagree with this assessment; if anything Atwood is known for involving and strategically implicating her readers (Grace, *Violent* 2; Howells, *Margaret* 8; Maclean 179). In Bouson's words, Atwood has "the power to disturb, compel, and at times even brutalize her readers" (ix-x); this is hardly being "let off the hook." Perhaps unsurprisingly, MacDonald also targets other critics, calling them "Jungian detectives [who] write exegetic articles that solve the crime, which is rational analysis, and point the moral, which is to pay more attention to one's unconscious and let society take care of itself" (136). Despite his attempts to condemn Jung, Atwood, her readers, and her critics as simplistically dichotomous in their thinking, such statements ultimately implicate MacDonald himself; his assumption that a call to self-development necessitates an abandonment of all social responsibilities relies on an either/or mentality.

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[20] MacDonald's nod to the humourous aspect of the novels -- "[w]e may laugh at them [the characters], as we were clearly meant to" -- rings false, sounding at best as a hollow, short-lived laugh which he proceeds to retract in the same breath (133). The laughter itself seems dangerous for disguising what he views as "thesis novels" (121) with the "serious intentions" of insidiously trivializing, if not actually of ousting, reason, ideas, politics, history, and economics from society (133), using them merely as an "obliging cardboard backdrop" (137). MacDonald is not laughing; he is wringing his hands in despair.

By contrast, MacDonald advocates "a 'rage for action' in the public and political life of the collective" (128). From whence does such action come -- the beneficial and evil results to which history attests -- if not from the minds of individuals? Surely psychology as a study of the individual mind need not be disregarded in order to preserve social thinking and action. Such a reaction only upholds Jung's assessment of fear as the inhibiting factor in the development of psychology (*Undiscovered* 27-28) and emphasizes his warning of the danger of such extremist thinking:

> Naturally, society has an indisputable right to protect itself against arrant subjectivisms, but, in so far as society is itself composed of de-individualized human beings, it is completely at the mercy of ruthless individualists. Let it band together into groups and organizations as much as it likes -- it is just this banding together and the resultant extinction of the individual personality that makes it succumb so readily to a dictator. A million zeros joined together do not, unfortunately, add up to one. Ultimately everything depends on the quality of the individual, but our fatally short-sighted age thinks only in terms of large numbers and mass organizations, though one would think that the world had seen more than enough of what a well-disciplined mob can do in the hands of a single madman. Unfortunately, this realization does not seem to have penetrated very far -- and our blindness is extremely dangerous. (*Undiscovered* 31)

In this light, MacDonald's advocation of "massified society" over subjectivity (142) seems not only easier to dismiss than individual responsibility but indeed it seems much more urgent to do so. Finally, then, MacDonald's accusation of Atwood's psychological focus is important because it gestures towards a larger debate of the value of psychology in contemporary society, a focus beyond the scope of this study. Nevertheless, as the vehemence of his argument makes clear, MacDonald grants a great deal of influence and agency not only to the "serious writers" -- including Atwood -- whom he so harshly critiques but also, indirectly, to their readers. If it were not so, such a vehement argument would be futile. In spite of MacDonald's own protests, then, Atwood's reader is apparently not duped into being disengaged either from the novels or from society.

The other extreme view of Atwood's psychological focus is often found in feminist and postmodernist readings of her works, where Atwood is seen to present a

gendered vision of liberating plurality. Eleonora Rao has recently issued such claims and demonstrates the subtle difference between this feminist pluralist reading and a Jungian one. Rao argues that "Atwood problematizes to an extreme degree notions of unity, essence, and authenticity. Atwood's treatment of character and subjectivity presents the ego as inconsistent and in constant process. The novels challenge the notion of a coherent and self-sufficient subjectivity accepted by bourgeois ideology" (*Strategies* xvii). This focus on the development and self-realization of the self in areas and via methods that are outside the status quo does not inherently differ from a Jungian view. In both, the ego is seen as being in flux, and Rao also notes that the unconscious plays a significant role in Atwood's presentation of the self. Speaking of *Lady Oracle, Bodily Harm, Life Before Man,* and *The Handmaid's Tale*, she observes, "[t]he texts provide a portrayal of a subjectivity as the product of the unconscious, emphasizing the fact that it is continuously in process." Rao further notes that "[t]his agrees with recent psychoanalytic theories in which the inner dimension of the psyche is accorded positive, liberating qualities" (*Strategies* 42). Nevertheless, she then proceeds to credit Freud with locating the subject as fluctuating between the conscious and the unconscious psyche and Lacan with recognizing the disruptive potential of the unconscious (*Strategies* 42). While the veracity of these claims is not in dispute, the fact that Jung's name is not invoked, even to dismiss it, highlights the fact that psychoanalysis as a whole is generally equated with Freud. As John Freeman observes, Jung is consistently overlooked: "while the general outline of Freud's work was well known to educated readers all over the Western world, Jung had never managed to break through to the general public and was always considered too difficult for popular reading" (v). Similarly, the relevance of his contributions is typically --if unintentionally -- minimized: "Jung's thinking has colored the world of modern psychology more than many of those with casual knowledge realize" (Freeman viii). This influence is evident in the common usage of Jungian terms without recognition of the source -- perhaps the most striking example is the term "complex" itself. Although Jung

affirms that he coined the term "complex" (Evans, *Jung* 120), it is a concept often attributed to Freud. This tendency to overlook Jung is evident in Rao's argument and, I suggest, contributes to her reading of Atwood's presentation of the ego as strictly female.

While Rao acknowledges the co-existence of conflictual elements in Atwood's representation of subjectivity, she sees this as specifically female. Rao argues that incorporating otherness into the self, as particularly evident in *Lady Oracle*, is a female representation of self (*Strategies* 45, 52). Since a Jungian reading posits the self as including conscious and unconscious aspects, and the psyche as bisexual, Rao's identification of Atwood's "challenge to the notion of the homogeneous ego" need not be read as "a specifically gendered vision wherein woman is more inclined than man to assume a multiplicity of roles and positions" (*Strategies* 45). Although Jung does indeed differentiate strongly between the sexes, positing male and female psychological tendencies as part of the psyche (see von Franz, "Process" 186-207), he specifically identifies them as co-existent in both genders. Consequently, the concept of a heterogeneous ego is not "gendered." Interestingly, Jung's view corresponds to Rao's assumption in that he also posits "receptiveness to the irrational" as a feminine psychological tendency; however, his concept of the anima also situates this female element in the male psyche (von Franz 186).[21] Jung contends that the concept of the ego itself as understood in contemporary Western society -- as the conscious psyche only -- is a serious limitation that needs to be challenged and debunked ("Approaching" 5-6, 37). In other words, Jung also offers one of the "psychoanalytic theories in which the inner dimension of the psyche is accorded positive, liberating qualities" -- those characteristics which Rao attributes solely to Freud and Lacan -- without presenting it as gender-specific.

The assumption that multiplicity is female is compounded by the claim that this state is a liberating one. Rao invokes French feminist theorists Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous to argue that "multiplicity [is] at the basis of the feminine" (*Strategies* 45) and

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[21] Jung's concept of the anima/animus is described more fully in the next part of this introduction.

further claims that Joan Foster's fractured self in *Lady Oracle* is Atwood's way of "emphasis[ing] the liberating aspects of a multiple, plural subjectivity" ("Margaret" 133). Conversely, Jane Flax's earlier remarks equate an utter fragmentation of self with a severe form of madness, asserting that the act of challenging social constructs -- including the "normal" concept of ego -- through multiplicity is only possible by an individual who possesses "basic cohesion within themselves" (qtd. in Bouson 11). Since this cohesion need not be consciously acknowledged, Flax's view coalesces with Jung's notion of the self as a self-regulating organism. Jung asserts that the unconscious compensates for what is absent in the conscious psyche (*Undiscovered* 46), and this eruption can be positive, "expressions of aspects of the individual which [are] neglected or unrealized," or negative, "warnings of divergence from the individual's proper path" (Storr 17-18). In either case, however, the self releases these unconscious intrusions in order to aid one on the path to individuation or self-realization. Thus, Rao's recognition of "subjects as a product of an unconscious always in process, unanalysable, uncharacterisable" ("Margaret" 146-47) is entirely in keeping with the Jungian conception of the self. "The self," Jung explains, "is merely a term that designates the whole personality. The whole personality of man is indescribable... [since] we don't know our unconscious personality" (Evans, *Jung* 85). Moreover, he adds, "[o]ur psyche ... remains an insoluble puzzle and an incomprehensible wonder, an object of abiding perplexity" (*Undiscovered* 25). Certainly Jung's view of subjectivity is heterogeneous and liberating in the sense that it opens vistas of exploration into the unconscious; however, Jung's conception is ultimately concentrated in the process of individuation which seeks to draw together the fragmentation in an attempt to recognize the self, including hitherto neglected aspects.

To glory in multiplicity for its own sake -- as an extreme form of Rao's views could allow -- is a romanticized notion which, if acted upon, can be seen as a frightening form of madness. James Glass, a political theorist, studied women clinically diagnosed with multiple personality disorder and reports that "'in none of the accounts ... did I see

that the phenomenon ... was a creative or playful or regenerative experience.'" Glass adds that "'[m]ultiplicity of identity becomes for these women an ongoing torment, a horror ... that totally incapacitates them'" (xvi qtd. in Caminero-Santangelo 98). In fact, Marta Caminero-Santangelo observes that in comparing multiple personality disorder to the postmodern subject, "Glass finds the parallels so disturbing that he uses the clinical category of multiple personality disorder to debunk conceptions of a liberatory 'multiplicity'" (98); Glass argues that "'for a real person the psychological reality of being multiple, of actually living it out, is an entirely different issue'" (xvii-xix qtd. in Caminero-Santangelo 98). If theoretically liberating, Caminero-Santangelo notes that when put into practical terms, multiplicity and fragmentation "reduced women to even greater powerlessness" (98), by "demonstrat[ing] the absolute powerlessness of one who cannot completely claim the 'I' for herself" (103). This leads her to ask how agency is possible "without ... being able to identify oneself as an 'I' rather than a 'she'?" (Caminero-Santangelo 102). Thus, the inherent danger of romanticizing (female) multiplicity is identical to the danger of romanticizing (female) madness; rather than offering freedom, the subject is removed from discourse and so is silenced.

This question of agency is central to my examination of madness and to the tenuous nature of identity -- whether the self is considered homogeneous or heterogeneous. In a final assessment, Jung engages both extremes of this binary, for he views the self as heterogeneous (conscious and unconscious, bisexual, autonomous) and also values the goal of individuation or integration of these aspects of the self. Notably, the Jungian self differs from the commonly-held notion of a homogeneous self, which critics such as Rao challenge as limiting and distinctly male. That view is limited to the ego-self, whereas Jung emphasizes the complex, self-regulating nature of the Self in which there is "a constant flow between opposing poles" of the conscious and the unconscious (Roper 55).[22] In this sense, a homogeneous self is not the current state but

[22] For a succinct summary of Jungian depth psychology, see Gordon Roper (54-60).

the future goal of an individual, a goal that must be taken up consciously and tenaciously pursued, for in both Jungian and Laingian terms, it is vastly different from our current, divided state. Not surprisingly, then, self-realization is not a gendered process, vision, or goal in either Jungian terms or, I would argue, Atwoodian ones. As John Lauber notes of *The Edible Woman*, "[m]asculine identity seems as problematic as feminine ... and the novel insistently asks whether and how anyone can achieve identity in the artificial society it presents" (20). Lauber's point here is an excellent one and redirects attention to Atwood's representation of society through the individual psychological struggles of her characters. Perhaps more significantly, these struggles are mirrored in and experienced by the reader. In John Moss' words, "the very effectiveness of her [Atwood's] writing leads the reader away from the art, to a consideration of his own or of the author's situation in the world. This is, perhaps, appropriate, for Atwood above all is a social critic, although her medium is what might be called psychological realism" (Introduction, *Canadian* 9).

Although many insightful studies of madness have been done specifically in the psychological field and in literary criticism from the feminist perspective, it is my contention that Atwood's work can also be rewardingly examined from a psycho-social perspective that includes the dynamics of reader-text participation. Whereas such an approach is largely complementary to feminist readings, it serves here to refocus attention on the human psyche -- both in fictional characters and in the reader -- rather than on gendered roles. That is not to say that socially prescribed roles and identities do not further complicate views of madness, but rather that the very concept of "normality" -- irrespective of gender -- is also a construct, which subsumes the unconscious and thereby limits the process of self-realization. I would argue that the act of drawing attention to these constructs through implicating the reader in both creation and resistance is an important function of Atwood's texts.

Recent criticism by Hilde Staëls (*Margaret Atwood's Novels,* 1995), Sonia Mycak (*In Search of the Split Subject*, 1996) as well as Klaus Peter Müller ("Reconstructions of

Reality in Margaret Atwood's Literature," 2000) share this movement away from the feminist readings that have dominated Atwood criticism to date. Staëls focuses on structure (narratology) and semiotics in the novels; her work suggests the significance of the reader's role "in disclosing meaning in a dynamic relationship with the text" and demonstrates specifically how metaphors "convey a character's conscious and unconscious mental operations" (10).[23] Mycak's dual approach to investigating the divided self in Atwood is founded on her beliefs that "while psychoanalysis addresses the ways in which an 'I' is constructed, phenomenology addresses the ways in which that 'I' relates to the world" (16); hers is a Freudian and, more extensively, Lacanian analysis of six of Atwood's novels. Müller, on the other hand, takes a constructionist approach, outlining how the mind and language combine to create reality. In Müller's terms, constructionism "underlines the importance of the human mind for any understanding of reality.... Reality is there, but the way in which human beings look at it, and the meaning they attribute to it, depend on many complicated factors" (229), most particularly, on culture (230). Each of these critics illuminates important areas of Atwood's work that my psycho-social, reader-oriented reading will combine in new ways and extend through a focus on madness in Atwood's novels to date. Some of these areas include: the constructed nature of reality and sanity; the reader's role in constructing the fictional text and how this relates to "reality"; and the complex interaction between the individual and society in the fiction. While each of these critics also draws attention to the power of language in Atwood's work, I suggest that in addition to the language itself, its gaps and ambiguities form an integral part of Atwood's construction of character and, more specifically, these absences enable her to implicate the reader in the same construction of character, society, and "madness" in the texts. In examining these aspects of the texts, my

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[23] Whereas Staëls is acerbic in her dismissal of feminist critics, including Elaine Showalter, as "reductive" and "essentialist" (see *Margaret Atwood's Novels* 5-8), I would agree that the extreme attempts to categorize Atwood as feminist are misguided; however, I also contend that these very opinions emphasize the importance of the reader's role in the development of the text.

analysis of the role of madness in Atwood's novels will proceed based on a threefold approach: C. G. Jung's theories provide the main psychological basis, R. D. Laing offers a complementary socially-based view, and Wolfgang Iser, a means of clarifying the strategies of reader involvement.[24]

[24] While "psycho-social with reader-involvement" is admittedly a cumbersome description of theoretical methodology, I have deliberately avoided the terms "Jungian" or "Laingian" as general descriptors since my study is based purely on neither but depends upon the psychological view as well as challenges to it. Similarly, "psychoanalytical" would be misleading as the analysis is distinctly not a Freudian one.

II

Jung, Laing, and Iser: A Theoretical Framework

"[M]adness fascinates because it is knowledge."

-- Michel Foucault (21)

While Michel Foucault's claim might initially seem specious, it bears further consideration. That "madness fascinates" -- even as it may also frighten -- is upheld by the continued interest it elicits in various fields. This fascination is perhaps best exemplified in the custom of displaying the insane for public view, a practice which Foucault dates to the Middle Ages (68) and which came into vogue in the early nineteenth century as "[m]adness became pure spectacle" (69). Foucault further argues that during this latter period, madness took on the role of the Other: "Madness had become a thing to look at: no longer a monster inside oneself, but an animal with strange mechanisms, a bestiality from which man had long since been suppressed" (70). Insight to the issue is couched in this claim, for civilization has attempted to segregate madness from society even though it is an inextricable part of the social structure and, within that context, a part of each individual. That is not to say that madness is to be encouraged but rather that social structure creates situations in which so-called madness becomes a coping strategy for some individuals even while that same society condemns such a reaction and perceives it as completely Other. Foucault's claim, then, coincides with this view of madness as a part of social structure, for he suggests that a subconscious recognition of "knowledge" in the mad figure fascinates the normal individual. What knowledge can one possibly gain through madness? If one is to avoid romanticizing the condition, there seems to be a single answer to this question: madness contains knowledge of those realms withheld from reason and precluded by social acceptability. In fact, as Foucault's text suggests, madness is not a condition that is Other, but rather one that is a "complex,

human -- too human -- phenomen[on]" (Barchilon viii). In this reading, the knowledge contained in and attained through "mad" or abnormal actions would include, not least of all, depths of the self that are otherwise restricted and ignored. In other words, the unknown psyche becomes more known, or the mad figure has access to "the unconscious part of the human mind," a psychological connection that Foucault also maintains (Barchilon viii). Such a focus suggests the significance of the unconscious on both individual and social development -- the very concept that C. G. Jung maintains is the key to self-realization.

Jung's views of mental health and the human psyche run counter to the social impulse to segregate madness as the Other and to separate "it" from the self. Conversely, Jung contends that acceptance of what is labelled the "irrational" is necessary for self-realization and mental health, for the current condition of "normality" is far too limited. This acceptance of the irrational makes Jung's concepts especially suitable for a study of madness in Margaret Atwood's novels, for her works suggest a similar openness. In a Jungian view, the irrational is the unconscious, the hidden aspect of the self which forms an immeasurable portion of the human psyche yet lacks recognition by "civilized" society. Jung maintains that "[i]ndefinitely large areas of the mind still remain in darkness. What we call 'psyche' is by no means identical with consciousness and its contents." In fact, he argues that "even a thoroughly educated person shares the common ignorance and underrates everything remotely connected with the 'unconscious'" (*Symbols* 73). Notably, Jung offers an explanation for this behavioural tendency: "[i]t is not, of course, scientific responsibility or honesty that causes such resistance, but age-old misoneism, fear of the new and unknown" (*Symbols* 73). This is a serious charge against a presumably advanced society, yet that same society is implicated by its actions; the

attempt to segregate and to gape at the Other suggests that very fear of what is not understood, the unknown manifested as madness.[25]

Critics have acknowledged a similar recognition of the value of the unknown in Atwood's work. George Woodcock notes, in particular, Atwood's "intuitive wisdom that in the last resort will accept the irrational as truer than the rational" as a key feature of her work ("Metamorphosis" 141). His phrasing is suggestive; to argue that Atwood accepts the irrational "in the last resort" indicates the attempt in her work first to understand the unknown through reason but ultimately to concede that areas do exist outside of the rational realm. Jung's focus on the unconscious helps to illuminate this impulse to seek understanding, for his work with the unknown realm of the human psyche is likewise an attempt to seek intelligibility. Rather than diagnosing and slotting patients into psychoanalytical categories, Anthony Storr observes that Jung's focus was on understanding the individual; moreover, his unconventional interest in "delusions and hallucinations ... [that is,] phenomena, hitherto dismissed as incomprehensible," at times enabled discovery of "a psychological origin and meaning" that was overlooked by other methods of investigation (15). Again, it is noteworthy that the rational explanation is not always found and, thus, Jung sees particular value in that which is labelled "irrational." More specifically, Jung also accepts that some phenomena remain in an unintelligible state, and this too is a condition in which these behaviours retain their validity and significance since the limiting factor is present human understanding, not the composition of the psyche itself.

In Jung's terms, "there are innumerable things beyond the range of human understanding" ("Approaching" 4), and so he fixes his gaze on the unconscious, that unknown element of the human psyche. As John Freeman notes, this focus on the

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[25] Although Jung's comments date to 1950 and 1953, the development of the rational and scientific mind -- upon which he bases the claims of "civilized" humanity losing contact with the unconscious -- has been intensified, rather than negated or replaced, in the past fifty years. Consequently, Jung's references to "modern" alienation, ignorance, and fear are used in my study as inclusive of contemporary conditions in twenty-first-century Western society.

unconscious is considered to be "his [Jung's] overwhelming contribution to psychological understanding" because it moves the concept of the unconscious away from Freud's "glory-hole of repressed desires" and, instead, gives it a much greater role; Jung posits the unconscious as "a world that is just as much a vital and real part of the life of an individual as the conscious, 'cogitating' world of the ego, and infinitely wider and richer" (Freeman viii). Two significant points arise here: first, Jung attributes an influential function to the unconscious. This difference cannot be over-emphasized, for Jung perceives the unconscious not only as an important minor aspect but as an autonomous entity equal to the conscious mind. In an interview, he clearly describes the unconscious as a "basis of consciousness, possessing a creative nature and capable of autonomous acts, autonomous intrusions into the consciousness," and laments the fact that it continues to be (wilfully) ignored by society: "[i]t has not become recognized that in our psyche there are two factors, two independent factors, with consciousness representing one factor and, equally important, the unconscious representing the other factor" (Evans, *Jung* 134). Such an attribution of influence and vastness to the unconscious forms the basis of Jung's contention regarding the limited range of "normality" in contemporary society.

A similar but broader observation is that Jung's concept of the unconscious differs markedly from Freud's, and that these differences make Jung's more relevant for the present study of madness. A major difficulty with Freud's view of the unconscious is that it is much more restricted than Jung's. While even the Freudians themselves note this limitation of the Freudian unconscious, they endeavour to interpret it favourably. Such a reading is exemplified in Juliet Mitchell's attempt to salvage feminist compatibility in Freud. She argues that "[t]he unconscious that Freud discovered is not a deep, mysterious place, whose presence in mystical fashion, accounts for all the unknown; *it is knowable and it is normal*.... [U]nconscious thoughts are repressed and thus transformed 'normal' ones, and ... they are always there, speaking to us, in their way" (6). While Mitchell clearly finds this view of the unconscious as a "*knowable*" place to be reassuring, her

comments highlight precisely how such a perspective is problematic. In this view, the unconscious is not only limited to functioning as a receptacle solely for repressed thoughts but it also becomes entirely rational, in need only of decoding, and so any element of the unknown is eliminated. Thus the Freudian position is opposed to Jung's view of the existence of a vast area beyond the grasp of the human psyche; Freud's unconscious is restricted to a reactive principle based exclusively on the individual's early experiences. As a further limitation, the early experiences that cause repression are restricted to sexual experiences or "lacks"; that is, a Freudian view allows only a strictly limited range of influence to be considered a legitimate causal factor of repression, and so of the existence of the unconscious itself. Jung famously took issue with this focus, claiming, "I was deeply impressed by the almost unbridgeable gap between Freud's own mental outlook and background and my own.... I could not share Freud's almost exclusive interest in sex" (*Symbols* 94). Although Jung admits that "sex plays no small role among human motives," he argues that "in many cases it is secondary" to other drives (*Symbols* 94). In contrast to Freud, Jung considers the unconscious to be constituted much more widely and that its very nature is the unknown, of which the human psyche can only glimpse a small portion. In short, while Jung also seeks to make the unconscious intelligible, he is more willing to engage with the irrational or the unknown and to accept its existence.[26]

It is arguable that Jung not only is willing to engage with the unknown through his focus on the unconscious aspect of the human psyche, but considers it a vital aspect of existence. He convincingly employs the model of empiricism to outline the limitations on human perception and, consequently, on comprehension. Regarding the individual, Jung argues that "the number and quality of his senses" determine what is recognized and

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[26] While a comprehensive comparison and contrast of Jung and Freud is outside the scope and focus of the present study, two of the major points of difference as they relate to the unconscious are outlined here. For an interesting assessment of their relationship and theories from Jung's point of view, see *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, Vol. 4: 25 "Freud and Jung: Contrasts," and Vol. 7: 22 Appendix "The structure of the unconscious: The distinction between the personal and impersonal unconscious."

"limit his perception of the world around him"; most tellingly, Jung observes that even with the compensatory aid of scientific instruments, "at some point he [the individual] reaches the edge of certainty beyond which conscious knowledge cannot pass." That said, Jung further asserts that in addition to this partial recognition of the tangible world, "[t]here are, moreover, unconscious aspects of our perception of reality" ("Approaching" 4). In this view, perception is conditioned by both physical factors and also, less obviously, by factors that remain unrecognized, those "unconscious aspects" of the self. In contrast to Freud, Jung sees the unconscious as a concurrent part of human perception because it is a complex and influential part of the psyche, which affects one's view of reality in equal proportion to conscious psychic aspects. As a result, awareness of the unconscious can enable one to deal with the reality of the present situation and with the self in social context.

This awareness of the inner self is critical, for in a Jungian view, "[t]he only adventure that is still worthwhile for modern man lies in the inner realm of the unconscious psyche" (von Franz, "Process" 228). Unfortunately, the majority of individuals in contemporary Western society remains oblivious to this adventure as a result of dissociation from the inner self. As M.-L. von Franz, one of Jung's closest associates, observes, "we, with our uprooted consciousness, are so entangled with external, completely foreign matters that it is very difficult for the messages of the Self to get through to us. Our conscious mind continually creates the illusion of a clearly shaped, 'real' outer world that blocks off many other perceptions" ("Process" 221). Contemporary society then falls under the spell of that illusion of external reality, and so fails to develop the self or even a sensitivity to its existence outside of consciousness. Notably, society's fearful distancing from the unconscious and equation of it to madness suggests a problem area that R.D. Laing also identifies; that is, the dissociation of inner and outer self and the need to explore "the depths of subjectivity" (Mitchell 239). Jung and Laing, while

differing in many respects, concur that these are the critical failings of contemporary society.

In Jung's assessment, social myopia has a serious result; that is, it leads to neurosis -- not so-called madness which is simply a divergence from norms but an actual condition of self-dissociation. He advocates the significance of recognizing the irrational or unconscious to achieve psychic balance, observing that "it is quite natural that with the triumph of the Goddess of Reason a general neuroticising of modern man should set in" (*Undiscovered* 36). Jung suggests that if all of one's perceptions must conform to reason and be fully explicable, then a large area of the psyche and the self are negated by the individual. Moreover, if these suppressed unconscious elements are held to be of equal importance with the conscious, then instability or neurosis must be the result. Ironically, Jung contends that "many critics assume that the unconscious and its manifestation belong to the sphere of psychopathology as neurotic or psychotic symptoms and that they do not occur in a normal mental state" (*Symbols* 78); however, he notes that the situation is precisely the opposite. Integration of the unconscious is not proof of neurosis; conversely, it is essential to avoid a neurotic condition. In fact, the overbalance of the conscious, rational mind has already created what might be called a paranoid state of seeing madness everywhere.[27] The contemporary individual easily doubts her/his own sanity and sees abounding evidence of aberrations from a normality that is stiffly delineated; Jung argues that

> [w]e are so used the rational surface of our world that we cannot imagine anything untoward happening within the confines of common sense. If our mind once in a while does something thoroughly unexpected, we are terrified and immediately think of a pathological disturbance, whereas primitive man would think of fetishes, spirits, or gods but would never doubt his sanity. (Jung, *Symbols* 85).

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[27] As noted earlier, this tendency to see madness as a predominant characteristic is, ironically, most pronounced in the psychiatric and psychological professions. However, Jung specifically describes this as the tendency of "modern" society *in toto* -- not exclusively of the psychological profession.

This failure of imagination, or of what is socially accepted as "normal" in the workings of the mind, is a rejection of the irrational.[28] Consequently, what is currently considered the "normal" condition is not a stable one, as might be expected, but is actually a "neurotic" one because there is a constant fear-induced self-assessment made on the faulty basis of a dissociated condition. Such an inversion of expectations and challenging of the designation of normality aligns Jung with Atwood, thereby providing a means of entering her texts which overtly and covertly work along these same lines.

One of the striking features of Jung's approach to the human psyche is his acknowledgement of the necessary coexistence of individuality and society. Much like the coexistence and equal influence of the conscious and unconscious aspects of the psyche on the Self and on one's perception, Jung recognizes the interdependency of the one and the many. Yet acknowledgement alone would restrict the idea to the theoretical realm and Jung's is a practical approach in both senses of the term; he moves beyond theory to practice and takes a "sensible" (though not necessarily "rational") approach to psychotherapy. That is to say, one of the Jungian tenets is that treatment must be tailored to the individual whose own psyche and manifestations of the unconscious -- often appearing in dreams -- set the course and limits of approach. "There is," Jung affirms, "no therapeutic technique or doctrine that is generally applicable, since every case that comes for treatment is an individual in a specific condition" (*Symbols* 104). This acknowledgement of the individual as unique is essential as it resists the medical model of madness, as discussed in the preceding section; instead of seeking to categorize the symptoms and label the disease, Jungian analysis begins from the belief that there is no single "cure." Perhaps unsurprisingly, this recognition of individuality has exposed Jung to criticism; as von Franz notes, "[m]any people have criticized the Jungian approach for not presenting psychic material systematically. But these critics forget that the material

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[28] Not least of all, this failure of imagination includes the literal loss of fantasy, as will be discussed in chapter two in relation to *Lady Oracle* and *Life Before Man.*

itself is a living experience charged with emotion, by nature irrational and ever changing, which does not lend itself to systematization except in the most superficial fashion" ("Process" 167). In addition to the mutable nature of psychic material which von Franz identifies, one might also observe that the very concept of systematization directly opposes the goal of self-realization and so, in all likelihood, would hinder the very individuation process that Jung seeks to cultivate.[29]

Notably, Jung holds a complex view that seeks to maintain and develop one's individuality within the social context. He cautions against systematization, warning that mental balance is not achieved when society subsumes the individual, but that such a state would result in a regressive annihilation of the individual. Jung asserts that "the result [of psychotherapy] cannot be a completely collective levelling out of the individual to adjust him to the 'norms' of his society. This would amount to a most unnatural condition. A sane and normal society is one in which people habitually disagree" ("Approaching" 46). While the individual must be preserved within society, that same individual cannot be isolated from it. Neither Jung nor Atwood condones the extremes of assimilation or isolation. For both of them, the social context is vital, but the individual is the ultimate focus. In fact, "[t]o understand human psyche," Jung maintains that "it is absolutely necessary that you study man also in his social and general environments" (Evans, *Jung* 151). Clearly, social context and relationships influence the individual as much as her/his own psyche does, and so both aspects must be taken into account.[30]

An interesting manifestation of this individual-social duality is the concept of projection. The general psychoanalytic understanding of projection is a condition in

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[29] I would further suggest that this lack of systematization is a major factor in limiting the integration of Jungian concepts to psychoanalytic critical theory and so providing opportunity for Freudian analysis to dominate the discourse. The Freudian unconscious, as discussed in the preceding section, is one example in which such systematization provides a convenient tag but also demonstrates the problematic nature of such limitations. Conversely, the context-dependent nature of archetypal criticism, as derived from the larger sphere of Jungian analysis, demonstrates the value and depth offered by a less systematic, more individually tailored theory.

[30] For an interesting elaboration of Jung's "social and general environments" as influential factors on the individual, see interview with Richard I. Evans, *Jung on Elementary Psychology* 150-54.

which "people observe their own unconscious tendencies in other people" (von Franz, "Process" 179, 181). While this concept suggests a direct link between the individual and social context, R. D. Laing counters that this very concept is severely limited and does not "bridge the gap *between* persons" in the sense that it deals with the behaviour and experience of an ego; this ego remains isolated since it is, by definition, the singular "I" (*Politics of Experience* 50-51). Laing's observation is an interesting one, but he admits that it posits an impossible scenario for the discipline of psychology, moving instead into a philosophical mode of speculation (*Politics of Experience* 50). Nevertheless, he does draw attention to that same duality on which Jung focuses -- the self within social context and the significance of relationships therein -- suggesting a closer alignment of their ideas than might be recognized or than Laing seems prepared to admit.[31] I suggest that the apparent discrepancy arises mainly from the fact that Laing, in this same passage of *The*

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[31] Laing's stance towards Jung is ambivalent, tending towards reservedly positive. In an interview, he expresses hostility towards Jung's method of expression -- "I got very impatient with Jung as a stylist, compared to Freud's elegance and wit and irony and sharpness" -- and towards Jung himself, for his views: "I detested Jung for adopting that stance [that Nietzsche was psychotic].... There was something about Jung entrenching himself in the justification of being the sane authority, the pontificating post meta-psychiatrist that he never gave up. Jung had distanced himself from the people that took their *chances*... like Nietzsche and the rest of them. I felt there was something potentially very corruptive to entrench myself in an authoritative surround, throught which I could judge people like that from that position" (Mullan 104). In fact, Jung is fully aware of the analyst's limitations, and warns against these -- specifically including himself; as early as 1929, he noted that "I try to free myself from all unconscious and therefore uncriticized assumptions about the world in general. I say 'I try,' for who can be sure that he has freed himself from all of his unconscious assumptions?" (*CW* 4. 25). Perhaps Laing objects to what he regards as conscious assumptions -- although Jung's warnings include these aspects as well (see *Undiscovered* 7-8 and *Symbols* 97-100).

Nonetheless, Laing is well-versed in Jung's main tenets of the self, the unconscious, and integration of the self (Mullan 105). He even admits elsewhere that in positing a potential association between "madness" and self-discovery or "madness" as intelligible, "Jung broke the ground here but few have followed him" (*Politics of Experience* 168). While this latter notion suggests the intersection of their views, Laing is reluctant to ascribe too much admiration to Jung. On the one hand, he admits that "[o]ne of the great points about Jung was that he was prepared to look at a lot of which very few people have been prepared to even begin to *imagine*" (Evans, *Laing* 9); on the other hand, Laing observes that "I don't think Jung was a *master* theoretician. He recalls us to our own minds.... We have a rich combination of things in Jung, including unavowed biases. Maybe I'm being less effusively enthusiastic than I mgith be. I regard Jung with great respect and I have studied him carefully over the years. He is undoubtedly a great psychologist" (Evans, *Laing* 10).

Laing's ambivalence may stem, in part, from the fact that the two men do differ drastically on some key points. Perhaps the most significant of these in relation to my study is the fact that Laing argues that "there is no such thing as a *self*" (Evans, *Laing* xxviii; see also xxxvii-xxxviii); conversely, discovery of a self (with some unknowable aspects) is the foundation of Jungian individuation.

Politics of Experience, specifically identifies psychology as Freudian; consequently, the "ego" that Laing indicates as such a limited factor is not equivalent to Jung's "self" but only to the "ego-conscious." Such a removal of the unconscious element is a critical one, for the unconscious makes possible the concept of projection, in effect, "bridg[ing] the gap *between* persons" on that level. Thus, since projection is the observation of unconscious aspects of the self in others, the connection between those individuals does exist -- even if it is not consciously recognized. As will be seen, Atwood's novels include projection between the mad figure and "normal" characters, thereby suggesting that the link between these characters (or between the individual and society) is unconscious, at least in part. This projection emphasizes to the reader the interdependency and, more significantly, the mutability of such views of the Other, ultimately suggesting that those views have the potential to reveal a great deal about the self. Since the reader repeats the act of projection via the act of reading, this potentially revelatory experience is transferred from the characters to the reader. Jung's relevance to the study of Atwood derives largely from this shared focus on individual development within -- and, at times, despite -- social context, an interdependency that is particularly significant to the study of madness, that socially constructed label.

Jung's focus on understanding individual development centers around two main concepts: the structure of the psyche and the individuation process itself. In addition to the duality of the conscious and the unconscious, the Jungian conception of the human psyche includes three components: persona, anima or animus, and shadow. Each of these components is evident within Atwood's representation of madness in society, and this scheme is one method of revealing the degree of self-awareness possessed and gained by her characters. Within the Jungian framework, the persona represents the visible aspect of the psyche, as is its role. The persona is defined as "the protective cover or mask ... that an individual presents to the world. It has two purposes: first, to make a specific impression on other people: second, to conceal the individual's inner self from their

prying eyes" (Jacobi 350). In other words, the persona is the visible external representation of self that simultaneously reveals and conceals. Jung remarks that the visible nature of the persona often results in its misidentification as the individual's "personality"; he emphasizes that it is a constructed image made to coincide with one's social roles: "the persona is a certain complicated system of behaviour which is partially dictated by society and partially dictated by the expectations or the wishes one nurses oneself. Now this is not the real personality" (Evans, *Jung* 79-80). That is, as Jung's examples of doctor, professor, and parson demonstrate, one must recognize that the self is only partially represented by this persona or social image. The unconscious, in particular, is precluded from such a limited representation of self.

In Jungian terms, recognition of the unconscious is fundamental to a development of self-knowledge, and the unconscious includes the other two elements of the psyche: the anima or animus and the shadow. The anima/animus are the female/male aspects of the individual's unconscious which assume the opposite gender in form. Jung notes that this contrasexual element is pre-existent in the human psyche, irrespective of gender (Evans, *Jung* 73). He elaborates on its characteristics in the male: "[t]he anima is an archetypal form, expressing the fact that a man has a minority of feminine or female genes. That is something that doesn't appear or disappear in him, that is constantly present, and works as a female in a man" (Evans, *Jung* 74).[32] Jung notes that "[t]he same is the case with the animus. It is a masculine image in a woman's mind that is called to life the moment a woman meets a man who says the right things" (Evans, *Jung* 74). That is, Jung observes the two possible states of existence for the anima/animus: as pre-existent gendered psychological aspects or as projections onto a particular individual with whom one feels an instant "affinity." Since the latter event results from one's

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[32] Interestingly, Jung makes particular mention of H. Rider Haggard's *She* as an "exceedingly typical" representation of the anima figured as "*la femme fatale*" (Evans, *Jung* 73). Atwood's unfinished doctoral dissertation was to include an examination of *She* and the novel is a recurrent example for Atwood (see, in particular, "Superwoman Drawn and Quartered: The Early forms of *She*," *Second Words* 35-54; other references include *Survival* 113-14 and *Second Words* 75, 220).

anima/animus being projected onto another, then the resulting attraction is the (unconscious) recognition of some unrecognized aspect of one's own self manifested in the other. Thus, for both genders, the anima/animus plays an important role for the individual's knowledge of the unconscious and "takes on the role of guide or mediator, to the world within and to the Self" (von Franz 193). As such, it functions on both the visible and invisible levels but becomes visible only to steer one towards the unconscious. The anima/animus assumes the form of a projection as part of the compensatory function of the unconscious psyche in an attempt to establish psychic balance. The autonomy of the unconscious enables it to intrude on the individual's consciousness to redress any imbalance.

The third aspect of the Jungian psychic structure is formed by the shadow, which is also part of the unconscious and can be described as "the hidden, repressed, and unfavourable (or nefarious) aspects of the personality" (Henderson 110). Significantly, as Joseph L. Henderson observes, one must recognize that "this darkness is not just the simple converse of the ego.... [T]he shadow has good qualities -- normal instincts and creative impulses" (110). Although the latter manifestation is less common, the shadow cannot simply be dismissed during the individuation process; rather, it must be recognized, confronted, and then rejected or assimilated. To enable this encounter, this aspect of the unconscious psyche also takes the form of projections. While this tendency may seem an attempt to dissociate a characteristic from the self, such externalization actually illuminates -- though unconsciously -- that same aspect as an existing feature of oneself. It may be seen as a psychological instance of recognizing the splinter in the eye of another while overlooking the plank in one's own. Interestingly, this tendency to project the shadow is one link that Jung uses to show the striking similarity between the sane and the so-called mentally unbalanced: "the normal individual, like the neurotic, sees his shadow in his neighbour or in the man beyond the great divide" (*Undiscovered* 36). Thus, while it might appear to be a dangerous undertaking, assimilation of one's

shadow is critical; as Jung contends: "[r]ecognition of the shadow ... leads to the modesty we need in order to acknowledge imperfection. And it is just this conscious recognition and consideration that are needed whenever a human relationship is to be established" (*Undiscovered* 57). Here, then, Jung indicates both the unyielding connection between individuals -- in spite of our socially constructed boundaries -- and also the fact that individual development is not contrary to social principles but stabilizes these principles through relationships. In direct opposition to the criticism Laing aims at the limitations of Freudian projection as ego-isolating, Jung argues that projection can bridge the gap between individuals by way of calling attention to the shadow. In fact, such projection of predominantly dark tendencies strongly parallels the general segregational impulse of society towards madness. As Laing observes, that perception of such division is often "a sort of social mirage" wherein "[t]he invention of Them creates Us, and we may need to invent Them to reinvent Ourselves" (*Politics of Experience* 90-91). Similarly, Jung's concept of projecting the shadow can be seen as "invent[ing] Them," for this attempt to isolate through dissociation actually reveals elements of the unconscious, thereby enabling "reinvent[ion] of Ourselves" -- should one choose to pursue self-realization.

As mentioned, a significant aspect of Jung's structuring of the psyche involves the recognition of the autonomous, vast nature of the unconscious. However, Jung is perhaps most often associated with the expanded notion of the unconscious. He observes that "we must distinguish three psychic levels: (1) consciousness, (2) the personal unconscious, and (3) the collective unconscious" (*Essential* 67; *CW* 8). These levels of the unconscious form the basis of two types of literary criticism. Jung identifies the collective unconscious as the source of archetypes from which the more common form of criticism derives. Distinct from archetypal criticism, a critical method based on Jungian principles of the personal unconscious and individual psyche is occasionally termed depth psychology,

analytical psychology, or the psychology of personality.[33] Analytical psychology does not preclude the collective unconscious in the form of archetypes, but incorporates archetypes in a subtler manner -- less as a symbolic scheme with cultural and personal implications, and more as a means of specifically exploring the individual psyche. My study will accommodate this range of Jungian concepts while focusing on two elements of the interaction between consciousness and the unconscious. In Jung's view, the shadow itself originates from the collective unconscious, but forms "the most accessible of the archetypes" and "represents primarily the personal unconscious" (*CW* 9.2:2; *Abstracts* 110). He emphasizes that the shadow must be recognized to establish and preserve both moral and psychic health (*Symbols* 125). Conversely, Jung identifies the anima/animus and their projections as "archetypes from the collective unconscious" which, unlike the shadow, "are almost impossible to recognize as emanating from one's own psyche" (*CW* 9.2:3; *Abstracts* 110). Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, recognition of the anima/animus is only possible following recognition of the shadow (*CW* 9.2:3; *Abstracts* 110). Most significantly, Jung asserts that the "archetypes that most affect the self, [are] namely the shadow, the anima and the animus" (*CW* 9.2:17; *Abstracts* 114). Therefore, my study will examine, in part, how Atwood's novels present her characters' interaction with these two specific manifestations of the unconscious: the shadow and the anima/animus. This examination will reveal her characters engaging in the process of self-realization, an activity prompted by the unconscious itself through autonomous -- and frequently unwelcome -- acts of projection.

Underlying this structuring of the psyche is Jung's concept of the self-realization process itself, which he terms "individuation." Perhaps the most comprehensive yet

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[33] This latter term can be problematic since it closely resembles Jung's concepts of personality types: introvert and extravert which are further defined by predominant characteristics of thinking, feeling, sensation, or intuition (see *CW* 6 for Jung's extensive discussion of theories of Personality Types and *CW* 6.10 for particulars of his own theory). However, Jung also uses the term "personality" to designate the common understanding an individual's self; for example, he observes that the self "embraces not only the conscious but also the unconscious psyche, and is therefore, so to speak, a personality which we *also* are" (*CW* 7.2:2).

succinct definition of individuation is included in *Man and His Symbols*, which is the last volume of work by Jung and his associates; it was co-edited by Jung himself in 1962, published posthumously, and directed at the general reader. Since this volume is not intended for professionals in the psychological field, it has the advantage of offering a readily accessible presentation of the culmination of Jung's views, drawing together many of the concepts he developed over the course of his career. Within this volume, Jung's close associate and co-editor, M.-L. von Franz, explicates many of Jung's key concepts and their interrelations in a chapter titled, "The Process of Individuation." John Freeman notes the significance of this single chapter wherein von Franz focuses on "the process by which the conscious and the unconscious within an individual learn to know, respect, and accommodate one another," thereby communicating "the essence of Jung's philosophy of life" (xi). As von Franz observes, Jung's concept of the process of individuation or self-realization is "a slow imperceptible process of psychic growth" which is regulated by the center of the psychic system, the self; this psychic activity gradually becomes visible and is commonly regarded as the individual's personality ("Process" 161-62). Such activity between the two elements of the self -- the conscious and the unconscious psyche -- is most evident through the individual's dreams. It bears repeating that Jung placed great emphasis on dreams as "spontaneous product[s] of the psyche" which convey a message from the unconscious (Jung, *Symbols* 76). Jung notes that "[t]he general function of dreams is to balance ... disturbances in the mental equilibrium by producing contents of a complementary or compensatory kind" (*Symbols* 87). Consequently, heeding such manifestations of the unconscious is vital for individuation (von Franz, "Process" 165-67).

The goal of this conscious, purposeful self-analysis is, as Jung's term individuation suggests, "realization of [the] uniqueness in the individual" -- a variable concept with the commonality of possessing vast, unrecognized potential (von Franz, "Process" 163-4). Ultimately, the conscious assimilation of the unconscious "generally

begins with a wounding of the personality ... [that] is often not recognized as such"; that is, the ego-conscious is hindered in some aspect and projects this obstruction onto an external person or situation (von Franz, "Process" 169). Therefore, the individual must confront this projection or stagnate; these projections most often take the form of the shadow or the anima/animus. Jung emphasizes that it is not only limiting but dangerous to ignore the "unconscious counterbalance to consciousness"; however, contemporary society continues to do so, thereby existing in a false sense of security and "normality." As Jung laments, "[w]e still go on thinking and acting ... as if we were *simplex* and not *duplex*. Accordingly, we imagine ourselves to be innocuous, reasonable, and humane" (*Undiscovered* 46).

Following from these views, the process of individuation is focused on the individual but is not a solipsistic activity; rather, developing such self-knowledge is more widely beneficial. Consequently, this process is also characterized by the duality of the individual and the collective or social. On the one hand, as might be expected, such a process of self-realization separates the individual from the masses; on the other hand, this same process simultaneously unites the individual with society through the unconscious and the development of relationships. As Anthony Storr notes, "Jung was well aware of the importance of interpersonal relationships, but believed that it was only when the individual had come to terms with himself that satisfactory relationships with others could be achieved" (22). In fact, Jung emphasizes that part of the value of individuation is precisely in the collectivity which ensues; he asserts that "the natural process of individuation brings to birth a consciousness of human community precisely because it makes us aware of the unconscious, which unites and is common to all mankind" (*Essential* 22; *CW* 16). Individuation, by definition, is a process of continuous flux, for a static state would minimize the autonomy and vastness of the unconscious; that is, there would remain no unknown aspect of the psyche, a condition precluded by Jung's conception of the unconscious. Nevertheless, far from invalidating the process, the fact

that individuation is rarely -- if ever -- achieved increases its value by suggesting the depth of the human psyche, and so, of the self.

Such a continuous process of development is also a feature of Atwood's thinking and is reflected in her characterization. She asserts that "[t]he ideal ... would be to integrate yourself as a human being," yet simultaneously contests the interviewer's assumption that her novels then must portray the achievement of this type of wholeness in her characters. Conversely, Atwood suggests the validity and the value of constantly seeking to improve oneself; regarding such integration, she asks, "[d]oes anyone ever achieve it? If you define human beings as necessarily flawed, then anybody can be one. But if you define them as something which is potentially better, then it's always something that is just out of reach" (Gibson 16). In this view, to be human is not merely to exist but rather to engage in an on-going process of development. Similarly, individuation seeks continually to deepen one's understanding of the self through the specific exploration, confrontation, and integration of the unconscious psyche as a means of self-realization. In these ways, Jung's concept of individuation offers a helpful approach to a study of Atwood's characterization.

While the richness of a Jungian approach offers many avenues by which to examine Atwood's texts, the fact remains that in a discussion of madness, Jung's status as a psychologist makes him susceptible to criticism. As mentioned earlier, other than objections raised by feminists, perhaps the most vocal challenges to psychology have been issued by those termed the "antipsychiatrists." Among these, the work of R. D. Laing offers a useful challenge to artificial designations of sanity, thereby broadening the social criticism in ways which Jung's position seems to limit. Nonetheless, and as noted, Laing's work is in many ways unexpectedly complementary to Jung's. A particularly important parallel between the two theorists is their shared view of the modern individual as psychically dissociated or alienated. Such a perspective emphasizes the limitations of normative existence, thereby drawing attention to norms as tenuous social constructs.

Both Laing and Jung seek to alter the common perspective through an increased awareness of untapped individual potential. In this view, both hold the individual responsible and grant her/him agency. Such empowerment of the individual is a strategy which Atwood employs on the literary level -- in relation to both her characters and the reader. This strategy will be assessed through Iser's theories, as a complement to the psycho-social aspects offered by Jung and Laing. Although the link between Laing's ideas and Atwood's work has been recognized by other critics, such as Rigney (*Madness* 7-12), Mandel (59-63), Moss (*Paradox* 187), and more recently Hatch (186), the extent of this exploration has been minimal. Conversely, Laing's work is often dismissed as radical or irrelevant, but this reaction is typically based on falsely attributed claims or misinterpretations.[34]

Laing is misunderstood and misread in three particularly damaging ways: his work is seen as causal, antifamily, and antifeminist. The tendency to interpret his work as causal may express the rational impulse, the identification of cause-effect patterns that helps make sense of the world in order for it to succumb to the reign of what Jung terms "the Goddess of Reason." In any event, Laing's questioning of the medical assumptions is frequently misread as an attempt to replace one causal agent (the "patient") with another (the family, or more broadly, society). Jane Ussher's remarks demonstrate this misreading; she claims, "[t]his analysis recognizes that there is some reality in the experience labelled madness, that individuals are distressed -- but that this phenomenon is caused by society. Laing viewed this as problems caused by the family" (*Women's* 149).[35]

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[34] Incidentally, Atwood dismisses any familiarity or association with Laingian views. She asserts in a 1988 interview that "*Lady Oracle* is more Jungian than Laingian.... There is not very much I know about Laing but I know I do not agree with him when he says that crazy people are the same as insane people" (Vevaina, "Daring" 154). Atwood's erroneous summation of Laing either emphasizes the extent of her lack of knowledge, or is a purposely ironic comment. Notably, Atwood is equally dismissive of the interviewer's prompt that Laing argued "schizophrenics are in fact sane" (Vevaina, "Daring" 154). Nonetheless, in a more recent conversation with Victor-Lévy Beaulieu, Atwood herself offers this very possibility by suggestively asking, "[c]ould it be that the character who's well-adjusted to society is actually the crazy one?" (Atwood and Beaulieu 184).

[35] Similar causal criticisms are made by Mitchell (xviii, 232) and Showalter (222).

This assessment, while succinct, is inaccurate, for as the preface to *Sanity, Madness and the Family* explicitly states, Laing makes no attempt to seek a cause of "schizophrenic" behaviour. His purpose was to reject the assumption that so-called abnormal behaviour must signal the presence of a disease called schizophrenia and, further, to reject the consequent result that the cause of this "disease" must be determined in order to treat or to cure it. Instead, he asserts, "[o]ur question is: are the experience and behaviour that psychiatrists take as symptoms and signs of schizophrenia more socially intelligible than has come to be supposed?" and emphasizes that "[t]his is *what* we are asking" (*Sanity* 11-12). Despite his repeated clarifications and explicit denial, critics and even psychologists such as Ussher continue to collapse Laing's work with self-proclaimed antipsychiatrists (such as Thomas Szasz and, more drastically, David Cooper) and so label him as "antifamily."[36]

Laing contends that society and the psychological profession in particular are eager to translate his statement that "the experience and behaviour that leads someone to be diagnosed as schizophrenic is more socially intelligible than has come to be supposed" into the claim that families cause schizophrenia in order to avoid bearing any responsibility for the condition (Mullan 378-79). The conflation of Laing's claims with those who specifically claim to be antifamily, such as Cooper, is telling and, perhaps more convincingly, the admittedly purposeful instances of such simplification supports Laing's reasoning that avoidance of responsibility is one motivating factor. For example, Ussher admits in an endnote that "it serves my own purpose more adequately to consider

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[36] The existence of studies which identify the family as a causal agent of psychological problems or mental illnesses is not in dispute. While such views were most prominent in the 1960s, variations consistently recur in the field of psychology even though contrasting psychological studies continue to identify serious negative implications of blaming parents or families as causal agents (Seeman 195-96, 199). That said, such causal studies remain part of current Canadian psychological research and, notably, focus on the predominant "mental illness" of depression. For example, a recent study conducted in the Department of Psychiatry, University of Manitoba set out to evaluate "a causal model in which harsh and perfectionistic parenting lead[s] to maladaptive perfectionism which, in turn, leads to depression proneness"; in publishing their findings in 2002, the authors conclude that the results of their study validate the claim that parents are causal agents of depression (Enns *et al.* 921).

the critiques of dissenters [the 'antipsychiatrists'] across the decades *en masse*, in order to be able to use them to inform an analysis of women and madness" (*Women's* 158). Such slippage allows facile dismissal of Laing but on a faulty premise. Consequently, the social questions he raises remain unanswered and can be ignored while, simultaneously, the artificial distinction between normality and madness remains undisturbed. As the latter category is one which Jung also challenges, the label of "antipsychiatry" itself is also misleading in its suggestion of diametric opposition.

Similarly, the label "antifeminist" is entirely misapplied when used for Laing. Elaine Showalter is among the most condemning critics in her remarks that regarding women's situations, "even the antipsychiatry movement of the 1960s ... not only failed in its theoretical effort but may well have been the most sexist of all in its practice" (*Female* 5). While she firmly situates Laing in this movement and sharply criticizes him (Showalter, *Female* 228-46), in the end even Showalter grudgingly concedes that she must "acknowledge the importance of his analysis of madness as a female strategy within the family" and that "Laing's work has been important to feminist critics" (246). Still, Showalter maintains a critical and even antagonistic attitude towards Laing.[37] While Laing makes no claims to taking a feminist position nor expresses any regret for not doing so (Mullan 303-305), in many ways his work upholds a feminist agenda. For example, a major advance in the struggle to end female repression is, in Luce Irigaray's view, "to attribute more importance to the mother-daughter relationship, to establish a genealogy of women" (Mitchell 125). Similarly, Laing's work is based on the experiences of women, and more often he interviews the mothers than the fathers of his patients. His work is nonetheless dismissed as "consider[ing] women only by default, almost coincidentally" (Ussher, *Women's* 161).

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[37] For an interesting perspective, see Laing's reactions to Showalter's critiques as presented in *The Female Malady* (Mullan 183-87).

The problem that many feminists identify with Laing is, ultimately, the fact that he is male. Although Laing's focus on women's behaviour and experience, and even the conclusions of his work are complementary to feminist readings, Laing's attention to detail is viewed negatively and his perspective is discredited on the basis of his gender. Ussher exemplifies this particular feminist stance, declaring that "[t]he women whose cases are described in almost voyeuristic detail are presented from a male perspective" (Ussher, *Women's* 161). The position is then untenable. While a Freudian focus on the father is posited as a patriarchal silencing of women (Caminero-Santangelo 71), Laing's attention to women and focus on the mother is criticized concurrently for "omitting to give any significance to the patriarchal law and order in which all our families are placed" (Mitchell 291) and so it is invalidated as misogynistic.[38] Ironically, both the antifamily and antifeminist attacks on Laing stem largely from the misleading conflation of Laing with other critics of the psychiatric field, that is, with the self-proclaimed antipsychiatrists or dissenters. In the end, the man who set out to challenge categorization and social distinctions often falls prey to these very practices by his critics.

Despite the numerous misreadings, Laing remains an important figure in the psychological landscape and retains relevance for investigations of madness within the social context and in Atwood's fiction. Denise Russell's 1995 text *Women, Madness and Medicine* both argues for the validity of Laing's early work and identifies contemporary psychologists who continue to pursue Laing's direction of research; she observes that "[t]hese authors are not attempting to give an alternative causal theory of schizophrenia but rather to question the validity of the category.... [W]e are likely to come closer to

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[38] For example, Ussher concurs that Freud's focus on the father is misguided and offers this commendation: "This phallocentric view of women's psychology and sexuality has been challenged by many women psychoanalysts and feminist psychoanalytic theorists, who view the relationship with the mother as much more important in women's development and sexuality" (*Women's* 194). Seemingly unaware of any self-contradiction, Ussher simultaneously expresses the opinion that when male psychoanalytic theorists focus on the mother, it is clear evidence of misogyny: "Laing ... invariably placed the blame firmly at the door of the mother.... The role of the father in these problematic families was ignored" (162). Here, Ussher also invokes the causal argument, thereby demonstrating a connection between these two misreadings.

understanding the meaning of these experiences if we refuse to reify them into a 'condition' and instead look at their meaning in the person's context" (83-84). These contemporary psychologists continue to seek intelligibility for so-called abnormal behaviour -- a goal shared by Laing and Jung before them -- and recognize that, to the extent that this is possible at all, such understanding must consider the individual within her/his social context. In *Sanity, Madness and the Family*, for example, Laing focuses on communication patterns in family interaction in order to question the "irrationality" of behaviour when taken in context. Such an undertaking requires a different way of seeing that "unintelligible" behaviour: not as a psychiatric condition in which "experience and behaviour are invalidated" but "in their original family context" (*Sanity* 12-13). This focus on perception and, more specifically, on interpretation makes Laing's work particularly relevant for a study of Atwood, whose own work shares this preoccupation. Moreover, it signals one of the many important ways that Laingian views complement a Jungian approach.

Laing notes the significance of psychiatric studies that are dissatisfied with "any theory or study of the individual which isolates him from his context" (*Self* 65), and he recognizes that "we cannot give an undistorted account of 'a person' without giving an account of his relation with others" (*Self* 66).[39] That is, mirroring Jung's focus, Laing also conceives of the individual as social; he argues that behaviour and experience are significant aspects of the self: "[m]y experience and my action occur in a social field of reciprocal influence and interaction" (*Politics of Experience* 24). Thus, according to Laing, the "schizoid" is one who experiences not only "a disruption of his relation with himself," such as a mind-body split, but also "a rent in his relation with his world" (*Divided* 15). This is a significant point since integration of the social context and of the individual self are then considered equally important to mental balance.

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[39] Laing also uses the masculine form as gender neutral; his original construction will be maintained throughout this study.

To achieve the fine balancing act of this dual integration not only requires hard-won self-knowledge but the inevitable positioning of oneself, as both Laing and Jung maintain, within a context of relationships. Notably, Reingard Nischik remarks that this individual-social connection is an important aspect of Atwood's writing and manifests itself as "a strong emphasis in her work on the responsibility of human beings for their natural, social, and personal environments" (8). Nischik's assessment suggests that not only does the individual exist in this complex social sphere but, more importantly, s/he bears responsibility for it. By extension, then, the construction of norms cannot simply be shrugged off, for each member of the society is complicit in the perpetuation of those criteria. It is precisely the construction of these norms and their ensuing limitations that Laing contests. In *The Politics of Experience* he argues that what society considers to be a normal condition is one of alienation, characterized by a serious lack of self-knowledge resulting from limitations on types of experience.

In Laing's view, socially imposed limits on exploration and experience of one's inner world are particularly damaging. He considers such "normality" to be a specious construct based on the average, limited condition of individuals rather than any stable, substantiated measure. Consequently, Laing contends that "[t]he 'normally' alienated person, by reason of the fact that he acts more or less like everyone else, is taken to be sane.... The condition of alienation, of being asleep, of being unconscious, of being out of one's mind, is the condition of the normal man" (*Politics of Experience* 27-28).[40] This lack of inner experience, Laing argues, most constricts the social definition of norms -- particularly of normative psychic experience -- since exploration of the inner self is labelled "mad." Laing further notes that "[w]e are socially conditioned to regard total immersion in outer space and time as normal and healthy. Immersion in inner space and

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[40] It is important to distinguish here that Laing's use of the term "unconscious" indicates a condition of ignorance or lack of awareness; it is not used in the psychoanalytic sense of the unknown part of the psyche. Laing is not arguing for the existence of an overbalance of the unconscious; conversely, he maintains that the individual is seriously unaware of her/his total self -- particularly of the unconscious aspects, including fantasy.

time tends to be regarded as antisocial withdrawal, a deviation, invalid, pathological *per se*, in some sense discreditable" (*Politics of Experience* 125). In this sense, then, Laing agrees with Jung regarding the need for movement into one's psyche despite social discouragement or even condemnation.

Although the theories of Laing and Jung complement one another in significant terms -- including the concepts of alienation, psycho-social contextualization, and individual agency -- they differ significantly in their understanding of the unconscious. In this respect, Laing is more closely aligned with Freudian thinking and sees the unconscious as an entirely knowable realm. In contrast to Jung, Freud posits the unconscious as fully intelligible once one discerns how it has been transformed in its repression from consciousness; that is, one must uncover a "code" or "key" to interpret this transformed experience in a manner recognizable to the conscious mind (Mitchell 6-7). While Laing shares Freud's conception of the unconscious as having a limited contents, somewhat contrarily, he does not view the transformation of this contents as the reason for it not being easily recognizable; rather, Laing considers the unconscious contents as unrecognized merely because it is ignored. This view has serious implications, as Mitchell maintains: "Laing thus wants to change the whole meaning of the psychoanalytic concept of the unconscious, making sure there is nothing distinctive about it.... To Laing the unconscious means merely the *untransformed* mode of experience that we are simply unaware we are experiencing. Its importance as a concept and as the object of scientific investigation has vanished" (255-56). If one accepts Laing's definition of the unconscious, then, the depth of the human psyche is even more limited than in a Freudian reading. My study thus seeks to consolidate the psychological and social views of the unconscious, recognizing Laing's focus on alienation and ignorance of the unconscious but not limiting the unconscious to complete behavioural control, as Laing's views, if taken alone, would require. Together, the theories of Jung and Laing enable my dual study of Atwood's complementary representation of madness as a social

phenomenon and of self-realization as an individual phenomenon -- with both phenomena involving direct contact with the "irrational."

As Foucault notes, a major obstacle in any attempt to consider madness is the fact that in contemporary society no language of common understanding exists between the rational and the irrational. Acceptance of the medical model has created an artificial distinction between sanity and madness: "the constitution of madness as a mental illness, at the end of the eighteenth century, affords the evidence of a broken dialogue" (Foucault x). In the absence of language, he contends, it is this very silence between them that links the two states of being: "[h]ere madness and non-madness, reason and non-reason are inextricably involved: inseparable at the moment when they do not yet exist, and existing for each other, in relation to each other, in the exchange which separates them" (Foucault x). The gap becomes highly significant not only to suggest the interconnection of the two "discrete" mental states but also as the paradoxical site of communication through silence.

It is this very gap that Margaret Atwood's novels employ meaningfully and with vigour. Her work speaks largely through suggestiveness, thereby inverting the absence of language into a means of prompting the reader's construction of madness or, more broadly, of normative expectations. Atwood's use of ambiguity is particularly effective in implicating the reader in character judgements and, therefore, in construction of fictional social norms by which to measure deviation. This reader involvement is a critical aspect of Atwood's fiction and forms a necessary component of her fictional presentation of madness. It is through the reader that the writer's society comes alive, as Atwood's recent text on writing, *Negotiating with the Dead* (2002), makes clear: "[a] book may outlive its author, and it moves too, and it too can be said to change -- but not in the manner of the telling. It changes in the manner of the reading.... [W]orks of literature are recreated by each generation of readers" (50). While such comments open several avenues of reader-related theories, neither the broadly-defined reader response approach, which investigates

the multiplicity of readings through positing an interpretive community, nor the reader reception approach, which focuses on historical consumption and criticism, is particularly useful here. Rather, to recognize and to assess the role of Atwood's reader through her use of gaps and in the creation of fictional society, I suggest that the reader-involvement model outlined by Wolfgang Iser offers the most useful approach.

Iser's theories of aesthetic response provide the basis for my use of the term "the reader," rather than a broader designation of "readers," in this study of Atwood's novels. Notably, Iser's concept of the "implied reader" recognizes that "the active nature of this [reading] process ... will vary historically from one age to another" (*Implied* xii). However, he also notes that assessing the aesthetic response elicited by the general act of reading requires a conscious objectification of that reader; such a general view enables a focus on the broad act of ideation rather than on a particular historical response. That is, to access "the effects caused and the responses elicited by literary works, we must allow for the reader's presence without in any way predetermining his character or his historical situation" (Iser, *Act* 34).[41] Further, Iser emphatically asserts that "the ideal reader ... is a construct and in no way to be identified with any real reader" (*Act* 34). Following from these views, my use of "the reader" in this specific study of Atwood's work indicates an engaged, contemporary Western reader's perspective. However, this assessment is made with full awareness that such a response is only one possible form of engagement with the novel and, in particular, this view does not preclude other types or degrees of aesthetic response.

More fundamentally, Iser's focus on the reader's role of discovery and exercise of agency through the act of reading are central to my representation of "the reader" (*Implied* xiii). Iser emphasizes the reader's ability to engage with the text to variable degrees -- including the possibility of "opt[ing] out" due to "boredom [or] overstrain" -- thereby

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[41] As with Jung and Laing, Iser's use of masculine pronouns as gender neutral will be maintained throughout this study to retain grammatical clarity.

highlighting her/his agency while conceding that deep involvement is voluntary and will preclude some readers (*Act* 108). Similarly, Iser's positioning of the reader -- outside of the text but directly implicated in it by the process of ideation -- is significant; he notes that

> [b]y virtue of this standpoint [of observer], the reader is situated in such a position that he can assemble the meaning toward which the perspectives of the text have guided him. But since this meaning is neither a given external reality nor a copy of an intended reader's own world, it is something that has to be ideated in the mind of the reader. A reality that has no existence of its own can only come into being by way of ideation, and so the structure of the text sets off a sequence of mental images which lead to the text translating itself into the reader's consciousness.... [This is a] process whereby the actual structures are transmuted through ideational activities into personal experiences. (*Act* 38)

Through this act of reading, then, the reader enters and creates an alternate reality, yet these experiences and responses elicited by the novel extend to affect her/his vision of surrounding "reality." This effect of the text on the reader's consciousness through dynamic interaction forms Iser's focal point of investigation; that is, "the text and the *way* in which it is received depends as much on the reader as on the text. Reading is not a direct 'internalization', because it is not a one-way process, and our concern will be to find a means of describing the reading process as a dynamic *interaction* between text and reader" (*Act* 107).

Similarly, Atwood has articulated her own view of "the reader" as an active participant of the creative process. These remarks date to early essays, such as "An End to Audience?," wherein Atwood describes reading as "a process ... [that] changes you." She notes that "[y]ou aren't the same person after you've read a particular book as you were before," and that "there are no truly universal readers" ("End" 345). In this same essay, Atwood describes "[t]he ideal reader" as someone "intelligent, capable of feeling, possessed of a moral sense, a lover of language, and very demanding" ("End" 345-46). She offers a similar definition in an interview, outlining "The Ideal Reader" as one "who reads what you write according to the text, just what's on the page, is conscious of

everything that you are doing in a literary way, responds on an emotional level at the right places, laughs at the jokes, doesn't mistake irony for straight comment, [and] gets the puns" (Mendez-Egle, "Witness" 168-69). While these remarks date to the early 1980s, perhaps Atwood's most elucidating remarks are included in the fifth chapter of her recent book on writing, *Negotiating With The Dead*, where she makes several key observations. Somewhat paradoxically, Atwood notes that "[d]espite the hazards a reader may pose, a reader must be postulated by a writer, and always is. Postulated, but rarely visualized in any exact, specific form -- apart that is from the primary readers, who may be those named on the dedication page ... [or] thanked in the acknowledgments. But beyond that, the reader is the great unknown" (*Negotiating* 133). Alluding to Emily Dickinson's well-known poem, "I'm Nobody! Who are you?," Atwood remarks that "'Nobody' is the writer, and the reader is also Nobody. In that sense, all books are anonymous and so are all readers" (*Negotiating* 133). She discusses the complications that arise for a writer when "the reader" is a mass public audience and ultimately dismisses this broader conception in favour of an individual reader. As Atwood concludes, "[t]hat is who the writer writes for: for the reader. For the reader who is not Them, but You. For the Dear Reader. For the ideal reader.... And this ideal reader may be anyone at all -- any *one* at all -- because the act of reading is just as singular -- always -- as the act of writing" (*Negotiating* 151). Thus, I base my use of the singular form of "the reader" on the combined views of Iser and Atwood, in order to signal the potential response of an individual thoroughly engaged in and by Atwood's novels.

Iser contends that reading is an active process, a view fully endorsed by Atwood both in her claims and, more importantly, fostered by her work. Iser argues that "active participation is fundamental to the novel" for which he posits the term "implied reader," a term which "incorporates both the prestructuring of the potential meaning by text, and the reader's actualization of this potential through the reading process" but is clearly distinguished from historically-based reader reception theories (*Implied* xii). Atwood is

similarly direct in acknowledging the reader's role, claiming "[i]t is my contention that the process of reading is part of the process of writing, the necessary completion without which writing can hardly be said to exist" ("End" 345). As a writer, Atwood values the role played by the reader in fictional creation and her writing strategically elicits this involvement to its fullest potential, thereby implicating her readers, at times even to their chagrin. This link between the novel and the reader's experience enables the transfer over boundaries of fiction and reality to occur. According to Iser, this transference is particular to the novel:

> [l]ike no other art form before it, the novel was concerned directly with social and historical norms that applied to a particular environment, and so it established an immediate link with the empirical reality familiar to its readers. While other literary forms induced the reader to contemplate the exemplariness they embodied, the novel confronted him with problems arising from his own surroundings, at the same time holding out various potential solutions which the reader himself had, at least partially, to formulate. What was presented in the novel led to a specific effect: namely, to involve the reader in the world of the novel and so help him to understand it -- and ultimately his own world -- more clearly. (*Implied* xi)

Iser recognizes the significant role of social norms in the novel -- particularly, how these directly reflect and implicate the reader. This emphasis on the power of normative categories aligns Iser's concepts with the portrayal of madness in Atwood's novels. My study of madness is concerned with just this function of social psychic norms.

The reader is positioned not only to construct those fictional norms but also to transfer the structures of sanity and madness from the novel to the real world. While hinging on the link between the novel and the reader's experience, the efficacy of the movement from text to reader arises from the reader's identification with the author through the act of creation and, equally importantly, with the characters through their self-realization. J. Brooks Bouson observes that "[i]f the Atwood novel ... has the power to make critic/readers [*sic*] anxious as it invites them to identify with female characters who are subject to disintegration anxiety and persecutory fears, it also invites them to form an identificatory band with the author-designer by encouraging them to interpret and

thematize, to focus attention on the complexities of narrative structure" (12). Bouson utilizes this recognition of the reader's dual identification to focus on the form of the texts and to argue for Atwood's careful structuring of narrative strategies. As a corollary to this reading, Helmut Reichenbächer's recent study "Challenging the Reader" utilizes early drafts of *The Edible Woman* taken from the Margaret Atwood Papers housed at the University of Toronto to demonstrate how Atwood revises her novel for the specific purpose of creating gaps that require the reader to construct the missing portions, thereby interpreting characters' motives and psychic conditions. That is to say, while the visible structure of the novels is significant, the absences or gaps -- what is not included in the text -- most intensify the link between reader, characters, and author. Similarly, Iser notes the significance of gaps as an authorial strategy and specifically extends Laing's argument from *The Politics of Experience* to emphasize the significance of gaps in interpersonal relationships. Iser cites Laing and then concludes,"[t]hus, dyadic and dynamic interaction comes about only because we are unable to experience how we experience one another, which in turn proves to be a propellant to interaction. Out of this fact arises the basic need for interpretation, which regulates the whole process of interaction" ("Interaction" 108). It is the gaps in experience, then, which create the need for interpretation in actual human experience as well as in the reader's experience of the novel. In both cases, the reader of the novel or of the other person must actively engage in the process of interpretation by filling in the gaps.

Iser's focus on this potentiality of the text aligns his thoughts with the recognition of individual potential expressed by Laing and Jung, together enabling the present study of Atwood's novels. Iser's contention that "the act of interpretation ... is a basic element of the reading process" (*Implied* 280) finds support through two means of eliciting reader involvement, that is, through gaps and ambiguity in the text. Both are means which characterize Atwood's novels; as Karen Stein observes, "[h]er protagonists are storytellers, witnesses to a world that is often confusing and dangerous. Most of these

protagonists undertake journeys that may lead them to insights, although the texts resist closure, preferring ambiguity" (xi-xii). Stein's comments suggest that the flex in Atwood's texts is structural since the open-ended approach encourages several potential readings; further, if less obviously, Stein suggests that the gaps and ambiguities are not limited to the reader, but are also experienced by Atwood's characters in their interpretation of the "confusing and dangerous" world in which they exist.

Moreover, the interpretation required by the characters' experience is redoubled in the reader's experience of identification with them. In Jung's view, such overlap of experience opens one up to the dangers inherent in the gaps of the unknown and unknowable experience of the other. He contends that in attempting to interpret someone else's ambiguous experience, "we are particularly hampered by an almost invincible tendency to fill the gaps in our understanding by *projection* -- that is, by the assumption that what I think is also my partner's thought" (*Symbols* 100). Iser concurs, noting that the specific function of projection in literary interpretation results from the gaps which create the potential for communication: "[b]alance [between the text and reader] can only be attained if the gaps are filled, and so the constitutive blank is continually bombarded with projection" (*Act* 167). Since such projection necessarily limits one's understanding of the other individual, Jung posits the need for relationships as a mediating factor (*Undiscovered* 57). Similarly, Iser makes clear that the process between text and reader can only be termed interaction if the projections made by the reader do not subsume the text; rather, he argues that "a successful relationship between text and reader can only come about through changes in the reader's projections" (*Act* 166-67). These remarks suggest that while the reader acts upon the text, ideally the text also acts upon the reader.

This textual action upon the reader is another important concept noted by Iser, which relates both to norms and to the reader's experience. The change in the reader is caused by a somewhat paradoxical reaction; as the reader identifies her/his own experience with the characters' and participates in the act of creation, the fictional text

creates a dual sense of identification and of distance. The ensuing sense of distance is critical, for it enables the reader to gain perspective and so to re-evaluate the norms which the text presents. Iser observes that "in general, literary texts constitute a reaction to contemporary situations, bringing attention to problems that are conditioned though not resolved by contemporary norms" (*Act* 3). That is, the norms function as a means of social control of problematic issues, such as madness, and these limits are reflected in novels. However, Iser is careful to state that the texts do not serve merely a mirroring function: "[t]hough the novel deals with social and historical norms, this does not mean that it simply reproduces contemporary values." In fact, he argues, the norms which are presented cease to be the actual social regulators, assuming a different function for the reader: the norms in the fiction become "the subject of discussion which, more often than not, ends in a questioning rather than a confirmation of their validity" (*Implied* xii). Only once the reader has been positioned tentatively both inside and outside that fictional society can the text act upon her/him. In this straddled position, the reader gains a degree of perception otherwise limited by familiarity and complacent acceptance of her/his own social norms and becomes willing to question the validity of the norms presented (*Act* 74). This function, Iser asserts, is particularly effective when the presented norms differ in some marked way from those accepted in the reader's own society and, in that case, can cause the questioning of fictional norms to be transposed onto reality: "he [the reader] discovers a new reality through a fiction which, at least in part, is different from the world he himself is used to; and he discovers the deficiencies inherent in prevalent norms and in his own restricted behavior" (*Implied* xiii). It is this discovery of self and of one's own society through the reading process that Iser most values.

Somewhat paradoxically, the reader's identification with and distancing from the fictional text together enable this process of self- and social-discovery. Atwood's novels redouble this discovery by presenting the reader with characters who are undergoing this same process of questioning and re-evaluating norms within the novel, leading to some

degree -- or, at least, some possibility -- of self-discovery. As Natalie Cooke notes, "[a]n Atwood protagonist's thoughtfulness generally leads her to noncompliance with society's norms" (324). The reader, in turn, takes up the character's position; s/he moves away from easy acceptance of norms and identifies with the character's discovery process, thereby subtly undergoing a similar process. Thus the questioning and re-evaluating of textual-societal norms occurs first within the novel so that the process and potential for self-discovery become both internal and external to the text. If the maximum effect is to be achieved, Iser asserts that the reader must move outside of her/his known experience and known aspects of the self through the process of ideation:

> [t]hus we have the apparently paradoxical situation in which the reader is forced to reveal aspects of himself in order to experience a reality which is different from his own. The impact this reality makes on him will depend largely on the extent to which he himself actively provides the unwritten part of the text, and yet in supplying all the missing links, he must think in terms of experiences different from his own; indeed, it is only by leaving behind the familiar world of his own experience that the reader can truly participate in the adventure the literary text offers him. (Iser, *Implied* 281-82)

These comments indicate how reading as an interactive process has the potential to broaden the reader's experience of self and others.

Moreover, Iser's view of potential literary "adventure" bears a striking resemblance to the Jungian concept of the potential inner "adventure" of recognizing the unconscious psyche. As von Franz notes, "[t]hus, in the midst of ordinary outer life, one is suddenly caught up in an exciting inner adventure; and because it is unique for each individual, it cannot be copied or stolen" ("Process" 228). Notably, Iser contends that the efficacy of this interactive reading process is determined not by the existence of gaps in the text -- these are taken as a given -- but by the extent of the reader's involvement with these gaps, which requires psychic movement into previously unknown experiences. This movement is facilitated by the reader's engagement with the presented norms; as Iser further notes, "the reassessment of norms is what constitutes the innovative character of the [literary] repertoire ... the participant will see what he would not have seen in the

course of his everyday life.... In other words, the literary text enables its readers to transcend the limitation of their own real-life situation; it is not a reflection of any given reality, but it is an extension or broadening of their own reality" (*Act* 78-79). Thus through distancing from the self and the text, the reader finds a space from which to assess the norms within the novel and, ultimately, to redefine reality through the experience.

While changing or even challenging "reality" may seem a questionable line of argument in a discussion of fiction, it is not the text itself that creates the potential for this transformation but rather the reader's engagement in the process of reading. In Iser's terms, "[r]eading is experienced as something which is happening -- and happening is the hallmark of reality" (*Act* 73). The interaction between text and reader creates the sense of reality. In fact, I suggest that the status of fiction and reality closely proximates that of normality and madness; in both cases, the generally accepted opposition is a false construct. Iser contends that "[i]f fiction and reality are to be linked, it must be in terms not of opposition but of communication, for the one is not the mere opposite of the other -- fiction is a means of telling us something about reality" (*Act* 53). In this newly posited association, then, focus is averted from an oppositional relationship to an act of communication and, consequently, is directed to "the hitherto neglected recipient of the message," that is, to the reader and her/his interaction with the text (Iser, *Act* 54). Moreover, this reader-text interaction not only negates the opposition of fiction and reality, but challenges the perception of them as discrete states. That is, even the distinction between what constitutes reality and what constitutes fiction is obscured. As Iser observes, "[i]f the sense of the narrative can only be completed through the cooperation of the reader (which is allowed for in the text), then the borderline between fiction and reality becomes increasingly hazy, for the reader can scarcely regard his own participation as fictional. He is bound to look on his reactions as something real...." That said, the reader will further perceive the world of the text as real: "since his reactions are

real, he will lose the feeling that he is judging a world that is only fictional. Indeed, his own judgments will enhance the impression he has that this world is a reality" (Iser, *Implied* 113). Unsurprisingly, once this perception is in place, the reader readily transfers her/his judgments and assessments of norms from the "fictional" reality to "the real world," thereby actually creating reality through its redefinition. According to Hutcheon, this form of participation is not only solicited but demanded by Atwood's texts; she asserts that "[t]he reader of Atwood's novels can never be passive; he must accept responsibility for the world he too is bringing to life by his act of reading" ("From Poetic" 29-30). Thus as the reader realizes (that is, re-creates) the world, s/he becomes complicit in establishing social norms, including psychic norms, and so in passing judgment on the characters.

Lastly, Iser's relevance to a study of Atwood's novels is evident in the manner his ideas coalesce with those of psychoanalysis and particularly Jung's concept of the psyche or the unconscious. Iser argues that the interaction between text and reader not only creates the reality, but that the process of reading actually has the potential to reveal the reader's unconscious. As stated, the reader's fullest textual experience occurs when s/he steps outside of the known aspects of self and environment to engage with the characters in their milieu; by moving beyond the known or ego-conscious self, s/he encounters part of the unconscious psyche which subsequently may become consciously realized. Iser asserts that such a revelation requires perspective that can only be gained away from the familiar: "it is only when the reader is forced to produce the meaning of the text under *unfamiliar* conditions, rather than under his own conditions ... that he can bring to light a layer of his personality that he had previously been unable to formulate in his conscious mind" (*Act* 50). In this view, the process of reading and interaction with the text can become a means of that self-realization which Jung so strongly advocates. While reading has this illuminating potential, Iser considers it neither a substitute for nor a direct part of psychoanalysis; however, the similarities allow for neat parallels of study between the

reader-involvement model and the psycho-social model proposed in the first section of this introduction. As Iser cautions, "reading is not a therapy designed to restore [the unconscious areas of the mind] to communication.... Nevertheless, it does enable us to see how little of the subject is a given reality, even to its own consciousness." And he adds that the subject must be acknowledged to consist of more than consciousness alone (*Act* 159). That is, as Jung repeatedly emphasized, the unconscious must be recognized for realization of human potential. Significantly, Christina Ljungberg notes that this "awareness of a hidden reality beyond our everyday existence is also present in Atwood's work" (147). Such recognition of the interplay between the conscious and unconscious realms applies to the characters and the reader since the discovery of self occurs in both and, arguably, is precipitated in the reader through the characters. This dual recognition is also directly aligned with the Jungian concept of the psyche and of the self.

Psychoanalysis, social awareness, and reader-involvement can be seen, then, to share many approaches to and models of madness -- not the least of which is the willingness to engage with, rather than to dismiss, the irrational or unknown. Foucault notes that in its early encounters with madness, psychoanalysis had the lofty aim of attempting to transform madness from the asylum's observation-model, the silent Other, to one of dialogue by "substitut[ing] for its silent magic the powers of language" (250). This goal could only be partly realized; instead of the desired dialogue, the best that could be achieved was "the new structure of language without response," or a monologue of reason that still excluded the irrational (Foucault 251). Although this twentieth-century inclusive impulse was movement in the right direction, and so retains meaningful avenues of exploration, it could not break down the barriers isolating the mad from the sane.[42] Thus the mad figure -- both in literature and in contemporary society -- continues to seek a voice outside of the madness that silences and is, as Chesler observes,

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[42] It is important to note that Foucault's use of "psychoanalysis" indicates the Freudian model; consequently, the area of divergence between Freud and Jung regarding the role and composition of the unconscious demonstrates where Jung's concepts may prove useful and, perhaps, may challenge these

a figure of powerlessness (101). While arguably not the figure of symbolic rage that Gilbert and Gubar posit, the madwoman is, as they assert, "simply a woman who seeks the power of self-articulation" (*Madwoman* 79). The goal of this quest, however, remains elusive and so Atwood's reader continues to encounter mad figures. In a recent assessment of Atwood's fiction, Ljungberg indicates that she is "constantly probing where to draw the boundary between inner and outer realities," arguing that this "create[s] several possibilities of interpretation: frequently the reader has to choose between reading the text as a realistic narrative about a person either suffering from mental illness or abnormal imagination, or as a narrative about a 'real' intrusion of irrational and supernatural powers into everyday life" (Ljungberg 147). I would further contend that the possibilities of interpretation are not limited to these two extremes, for the mutually exclusive rendering here presumes a stable definition of sanity. Rather, the reader first has to define the parameters of normality which create the reality and only then can s/he grapple with the irrational. Yet grapple s/he must. It is only through the potential for reassessment inherent in the reader that Atwood's texts preserve a sense of hope for assimilating madness.

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broader conclusions. Nevertheless, as psychoanalysis is typically equated with Freud, Foucault's point is well taken, and it also must be conceded that in general psychoanalytic approaches do retain the medical model of madness, thereby positing an inherent division between the analyst and analysand.

III

Notes on the Novels Not Chosen

Although it may seem surprising that a study of madness in Atwood's novels would not focus on *Surfacing*, it is precisely because this novel has received such thorough critical attention that I have elected to turn my attention elsewhere. Nevertheless, I want to acknowledge that *Surfacing* (1972) is foundational to the concept of madness as a constant feature in Atwood's novels, offering perhaps the most recognizable presentation of a protagonist's experience of madness; certainly, with the possible exception of *Alias Grace*, it is the novel with which many readers are most familiar as a representation of madness. And *Surfacing* is, in many ways, the paradigmatic Atwood novel on madness, representing the narrator's response to her dissociated state -- including her increasing recognition of her own extreme condition, which can be viewed as a form of madness. The unnamed narrator wrestles with the unconscious (in dreams), the irrational (in visions and hallucinations), the wilderness, her own repressed memories and false reconstructions, a legacy of madness represented by her father's bush madness,the mind-body schism represented by her repression of feeling, and the self-other schism represented in her tenuous relationships with her travelling companions. The narrator's extreme alienation and apparent "normality" are juxtaposed with her own recognition and criticism of her companions -- specifically of the constructions of "normality" to which they seem oblivious.

Ultimately, she withdraws from them into her inner journey, which takes outward form in the dive into the lake and her concluding abandonment of the trappings of civilization, taking on an "animal" form. While her external actions -- discarding clothing and shelter, scavenging for food, and leaving her droppings on the ground -- simulate that of a "wild man," she posits herself as "a natural woman... face dirt-caked and streaked,

skin grimed and scabby, hair like a frayed bathmat stuck with leaves and twigs" (190). (The image is a striking revision of Ophelia, whom Atwood identifies as one of "the great-grandmothers of almost every poetic and theatrical and operatic madwoman of the nineteenth century" -- the other being Lady Macbeth ("Ophelia").) Notably, in *Madness in Literature*, Lillian Feder makes this same connection, remarking that "the prototypical mad man or woman is analogous to the wild man" as represented in various forms and cultures (3). Moreover, in *Surfacing*, the narrator's removal from language marks her as a madwoman, removing her from agency through her withdrawal into silence. That said, as is typical of Atwood's novels, the narrator remains poised for action at the conclusion -- but couched in ambiguity. Although the narrator admits that "withdrawing is no longer possible and the alternative is death," awkwardly dresses again, and claims to "re-enter [her] own time" (191), she remains ambivalent and even suspiciously hesitant about reengaging with "reality." Significantly, in response to her lover, Joe, who returns, calling for her, the narrator is silent, weighing her alternatives and recognizing the need to re-enter discourse: "[i]f I go with him we will have to talk.... For us it's necessary, the intercession of words." Yet she does not immediately opt for agency; she wavers but withholds herself: "I tense forward, towards the demands and questions, though my feet do not move yet.... His voice is annoyed: he won't wait much longer. But right now he waits." This world of discourse, of "normality," "reality," and relationship which Joe represents, is starkly juxtaposed with the narrator's isolated retreat into nature: "[t]he lake is quiet, the trees surround me, asking and giving nothing" (191). While she is "tens[ing] forward" and assuring herself that she "can trust him [Joe]" (191), Atwood clearly leaves the narrator hovering on the edge of the forest, straddling the two worlds; consequently, she leaves the reader to determine the course of action.

Such a responsibility is further complicated by the reader's experience during the novel of discovering the narrator's unreliability, questioning her sanity, and, ultimately, being confronted with an unstable figure wavering on the edge of "normality." Moreover,

the reader's confidence in her/his own interpretation of the character has been dramatically undermined by the reading experience, shattered by this unpredictable figure whose decision is anything but transparent. Ironically, the ambivalence of Atwood's conclusion is often obscured in the criticism, as critics, in their capacity as readers, predict the outcome of the narrator's final stance and interpret the novel -- particularly the function of madness in the novel -- on this basis. Specifically, critics who interpret the outcome as a reconciliation of the narrator to society use this assumption as a lens to read madness as an unparalleled, positive process of renewal.

Since its publication in 1972, critics have focused on *Surfacing* as a portrayal of madness, with each subsequent decade continuing the discussion specifically on Laingian, Jungian, and psychological premises -- which coincides generally with my angle of investigation. In the 1970s such studies include Catherine McLay's "The Divided Self: Theme and Patter in Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*" (1975), which views the novel from a Laingian perspective as a model of modern alienation, and Roberta Rubenstein's similar interpretation based on a Jungian reading: "*Surfacing*: Margaret Atwood's Journey to the Interior" (1976), which argues that "[t]he journey towards wholeness involves a Jungian rejoining of the radically severed halves of the narrator's self" (389). Jane Rule tempers this view somewhat in "Life, Liberty and The Pursuit of Normalcy: The Novels of Margaret Atwood" in the 1977 Atwood Symposium edition of *The Malahat Review.* She contends that in Atwood's novels, "normal" does not equate to "average" and that the narrator of *Surfacing* finds "normality... terrifying and important" but is "sceptical of ever finding normalcy that is not average" (45); instead, she experiences "near madness" (46). Unfortunately, the latter remains a nebulous term which Rule does not investigate further, suggesting that the parameters of sanity and madness are obvious and universal, thereby relying on problematic assumptions. Much more expansively, Barbara Hill Rigney attempts to reconcile feminism and psychology in her study, *Madness and Sexual Politics in the Feminist Novel: Studies in Brontë, Woolf, Lessing, and Atwood* (1978). Rigney

turns to a Laingian reading of *Surfacing*, arguing that Atwood's narrator achieves a supranatural female condition: "[t]o the protagonist belongs the ultimate sanity: the knowledge that woman can descend, and return -- sane, whole, victorious" (115). This perceived unity of the female self, Rigney contends, occurs through the alienated narrator's search "through the mother for whom she must search in the depths of her own psyche" (93). In this reading, Atwood not only presents an unqualified success at the conclusion of the novel, but also affirms that such an endeavour is particularly a feminist project.

While such views may, in large measure, accurately reflect the *Zeitgeist*, critical interest in *Surfacing* as a model of madness continued through the 1980s in significant studies of Atwood. For example, Sherrill Grace's *Violent Duality* (1980) speaks of the novel as a "metamorphosis from self to non-self, other, or place" (106) and "a psychological quest" in which the narrator seeks to rid herself of ghosts which are, in fact, "parts of the narrator's self." Grace observes that "[s]he will not be free of these ghosts until she recognizes them and readmits them into her psychic and emotional life" (109). Madness is then the experience of confronting these inner ghosts. Despite its selective focus, in his study, *Surviving the Paraphrase: Eleven Essays on Canadian Literature* (1983), Frank Davey also devotes time and attention to madness as a primary feature of *Surfacing*. This focus is repeated the following year in *Margaret Atwood: A Feminist Poetics*. Despite Atwood's publication of five other novels in the intervening period, Barbara Hill Rigney returns to *Surfacing* as her sole focus among the novels. She argues again that "Atwood's primary interest, then, is the psychological rather than the mystical or the religious. The protagonist is close to mental collapse in the beginning of the novel, and she must actually break down before she can break through" (52). While Rigney does expand her view by pairing the novel with a poetry collection, *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* (1970), her restricted focus typifies the critical examination of madness in Atwood's novels.

Notably, interest in Atwood's representation of madness has continued through the 1990s, with *Surfacing* receiving some competition from *Alias Grace*, but still dominating the critical eye. Feminist studies still remained strong with Eleonora Rao's *Strategies for Identity: The Fiction of Margaret Atwood* and "Cultural Feminism, Female Madness, and Rage in *Surfacing*" in J. Brooks Bouson's *Brutal Choreographies: Oppositional Strategies and Narrative Design in the Novels of Margaret Atwood,* both appearing in 1993. This latter text echoes a concurrent focus on narrative strategies as earlier represented by Annette Kolodny's "Margaret Atwood and the Politics of Narrative" (1990). Laingian readings of madness also continued to emerge in works such as David Ward's "*Surfacing*: Separation, Transition, Incorporation" (1994) and John Moss' *The Paradox of Meaning: Cultural Poetics and Critical Fictions* (1999). Moss draws particular attention to the narrator's transformation "into the beast she has been forced to recognize within herself" (187), thereby suggesting the connections between Laingian and Jungian interpretations of "madness." Such a Jungian view is expounded in two significant works, Hilde Staëls' *Margaret Atwood's Novels: A Study of Narrative Discourse* (1995) and Coomi S. Vevaina's *Re/Membering Selves: Alienation and Survival in the Novels of Margaret Atwood and Margaret Laurence* (1996). Staëls' chapter, "*Surfacing*: Retracing the Paths of
(Self-) Mutilation," is particularly inclusive in identifying the narrator's fears of the unknown (44), the irrational (47), and lack of control (48); Staëls contends that the narrator is estranged from the unconscious (58) and that the novel is resolved in a recognition of the need for human relationship (68). Although it is perhaps unsurprising that psychological readings of *Surfacing* have remained prevalent, it is interesting to note specifically that Jungian and Laingian approaches continue to be significant lines of inquiry. While its importance in Atwood's oeuvre as a representation of madness is unquestionable, the amount of critical attention directed at *Surfacing* has also distorted the significance and extent of madness as a feature of Atwood's other work, particularly

her other novels. My study seeks to redress that oversight by drawing together the other novels under a frame of investigation provided by Jung, Laing, and Iser. Before proceeding to those other novels, I would like to address three other novels that would likely occur to readers as candidates for this discussion of madness in Atwood's work: *The Handmaid's Tale, Cat's Eye,* and *The Blind Assassin.*

The Handmaid's Tale (1985) offers a frightening glimpse of Western society taken to an extreme -- a fundamentalist and patriarchal society itself gone mad. Within this narrative, Offred's speculations on the mutability of sanity and normality demonstrate the seemingly arbitrary, actually tendentious, placement of these labels. As John Moss notes, "this novel involves the reader with explosive force in the moral complexity of its world.... The relationship between reading, the novel, and the author whose personality informs the work, inhabits the text, and shares with us her deepest and most whimsical fears, refuses closure" (*Paradox* 142). This assessment also holds true for *Bodily Harm.* In fact, I would argue that Atwood's presentation of socially-sanctioned and socially-regulated "mad" behaviour in such "normal," recognizable, modern societies as those presented in *Bodily Harm* has an even greater "explosive force" of involvement than the radical dystopia of *The Handmaid's Tale.* The identifiable "normal" contemporary societies (Toronto, St. Antoine, and Ste. Agathe) and their inherent perils are more difficult for the reader to dismiss; the "normality" serves to highlight the co-existence of "madness" in a seemingly sane, civilized society. Consequently, my study focuses on the earlier of these two novels, *Bodily Harm,* as a means of exploring the protagonist's confrontation with the malleable, influential, and constructed nature of norms -- realizations which also occur in *The Handmaid's Tale.*

Offred's world is one of segregation, repression, and loss of agency, thereby situating her in the role of the madwoman. Nevertheless, Offred retains some agency psychically and so jealously guards the freedom of her thoughts: "[t]he night is mine, my own time, to do with as I will, as long as I am quiet. As long as I don't move. As long as I

lie still.... [I] step sideways out of my own time. Out of time. Through this is time, nor am I out of it. But the night is my time out. Where should I go?" (35). Suggestively, her agency is directly connected to her ability to consciously remember people and events from "normal" life in the past. Moreover, the placement of these thoughts in the night scenes of the novel suggests their link to dreams and the compensatory function of the unconscious psyche. Atwood's novel inverts this means of psychic balance by utilizing memories of "real life" to compensate for the nightmare of Offred's existence as a Handmaid -- an existence that has the quality of dream and fantasy. Within this nightmare existence, Offred also dreams: these dreams are largely of the past: her lost husband, friends, daughter. "Of all the dreams," Offred notes, dreaming about her daughter being forcibly taken away from her "is the worst" (71). Atwood strategically blurs the line separating dream states, thereby suggesting psychic imbalance. Offred wavers between the states of dreaming and consciousness:

> I'm dreaming that I am awake.
>
> I dream that I get out of bed and walk across the room.... I begin to cry because I know then that I'm not awake. I'm back in this bed, trying to wake up, and I wake up and sit on the edge of the bed.... But I'm not awake this time either.
>
> After these dreams I do awake, and I know I'm really awake because there is the wreath, on the ceiling, and my curtains.... I feel drugged. I consider this: maybe they're drugging me. Maybe the life I think I'm living is a paranoid delusion.
>
> Not a hope. I know where I am, and who, and what day it is. These are the tests, and I am sane. Sanity is a valuable possession; I hoard it the way people once hoarded money. (103)

Notably, "normality" is not equivalent to "sanity"; Offred's existence in Gilead has the quality of delusion or madness. During the Ceremony when Offred fulfils her Handmaid's role, she dissociates herself -- "[o]ne detaches oneself. One describes" (89) -- and wistfully considers madness: "[m]aybe I'm crazy and this is some new kind of therapy. I wish it were true; then I could get better and this would go away" (88). However, the likelihood of such a simple "cure" for any form of madness or mental instability is remote and signals Offred's ironically romanticized notion of madness as

temporary, definable, and therefore curable. Not surprisingly, the "reality" of Offred's existence in Gilead is so dreadful that any other condition -- including a "crazy" one -- seems desirable.

Paradoxically, the reader perceives Gilead as a mad society, thereby inverting the terms of definition: removal from madness (the reality Gilead) becomes a form of sanity. Thus, Offred's possible physical escape at the conclusion of the novel may represent a preservation of the sanity that she so jealously guards as a "valuable possession." Earlier in the narrative Offred tellingly remarks that "I save it [sanity], so I will have enough, when the time comes" (103). However, her characterization of the actual departure from the Commander's house is enigmatic: "[t]he van waits in the driveway.... Whether this is my end or a new beginning I have no way of knowing: I have given myself over into the hands of strangers, because it can't be helped. And so I step up, into the darkness within; or else the light" (276-77). Thus Offred's act of interpretation in the face of unknown elements parallels the reader's role: the need for interpretation based on limited information. Critical attention is often directed at the novel's "Historical Notes," where the reader is positioned as a listener to an interpretation by pompous, sexist Professor Pieixoto. Atwood's inclusion of this satiric scholarly convention problematizes the reader's role at a fundamental level, for the assembling of the story itself (including selections, omissions, and ordering) is called into question. At the very least, this afterword clearly emphasizes the act of interpretation upon which literature is predicated. However, Atwood highlights the reader's role throughout the novel. In a revealing early passage, Offred speculates about her audience and the complex, blurred distinction between "reality" and "story":

> I would like to believe this is a story I'm telling. I need to believe it. I must believe it. Those who can believe that such stories are only stories have a better chance.
>
> If it's a story I'm telling, then I have control over the ending. Then there will be an ending, to the story, and real life will come after it. I can pick up where I left off.

> It isn't a story I'm telling.
> It's also a story I'm telling, in my head, as I go along.
> Tell, rather than write.... But if it's a story, even in my head, I must be telling it to someone. You don't tell a story only to yourself. There's always someone else.
> Even when there is no one.
> A story is like a letter. *Dear You*, I'll say. Just *you*, without a name.... *You* can mean more than one.
> You can mean thousands....
> I'll pretend you can hear me.
> But it's no good, because I know you can't. (37-38)

Although Offred posits the presence of a reader/listener, her comments also retract the possibility of direct interaction with that audience. Nevertheless, she persists in recounting her story, thereby suggesting the author's faith in the act of writing (creation) itself.

While Offred's comments are telling, they are not exclusive to this novel; such tenets are "classic Atwood." For example, J. Brooks Bouson's observation of reader involvement in *The Handmaid's Tale* is insightful but equally relevant to the earlier novel, *Bodily Harm*. Bouson's assessment hinges on "the fact that Offred's narrative never reaches a definitive conclusion" and on "the novel's inclusion, in direct addresses to an implied reader, of self-reflexive discussions about the difficulties inherent in the narrative reconstruction of events" (136-37). Rennie's fate remains equally undetermined. The concluding account of her release from prison may be fantasy -- as Atwood signals through Rennie's phrasing: "[t]his is what will happen" (*BH* 293). Moreover, the entire structure of *Bodily Harm* pivots on Rennie's opening line, "[t]his is how I got here" (11), which strongly parallels *The Handmaid's Tale* by predicating the existence of a listener or, more likely for a writer such as Rennie, an implied reader. Bouson further notes that Offred "struggles to retain a sense of sanity in an insane world of sexual slavery" (143). Likewise, Rennie flirts with sexual aberrations, witnesses sexual manipulation, and struggles to retain her sanity in the dank horrors of the Caribbean prison cell, starving, filthy, and subjected to tortured prisoners' nightly "screaming [which] is worse when it

stops" (*BH* 287). While both the Gileadean regime and the wrongful, inhumane imprisonment are extreme versions of social control, the latter seems to be more accessible in its horrors and its (marginal) likelihood for the contemporary Western reader. By contrast, the futuristic setting of *The Handmaid's Tale* positions the novel closer to "fantasy" than the immediacy of *Bodily Harm*. Somewhat paradoxically, then, the less extreme version of society gone mad remains the more threatening. *Bodily Harm* insistently calls attention to one's complicity in constructing and upholding social norms -- including what behaviour is deemed mad -- and so offers the reader a disturbingly accurate view of reality, emphasized by Rennie's placement in two realms.

In a similar effort to avoid repetition among analyses, this study focuses on *The Robber Bride* as the novel which most effectively represents the concept of the Jungian shadow. However, it is notable that this confrontation of madness in the specific form of the projected shadow occurs most recently in *The Blind Assassin* (2000) and earlier in *Cat's Eye* (1988): Iris Chase Griffen is paired with her sister, Laura, and Elaine Risley with Cordelia, respectively. In both novels, Atwood creates a character who functions as a projection of the protagonist's unconscious in the form of a shadow figure and as a direct link to madness. Although the diagnoses of madness in *The Blind Assassin* and *Cat's Eye* are more overt, *The Robber Bride* offers a more complex view of the shadow, projecting it through three different psyches. At the same time, the representation of madness in Zenia is more identifiable for the reader as it is less extreme; in this sense, *The Robber Bride* functions in a similar capacity to the contrast of *Bodily Harm* to *The Handmaid's Tale*. That is not to say that Zenia as a character is not extreme but only that she is less directly, though no less effectively, associated with madness. In fact, Zenia exists as an amalgam of the others, as a "schizophrenic" in the Jungian sense: "the schizophrenic's ego is only one of the subjects. In schizophrenia, the normal subject has split into a plurality of autonomous complexes, at odds with one another and with reality, bringing

about a disintegration of the personality" (*CW* 3:11; *Abstracts* 24). Zenia's existence relies on the histories of the three protagonists from whence she constructs an identity and no version of herself is the ego-subject.[43] It is my contention that Zenia's implicit connection to madness is the more insidious and confronts the reader more generally. Although Iris and Elaine are confronted with socially-labelled "madwomen" in the figures of Laura and Cordelia respectively, this construct of in/sanity is removed from the other directly onto the self in *The Robber Bride*. Through a confrontation with the shadow figure of Zenia, Atwood's three protagonists -- Charis, Roz, and Tony -- are themselves taken to the brink of madness, suicide, and collapse.

Significantly, in *The Robber Bride* each of the three women confronts her own most pressing form of madness, being forced through the projections of her own shadow to acknowledge her psychic imbalance: Charis' over-reliance on the spirit, Roz's on the body, and Tony's on the mind. Moreover, Atwood's presentation reveals that none of the women is precluded from the impingement of madness -- implicitly, neither is the reader. Each confronts madness in the form of suicidal tendencies and the threat of being overcome by the dark aspects of her own psyche, aspects which are manifested in the shadow figure of Zenia. Although Zenia threatens to subsume each of the protagonists, each acknowledges her self in Zenia -- acknowledging the evil within her self -- and so is able to assimilate the positive, strengthening characteristics of the shadow while also rejecting and so overcoming its dark, threatening aspects. Ultimately, Zenia is relegated to death, whereas Charis, Roz, and Tony all attain an increased level of self-knowledge through recognizing the unconscious part of the psyche. The positive outcome of their dark encounters is most clearly manifested in the enduring and deepening relationship

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[43] In this respect, Zenia is an interesting echo of Louise, a character in Atwood's early short story "Polarities" from the collection *Dancing Girls* (1977). Louise is a graduate student who is eventually committed to a mental institution by her colleagues; paradoxically, Louise's distinguishing feature is her amalgamation of other people and their environments. Unlike Zenia whose world is verbal, Louise's "schizophrenia" is evidenced in her physical surroundings -- all reproductions of other people's homes: "[p]oor Louise had been trying to construct herself out of the other people she had met" (589).

between the three women. In contrast to their initial states of alienation and dissociation, Atwood's protagonists discover reintegration with self -- in the forms of the conscious and unconscious psyche and the mind-body schism -- as well as with others. This progress of acknowledging, assimilating, and overcoming the shadow is most effectively presented in *The Robber Bride*.

While *The Blind Assassin* seems to hold a similar fate for Laura of relegating the shadow figure to death, in the end Iris fails to confront the shadow, preferring to construct an outcome which she erroneously perceives as a resolution. Contrary to the final confrontation that Charis, Roz, and Tony undergo with Zenia, Iris avoids such a confrontation with her sister. In this sense, Laura's fate is that of being condemned to madness by society, which is represented in Iris' husband, the powerful industrialist and rising politician, Richard Griffen, and his sister, Winifred Griffen-Prior. When Laura is impregnated by Richard, he and Winifred arrange to have her sent to BellaVista Clinic, a private mental institution where she undergoes sedation, electroshock therapy, and a forced abortion. Iris is told that "Laura had finally snapped," "had been declared a danger to herself and to others," and was "clearly suffering from delusions" (429). In short, Richard and Winifred keep Iris from contacting her sister, convincing her that Laura is "'hysterical,'" "'raving,'" and "'insanely jealous'" (431). Although Iris is suspicious, she is also insecure about her own ability to judge the boundaries of sanity; when Winifred explains that Laura is "deranged" and "violent," Iris thinks, "I had a hard time believing that Laura had suddenly fallen to pieces, but then I was so used to Laura's quirks that I no longer found them strange. It would have been easy for me to have overlooked the slippage -- the telltale signs of mental frailty, whatever they might have been" (430). Although Iris doubts this version of reality, she relinquishes herself to the position of powerlessness, thereby also abandoning Laura to her fate as a madwoman. Moreover, Iris fails to recognize that Laura is a manifestation of the unconscious and representation of the shadow of madness as determined by social constructions of "normality." While Iris

cannot foresee that at a later date, Richard will also label her as "mentally unstable" and "a mad wife" (507), more generally she does not recognize Laura as a projection of herself. Ironically, although Iris does not align herself with Richard and Winifred, neither does she align herself with Laura, thus inhabiting an indeterminate position which indicates her lack of self-knowledge.

The fact that Iris posthumously attributes the novel's embedded text, *The Blind Assassin*, to Laura and has it published as such seems to indicate that Iris recognizes the connection between her self and Laura. Although Iris does not overtly reject the connection of herself with Laura, neither has she assimilated the shadow fully; that is, she persists in seeing Laura as external only rather than as a projection of her own psyche. Perhaps most tellingly, in the most confrontational scene between the sisters, when they meet after Laura's institutionalization, escape, and lengthy absence, Iris does not directly face the question of her sister's potential madness. During their discussion, Iris faces the fact that "[t]his was the crossroads: either Laura had been mad, or Richard had been lying. I couldn't believe both" (485). Iris' reaction is telling. On the one hand, she admits that "[t]here was still room for doubt"; on the other hand, she finds Laura's story plausible and chooses to believe her sister despite the missing information (486). However, Iris' faith wavers almost immediately, leaving her "newfound reliance on Laura's sanity ... crumbling" (487). Once Iris' confidence is shaken, she avoids the psychic "crossroads" of needing to decide whether "Laura had been mad" and focuses on trying to rationally order externals, to "make sense" of what Iris terms Laura's "construction of events" (487).

Notably, during their meeting, Iris does not arrive at a conclusion about Laura's mental stability and refuses to recognize the constructed nature of norms; thus she is unable to recognize her own shadow projected onto Laura. In retrospect, as Iris recounts their history to Sabrina, her granddaughter and intended audience, she is able to acknowledge that society's perception of Laura as "*different*" was inaccurate: "perhaps

Laura wasn't very different from other people after all. Perhaps she was the same -- the same as some odd, skewed element in them that most people keep hidden but that Laura did not, and this was why she frightened them. Because she did frighten them -- or if not frighten, then alarm them in some way" (89). Significantly, Iris posits herself as standing outside of the social perception held by "them," but this only indicates her self-deception. Unlike the protagonists of *The Robber Bride*, Iris does not initiate a "confrontation" with the shadow figure, for she does not recognize Laura as such; this lack of awareness is signalled by Iris' passivity in the encounter: the meeting between the sisters is both initiated and abruptly terminated by Laura.

While Iris' attribution of her own novel to Laura underlines their association rather than their segregation, this suggestion of a collapse between the two characters is misleading. Ironically, Iris' own actions of publishing the novel ensure that Laura remains an intrusive presence despite her death, for Iris' encounter with the shadow figure becomes complicated and remains unresolved. As though to make-up for her harsh treatment in life by society, Iris attempts to promote positive social effects for Laura after her death. However, since all of the attention results from the publication of the book which Iris herself has written, Laura remains rejected by Iris. Iris tries to re-create Laura, the shadow figure, in her own image by falsely attributing her own willingness to flout social norms and expectations onto the nameless figure in the book, a figure which everyone else believes is Laura. Ironically, through this action, Iris attempts to invert their roles by becoming a shadow figure for Laura -- manifesting their mutual desire for the rebel figure Alex Thomas, who becomes Iris' secret lover and, consequently, the male character and storyteller in the scandalous novel, *The Blind Assassin*. Notably, Iris is fully aware that she herself is the errant figure -- the cheating wife who disregards normative expectations of sexual behaviour -- and that she falsely represents Laura as the rebel. This collapse between herself and a self-created representation of Laura suggests Iris' persistent desire to project her shadow onto the external figure of Laura. Iris refuses to

acknowledge this aspect of her self and, instead, relishes her apparent ability to hide behind Laura. In turn, Laura inhabits the role of the madwoman; she is silenced by society, by death, and by her sister through the ambiguities of language.

Far from giving Laura a voice, then, Iris repeats the socially-enforced silencing of Laura, for she projects her own voice onto Laura, creating both a "reality" and a "fantasy" that Laura never inhabited. Through this action, Iris secures a level of comfort for herself and so unwittingly mirrors Richard's action of secreting Laura into the institution, removing her from agency. In fact, Iris' insistence on creating this illusion of authorship and of the rebel figure suggests that she desires to be in control of this shadow without confronting it as a part of her self -- an impossible desire in the Jungian view of the shadow as a manifestation of the autonomous unconscious. Not surprisingly, then, Laura continues to "talk to her [Iris] ... though she tends to repeat herself, as the dead have a habit of doing" (491). Ironically, it is Iris' recognition of autonomous power that misguidedly causes her to re-create Laura as the author figure, for prior to embarking on publication, Iris eerily muses that "[n]othing is more difficult than to understand the dead, I've found; but nothing is more dangerous than to ignore them" (509). While this description coincides with the Jungian concept of the ability of the unconscious to intrude, Iris persists in seeing herself as the shadow figure; that is, she fully recognizes adultery and its falsehoods as "dark impulses," but does not fully confront Laura as a projection of her own unconscious. The "Laura" that Iris seems to confront and tries to appease is an illusion, her own false creation and so, ultimately, Iris is relegated into silence and dissociation by her own actions. The projection of her own unconscious remains falsely -- perhaps even more falsely than before -- externalized and unresolved. As Laura observes, Iris remains "a sleepwalker" (237), unaware of her self.

Similarly, in *Cat's Eye*, Atwood presents Cordelia as an enigmatic character with whom Elaine increasingly identifies her self; thus, Cordelia functions more obviously as the

shadow figure, embodying Elaine's unconscious psyche. In contrast to *The Robber Bride* and more explicitly than in *The Blind Assassin*, Elaine's relationship with Cordelia is left problematically unresolved. Iris' rendition of her history with Laura includes the implication of Iris' blunt revelation of her sexual relationship with Alex Thomas as a death knell -- the part of the story that decades later, Iris admits, "still haunts me" (488). Like Iris, Elaine is haunted by her memories of interaction with Cordelia, moments that link their final unresolved confrontation directly with their past interactions. While Laura diverges from "normal" behaviour, Cordelia plays a dual role, acting both as the measure of that behaviour and then as the measure of deviance. In childhood, she is pivotal in constructing the boundaries of acceptable behaviour and of making them intentionally fluid so that Elaine never knows where the limits are or what infractions she is liable to make unwittingly. Consequently, Elaine lives with constant anxiety: "I worry about what I've said today, the expression on my face, how I walk, what I wear, because all of these things need improvement. I am not normal, I am not like the other girls. Cordelia tells me so, but she will help me.... It will take hard work and a long time" (125). This imbalance begins to manifest itself in external signs: Elaine's handwriting deteriorates, becoming "spidery, frantic, and disfigured" (135), and she develops constant nausea (147). Particularly revealing are the signs of self-mutilation -- Elaine peels her feet until drawing blood and chews on both her cuticles and her hair (120) -- and her newfound ability to faint as a means of escape (183-85).

Significantly, Elaine directs all of these actions at herself, seeking physical pain to dull the psychological and emotional pain; she peels her feet because "[t]he pain gave me something definite to think about, something immediate. It was something to hold on to" (120). Elaine is desperate for some stability in her life -- even if painful, limiting, and self-induced -- and, ironically, seems to recognize intuitively that such stability is a construct. After a summer absence, Elaine gains some perspective and recognizes that Cordelia is measuring herself by Elaine's reactions: "[n]ow she's harsher, more relentless.

It's as if she's driven by the urge to see how far she can go. She's backing me towards an edge, like the edge of a cliff: one step back, another step, and I'll be over and falling" (165). That is, Elaine recognizes that she must create a limit or she will fall into madness once overtaken by her shadow figure. Once Elaine does stand up to Cordelia after literally falling into the icy river, it appears that she has subsumed the shadow; however, such appearance is misleading since the effect is only temporary.

As teenagers, together, Elaine and Cordelia challenge the boundaries of normative behaviour, yet Cordelia always goes further, is more reckless than Elaine, is "wild, pure and simple" (139). By this time, Elaine seems to have dealt with Cordelia as a projection of the shadow, for externally Elaine begins to gain an advantage over her; this transference seems most obvious in Elaine's ability to put Cordelia down, to silence her with criticisms and a "mean mouth" (250-52). Ultimately, however, Cordelia represents Elaine's fear of her self, of the unknown, of madness; she admits, "I'm afraid of being Cordelia. Because in some way we changed places, and I've forgotten when" (243). While it appears that Elaine has silenced her shadow or, in her view, that she has become Cordelia's shadow, this misconception signals Elaine's own lack of self-knowledge. Since this apparent overcoming of the shadow remains external, Elaine does not recognize Cordelia as a manifestation of her self and again the results are only temporary. Consequently, she cannot rid herself of thoughts, fears, and speculations about Cordelia.

It is clear that Elaine has not dealt with Cordelia as her shadow, for even as an adult she keeps anticipating Cordelia's reappearance. More directly, Elaine still fears the threat of madness in herself: "[l]ately I've caught myself humming out loud, or walking along the street with my mouth slightly open, drooling a little. Only a little, but it may be the thin edge of the wedge, the crack in the wall that will open, later, onto what? What vistas of shining eccentricity, or madness?" (6). Since Elaine has never dealt with her fear of madness or faced the unknown within her self, Cordelia continues to be "the part that still haunts" her. As in *The Blind Assassin*, there is a scene that approximates a

confrontation of the protagonist and her shadow figure. As though prefiguring the meeting between the Chase sisters, Elaine, like Iris, avoids making a determination of madness, and like Laura, Cordelia requests the meeting. The women meet in The Dorothy Lyndwick Rest Home, "a discreet private loony bin" where Cordelia has been placed (presumably by her family) for attempting suicide by overdosing -- an event precipitated by depression (376-79). Cordelia mocks the doctors and their tranquilizers, begging Elaine to help her get out. Although Elaine feels "culpable and accused" by Cordelia's situation (378), she refuses to help because not only is she uncertain of Cordelia's mental state -- "exactly how sick in the head is she anyway?" -- but, more tellingly, because Elaine herself is feeling unbalanced. Elaine admits that "I am not feeling totally glued together myself" (380).[44]

During their visit, Elaine's comment to Cordelia -- "'[y]ou aren't any crazier than I am'" (379) -- is more revealing than she realizes, for Elaine herself falls into depression and attempts suicide (394-95). Elaine is beckoned by the darkness -- a more menacing echo of her childhood slips out of consciousness through fainting -- and hears a voice ordering her to slash her wrists. While Elaine does admit to being afraid of her own actions and of being put into an asylum (395), such self-knowledge is retrospective. By contrast, immediately following the attempt, she refuses psychiatric care and denies being afraid of this voice, claiming that "[i]t wasn't a frightening voice, in itself. Not menacing but excited, as if proposing an escapade, a prank, a treat.... The voice of a nine-year-old child" (396). Nevertheless Elaine recognizes that she is "capable of such a thing" as

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[44] Laura M. Robinson has recently argued against the concept of projection, claiming that "[t]he connection and identification of Cordelia with Elaine suggest more than a blurring of self and other, or a projection of one's fears onto another's subjectivity" (238). Robinson somewhat startlingly posits the basis of this relationship as "unarticulated lesbian desire": "[i]n Atwood's version, in order to drive home the point that Elaine has banished some aspect of her own personality, this moment signifies the last time Elaine sees Cordelia. She wants Cordelia to remain institutionalized, a metaphor for the need to conform to normative society. In shutting out Cordelia, Elaine could be shutting out a part of herself: the transgressive, the theatrical, the insane, the socially unacceptable, all aspects of Cordelia's convoluted identity. Elaine then spends the rest of her life longing for whatever it is she has denied. Cordelia is more than a metaphor, however, and Elaine's rejection is not only of what Cordelia represents, but also of Cordelia as a person. More specifically, Elaine's rejection is of Cordelia as a *woman*" (240).

suicide (397); in itself, this admission signals a partial self-realization, for suicide is a form of temporary madness wherein the psyche is overtaken by the irrational, figured here as darkness. Not surprisingly, Elaine feels threatened by this tendency within her, and this indicates her persistent fear of madness: a condition she associates directly with Cordelia. Notably, after leaving Cordelia in the institution, Elaine dreams that "[s]he knows I have deserted her, and she is angry" (381); this dream takes on significance as a Jungian indication of the shadow being ignored. As a result, the unconscious begins to manifest itself in a dual form: collapsed into suicidal tendencies and the "shadowing" of Cordelia that Elaine continually experiences in adulthood. These suicidal tendencies push Elaine to the point that she admits to being unbalanced and briefly seeks the aid of a psychologist, to no avail (399). Significantly, this awareness of her imbalance has the potential to direct Elaine to an increased awareness of her self -- a task she continues to defer, isolating herself instead. In an eerie echo of *Life Before Man*'s Elizabeth Schoenhof, Elaine intermittently lies inert on the bed and admits to feeling the darkness "washing over me [Elaine] in a wave of black vacancy. I know I can wait it out" (402).

Elaine only becomes aware of her need to see Cordelia after her retrospective art exhibit. When, as adolescents, Cordelia began to show signs of "slippage," Elaine avoided her while claiming not to know why (273), thereby suggesting there was no reason. Similarly, after Elaine returns Cordelia to the institution, she tries to convince herself that Cordelia will be fine and will restabilize, just as before (381). Yet, a few months later, when her letter to Cordelia is returned as "*address unknown*," Elaine is expectant and frightened; tellingly, she is aware that Cordelia "could ring the doorbell at any minute.... She could be anywhere" (382). Interestingly, the one place Elaine avoids looking is inside her self, and so she keeps glimpsing Cordelia in everyone she passes on the streets in Toronto. Elaine is intent on seeing Cordelia in order to "give her something you can never have, except from another person: what you look like from outside. A reflection. This is the part of herself I could give back to her" (434). Ironically, Elaine

actually needs the opposite: to recognize her own unconscious psyche which is projected onto the shadow figure of Cordelia.

Once Elaine realizes that Cordelia, in person, is not going to appear at the art exhibit, she is at a loss, admitting that "I've been prepared for almost anything; except absence, except silence" (435). Ironically, Elaine even argues with the Cordelia she imagines: "*You're dead, Cordelia.* No, I'm not. *Yes, you are. You're dead. Lie down*" (437). But Cordelia, as the unconscious, retains her autonomy. The next day, Elaine again tries to silence Cordelia, this time by tracing her childhood route at the ravine and the site of Elaine's icy revelation of autonomy. In the absence of an alternative, she imagines a confrontation with Cordelia. Expecting to see a childhood version of herself, Elaine instead sees a spectre of Cordelia as a child: "I know she's looking at me.... There is the same shame, the sick feeling in my body, the same knowledge of my own wrongness, awkwardness, weakness; the same wish to be loved; the same loneliness; the same fear. But these are not my own emotions any more. They are Cordelia's; as they always were" (443). Thus, Elaine perceives that her childhood reactions to Cordelia represent unrecognized parts of Cordelia herself; that is, Elaine was the site of Cordelia's projections, her shadow figure. However, Elaine's insight falls short, for she fails to see the converse: that Cordelia, in turn, continues to be a reflection of Elaine's own unrecognized aspects.

Significantly, Elaine imagines only a confrontation with the child figure and her implicit emotions, not the adult figure who reflects madness and suicide. As Elaine admits, she views only herself (not Cordelia) as an adult in this scene; she is "the older one now" and so concludes that "I'm the stronger." As a result, Elaine mistakenly believes she can "release" Cordelia: "[*i*]*t's all right*, I say to her. *You can go home now*" (443). In reality, this confrontation has only been partial; while Elaine sees Cordelia reflected in her self, she does not see aspects of her self reflected in Cordelia. In this final bridge scene, Atwood includes a suggestive parallel to the last moments between Cordelia

and Elaine at the institution. Elaine imagines Cordelia's expression during this bridge scene as "the face closed and defiant" (443); this is strikingly similar to her final expression before Elaine leaves her in the institution: "she has that stubborn, defiant look, the one I remember from years ago." Moreover, Cordelia's reaction to Elaine's refusal to help her escape is chillingly lucid: "'I'll get out anyway,' she says. Her voice is not thick now, or hesitant" (381). Get out she does -- despite Elaine's best efforts to contain her. Even on the airplane, heading back to Vancouver from Toronto, Elaine continues to see Cordelia -- now as an absence -- figured in the two elderly women who represent for Elaine "something that will never happen. Two old women giggling over their tea" (445). She claims to have "enough [light] to see by," but the significant feature of that final scene is the surrounding darkness: "full night, clear, moonless, and filled with stars" (445). Cordelia is "out" in that darkness; she remains Elaine's shadow, who "could be anywhere."

Although Cordelia clearly represents a projection of the shadow figure, *Cat's Eye* represents only a partial confrontation of the protagonist with her shadow. While Elaine tries to reconstruct a scene of confrontation, this remains only partial: imagined and limited to childhood. In keeping with a Jungian view, in order to result in self-awareness on the part of the individual, s/he must recognize the present, unconscious act of projection, thereby seeing the unknown and, often, undesirable aspects of the self manifested in this other figure. At that point, the shadow may be assimilated or rejected, as required. The confrontation with the shadow -- an act which must precede a final rejection or assimilation -- is, more specifically, a confrontation with madness in the form of the extreme unknown. While Atwood does signal some increase of self-awareness on Elaine's part not only in her ability to recognize herself as a shadow for Cordelia in childhood but also in her acknowledgement of her own tenuous psychological balance, Elaine studiously avoids a confrontation that would require seeing her own madness in Cordelia. Moreover, Atwood represents a continued state of alienation in the final scene

with Elaine mourning Cordelia's absence and the loss of a relationship. Iris is left even more starkly alone in *The Blind Assassin,* the novel concluding in her death. By contrast, as will be discussed in chapter three, *The Robber Bride* offers the most fruitful site of examining a confrontation with the shadow figure, most clearly representing the positive potential for recognition of the self and reintegration -- of conscious-unconscious, mind-body, and self-other -- available through this difficult process.

Chapter One

Madness as a Social Phenomenon: *The Edible Woman* and *Bodily Harm*

"Ways of going crazy are culturally determined."

-- Margaret Atwoood (Hammond, "Articulating" 114)

While claims of cultural diversity and cautions against cultural appropriation may seem commonplace in contemporary Western society -- and particularly in Western literary criticism which has been characterized recently by theoretical approaches such as postcolonialism and feminism -- Margaret Atwood reminds this society that its wariness of universalizing tendencies also applies to madness. Atwood's assertion -- that "[w]ays of going crazy are culturally determined" -- is based on the assumptions that the presence of the mad figure is a given in any society and that madness is a fluctuating category. In this view, each society determines what persons, what actions, and what given circumstances are accepted as "normal" and which deemed to be "crazy." Such awareness also characterizes some of the most comprehensive and lauded philosophical and psychological investigations of madness, including Michel Foucault's *Madness and Civilization* which brings "folly ... back to life as a complex social phenomenon, part and parcel of the human condition" (Barchilon v). Similarly, Atwood's fiction invariably presents mad figures within its societies and reveals characters within those societies undergoing processes of determining where sanity ends and madness begins. In this context, her protagonists undergo an individual process of determining where their own borders of sanity lie and, often, how these borders clash with the surrounding social determinations. Moreover, the reader of Atwood's novels is doubly implicated. On the one hand, s/he identifies with the protagonist and so attempts to determine boundaries of

sanity independent of, and often in contrast to, social assumptions; on the other, s/he is implicated as a part of that very society that creates and holds those assumptions. Society is not "other," segregated from the reader, and so the reader cannot dismiss its constructions; society, however, often treats madness dismissively, as the Other, a stable category entirely removed from the rest of society. Foucault notes that historically "[m]adness became pure spectacle" (69); madness is literally placed on view, and is viewed not only as Other but even as entirely non-human (Foucault 74). Atwood's ten novels all oppose such facile and deceptive segregation of normality and madness through their presentation of society. Madness is not Other to society, nor is society Other to the reader; it is rather their interstices that are of interest in Atwood's fiction.

Specifically, Atwood's recognition of the significance of social context in constructing and defining madness is reflected in her use of marginal and marginally insane characters in *The Edible Woman* and *Bodily Harm*. In these novels, madness is not presented as an extreme, readily-identifiable condition restricted to a single figure but as an inextricable part of the social fabric that exists in a multiplicity of forms. It is noteworthy that Atwood's representation of madness varies in degrees, for this awareness emphasizes the fact that insanity and normality differ in degree but are not opposites, as is commonly supposed. As Jung notes, "neurotic phenomena are not by any means the exclusive products of disease. They are as a matter of fact *normal occurrences pathologically exaggerated*, and therefore just more obvious than their normal parallels. One can indeed observe all hysterical symptoms in a diminutive form in normal individuals, but they are so slight that they usually pass unnoticed" (*Symbols* 78). Consequently, the dividing line between sanity and madness is a tenuous one that must be continuously re-negotiated, and social context must be considered in the evaluation of human behaviour.[1] This latter observation was also the impetus of R. D. Laing's work:

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[1] Interestingly, a recent *PMLA* article on film studies opens with a revealing scenario of "madness" and "normality." Thomas Elsaesser writes, "[f]or several years now walking back from the office to my house in the evening, I have been pained as well as reassured by the sight of the resident homeless man on

the intelligibility of seemingly mad behaviour may well be illuminated by social, especially familial, context. Social criticism is inherent in Laing's work wherein social context retains its significance but not its assumptions since the assessments of both the experts and the populace are called into question. One of Laing's criticisms is the fact that interpersonal relations are largely based on the false assumption that one can experience another person's experience; in actuality, he argues, interrelations are necessarily based on filling the gap between experiences.[2] In other words, human interaction involves continuous interpretation of behaviour. Wolfgang Iser concurs with Laing on this point, observing that "[human] interaction comes about only because we are unable to experience how we experience one another, which in turn proves to be a propellant to interaction. Out of this fact arises the basic need for interpretation, which regulates the whole process of interaction" ("Interaction" 107-8). More importantly for present purposes, Iser extends this model to include the interaction of text and reader. "Similarly," he observes, "it is the gaps, the fundamental asymmetry between text and reader, that give rise to communication in the reading process" ("Interaction" 109). Atwood's novels not only correspond with Iser's model of reading, but overtly foster this interaction and interpretation through their structure. As Karen Stein notes, "[h]er writings question, challenge, and disrupt" literary, social, and philosophical assumptions;

Rembrandt Square. I am relieved when he is talking to himself and worry when he gesticulates or shouts, as he sometimes does. A few weeks ago, I noticed a man in pin-striped suit crossing the square, also talking to himself and as apparently lost to the world around him as was the homeless man he walked straight past. What looked like a scene from a Beckett play was proof that the mobile phone will soon be all but invisible. But it took me a few minutes to realize that my placid or angrily fizzing malcontent on the square was also no longer who he used to be, a human being fallen out of all social networks, turning a public square into his living room as well as his bedroom. The other man's phone had made the vagrant's behavior normal. More than that, it may have put him in the vanguard of a subtle but momentous cultural exchange. That evening, as I felt embarrassed by the comical and even heartless comparison I had made between the two men, it also set me thinking about a problem in my discipline -- film studies -- that had not been able to get a theoretical grip on" (120). Although Elsaesser uses this observation as a point of departure for a discussion of technology, society, and media, his recognition of the culturally- posited distinction between the businessman and the vagrant is telling. Perhaps more revealing is the collapse of these two figures when the vagrant's behaviour is momentarily "normalized."

[2] See in particular *Interpersonal Perception* and *The Politics of Experience* for Laing's development of this line of argument.

"[a]s Atwood continually reminds us, stories are always ambiguous and subject to interpretation" (Stein 4). The reader, then, becomes the agent of interpretation and so her/his relation to both the protagonist and the fictionalized society become increasingly important as the interaction between text and reader occurs.

In particular, Atwood's novels not only offer an effective site of analysis for the interaction of text and reader, but they challenge the perception of norms as universal and stable. The main method of doing so is by integrating the margins and the marginalized in character, society, and reader. Frank Davey notes that Atwood's work implies an ideal reader characterized by "a feeling of inarticulateness, of being marginalized ... from authorized discourse," and that any internal conflict of beliefs in the reader is negated by "affirmation of someone or something silenced, something capable of complex non-verbal communication but lacking an authorized language and unable to utter 'official' speech" (*Reading* 69-70). That is, the reader identifies with both the margins and the marginalized. It is notable how closely Davey's assessment of the marginalized figure approximates descriptions of madness; both are characterized by a relegation to silence.[3] It is this silence that Atwood's texts seek to articulate through a representation of the margins and the gaps, those gaps which Laing and Iser contend foster interaction and interpretation between text and reader. In Stein's words, Atwood engages readers with a provocative question: "[w]hat would happen if we heard the stories of marginalized, usually silent people?" (1). One of these people is the mad figure; hence, her novels integrate the experience of the mad figure to foster reader interpretation, though often these figures do remain in the margins of the narrative.

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[3] Specific descriptions of madness as silence include: "It [madness] is judged only by its act; it is not accused of intentions, nor are its secrets to be fathomed. Madness is responsible only for that part of itself which is visible. All the rest is reduced to silence. Madness no longer exists except as *seen*" (Foucault 250); "Perhaps the reason why the madwoman continues to be such an enticing figure is that she offers the illusion of power. although she in fact provides a symbolic resolution whose only outcome must be greater powerlessness. ... [T]he symbolic resolution of the madwoman as an alternative to patriarchy ultimately traps the woman in silence" (Caminero-Santangelo 3-4).

For this reason, the margins and the marginalized are equally important in Atwood's portrayal of madness: a point often overlooked in early and recent criticism alike. In the first monograph study of Atwood's work, *Violent Duality* (1980), Sherrill Grace emphasizes the significance of social context: "the self ... [is] co-extensive with its environment"; she also notes Atwood's focus on the constructed nature of that context: "she [Atwood] is quick to point out that the world we perceive is, in some measure, a world we create" (2). Recent critics continue to note the significance of contextualization, as Hilde Staëls' 1995 study of Atwood's novels demonstrates; Staëls' focus is on "the formation of the protagonist in a network of social meaning systems associated with the family and social institutions" (*Margaret* 9). Nevertheless, Staëls is typical of the criticism in her focus on the protagonist, a focus which offers fruitful insight but largely overlooks the margins and the minor characters therein.[4] It is my contention that these minor characters are essential to Atwood's presentation of the constructed nature of society and are particularly revealing as aspects of her representation of madness. In her book on the process of writing, *Negotiating with the Dead* (2002), Atwood herself makes the connection between interpretation and judgment, asserting that overt authorial statements are superfluous, for "the reader will judge the characters, because the reader will interpret" (110-11). Thus the reader is the site not only of interaction with the text, but also of interpretation and, through interpretation, of judgment. As *The Edible Woman* and *Bodily Harm* demonstrate, this judgment takes on particular poignancy when the characters are either marginalized or marginally insane. Madness, then, is recognized as socially determined and the reader's complicity in that social determination is highlighted as s/he becomes the site of judgment.

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[4] Coomi S. Vevaina's study *Re/Membering Selves: Alienation and Survival in the Novels of Margaret Atwood and Margaret Laurence* (1996) is a notable exception. She explains that "when dealing with the female protagonists of Atwood and Laurence and the numerous minor characters in their novels (hitherto neglected by critics), I have discussed both the inner labyrinths of the characters and their social milieu for 'unconsciousness-raising' is as vital to spiritual survival as is consciousness-raising" (x-xi). Vevaina offers a post-Jungian, feminist reading that focuses on archetypes and, particularly, the spiritual alienation of modern (Western) life.

In typical Atwoodian fashion, *The Edible Woman* (1969) is a mass of contradictions -- simultaneously a brusque social criticism, a comical romp, and a serious commentary. A serious study of madness is certainly possible but, by the same token, it would be seriously misleading to present the novel as didactic since the tone is unmistakably comedic. Atwood achieves this apparent contradiction by filtering the subject through a wry authorial gaze at the psychological and psychoanalytical context of Western culture; that is, in postmodern terms, her parodic representation both uses and abuses the (psychological) conventions to create humour and to draw attention to the assumptions and the constructed nature of society (Hutcheon, *Canadian* 8). *The Edible Woman* employs two primary means of representing psychology as part of society: the parody of various characters' popular use of psychology and psychoanalysis, and the inclusion of abnormal psychological behaviour in various background figures. That Atwood parodies psychology by no means negates the novel from a study of mental instability in social context; rather, it aligns her work with the serious criticisms of psychology, as discussed in the introductory chapter, and so suggests the validity of her subtle, comical, but nevertheless astute observations of human behaviour. In fact, parody is particularly suited to a representation of mental instability in a modern psychological society, for "[p]arody," as Linda Hutcheon observes, "can also be a weapon against marginalization: it literally works to incorporate that upon which it ironically comments. It can be simultaneously both inside and outside the dominant discourses whose critique it embodies" (*Canadian* 121-22). In this view, parody may offer a means of articulating the voice of madness that would otherwise remain silenced.[5]

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[5] Feminist critics, such as Shoshana Felman, identify with grave concern the dichotomous representations of woman/madness/silence and man/reason/speech (7), arguing that this silence or lack of agency demonstrates that women must radically re-create language in order to move outside of patriarchal systems of discourse and meaning (10). While such goals -- admirable as they may be -- remain unfulfilled and current (male) discourse prevails, parody may offer an imperfect but plausible avenue of approach. That is, in Hutcheon's terms, "because of its ironic double-voicing, parody allows women novelists an alternative to silent rejection of male 'universals': they can address their culture directly, without risking co-option by its values" (*Canadian* 121).

Since Atwood creates the characters of Marian McAlpin and Duncan as the most overt means of investigating behavioural norms and the boundaries of sanity presented in *The Edible Woman*, critical attention has been largely focused on Marian's involvement with Duncan as a revelation of her psychic imbalance. Nonetheless, critics differ in their particular assessments of Duncan, describing him varyingly as Marian's double (Grace, *Violent* 92-93, Staëls, *Margaret* 25-30), alter ego (Rigney, *Margaret* 30), animus (Stein 49), personal unconscious (Vevaina, *Re/Membering* 105-10), or hidden aspect (Bouson 24). In addition to these assessments of Marian's psychic condition as revealed through Duncan, Marian's strictly internal struggle is also well-documented. Catherine McLay argues that "[i]ncreasingly in Part II of the novel, Marian moves away from the 'normal,' the practical sensible young woman, and towards the world of madness. The change from 'I' as teller to 'she' as character marks her altered perception of herself and others. Her vision is distorted" ("Dark" 131-32). Similarly, Grace comments on "Marian's increasing paranoia" (*Violent* 91). John Lauber convincingly argues that the novel portrays a state of "alarming dissociation both of Marian from her society and, internally, of her mind from her body, her intellect from her emotions, her conscious from her unconscious" (25). A particularly thorough study both of "Marian's psychological disturbance" (464) and of Duncan as Marian's double or shadow is offered by Susan E. Lorsch. Although Marian's psychological aspects, particularly as revealed through Duncan, have received well-deserved critical attention, other aspects are necessarily overshadowed by this focus.

It is equally significant that Atwood couches this character and relationship in an environment teeming with "pop psychology." This society with its psychology, pathology, and "experts" everywhere is the focus of Atwood's critical eye. However, the severity of her criticism is tempered by comedy. Atwood herself maintains that most of her writing is not satire but parody or caricature, "distortion rather than scathing attack," and that "a lot of things that may seem to be satiric are quotations from real life." She further describes the social situations, such as the market research in *The Edible Woman*,

as "realism verging on caricature," and concedes that the characters are not only exaggerated but are specifically chosen as "outgrowths of their society" (Sandler 54). Herein she makes two significant points: the mocking tone is purposeful and, more so, the characters are indeed representative of society. Hence accurate analysis of the context requires attention to both the truths and criticisms hidden in the humour as well as to the behaviours and assumptions of both minor and major characters.

Atwood's comical presentation of psychology and popular-culture analyses leaves no character exempt. Marian McAlpin and Ainsley Tewce have a landlady who is prudish, paranoid about her tenants starting fire, and a scrupulous snoop with an overprotected, "hulking" daughter of about fifteen, known only as "the child." Marian reflects, "I'm sure she [the child] is really quite normal, but there's something cretinous about the hair-ribbon perched up on top of her gigantic body" (*EW* 12). Ainsley is convinced the landlady is not content with whisking out from behind her velvet curtain in the hall to corner them about smoke from cooking or rings in the bathtub but, on the contrary, is biding her time for a serious breach of norms: "'[w]hat she wants,'" Ainsley announces, "'is an orgy.'" Interestingly, Marian dismisses this psychological assessment with one of her own, "'[n]ow Ainsley, ... you're being paranoid'" (13). That one tends to agree with Marian's dismissal not only subtly implicates the reader but draws attention to the commonality of such pop-psychology as evidenced in the casual use of terminology and the ease of "assessment." In addition to such indirect references, psychology is directly mentioned as the common ground between Ainsley and Clara Bates, an old friend of Marian's. In fact, on a visit to Clara and Joe's, Marian brings Ainsley along as a distraction, musing that "[s]he and Clara could talk about child psychology" (29), thereby relieving some of the social pressure on Marian to entertain her pregnant friend. Apparently, there is much that could be discussed, for during this visit it becomes evident that Arthur, Clara and Joe's son, "loves peeing behind doors" (38) and buries his excrement in the garden; his mother ruefully proclaims, "[h]e thinks he's a fertility-god"

(35). Clara's comment ironically posits her toddler's behaviour as a manifestation of psychological imbalance, suggesting that Arthur exhibits megalomaniac tendencies.

Even Peter Wollander, Marian's fiancé, who is "ordinariness raised to perfection" (65), is presented with psychological quirks. Peter is the stereotypically macho male, a social-climbing lawyer in the making, who is domineering in temperament and interests. In Hutcheon's words, "Peter-the-hunter is, not surprisingly, Peter-the-photographer: in English ... we shoot with both guns and cameras" (*Canadian* 142). His hobbies, then, are a means of static capture,[6] and he mourns the loss of his last bachelor friend, displaying a comically exaggerated male chauvinism and fear of marriage (68-69). Although Francis Mansbridge argues that the role of Atwood's minor characters is inconsequential and that "[w]e rarely get to know the secondary characters beyond a few general characteristics" (107-108), it is significant to note that, within this limited scope, Atwood chooses to include their psychological eccentricities. Such a psychologically focused presentation of characters extends to Marian's co-workers whom Ainsley dubs the three "office virgins." Lucy is the "elegantly coiffured" blonde, outwardly polished but inwardly paranoid, exhibiting "a conviction that all bedrooms are wired for sound, with society gathered at the other end tuning its earphones" (21). Millie, a practical, no-nonsense Australian, seems the most psychologically stable but is socially awkward; Emmy, on the other hand, is both outwardly and inwardly unstable, known for her psychosomatic disorders as "the office hypochondriac" (21) and as one who "always looks as though she is coming unravelled," shedding dandruff, hair, scales of dry lipstick, and loose threads in her wake (22). These psychological quirks reveal the basis of social perceptions and standards, for each of the characters is assessed, often directly within the novel by other characters and, invariably, by the reader.

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[6] See Hutcheon for discussion of camera use as aggression and possession, with particular reference to Atwood and her representation of Peter in *The Edible Woman* (*Canadian* 48).

This psychological basis is revealed in both the minor and more fully developed characters, including Ainsley, Len, Fish, Trevor, and Clara. Ainsley is the most fully drawn of these representations. Observing only the specific psychological references, the reader is made aware early in the novel that Ainsley was a psychology major in college and continues to play the role of the analyst, particularly in situations where she can assume the role of "expert." As Marian and her co-workers engage in a coffee-break conversation of possible marketing strategies used by Seymour Surveys, Ainsley, the only one not employed by the company, is not interested in Millie's amateur speculations that "anybody you could take past page three [of the thirty-two page questionnaire] would be a sort of laxative addict" (22). Instead, Ainsley wants to know why the survey is targetted only at Québec. Millie's practical reply that perhaps the remedy is required more due to the effects of regional diet is brushed aside in favour of a psychological basis as the more legitimate reason in Ainsley's view: "'[i]t must be their collective guilt-complex. Or maybe the strain of the language-problem; they must be horribly repressed'" (23). Clearly, in Ainsley's view, there must be a "deeper meaning" to what could well be a "random sample."

Ainsley's psychological pronouncements are not limited to displays of her cultivated mind for the benefit of Marian's co-workers but are a standard verbal strategy. She engages in melodramatic arguments, invariably taking a position based on psychological theory. The reactions to her arguments are not far removed from the silent hostility created by the coffee-break laxative conversation, although often they are more verbal. Peter and Ainsley have a passing antagonistic familiarity; Marian describes their initial meeting as a clash of political opinions -- Peter, conservative and Ainsley, in his view, "wishy-washy radical" -- which degenerated into an argument wherein Ainsley predictably reverts to "a theoretical speech about liberating the Id" (72). Interestingly, Atwood's selection of psychological vocabulary -- such as, repression and the Id -- clearly identifies Ainsley as Freudian in her interests, thus signalling the pervasive connection of

her psychological interests with sexuality. It is also telling that although Ainsley is the psychology major, Marian is rather adept at anticipating the likely behavioural and psychological tactics; her familiarity with Ainsley allows Marian, on occasion, to invert the psychological argument in her favour. Perhaps most strikingly, when Ainsley begins criticizing Marian's behaviour with Peter and her subsequent engagement as an ignorant decision, Marian neatly silences her by saying, "'[s]ubconsciously, ... I probably wanted to marry Peter all along.'" As Marian smugly observes, this tactic works, quite literally, like a charm: "[t]hat silenced her. It was like invoking a deity" (91). It is now Marian, not Ainsley, who invokes psychological theory in her favour; moreover, through her self-analysis, Marian ironically plays the simultaneous roles of analyst and analysand, yet tellingly remains cavalier in her use of the terminology and concepts.

In a similar ironic inversion, Ainsley's encounter with Leonard Slank can be viewed as the most drastic and perhaps most comical of the psychologically-motivated actions in *The Edible Woman.* Atwood inverts the typical seduction plot, enabling Ainsley to seduce the seducer by feigning youth and innocence, thereby manipulating Len into impregnating her. Notably, Ainsley's machinations are abruptly brought to a halt -- not by moral or by ethical reservations, but by the sudden mortifying revelation that her child will suffer irreversible psychological damage from the lack of a father figure. While Ainsley is fully prepared to fly in the face of convention by purposely becoming a single mother, she refuses to question the "authoritative" decree of a psychologist. Gilbert and Gubar identify Ainsley's need to maintain the image of a vacant mind,which she has adopted in order to dupe Len, as Atwood's focus on "the psychic cost of the 'pretty baby' pose" (*No Man's* 344); this pose, however, does not only require a psychic cost from Ainsley, but it also threatens to exact a psychological cost from her child. The revelation of this threat comes via Ainsley's pre-natal clinic where a psychologist delivers a guest lecture on the Father Image as a healthy aspect of the home for child development. He pronounces that "'it makes them *normal*, especially if they're boys,'" convincing Ainsley

that if she has a son, as she tearfully and melodramatically confesses to Marian, "'he's absolutely *certain* to turn into a ho-ho-ho-homosexual!'" (200-1). Atwood draws attention to the influence of psychological thought patterns not only through the behavioural concept of modelling, but by noting that the psychologist used "'all kinds of statistics and everything. They've proved it [the homosexual result] scientifically'" (201). It is this statistical and scientific "proof" that convinces Ainsley; however, Atwood subtly questions the influence of such statistics through Marian's remark that Ainsley was already aware of the importance of role models, including the father figure, for a child's psychological and behavioural development. In addition to the reader's general suspicion of the mutability of statistical "evidence," C. G. Jung draws attention to the misleading concept of "the average" -- a nonexistent ideal (*Undiscovered* 4-5). Jung specifically cautions that "[w]e ought not to underestimate the psychological effect of the statistical world picture: it thrusts aside the individual in favour of anonymous units that pile up into mass formations" (*Undiscovered* 8). Perhaps more obviously, the extreme nature of this psychologist's causal claim is highly questionable. Arguably, such a representation may be seen as Atwood's ironic comment on other "causal" arguments in the psychological field, including the radical anti-family claims of some anti-psychiatrists.

Ironically, earlier in the narrative, Ainsley sharply criticizes the Bateses on this same basis of parental and gender roles. She disparages their situation, scoffing to Marian, "'[y]ou can't say the sort of household Clara and Joe are running is an ideal situation for a child. Think of how confused their mother-image and their father-image will be; they're riddled with complexes already. And it's mostly because of the father'" (41). Notably, Ainsley's concern is not with the father's distance or absence, but with his over-involvement. Psychologist Mary V. Seeman notes that in the span of ten years, these disparate views dominated the field of psychology in research, diagnoses, and practice (199). At this point in the narrative, Ainsley is convinced that most children "have too many parents" and that Joe's domesticity allows Clara to wallow in an unacceptably

passive state (41). Through her line of reasoning Ainsley assigns the passive role to the father and, more importantly, the fulfilment of that father-image to Clara. By the time Ainsley herself is pregnant, however, the positive influence of a father-image can only be fulfilled by a man. That being the case, Ainsley sets about to remedy the situation by procuring a man for the role.

Atwood makes clear that Ainsley's psychological mindset remains intact throughout the narrative. Her logic disturbs Marian, who finds the methodical plotting to be unsettling -- even before Ainsley sets her sights on Marian's old friend, Len. From the outset of her initial scheme to capture Len, Ainsley carefully plots her actions on the basis of his likely reactions. As she breezily explains to Marian, "'I've got it all worked out. ... [Y]ou see it all depends on his [Len's] psychology. I can tell he's the sort that'll get scared off if I act too eager. I've got to give him lots of rope'" (93). Ainsley's gauge is accurate and she achieves her objective, successfully impregnating herself on the first attempt. Interestingly, once Ainsley's goal changes from sperm donor to father figure, her ability to read Len's psychology fails. She miscalculates his reaction, being unable to anticipate either the intensity of his aversion or his "hysterical" behaviour. In Atwood's comically inverted confrontation scene, Len sputters his disbelief to a cool and collected Ainsley: "'*you* seduced *me*!'" Ironically, he uses a psychological argument to dismiss Ainsley's attempts to calm him with reassurances that she is not threatening him with a paternity suit: "'[p]eace of mind. Hah. Oh no, you've involved me. You've involved me psychologically. I'll have to think of myself as father now.... Now I'm going to be all mentally tangled up in Birth. Fecundity. Gestation. Don't you realize what that will do to me?'" Matching Len's intensity and tactic, Ainsley refutes with accusations of "uterus envy." As the argument escalates, it is Marian, the supposedly objective bystander, who decides that Len is "becoming hysterical" (176). He dredges up an incident from his childhood, claiming that his mother forced him to eat an egg with a chicken fetus in it. Despite the lack of visible evidence, Len is convinced that it was not an ordinary egg:

"'And I know, I know there was a little beak and little claws and everything....'" In keeping with her character, Ainsley completely accepts this psychological explanation for Len's irrational behaviour and instantly transforms from being defensive to being maternally soothing: "'There, there. It's not going to be a little chicken anyway, it's going to be a lovely nice baby. Nice baby'" (177). Ainsley's infantile treatment of Len foreshadows his psychic regression, precipitated by this incident.

In contrast to Ainsley, Marian is repulsed by their behaviour and particularly by Len's total inability to deal with the birth issue. As Hilde Staëls notes, Marian "cannot but feel contempt for those people who lose the proper balance" and allow "unknown inner forces" to intrude on the stability of one's identity (*Margaret* 35). Despite this disparagement, walking off and shutting her bedroom door only manages to distance Marian from the incident on the overt physical level; it still holds physical and psychological implications for her. Marian has gradually been rejecting food as her imagination has identified with the consumed. This psychological association has direct physical consequences. Thus, when she tries to eat her customary soft-boiled egg the next morning, Marian's body rebels, regarding the yolk as a "significant and accusing yellow eye" and refusing to eat it: "It's living; it's alive, the muscles in her throat said, and tightened. She pushed the dish away. Her conscious mind was used to the procedure [of food rejection] by now" (178).[7] In this particular instance of food rejection, Marian's

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[7] Marian's gradual inability to eat and possible anorexia nervosa are the subject of much critical debate. This issue is of particular concern to many feminist critics and psychologists since anorexia is considered to be one of the eating disorders commonly associated both with women and -- significantly in regard to *The Edible Woman* -- with media representations through marketing. Psychologist Denise Russell, for example, notes that "[a]norexia nervosa has been recognized at least since the seventeenth century" (91), and she traces a concise history of eating disorders which are considered women's mental illnesses (85-95). Interestingly, Atwood's critics are divided on whether or not Marian's actions are considered to represent this "disorder." Christina Ljungberg addresses this critical debate, observing that "Marian's illness may be diagnosed as anorexia, as has been suggested by Hilde Staëls ([*Margaret*] 33) and J. Brooks Bouson (25). However, I agree w/ Coral Ann Howells, who points out that Marian does not exhibit any of the characteristic symptoms of anorexia. She suggests that, instead, Marian suffers 'from a condition of self-division' ([*Margaret*] 46-7)." Ljungberg goes on to discuss Marian's physical condition as an enactment of her psychological fragmentation, which she posits as Marian's actual "illness" (78-79). Notably, Marian does not exhibit any of the four primary symptoms of anorexia which Russell outlines from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (85-86). In broad terms, however, I concur with Howells and

physical reaction betrays her psychological imbalance through the parallel to Len -- whose own reaction Marian scorns. Despite the striking similarity of Marian's physical reaction to Len's egg incident, there is no indication that Marian recognizes the overlap so obvious to the reader. Thus Atwood cleverly provides another example of the psychological as part of everyday life, suggests the fine line that defines normality and the self, and gestures toward the role of the unconscious.

While Marian appears to be focused on her conscious existence only, Atwood continues to emphasize the role of the psychological in the novel. Interestingly, despite her unwillingness to acknowledge her own unconscious self, it is Marian who recognizes the explosive potential of a subsequent encounter between Ainsley and Len. When Len unexpectedly arrives at Peter's party with the Bateses, Marian is alarmed that his presence "might upset her [Ainsley] enough to make her do something unstable" (260). Despite Ainsley's assurances that there is no danger in his presence, that there is nothing he could say to upset her, and that there is no reason for her even to speak to him, these assurances evaporate in the confrontational scene Ainsley creates at the party by announcing that she and Len are having a baby. The situation rapidly degenerates, as Len replies by cursing and dousing her with his beer, leaving Fischer Smythe to mop up after him (266-67). Len is clearly both uncooperative and unfit to fulfil Ainsley's perceived role of a positive father image; in fact, after this incident, he ultimately regresses to childhood himself. Len abandons his work responsibilities, moves in with the Bateses, fears leaving the house and prefers to remain in Arthur's room. The difficulty, Clara observes later to Marian, is that "'he plays with all of Arthur's toys and sometimes they get into fights'" (310). Atwood seems to emphasize the extent of Len's psychological collapse; not only does he

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Ljungberg that Marian's physical reaction is a manifestation of her psychic imbalance -- though not an "illness." In fact, I suggest that the tendency of contemporary critics to label Marian as possessing an "illness" is an ironic comment on the casual use of such psychological designations in popular culture, thereby aligning such critics with the novel's society and making them a target of Atwood's wry gaze.

move into Clara and Joe's household but he is compared to Arthur, the parodic Saviour-complex child.

Interestingly, John Lauber posits *The Edible Woman* as a novel in which "true sanity is possible" via a Laingian process of withdrawal and dissociation (30); however, his argument is not a completely convincing one, in part because of its inconsistent tone regarding the condition of madness. On the one hand, Lauber is careful to distinguish the protagonist's behaviour that verges outside of accepted norms as "what is ordinarily considered madness" (30), thereby suggesting the tenuous nature of such categorical constructions. On the other hand, he casually refers to Len Slank's condition after the encounter with Ainsley as "his crackup" (Lauber 29). The tone of this latter comment undermines the concept of "healing withdrawal through dissociation" (30), for it is dismissive and trivializes the mental or nervous breakdown experienced by the character. This makes it difficult to imagine Len finding "a deeper understanding of the self and a truer sanity than the 'normal' possess," which Lauber argues that Marian achieves through her comparable experience (30). This incongruity of situation suggests one of the major points of divergence between Laingian and Jungian views, for Laing's notion of healing through "madness" is, by his own admission, restricted to a small segment of the population, a desperate reaction when no other option is possible in the current milieu. If Lauber's argument is allowed, this condition holds true for Marian but presumably not for Len, for Lauber sees Atwood's presentation of Len as "approach[ing] black humour" (29) -- a description which is hardly suggestive of a stage of healing. Conversely, Jung's notion of the psyche's self-regulatory balancing -- including intrusions to consciousness from the unconscious -- is the constant condition of every individual, thus including both Marian and Len. Within this state, only a select few ever seriously attempt to grapple with the unconscious in ways discouraged by social conditions by consciously attempting to reintegrate the self. Although Laing and Jung both address the divided state of the

individual, a Jungian reading encompasses the conditions of Marian and Len in a way that a strictly Laingian reading cannot.

Len's unexpected collapse notwithstanding, Ainsley is unwilling to be swayed in her endeavour to preserve the psychological health of her child. As Lorraine McMullen notes, "Ainsley retains her ability to cope, even to the extent of snatching a man at first meeting to provide the father figure she is convinced her child requires" (62). This meeting is Fish's rescue of Ainsley from her ignominious situation at the party. In contrast to Len, Fischer Smythe seems a comically ideal fit for the situation: a graduate student whose parodic speeches of psychoanalytical literary criticism, focusing on womb symbols and sexual-identity-crises (215), as well as his theoretical tendencies, make him a likely match for Ainsley, the psychology major and Freudian enthusiast. Coral Ann Howells notes that Fish is a "Jungian literary critic ... who is obsessed with archetypal womb symbols and who in turn becomes fascinated with the pregnant Ainsley as an Earth Mother figure" (*Margaret* 46). In Atwood's ironic representation, Ainsley fulfils a psychological role from Fish's perspective as fully as he does from hers. By contrast, Lauber claims that Fish's speech on *Alice in Wonderland* "reveals the speaker's own obsessions, and parodies the Freudian approach both to literature and to life" (19-20). The focus on sexuality does coincide more strongly with a Freudian view; while I would concur with Lauber that "Fish's language parodies itself" (21), this parody is distinctly unconscious on the character's part. Moreover, Howells' observation about the "Earth Mother" image is equally relevant and revealing. Thus, Fish is a comical, unlikely union of the Freudian and Jungian schools of thought. Similarly, this uneasy integration is mirrored in the union of Fish and Ainsley, the fervent Freudian. In a further symbolic manifestation, through their elopement and his "rescue" of Ainsley, the Earth Mother figure, Fish becomes an embodiment of his Saviour moniker (that is, Ichthus or Christ).

It is significant to note, however, that Atwood casts Fish into the role of father figure prior to this actualization with Ainsley. Although the trio of graduate students are

actually roommates, Fish and Trevor are portrayed as parent figures for Duncan. According to Ainsley's earlier stereotypical categories, Fish is clearly the father figure in this household, occupying (often literally) the passive armchair role. Conversely, Trevor fulfils the stereotypical female role in a comically exaggerated fashion; he is shown fussing with heirloom china and silverware, whipping up a gourmet meal in minutes, and verging on pyromania in his love of dishes *flambé* (214-22). Most tellingly, Trevor collapses into depression with "female" nervous symptoms in response to the elopement of Fish and Ainsley. Ironically, Duncan's description of the latter event to Marian seems to reinforce the premise of the father figure theory: "'Trevor was quite disturbed.... He's gone to bed with a nervous headache and refuses to get up even to cook. What it all means is that I'm going to have to move out. You've heard how destructive a broken home can be and I wouldn't want my personality to get warped'" (310). Clearly, the potential negative effects of Fish's absence, as father figure, or of Trevor's "female mental instability" and likely depression are both negligible, for Duncan's personality is already "abnormal" or outside the norm. As such, Atwood parodies Ainsley's blind faith in the psychological theory of the father image by echoing the sentiments through Duncan. Earlier in the narrative, Duncan similarly parodies Trevor's fascination with flames by idly setting the apartment on fire one day just to observe the resulting actions. This unprompted action leads to accusations from his roommates of being "'sick,'" being overwhelmed by "inner tensions" and needing to "go see a shrink." Duncan flatly refuses, citing previous experience with psychologists in a parodic inversion of Ainsley's avid response at the pre-natal clinic. Duncan announces that "'[t]hose types can't *convince* me anymore, I know too much about it, I've been through that already, I'm immune'" (107). The situation leaves Trevor a bundle of nerves and Fish playing the amateur analyst, looking up Duncan's symptoms and behaviour in "his leftover freshman Psych. textbook." Both parties are firmly convinced that the other is mad (107), adding to the novel's satiric comment on the proliferation of psycho-social labelling in society and of

behavioural anomalies. The reader is placed in a position where the behaviour of all three characters suggests some (minor) mental instabilities, but whether these attitudes and actions are "clinically" abnormal is undetermined. In fact, the "authorities" themselves are called into question by the proliferation of diagnoses by the characters themselves and, more specifically, by the divergent extremes of response to psychologists, represented in Ainsley and Duncan. Through the psychological quirks of minor characters, then, Atwood explores the significance of the marginalized and marginally insane, creating a structure wherein the reader must ultimately assess the boundaries of normality.

Significantly, in *The Edible Woman*, Atwood voices assessments of mental instability through Duncan or, more commonly, through Marian, thereby characteristically complicating the reader's act of interpretation. The reader cannot simply accept these assessments as an indication of the norm, for Duncan is decidedly unlike those around him -- that is, he is "abnormal" even in Marian's view -- and Marian is dubious of her adherence to normative limits. Although Marian seeks reassurance of her normality by directly questioning Ainsley, Peter, and Clara, all three are dismissive of her expressed concern; nevertheless, their responses -- the women's, in particular -- are revealing. In response to Marian's query, "'do you think I'm normal?'" Ainsley makes a suggestive distinction, reminding Marian that "'[n]ormal isn't the same as average.... Nobody is normal'" (226). Ironically, for Ainsley the Freudian, her comments are entirely in keeping with Jungian views; as Jung asserts, "[n]ot to put too fine a point on it, one could say that the real picture consists of nothing but exceptions to the rule.... There is and can be no self-knowledge based on theoretical assumptions, for the object of this knowledge is an individual -- a relative exception and an irregular phenomenon" (*Undiscovered* 5). Moreover, Jung emphasizes that statistics, such as averages, are misleading, for "[t]he individual ... as an irrational datum, is the true and authentic carrier of reality, the *concrete* man as opposed to the unreal ideal or 'normal' man to whom the

scientific statements refer" (*Undiscovered* 8). Through Ainsley, Atwood suggests the Jungian view that any assessment of the normal individual is necessarily hypothetical, for the actual individual is always the exception; thus, the average can be theoretical only. Interestingly, Jane Rule observes, "[w]hether one can be normal, and not automatically be a victim of normalcy, is a question variously posed and answered in all three novels, *The Edible Woman, Surfacing,* and *Lady Oracle*." Rule adds that being "normal, ... for Atwood's characters, is different from being *average*" (42). In apparent contrast to Ainsley's assertion that no one is normal, Clara maintains that Marian is thoroughly normal. However, the ambiguity of her diction hints at an underlying parallel: "'you're almost abnormally normal, if you know what I mean'" (228). Ironically, then, Clara's apparent assurance that Marian is "normal" becomes a confirmation of abnormality, for Marian is deemed to be too representative of that hypothetical condition of the "average." Thus Atwood's presentation suggests the fluidity of these constructed categories -- particularly of "normality."

The source of Marian's assessment is also ironic, for Clara is another former psychology major. Moreover, earlier in the narrative, Marian questions Clara's psychic stability, classifying her as a multipersonality, "a semi-person -- or sometimes, she [Marian] thought, several people, a cluster of hidden personalities that she didn't know at all" (126).[8] Interestingly, Marian's view of Clara closely echoes the psychological descriptions not only of multipersonality disorder -- which Stephanie Lovelady notes is "a still controversial condition believed to be brought on by trauma that causes the conscious self to fracture" (55) -- but, more menacingly, Marian's perception eerily resembles Jungian and Laingian views of schizophrenia. Anthony Storr explains that, from the earliest phase, Jung's work was based on the premise that

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[8] As further discussed in chapter four, Atwood returns to this diagnosis of multipersonality in *Alias Grace*, where the "experts" attempt to scientifically explain and to quantify the apparent co-existence of Mary Whitney within Grace Marks.

> [i]n schizophrenia, the personality appeared fragmented into many parts, rather than into two or three as in hysteria. Moreover, whereas the hysteric retained contact with reality by means of that part of the personality which was already being called the 'ego,' the schizophrenic lost contact with reality because the ego was overwhelmed by irruptions from the unconscious and became only one 'voice' amongst many. (14)

Similarly, Laing explains that "[t]he self in chronic schizophrenic states seems to fragment into several foci each with a certain I-sense, and each experiencing the other fragments as partially not-me" (*Divided* 170). The concept of a dissociated, multiple personality suggests the distance that would be experienced by such an individual and by others, such as Marian, who attempt to interact with her/him. As noted in my introduction, Marta Caminero-Santangelo observes that "the phenomenon of multiple personality does not magnify the potential for agency (through the coexistence of several 'wills') but actually undermines agency -- perhaps most drastically the agency of speech" (118). Marian's attribution of dissociation to Clara, then, can be viewed as an act of projection. Marian's own feeling of sudden distance from Clara and being at a loss for words indicates that Marian herself is experiencing a state of dissociation. The incident is suggestive, for in Karen Stein's view, Marian's uncertainty proves that "[i]nterpretation is an ongoing issue in Atwood's novels" (49). This observation is as true for the reader as it is for the characters: Atwood's reader is placed in a position where s/he must discern the extent to which characters' assessments both of themselves and of others must be questioned. This distinction is particularly problematic since Marian, who filters the reader's view, is of questionable reliability herself. As Atwood observes of *The Edible Woman* and *Surfacing*, "[i]n both of the books you have a choice of thinking the central character is crazy or thinking she is right. Or possibly thinking she is crazy and right. To a large extent the characters are creating the world which they inhabit, and I think we all do that to a certain extent, or we certainly do a lot of rearranging" (Gibson 14). Thus the reader is implicated in the act of interpretation not only in the novel but in "reality" on an individual and social level.

That said, *The Edible Woman* enables Atwood to suggest, somewhat ironically, the casual attitude with which society largely regards interpretation in the specific form of psychological theories and psychoanalysis. Not only are Fish and Ainsley obvious pop-psychologists, but Marian's interaction with the Bateses also has psychological undertones. When Clara is hospitalized after giving birth, she and Marian discuss related female psychological issues. Clara expresses her relief that post-puerperal depression is not part of her experience (142); notably, her sudden loquacity surprises Marian, who disregards Clara's claim of mental stability and still attributes this change to the birth process.[9] Marian considers the change in Clara and muses that "[i]t might be some kind of reaction, but it certainly wasn't hysteria: she [Clara] seemed thoroughly in control. Something to do with hormones maybe" (144). Denise Russell's critique of contemporary psychology offers compatible observations to Atwood's representation of this encounter. Both the characters' discussion of depression and Marian's potential explanations for Clara's behaviour --the suspicion of hysteria and hormonal imbalance -- are tellingly realistic. Russell asserts that "[d]epression is the most common psychiatric diagnosis in the twentieth-century Western world, and up until recently it has been thought to be primarily a female problem. It has the sort of 'catch-all' nature that 'hysteria' had in the nineteenth century" (51).[10] The terminology employed by Atwood's characters --

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[9] Atwood's short story "Giving Birth" offers interesting points of connection. The first-person narrator/author takes particular pains to distinguish herself from the pregnant woman: "(By this time you may be thinking that I've invented Jeannie in order to distance myself from these experiences. Nothing could be further from the truth. I am, in fact, trying to bring myself closer to something that time has already made distant. As for Jeannie, my intention is simple: I am bringing her back to life)" (229). The speaker identifies "the dreaming" (228) as the most significant difference between herself and Jeannie; by this, she refers to Jeannie's projection of an older, pregnant immigrant whose image haunts Jeannie -- even to the point of accompanying her to the hospital (232-33). Ironically, Atwood includes the comment that "Jeannie knows better than to say anything to him [her husband]. She is aware that the woman is not really there: Jeannie is not crazy" (233).

[10] Russell further maintains that this categorization of women is not being eradicated but continues to change form; just as hysteria as the "catch-all" diagnosis became depression, now depression is giving way to the diagnosis of premenstrual syndrome (51). For an interesting assessment of how PMS is an increasingly common diagnosis "despite the conceptual unclarity and lack of reputable research" (105), see chapter three of Russell's text (51-71). See also pages 101-105 for a disturbing view of how the diagnosis of PMS is being used as a legal psychological defense for criminal behaviour.

depression, hysteria, hormones -- emphasizes how much a part of the social fabric psychological assessment is, particularly in relation to women.

As a final complicating factor demonstrating the degree of cross-assessments, Atwood also has Joe Bates offer Marian an analysis of his wife's psychological state. Joe describes how Clara's problem is that her core -- "'[t]he centre of her personality, the thing she's built up, her image of herself'" -- got invaded when they were married, is being destroyed, and will leave her with no sense of self. Ever the philosophy professor, however, Joe treats this inevitable psychological destruction with suitable philosophical nonchalance, assuring Marian that awareness of such a threat makes no difference: "'[i]t happens, whether you realize it or not'" (261). J. Brooks Bouson argues that Atwood uses Joe's explanation to give Marian's experiences "thematic significance" and so "assuage potential reader anxiety about being enmeshed in the increasingly pathological world of the text" (21). I would contend that Joe's speech achieves precisely the opposite effect. Rather than assuaging the reader's anxiety, Joe's explanation heightens the level of anxiety by implicating the reader in the assumptions, constructions, and judgments of the "increasingly pathological" society. That is, Atwood does not encourage the reader to be comfortable or complacent but forces her/him into activity, for Joe becomes another "educated" source of psychological diagnosis whose accuracy and opinions the reader must gauge.

The apparent ease with which all of these characters diagnose psychological instabilities suggests that pathologies are everywhere and are evident to everyone. According to Phyllis Chesler, this situation would only be exacerbated by the experts, for "both their medical training and their legal responsibility predispose most psychiatrists to diagnose 'pathology' everywhere -- even, or especially, where non-experts are blind to it" (62). It is telling that within Atwood's novels the expert is generally absent, whereas the non-expert's recognition of and representation of the psychologically unstable figure are

consistently present.[11] The characters do not need the expert to see abnormalities, for the characters themselves, together with the reader, comprise the society that determines these norms. Although Atwood exaggerates her figures and their assessments to provide a caricature of the mutual recognition and diagnosis of psychological issues in Western society, her representation is not limited to a comical one. *The Edible Woman* also demonstrates Atwood's subtle integration of abnormal psychology into the social structure of her fiction. As Lee Briscoe Thompson asserts, "almost all of Atwood's poetry and fiction ... [share this] view of life as a series of small, uncertain battles on the fringe of madness" (111). Not only does the serious inclusion of "abnormal" figures affirm the pervasive existence of states and behaviours that might be viewed as pathologies, but its main function is to cause the reader to question norms and assumptions first of the society in the novel and then of her/his own society. As Iser notes, the reader's position distances her/him enough to enable questioning of the surrounding reality: "the reader's surprise [at the fictional society's norms] indicates that he now begins to perceive the system he is caught up in -- a perception that had not been possible as long as his own conduct was guided by that system" (*Act* 95). Characters that challenge these normative limits are thus invaluable to hastening the act of reader interpretation, and these figures -- often marginalized characters -- are an important part of the social fabric. Barbara Hill Rigney also recognizes the value, indeed, the necessity of this interpretive act for readers of *The Edible Woman*, who "should not be deceived by what appears to be a simple plot.... Atwood invites our participation in her creations; the images and allusions are clues, and the reader is challenged to interpret the evidence, to divine the lies, to reassemble and to propose hypotheses for solutions" (*Margaret* 18-19). This challenge involves the reader's interpretation not only of the main characters but of the larger social context, including the margins and the marginalized.

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[11] The obvious exception to this claim is *Alias Grace*, where the expert is one of Atwood's foci. For more detailed discussion, see chapter four.

In fact, Atwood encourages the reader's interpretation of the margins by representing this part of society as comprised of both normative and "transgressive" figures. The marginalized characters that Atwood includes in *The Edible Woman* form a subtle psychological background and range from absurdly innocuous to increasingly threatening figures. The range of these figures challenges the reader's interpretive strategies, for s/he receives very limited information on which to base psychic assessments. Moreover, Atwood's use of the marketing firm Seymour Surveys draws attention to the act of interpretation and its manipulation by psychologically-based consumer strategies. As several critics note, Atwood's inclusion of this firm provides an overt criticism of capitalist consumer society (for example, see Moss, *Reader's* 2, Dooley 138-39, and Palumbo 73). Somewhat more drastically, Jennifer Hobgood has recently assessed capitalism in the novel, connecting it to schizophrenia. Interestingly, Hobgood encourages readers not to seek resolution in the novel, but to seek meaning in its silences. In particular, she argues that Marian's most telling critique of society occurs in "the space where silences abound, where Marian loses the ability to speak for herself in the first person, where her body speaks through anorexia -- in short, the space where she becomes not only most marginalized from dominant culture but also at the same time one of its most penetrating critics" (Hobgood 146). More pointedly, Hobgood refers to Marian's physical and psychological inability to eat as an "escapist space of alternate reality, of madness and schizophrenia" (147). Thus Hobgood typifies problematic, romanticized readings which posit madness as positive escapism. She argues that Marian's silent body is itself a powerful social critique, undergoing the "progressive" stages of: anorexia, paranoia, schizophrenia, and psychosis.[12] Hobgood concludes that these psychological

[12] Among the issues which Hobgood's reading does not address is the question of how Marian's body can communicate a powerful critique of capitalism when Peter, one of its representative figures, remains oblivious to her plight (or, in Hobgood's terms, her silent protest). Presumably, Marian's refusal to eat results in weight loss; however, if anything, her body seems to be more attractive to Peter -- particularly when attired in the red party dress. Even when Marian confronts him with the cake woman, there is no

stages of "breakdown" are "breakthroughs," "productive," and indications of future developmental possibilities (164). I would contend that such terminology problematically romanticizes "madness" by presenting it simply as a form of release from social restrictions.

In relation to capitalism, Hobgood contends that Marian gains an increasing awareness of her complicity in the "the sleazy underside of consumerism" through "a particularly seedy mechanism of capitalism -- market research" (150). Although Marian distances herself from the firm, her perceptions of the women in the office and of the company, in general, both affirm that this false perception of distance results from Marian's ignorance of her own unconscious. Despite her mind/body dissociation, Marian is continually aware of the psychological basis of the marketing firm and of the strategies behind the marketing campaigns. As suggested in the coffee-break conversation with Ainsley and the "office virgins," her awareness reveals the company's subtle psychological influence in society. More directly, the presence of the psychologists, "the upper crust" (18), at Seymour Surveys indicates the company's purposeful manipulation of consumer response for capital gain. Essentially, as a group of experts, the psychologists engage in an official version of the same psychological behaviours exhibited by Atwood's non-experts, Marian and Ainsley; they predict human response and turn it to advantage. This overlap emphasizes that psychology is a formalization of the acts of interpretation and perception. Not surprisingly, then, Marian recognizes this behaviour and specifically notes the fact that the theory of marketing works on a level outside of the rational: "you let the thing in you that was supposed to respond to the labels just respond, whatever it was" (191). Her lack of self-awareness notwithstanding, Marian's ironic positioning as a part of the "industry" validates her awareness of the unconscious appeal factor as a psychological tactic.

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indication that Peter is aware of her difficulty with consuming food. Conversely, his rejection is instantaneous and nearly silent (301).

Notably, Marian's awareness of marketing's appeal to the irrational side of the self causes her to adopt a defensive posture to guard against what she perceives as its negative influence. Ironically, this defensive stance results in erratic and "abnormal" behaviour. She blindly grabs at packages, heedless of brand, and ticks items off talismanic lists (191). Most tellingly, and comically, Marian talks herself into being conscious of the Muzak's hypnotic effect, imagining an extreme consequence: "[i]t was dangerous to stay in the supermarket too long. One of these days it would get her. She would be trapped past closing time, and they would find her in the morning propped against one of the shelves in an unbreakable coma, surrounded by all the pushcarts in the place heaped to overflowing with merchandise..." (193). Clearly, Marian fears the result of indulging the irrational; however, she is oblivious to the danger of suppressing the irrational which results in extreme behaviour, as figured in her over-compensation to the threat of advertising.[13] This fear-induced unwillingness to engage with the irrational is precisely what Jung identifies as the major difficulty with contemporary society; Jung notes that "[i]t is this fear of the unconscious psyche which not only impedes self-knowledge but is the gravest obstacle to a wider understanding and knowledge of psychology. Often the fear is so great that one dares not admit it even to oneself" (*Undiscovered* 28).[14] In Jung's view, such limitation causes serious dissociation of individuals and, consequently, of the society they comprise. Moreover, he suggests that the individual must first recognize and acknowledge the fear before self-knowledge can begin. This claim is also true for Atwood's characters; the reader is able to observe vicariously -- and perhaps even encourage -- the self-realization process in the characters. More significantly, the reader concurrently engages in this increasing self-awareness as

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[13] During the course of the narrative, I would argue that Marian does overcome her reluctance to engage with the irrational as her increased involvement with the enigmatic figure, Duncan, and her creation of the symbolic cake both attest. However, this is not to suggest that she becomes fully reintegrated by the narrative's conclusion.

[14] See also Jung, *Symbols* 73-4 and *Undiscovered* 47-8.

s/he begins to recognize the presence and influence of the unconscious through the characters' experiences.

Such a process is, however, gradual as Atwood suggests by her subtle inclusion of psychological elements and hints of the significant presence of the unconscious. Psychological references are embedded in the background of the novel, adding complexity to the representation of society under the guise of the comical. Mass media is shown to undergird the depiction of society as inclusive of aberrant psychologies. When Marian must vacate the apartment for Ainsley's seduction attempt, she chooses a Western film to absorb the evening, expressing relief that "it wasn't one of the new Westerns in which people had psychoses" (136-37). Unlike the mindless entertainment to which Marian escapes, Klaus Peter Müller observes that Atwood's work "emphasizes that reality is far too complex for simple answers, even though these are often provided by society" (233). Thus Atwood complicates society's simple answer, the escapism of the movie, through Marian's cryptic, irrational encounter with Duncan in the theatre. Having avoided psychoses on the screen, Marian struggles with her own psyche instead. Similarly, the reader is left to wonder about Marian's mental state and whether Duncan is a fantasy or a manifested projection of Marian's unconscious. Although critics are notably divided on both issues, I concur with Helmut Reichenbächer's view that through such strategic gaps "the reader is spurred into greater activity" (273). Although some critics argue that the lack of obvious causal factors is problematic in the novel (Davey, "Lady" 157, Grace, *Violent* 88-89), this absence is a primary means of reader-involvement. As Reichenbächer notes, "[r]eader and protagonist therefore work much harder in order to close the gap and to understand her [Marian's] situation" (273). Such active engagement aligns the reader more closely with Marian who is also engaged in the continuous act of interpretation both of self and of others.

More generally, Atwood's complex presentation of reality includes abnormal figures who are comical but vaguely disturbing. One such figure is introduced via office

lunchroom gossip when Lucy recounts, with fascinated horror, the tale about a girl who was living with Lucy's friends in England and refused to wash: "'[n]othing else was wrong with her, she just didn't wash, even her *hair* even, or change her clothes or anything, for the longest time, and they [Lucy's friends] didn't want to say anything because she seemed perfectly *normal* in every other way, but obviously underneath it she must have been really *sick*'" (183). Interestingly, Lucy and her friends perceive the pathological behaviour as an isolated characteristic which they prefer to avoid confronting and focus instead on the other "normal" aspects of the girl. Such dismissal is characteristic of how abnormal behaviour is viewed, as Denise Jodelet observes in a French community's reaction to its insane members: "the process of denying deviant behavioural characteristics is frequently employed when the identity, the respectability, the normal face of a group is put at risk by the actions of one of its members. This is particularly true of responses to mental illness" (55). Thus, the desire of Lucy's friends not "to say anything" is perhaps motivated externally and internally, consciously and unconsciously: as an attempt both to maintain their own "respectability" and to foster their own illusion of distance from mental instability or irrational behaviour.

While Lucy's anecdote provokes laughter in the reader, more seriously it reveals the social stigma attached to abnormal behaviour and the possibility of a deeper mental disturbance, as Lucy's final assessment of the girl being "really *sick*" indicates. Interestingly, however, Jodelet identifies not just a dismissal of the behaviours but a reactionary attempt to integrate them into the accepted norms through denial of abnormality; the society exhibits "a tendency to consider the symptoms of mental pathology as normal" (55). Practical Millie demonstrates this tendency. Her attempt to counter Lucy's condemnation involves explanations of a possible difference in social cleanliness standards (183) and of an immature reaction to homesickness. Millie even suggests a similarity between normal people and such aberrant behaviours -- "'[m]aybe it was just one of those things we sort of all go through'" -- but Lucy flatly dismisses these

possibilities, tenaciously clinging to her belief that "'I think she was *sick*'" (184). It is not surprising that refined Lucy would refute any connection between herself and such slovenly physical and psychological conduct. Her reaction affirms Jung's observation that most individuals erroneously view normality and abnormality as mutually exclusive conditions. Moreover, both Lucy's behaviour and the resolution of this incident demonstrate a tendency to dismiss the irrational and the abnormal without examining their implications. As Lucy explains, "'one day she came home and just took off those clothes and burnt them, and had a bath and everything, and she's been perfectly normal ever since. Just like that'" (183). Even though there had to be some causal disturbance, the dismissive final phrase, "'[j]ust like that,'" suggests that the characters -- Lucy, her English friends, and her co-workers -- all hail the return to normality as the conclusion of the event. Even Millie, whose earlier remarks suggest a possible recognition of the constructed nature of "abnormality," now wanes in her interest.

Marian seems to be the exception to this dismissive reaction, recognizing her susceptibility to this danger of abnormality infringing on her life and sternly reminding herself later, "'[y]ou have to watch it, ... you don't want to end up not taking baths'" (189). The reader is tempted to laud Marian for her perceptive and preventative mindset, perhaps even aligning Marian with Caminero-Santangelo's description of another character who "monitor[s] herself sharply" and whose "recognition of her driftings toward 'madness' will presumably enable her to distinguish herself sharply from the truly mad" (84). However, such a view implicates the reader through her/his assumption that "madness" is clearly recognizable and so, also avoidable. Marian's awareness is still limited; she recognizes abnormality in this specific example but fails to see that it already exists within her in an alternate form. Mansbridge notes the parallel between Lucy's story and Marian's own physical manifestation of abnormal behaviour: "[t]he girl who wouldn't wash has become a social outcast -- a fate from which Marian is saved because not eating is considerably more acceptable in our society than not washing" (108).

Millie's remarks and Marian's partial awareness both gesture towards the problematic, fine and somewhat indistinct line society has constructed between normal and abnormal behaviour.

Similarly, the Underwear Man is a marginalized and marginally insane figure who draws the reader's attention to the constructed nature of normality. He is the object of office titillation and speculation, a man who phones women under the guise of doing an underwear survey for Seymour Surveys. Mrs. Bogue, the office manager, expresses legitimate concern about the company image and wishes to dissociate from this aberrant behaviour. Nevertheless, she simultaneously minimizes the potential threat, saying, "'[o]f course he's probably some nice ordinary man, perfectly harmless'" (127); moreover, Mrs. Bogue adds that "'they [the female complainants] all say he sounds so *nice*. So normal and even intelligent" (128). Not surprisingly, Lucy is the unwavering voice of condemnation, calling him "'one of those dirty men who phone women and say filthy things to them'"; she replies to Marian's idle speculation about his motives that "'he's probably one of those sex-fiends.'" Atwood again complicates this neat juxtaposition of opinions through Marian. After listening to this exchange, Marian coolly observes to Lucy, "'[m]aybe it all proves that some sex-fiends are very nice normal people'" (128). Lucy's reply, if any, is significantly unrecorded. Susan E. Lorsch contends that the split personality which Marian ascribes to the Underwear Man enables her to identify with him, particularly in her subsequent speculation that society drove him to this act (471-72). In Lorsch's view, Marian's ability to perceive him as "a victim of society" is "what she is unable at first to see in herself" (472). Although Lorsch's argument focuses on Marian's need to break out of socially inscribed feminine roles, her observation is equally relevant for socially constructed models of normality. It is noteworthy that Marian's comical fantasizing about the Underwear Man's "otherwise normal mind [being] crazed into frenzy by the girdle advertisements on the buses" (129) neatly parallels her self-avowed preference to read advertisements rather than to converse on the bus (14). This latter

action is particularly ironic, considering both Marian's employment and her coexistent awareness of the insidious, subconscious influence of marketing strategies. Normality is defined by a thin margin indeed.

Atwood seems to emphasize the marginal difference between normal and abnormal behaviour through Marian's mental process. Immediately after imagining the Underwear Man's victimization as a likely motivation and justification for his behaviour, Marian wonders if "[m]aybe it was really Peter" calling up these women (129). While Bouson argues that "Marian's comic-paranoid fantasy of the Underwear Man focuses attention on the cultural commodification of women" through the unfulfilled expectations created by the girdle advertisements (19), it is significant to note that Atwood's inclusion of the "comic-paranoid fantasy" itself closely links Marian to the abnormal. In fact, it is arguable that Marian's behaviour of indulging in fantasy to the extent that it obscures her sense of reality and causes paranoia is more aberrant in society's view than what Bouson describes as the male characters' shared perception of women "as objects of exchange and consumption" and as sexual objects (19). This position finds support in Timothy Melley's cultural studies text, *Empire of Conspiracy: The Culture of Paranoia in Postwar America* (2000), which posits paranoia as a common but serious psychological response in contemporary America. Melley uses Atwood as one of seven central literary figures, highlighting Marian's responses in *The Edible Woman* to demonstrate paranoia as "'agency panic'" driven by "an 'uncertainty about ego boundaries'" and ultimately by fear (qtd. in Nel 481). Melley's attempts to defend and rationalize the psychological reaction of paranoia signal the social stigma attached to it as a condition of mental instability. Similarly, Jung underlines the severity of paranoia as a form of mental instability in his explanation that "[t]he simplest form of schizophrenia is paranoia" (*CW* 3:11; *Abstracts* 24). Atwood's critics employ strikingly similar terminology: Roberta Rubenstein has termed Marian's experience a "comic/serious schizophrenic odyssey" (*Boundaries* 81), and Jane Rule argues that Marian experiences a loss of agency, by losing "not only her

appetite but her voice" (43). Thus, Atwood's alignment of Peter with the Underwear Man through Marian's perception suggests the tendentious nature of psycho-social determinations of normal behaviour; similarly, Atwood's presentation of Marian herself reveals the difficulty of psychological self-assessment. However, the fact that both Marian and Peter are compared to the Underwear Man also underlines that it is degrees of behaviour which separate the normal from the abnormal, abnormality being common behaviour taken to the extreme. While the sexual titillation of the obscene telephone-caller seems harmless and even entertaining to the reader, the subtle connection to potential sex crimes as an extreme degree of this abnormal behaviour is disturbing -- even frightening.

This frightening aspect of abnormal psychology is predominant in the final example of Atwood's increasingly threatening background figures in *The Edible Woman.* The characters remain marginal, but the margin separating insanity from sanity is increasingly fine and difficult to distinguish. There is nothing comical or titillating about the child-shooting incident mentioned in the novel. Conversely, the subtle means of introducing the incident increases its shocking effect. The reader follows Marian's thoughts as they wander from Peter cutting steak to the advertising campaigns recently connected with Seymour Surveys; she ponders the use of images, the falsely tidy images of a hunter and a fisherman, the lack of reality, of blood, of "anything ... ugly or upsetting." In a moment of jolting revelation, Marian sees how starkly this simplistic socially-constructed image contrasts with the untidy reality of the world around her, portrayed in that morning's front page story of "[t]he young boy who had gone berserk with a rifle and killed nine people before he was cornered by the police. Shooting out of an upstairs window" (166). The behaviour is certainly frightening, extreme, crazy, but more disturbingly, it was unexpected because submerged in "normality." Marian considers the deceptive potential of appearances: "[h]e [the child shooter] wasn't the kind who would hit anyone with his fist or even use a knife. When he chose violence, it was a

removed violence, a manipulation of specialized instruments, the finger guiding but never touching, he himself watching the explosion from a distance; the explosion of flesh and blood." Significantly, Marian connects this cause-and-effect sequence to the psyche: "[i]t was a violence of the mind, almost like magic: you thought it and it happened" (166). Most revealing and perhaps convicting -- to both Marian and the reader -- is the fact that initially Marian "had skimmed over [the story] without paying much attention" (166). Her casual approach underlines the common and commonly-accepted presence of the abnormal and of violence in society. Moreover, Marian's attitude reflects the false sense of distance that obscures the individual's position as part of the society within which such events recur. Atwood's use of a child-shooting incident bears particular resonance for a contemporary North American society far too familiar with such occurrences. This overlap between fiction and reality, then, points to the role of the reader as interpreter and her/his complicity in the social constructions of normality.

The inclusion of abnormal psychology is one means of causing the reader to question the norms and assumptions presented in *The Edible Woman*. As Atwood herself notes, "my belief [is] that one of the things writing, especially the writing of prose fiction, actually *does* in society is to force a constant re-examination of the values we think we're living by" ("Justice" 8). Atwood here draws attention to the fact that perceived values do not necessarily match lived values and that the critical evaluation of one's values requires fresh perspective. By questioning the premises of one's values, the critical reader not only judges but creates reality; through this renewed awareness of social constructs, s/he will judge both the characters and her/himself. Sanity is one social construct which Atwood's novels explore, challenging the assumptions used to define it. In a speech given at the Stratford Festival in 1997, Atwood asserted that "altered mental states" are of continuing interest to artists and writers "simply because few aspects of our nature fascinate people so much" ("Ophelia"). Her comments bear a striking resemblance to Foucault's claim that "madness fascinates because it is knowledge" (21), but offer the explanation in a more

basic and direct form: madness fascinates through fear. Atwood further notes that the writer's own fascination with madness is shared with the reader: "[t]he so-called mad person will always represent a possible future for every member of the audience -- who knows when such a malady may strike? ... [T]he prospect of losing our self and being taken over by another, unfamiliar self is one of our deepest human fears" ("Ophelia"). Foucault and Jung concur that this is a fear of imminent madness or, more broadly, a fear of the unknown part of the self: the unconscious psyche. This fear is both individual and collective, as Atwood's portrayal of her characters battling this fear demonstrates. The characters fear the unknown in themselves and they fear contact with it in others. This latter condition is articulated through the marginal, abnormal figures, whereas the former fear is more evident in Atwood's protagonists. In both cases, the reader faces her/his own fear of the unknown through reactions to the characters and their social assumptions. Alice Palumbo observes that Atwood "depict[s] characters at war with themselves and their environments. Through ... alterations in narrative point of view, and the use of the unconscious, Atwood shows the way in which the self is constructed from contradictory impulses, some more societally acceptable than others" (73). Palumbo's remarks indicate the importance of the unconscious in Atwood's representation of self as constructed in a particular social context. Notably, the self constructed in a society conditioned by fear of the irrational and the unknown is largely limited to the conscious self. This limitation precludes an indeterminable portion of the individual's experience and, therefore, in Jungian and Laingian terms, necessarily results in a condition of psychic imbalance.

While Atwood's presentation of psychology and marginalized figures in *The Edible Woman* both satirizes popular culture and emphasizes the reader's interpretation of behavioural norms, this focus on normative instability is sharpened in *Bodily Harm* (1981). The serious tone of *Bodily Harm* provides an illuminating contrast to the comical tone of *The Edible Woman*, presenting a view of society gone mad. Rennie Wilford, like

Marian McAlpin before her, functions as an interpreter of society and of behavioural norms, making it necessary for the reader to interpret, to evaluate, and even to judge Rennie's views. Part of Rennie's limitations result from the divided nature of the modern society which she inhabits, a society characterized by ego-consciousness and fear of the unknown or irrational. Such ignorance of the unconscious results in psychic imbalance, yet in Jungian and Laingian terms, such limited consciousness is the "normal" contemporary condition. Atwood suggests this dissociation by aligning Rennie with appearances, thereby exposing the danger of undiscerning acceptance of surfaces through her character's fallible and naïve belief in the stability of social constructs that prove to be illusory. However, such a presentation carries an inherent risk, for the modern Western reader shares -- if unknowingly -- Rennie's dissociated condition. Consequently, the revelation of normative instability has the potential either to be dismissed by readers who refuse to acknowledge their naïveté and complicity, or to deeply disturb those who recognize the insistent truth of Atwood's presentation of both character and society. J. Brooks Bouson observes that the latter reaction is evident in critical response to *The Edible Woman*, deeming the novel to be "potentially anxiety-provoking as it involves readers in the troubling plight of Atwood's character"; moreover, the degree of this involvement challenges attempts at complacency since "reader proximity to Atwood's character can be unsettling" (33). Such involvement is intensified in *Bodily Harm* with its starker presentation of socially constructed behavioural norms and the brutal consequences of misjudging their instability.

Significantly, this revelation of illusory stability is not limited to the external social sphere but also pertains to the internal and the individual on a microcosmic scale. The character and the reader are implicated in making naïve assessments on both levels. The novel suggests that the concept of a stable, known ego-self is as erroneous as presumed normative stability because the unconscious remains largely unacknowledged and unintegrated in the Western concept of self. The modern self -- in psyche and in

mind/body -- is in a dangerously divided condition; consequently, society is a limited, artificial construct. George Woodcock argues that Atwood's presentation of society in *Bodily Harm* incisively collapses the inner and outer conditions of the modern individual: "[in] *Bodily Harm* ... the demons are objectified; they are at large, not only within the individual consciousness, but even more menacingly in the world outside. It is this revelation that our fears and actuality are ultimately the same that surely makes Atwood our most knowing and complete realist" (Introduction, Fiction 19). Such an equation of internal fears and evils to external ones is particularly forceful in a novel with such graphic physical, psychological, and emotional consequences for ignoring one's complicity in creating the society wherein these "demons" exist. Atwood emphasizes the illusory nature of social stability and behavioural norms by placing her protagonist, Rennie, in two separate realms: the Western society she inhabits and the Caribbean islands where she attempts to escape the complications of her daily life. Interestingly, the overlap of these two cultures is suggested by the fact that ostensibly Rennie is taking a working vacation to write a travel piece, whereas her real motive is seeking escape from personal health issues: physical, psychological, and emotional.

Although Rennie perceives the Caribbean as entirely Other, violence characterizes her life in both realms, emphasizing the similarity of social constructs. In Western society, Rennie skirts the edges of behavioural norms to varying degrees through her interaction with Jake, Jocasta, and her career, ultimately being faced with the prospect of sexual violence in the form of the threatening coil of rope left on her bed by an intruder. Similarly, even with the exclusion of the violence accompanying the actual riot during the political uprising, Rennie's travels to St. Antoine and Ste. Agathe are characterized by violence in the experiences of the deaf-mute man and of Lora. Through witnessing these acts, Rennie is confronted with the spectacle of violence
in what she perceives as society gone mad. Again, Woodcock recognizes the dual function of Atwood's presentation, contending that "[h]er novels are also social,

criticizing the false elements in our own society, exposing the cruelties elsewhere of which Atwood is acutely conscious" (Introduction, Fiction 19). This doubleness is nowhere more evident than in *Bodily Harm* which posits Rennie's experiences in the two societies -- Western and "Other" -- as paradoxically both a juxtaposition and an echo. Since Rennie experiences cultural dislocation in the Caribbean, she clings to her belief in "normality" as a talisman, initially unwilling to recognize that the "demons" of evil and fear which she witnesses neither are exclusive to this society nor are they Other. Atwood presents the reader with Rennie's struggle to accept that norms are socially determined and, consequently, that they are unstable constructs through which social existence is ordered. In this respect, *Bodily Harm* posits the same lesson which *The Handmaid's Tale* intensifies four years later; that is, norms are malleable, are socially constructed, and exert an unrecognizably fierce control over one's behaviour by deeming what is acceptable and what is termed mad.

In the clearly recognizable Western society which Rennie inhabits, Atwood presents her protagonist as a figure of limited awareness. Although Rennie is unaware of her complicity in determining behavioural norms, she has strong faith in their existence, behaving as though these norms are stable constructs. Hilde Staëls notes of Atwood's fiction generally that "[t]he social mythology is revealed in the narrative text as the protagonist's internalized norm and her own object of desire" (*Margaret* 215). This assessment is certainly true of Rennie, yet it should be observed that she is unaware both of her internalization and of the fact that social mythologies are variable. Following her mastectomy, Rennie strives more consciously to affect a "normal" appearance: "[s]he examines her face in the mirror, checking for signs.... [S]he looks quite normal. Her dress is a washed-out blue, her face isn't too pale, she wears only enough makeup so she won't seem peculiar.... This is the effect she aims for, neutrality; she needs it for her work.... Invisibility" (*BH* 15). In this respect, Rennie strongly parallels Marian McAlpin of *The Edible Woman*, who "choose[s] clothes as though they're a camouflage or a protective

colouration" (*EW* 12). Similarly, Marian's internalized norms have been identified as the belief that "[a] solid surface, a self-restrained facade, a stable, clean, orderly, neat appearance that shows no traces of hidden 'mess' are standards by which to live" (Staëls, *Margaret* 20). Both protagonists naïvely rely on the external appearance as an accurate indicator of normality, and their interaction with others is based on the assumption of normative stability. Laing would argue that this premise is inherently false, for the alienation of modern individuals makes the very concept of "normality" suspect; that is, "what we fondly appeal to as normality is a cruel fiction based on no more or less than what most people at a given time guess they, and the others, think is so" (Evans, *Laing* xxiv-xxv). Far from a stable condition, then, this "normality" is a means of social control with a price. It is "a narrow majority agreement fraught with terrible contradictions about what shall and shall not be regarded as real or sane or good, that we enforce out of fear of too much uncertainty, and at the cost of appalling alienation" (Evans, *Laing* xxv).

In Laing's view, norms are social constructs determined for the sake of convenience. In a discussion of Atwood's early *The Circle Game*, Sherrill Grace makes strikingly similar assessments of both the function of norms and the impetus of fear: "[w]e keep the surfaces of life neatly ordered like city planners in a desperate effort to ignore the chaos beneath.... Because we are afraid of what we partially perceive beneath the surface, we insist upon 'still life' and 'daily normal order.' This obsession, ironically, leads to its own forms of insanity; we prescribe roles for ourselves and others that distort life and trap us" (*Violent* 22-3). Significantly, Laing contends that no one is exempt from this construction of social norms though most are unaware of their complicity: "we are all, in our fashions, truly mad, schizoid, doubly divorced, once from ourselves and once from virtually everyone and everything else.... yet [we] persist in making inferences about the world that are presumptuous past the point of delusion and act certain when really we are nearly blind" (Evans, *Laing* xxiv). Atwood's novel attempts to counter this form of psychological reflex, or interpretation and projection, by confronting Rennie with

challenges to her normative assumptions and, through Rennie's experiences, confronting the reader with these same challenges. Atwood has admiringly described Adrienne Rich's *Diving into the Wreck* as "one of those rare books that forces you to decide not just what you think about it; but what you think about yourself. It is a book that takes risks, and it forces the reader to take them also" ("Adrienne" 160). In its direct challenge to normative assumptions, *Bodily Harm* is also such a book.

The novel achieves this challenge, in part, by enabling the reader to perceive the complicity to which Rennie herself is blind. Atwood's main means of revelation is through the small town mentality of Griswold, Rennie's childhood home, and Rennie's internalization of these norms despite her outward disparagement of them. In Griswold, outward deportment is crucial; Staëls summarizes Griswoldian philosophy: "[p]eople should learn never to show excess of emotions and to keep the body disciplined, especially keep unconscious desires under control. People are made to feel guilty and sinful for wanting to threaten the limits of the established social and moral codes of behaviour" (*Margaret* 124). Considering this deification of order, appearances, and maintaining the status quo, it is perhaps unsurprising that part of Griswold society's fear is of an individual being alone. "People in Griswold," Rennie tellingly reveals, "had a great fear of being left alone. It was supposed to be bad for you, it made you go funny, it drove you bats. Then you had to be put in the loony bin" (109). The direct association that being alone inevitably results in behavioural aberration that requires institutionalization emphasizes the fact that "madness" is an extreme form of abnormality, or behaviour that veers from the norm. In a society where norms are so strictly delineated, group mentality is maintained by instilling fear of individuality and of being alone. Difference is defined as madness.

Rennie is under the illusion that she has escaped this way of thinking by leaving Griswold on a university scholarship, followed by residence in Toronto as a lifestyle reporter. However, in this belief she is badly mistaken, for as Vevaina notes, "[b]eing a

product of Griswold, Rennie, like the town, is addicted to surfaces and fears unknown depths.... Though Rennie sneers at the town for it, she has fully internalised this attitude as is evident from her job" (*Re/Membering* 176). Despite Rennie's belief in her escape, she fleetingly reflects on the fact that her "honesty" is a professional liability and seems on the verge of recognizing her internalization: "[m]aybe," Rennie speculates, "it's Griswold squeezing her head: *If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all.* Not that its own maxims ever stopped Griswold" (66). Nonetheless, Rennie does not consciously implicate herself in this mindset. Her latter comment suggests her overt dismissal of Griswold's authority in determining normative behaviour; moreover, it covertly reveals her own equally hypocritical behaviour in acknowledging the maxim only to ignore it, thereby mirroring the very actions she clearly disparages as "typical Griswoldian exclusion of self." Thus Rennie's comments indicate the degree to which Griswoldian thinking forms her attitudes and so it is not surprising that Rennie continues to regulate her behaviour most closely by appearances.

When contemplating her "escape" to the tropics, away from further tests ordered by her surgeon, Daniel Luoma, Rennie begins to speculate on the extent to which she is willing to go in order to seek out a cure or amelioration for her cancer.[15] Rennie wonders not whether but how long it will be before she occupies what she views as an ignominous position: "[w]hen will she get to the point where she'll try anything?" Interestingly, even in this situation, Rennie's concern about appearances is paramount, for it is the stigma of desperation that she fears: "[s]he doesn't want to be considered crazy but she also doesn't want to be considered dead" (60). Rennie's phrasing here is telling. Since her internalized norms will only allow her to envision the extreme consequences of her actions, the only alternatives Rennie sees for herself are madness or death. Moreover, it seems that only

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[15] Incidentally, "luoma" is a Finnish word which can be translated as "(an object/being) created (by me)" or "(my) creation." Atwood's selection of this name for a surgeon who prolongs life for his patients is characteristically ironic. More generally, it is aptly indicative of the author's role as creator. Within the novel, this name is also ironic since Rennie's manipulation of Daniel into an unfulfilling sexual encounter can also be seen as her attempt to re-create his normative limits by shattering his marital fidelity.

the fear of death is considered greater than the fear of "abnormal" behaviour; even that distinction is only marginal since breaking the established norms is automatically equated with madness -- a stigma to be avoided at all costs. Madness, in turn, is the equivalent of social death, for it results in ostracism and loss of agency. Despite her protests to the contrary, for Rennie, there is only one measure of acceptable behaviour: her ingrained Griswoldian norms.

Part of Rennie's difficulty is that, in Laingian terms, she is alienated both from herself and from others; thus, she is unable to recognize the variability and, perhaps more importantly, the arbitrary nature of these norms. Staëls observes that "Rennie also attacks Griswold for wanting the members of its community to be entirely knowable and visible.... It [Griswold] continuously surveys individuals and distrusts those who deviate from standard behaviour" (*Margaret* 125-26). In Rennie's case, this constant sense of scrutiny is largely self-imposed, as demonstrated by her fearful assumption that social censure will inevitably result in the stigma of madness. Atwood's construction enables the reader to recognize that Rennie herself expresses this same attitude of social censure; however, in typical Atwoodian fashion, she precludes the possibility of complacency in the reader so that any judgment of Rennie becomes, by extension, self-judgement. In her 1980 essay "An End to Audience?" Atwood argues that "fiction writing is the guardian of the moral and ethical sense of the community" (346). *Bodily Harm* upholds this tenet by confronting the protagonist, and thereby the reader, with moral and ethical dilemmas in an unfamiliar cultural milieu. Atwood's claim is based on her belief that "fiction is one of the few forms left through which we may examine our society not in its particular but in its typical aspects; through which we can see ourselves and the ways in which we behave towards each other, through which we can see others and judge them and ourselves" ("End" 346). These views highlight the significance of Staëls' earlier remarks -- that Rennie "attacks Griswold for wanting the members of its community to be entirely knowable and visible" -- by emphasizing Rennie's ignorance of her own dependence on

such rational limits. In this sense, Atwood's perception that Rennie is "typical" of society coincides with Jungian and Laingian assessments of the purblind condition of "normality" in contemporary Western society, and posits fiction as a means of awakening the reader's awareness via the interpretation and judgment that Atwood inscribes as part of the reading process. In her 2002 book on writing, *Negotiating with the Dead*, Atwood reiterates these early views, proclaiming the reader "a sort of spy" (126) who decides whether the writer's work is socially relevant (122) and who, independent of the author, re-creates the text and so "becomes his [or her] own interpreter" (50). If Rennie is also representative of the reader, as Atwood's remarks suggest, then the reader's recognition of Rennie's lack of awareness simultaneously becomes an unintentional self-condemnation.

A strong indication of Rennie's unknowing adoption of Griswoldian thinking is her tendency to perceive herself and others in terms of simple binaries. As Sherrill Grace convincingly asserts in *Violent Duality,* "[d]uality, whether of structure or metaphor, is not the same as polarity. But the human tendency to polarize experience, to affirm one perspective while denying the other, is deeply ingrained, and this makes choosing to live with duality very difficult" (132). She further observes that Atwood is most interested in "the dynamic of violent duality" and "is constantly aware of opposites -- self/other, subject/object, male/female, nature/man -- and of the need to accept and work within them.... [H]er art re-works, probes, and dramatizes the ability to see double" (Grace, *Violent* 134). In *Bodily Harm*, Atwood works by way of negative example, placing the reader in a position where Rennie's insistence on seeing in the singular, in segregating binaries, is presented as a serious limitation of perspective. In Laingian terms, Rennie is a divided self, who characterizes the split condition of contemporary society where thinking "start[s] again from the split of our experience into what seems to be two worlds, inner and outer. The normal state of affairs is that we know little of either and are alienated from both, but that we know perhaps a little more of the outer than the inner. However,

the very fact that it is necessary to speak of outer and inner at all implies that an historically conditioned split has occurred" (*Politics of Experience* 124).

Griswold exemplifies this inner and outer split in its suppression of the unknowable and invisible through an exclusive focus on the outer world. As Staëls notes, "[p]eople are made to feel guilty and sinful for wanting to threaten the limits of the established social and moral codes of behaviour" (*Margaret* 124). Consequently, Rennie perceives her foray into the big city as an escape from this tightly regulated existence, and admits that: "[a]ll I could think of at that time was how to get away from Griswold. I didn't want to be trapped, like my mother" (58). Rennie makes a sharp distinction between Griswold's expectations and those held by others, phrasing her observation in a way which devalues the former and validates the latter view: "what was mandatory in Griswold was, more often than not, ludicrous in the real world" (26). Despite this awareness of discrepancy, Rennie insistently refuses to acknowledge that these norms are not only innocuously out of step with "the real world" but, more broadly, that they are highly unstable constructs. Rennie desperately tries to convince herself, rather unsuccessfully, that she is "Other" to this manner of thinking. Atwood signals Rennie's lack of success, in part, by revealing that Rennie herself is not oblivious to the pervasive influence of Griswold; rather, she wilfully chooses to ignore it: "Griswold, she [Rennie] hopes, is merely something she defines herself against. Though it's not always so easy to get rid of Griswold" (18). While it is not easy for Rennie to "get rid of Griswold," she desperately tries to do so and to convince herself that she has indeed escaped. Atwood's careful construction of the novel, however, makes certain that the reader is convinced that Rennie has definitely not escaped.[16]

One of the means that Atwood uses to portray Rennie's attempts to distinguish herself as "Other" is through Rennie's adoption of behaviour that intentionally pushes the

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[16] For an interesting discussion of Atwood's careful construction of her novels and her revision processes as particularly directed to elicit reader involvement, see Helmet Reichenbächer's "Challenging the Reader: An Analysis of Margaret Atwood's Creative Technique in Her First Published Novel."

boundaries of Griswoldian norms, particularly regarding acceptable sexual behaviour. The most obvious of these behaviours involves Rennie's relationship with Jake, which is an attempt to live in what Rennie considers to be "the real world." Rennie disregards the expectations of marriage and has Jake move in with her. However, she only reveals this turn of events to her mother by compulsion, largely as a result of her mother being "fond of phoning her early in the morning, at a time when she thought everyone ought to be up" (81-82). Not only does Jake answer the phone but he does so in a disguised voice, "saying things like 'The White House' and 'Fiedlefort's Garage.'" This complicates matters for Rennie and forces a confrontation with her disapproving mother: "Rennie finally had to explain to her mother that it was only one male voice she was hearing, not several. Which was only marginally acceptable. After that, they didn't discuss it" (82). Consequently, when Jake leaves her after the mastectomy, Rennie is unable to face her mother's further disapproval and so chooses not to tell her (81). The type of relationship that Rennie has with Jake challenges Griswold's sanctioned norms; however, Atwood most clearly delineates both Rennie's challenge to the norms manifested in her mother and, more significantly, her own discomfort with Jake's actions through the details of that relationship rather than the common-law situation itself. Rennie's discomfort implicates her in retaining a belief in Griswold's norms, and her reactions demonstrate that denial of this belief does not preclude its existence.

The relationship between Jake and Rennie can be described as sado-masochistic: a degree of abnormality that, at times, verges on sex crimes. While Rennie perceives the rope left by an intruder on her bed as clearly menacing and begins to speculate about the possible consequences (40), she has difficulty recognizing that Jake's behaviour is not simply more liberated from Griswold's values, but that it is dangerous. Interestingly, when Rennie is initially confronted with the rope, she focuses on its appearance, its neutrality: "[t]here was a length of rope coiled neatly on the quilt. It wasn't any special kind of rope, there was nothing lurid about it. It was off-white and medium thick. It could

have been a clothesline" (13). However, this situation reveals to the reader that in most cases, appearance is neither a sufficient nor a reliable indication of reality, for it is the insinuation behind the plain, "normal" rope that begins to haunt Rennie, poisoning her thinking with fear and giving her nightmares (40). Atwood indicates that Rennie has gained some insight after the dissolution of her relationship with Jake, for Rennie is able to see past the surface neutrality of the rope to associate her fear with its symbolism. Rennie muses that "[t]he piece of rope ... was also a message; it was someone's twisted idea of love" (41). During their relationship, however, she dismisses her own discomfort and goes along with Jake's "twisted idea of love." Staëls asserts that "Rennie interprets the sexual behaviour of her partner Jake as beyond the pale of decency. She flattens him out, attacking him for being a sexual pervert. She is both fascinated and repulsed by his pornographic sexual fantasies, the grotesque expression of her own suppressed desire for sensual gratification" (*Margaret* 130). The point to note here is that Rennie's measure of "decency" is determined by Griswold, yet I would contend that Staëls' claim that Rennie "flattens him out" overstates the case.

Rennie's supposed fascination is largely an uneasy tolerance resulting from the fact that her only knowledge of norms derives from Griswold. She allows Jake to redecorate the apartment when he moves in, rationalizing the pornographic prints and posters based on his career: "[w]hat Jake did was design.... He was a packager. He decided how things would look and what contexts they would be placed in, which meant what people would feel about them" (103). Following from these views, Rennie attempts to match her feelings to the reaction she believes that Jake expects. Consequently, when he hangs "blowups of Cartier-Bresson photographs, [depicting] three Mexican prostitutes" in the living room (105) and two pornographic posters of nude women, one semi-bound and the other provocatively posed, in the bedroom (106), Rennie does not object despite her discomfort. Instead, she assumes that her own reaction is "abnormal" and "repressed": "[t]hese pictures made Rennie slightly nervous, especially when she was

lying on their bed with no clothes on. But that was probably just her background" (106). The latter comment is clearly unconvincing both to Rennie and to the reader, thereby serving to highlight Rennie's absence of normative limits in any context outside of Griswold. The reader's recognition of this lack is crucial, providing a foundation for the intensified form of dislocation which Rennie experiences in the West Indies.

During her involvement with Jake, however, Rennie is not sufficiently aware of the variability of norms to recognize that even in the Western society they inhabit, her discomfort with Jake's interest in "soft porn" is justifiable. That is, his behaviour is not just more liberated but signals his sexual aggression. Only later in the novel, imprisoned in the West Indies by men in power who wield aggression like a weapon, is Rennie able to discern that "[s]he is afraid of men and it's simple, it's rational, she's afraid of men because men are frightening. She's seen the man with the rope, now she knows what he looks like. She has been turned inside out, there's no longer a *here* and a *there*" (290). This admission is significant and reveals Rennie's developed consciousness. Earlier, despite numerous cues in Jake's behaviour, Rennie is not able to see him as potentially being "the man with the rope," and so suppresses her own reactions. While some of Jake's early actions can be construed as spontaneous demonstrations of desire, perhaps even as attempts at romance -- such as surprising Rennie at home "'for a lunchtime quickie'" -- others that Rennie classifies as his being "inventive" are more questionable in their aggression; for example, Jake climbs up the fire escape to enter the apartment through the window. Since Jake, a version of Jack, is a generic male name, Atwood may be suggesting the shared "anonymity" between Jake and the intruder and their similarity -- perhaps even their interchangeability. Most tellingly, however, Rennie reveals that Jake would "send her ungrammatical and obscene letters composed of words snipped from newspapers, purporting to be from crazy men, he'd hide in closets and spring out at her, pretending to be a lurker" (27). Such actions reinforce the fact that madness varies from normality only in degree of behaviour, and Jake is treading a fine line here between his

sexual fantasies and abnormal or mad behaviour. While Rennie assures herself that "[a]part from the first shock, none of these things had ever alarmed her" (27), this assurance wears thin as the relationship develops.

The change is evident in a post-coital conversation that occurs only a month after Jake has moved in; he becomes defensive and physically aggressive in order to end the discussion: "[p]retend I just came through the window. Pretend you're being raped," Jake urges as he pins Rennie to the bed. "What's pretend about it? said Rennie. Stop pinching" (117). In this action, Jake bears a strong resemblance to the Laingian "schizoid individual [who] fears a real live dialectical relationship with real live people. He can relate himself only to depersonalized persons, to phantoms of his own fantasies (imagos)" (*Divided* 80). Jake resents Rennie for asking about his dreams in an attempt to increase intimacy; he desires only the physical enactment of his fantasies. This trend continues in the relationship until Rennie is forced to admit that "Jake liked to pin her hands down, he liked to hold her so she couldn't move. He liked that, he liked thinking of sex as something he could win at. Sometimes he really hurt her, once he put his arm across her throat and she really did stop breathing. Danger turns you on, he said. Admit it" (207). While Rennie will not go so far as to "[a]dmit it," neither will she deny that these acts of violence are sexually stimulating. Conversely, despite this evidence of sexual aggression and borderline abuse, Rennie continues to parrot Jake's rationalizations in an attempt to assure herself: "[i]t was a game, they both knew that. He would never do it if it was real, if she really was a beautiful stranger or a slave girl or whatever it was he wanted her to pretend. So she didn't have to be afraid of him" (207). Her constant need for reassurance indicates the presence of lurking doubts and alerts the reader to Rennie's inability to discern what is "normal" sexual behaviour without Griswold's norms to guide her. Thus Rennie reveals society in its "typical aspects," exemplifying the dissociation which Laing insists is the modern condition: "[w]e live equally out of our bodies and out of our minds" (*Politics of Experience* 59). Rennie's dissociation makes it impossible for her

either to determine boundaries or norms, including those involving the treatment of her body, or to recognize her complicity in creating those limits through her own behaviour; instead, she ascribes the creation of these norms to an external source: either to Jake or to Griswold.

While Rennie earns a living analyzing surfaces and fashion trends, Atwood also utilizes this job to demonstrate Rennie's unknowing internalization of and dependence on normative limits. Through her intimate knowledge of these cultural surfaces, Rennie gains a sense of security. Nevertheless, she also recognizes that articles on such superficial topics are geared to instill a false sense of security and suggestively admits that "such lists [of trends that are 'In and Out'] reassured people, including those who wrote them" (65). Rennie views her job with detachment and irony as a position she took to replace writing serious pieces on "issues" (64); now she does not just report on but occasionally fabricates the existence of trends merely to watch the fashion-conscious scurrying to replicate them (25). In Laingian terms, Rennie's focus on surfaces is a common means of securing "normality" in modern Western society, for "[s]anity today appears to rest very largely on a capacity to adapt to the external world ... [which] is almost completely and totally estranged from the inner" (*Politics of Experience* 141). Somewhat paradoxically, Atwood employs this fixation on surfaces as a means of revealing Rennie's inner world, her unknowing adherence to and reliance on social morés, through her discomfort with the external. When Rennie is given an assignment to research pornography for an article, she is faced with disturbing concepts and images in materials confiscated by the police. This research, particularly the video footage of a live rat emerging from a vagina, changes reality for Rennie: "Rennie felt that a large gap had appeared in what she'd been used to thinking of as reality. What if this is normal, she thought, and we just haven't been told yet?" (210). Suddenly, Rennie is confronted with behaviour that she could not imagine existed and, understandably, is unable to assimilate it. Perhaps most significantly, the latter statement reveals her expectation that "reality"

and what is "normal" are to be determined exclusively by an external agency, rather than seeing herself as implicated in the creation of norms; Rennie expects merely to accept and to adopt prescribed normative limits.

Prior to this experience, Rennie has consistently accepted and adopted externally imposed norms, even to the point of disallowing her own discomfort. However, in this instance such dissociation does not occur, which suggests Rennie's own tenuous construction of a normative limit. Tellingly, she refuses to write the article, "decid[ing] that there were some things it was better not to know any more about than you had to. Surfaces, in many cases, were preferable to depths" (211). Despite her voiced attempt to cling to wilful ignorance, the encounter affects Rennie to the extent that it increases her discomfort with Jake's sexual fantasies and aggression. She even asks him if a live rat would sexually stimulate him, a question Jake finds insulting: "El sleazo, he said. Come on, don't confuse me with that sick stuff. You think I'm some kind of a pervert? You think most men are like that?" (212). Although Rennie denies that she holds this opinion, her belief in appearances has been shaken and she requires reassurance that these extreme sexual behaviours are not normal. The normative limit she constructed, then, falters as Rennie looks externally for affirmation of her views. In this action, it is important to observe that Rennie takes a common position, one which circumscribes her self-realization. "[I]nstead of thinking in terms of what one should do, or of what is generally thought right, or of what usually happens," in Jungian terms, there is one means beyond this normal condition of ignorance: "[o]ne must simply listen, in order to learn what the inner totality -- the Self -- wants one to do here and now in a particular situation.... It is, moreover, useless to cast furtive glances at the way someone else is developing, because each of us has a unique task of self-realization" (von Franz, "Process" 165-67). Rennie, however, is furtively -- even desperately -- glancing around in just this fashion, seeking reassurance. Despite her reply to Jake's defensive and aggressive questioning, Rennie herself is uncertain both about what degree of behaviour is required in order for someone

to be considered "some kind of a pervert" and also about who determines these limits; as her pornography research reveals, there definitely are limits to what she considers "normal." In short, behaviour of a certain degree is deemed mad. Rennie remains at a loss, however, since the norms delineating those behavioural boundaries seem unfixed. Her assumption about the existence of a stable, universal reality has been disrupted, thereby positioning her in the Laingian role of recognizing the so-called "normal" condition as "a cruel fiction" (Evans, *Laing* xxiv).

Ironically, then, Rennie is willing to push the limits of Griswoldian norms not because she has clearly determined other norms for herself, but precisely because she feels secure that such limits exist. It is this false assumption which Rennie's experiences force her to confront. Her security derives from the premise that she will invariably know when behaviour crosses the line, becomes abnormal, when it has gone too far -- as though normality were a stable determinant.[17] A clue that the stability of norms is itself a construct surfaces when Rennie is in hospital, recovering from her operation. She is uncomfortable with Jake's uneasy presence but attempts to brush it off; Rennie assures herself that "[w]e'll get back to normal, ... though she could not remember any longer what *normal* had been like" (35). Thus the very designation of "normality" -- even as a descriptor of a relationship -- is more fluid and more easily erased than Rennie assumes. This belief corresponds with her false sense of security in "sane behavioural norms" as a stable social construct.

Atwood's construction of the novel undermines this belief in both the protagonist and the reader for the purpose of replacing an assumption with a sense of responsibility.

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[17] An interesting parallel character is found in Atwood's short story, "Hairball," wherein the protagonist, Kat, a fashion editor, gleefully exploits the *outré* and makes her reputation on a willingness to "go way too far." Like Rennie, Kat challenges norms because she firmly believes in their solidity; like Jake, Kat re-packages her partner, Gerald, a married man on the magazine's executive board. This tendency to re-fashion, together with her radicalism, ultimately turn against her, as she misjudges the limits that others will allow. After Kat has a tumour removed, she is both abandoned and fired by her now "sexy" and stylish lover, Ger, on the pretext that her edgy approach is too radical for the executive board -- in other words, that finally she has gone "way too far." Thus, Kat's security in her ability to assess the situation proves, in the end, to be misplaced and suggests the instability of normative limits.

In a recent essay collection, *Margaret Atwood: Works and Impact* (2000), Klaus Peter Müller emphasizes "how in Atwood's writing 'reality is not the truth, but a construct people believe in.' This also implies a strong emphasis in her work on the responsibility of human beings for their natural, social, and personal environments" (Nischik, "'Flagpoles'" 8). Significantly, Rennie is aware that her own behaviour affects her social environment, as is seen in her lunch meeting with her friend, Jocasta.[18] Rennie is seeking support in order to cope after her operation, but she recognizes that her condition, her brush with death, is enough to make others uncomfortable. Consequently, Rennie attempts to regulate her behaviour to maintain the illusion of "normality," recognizing that "[s]he [Jocasta] was talking much too fast, Rennie embarrassed the hell out of her. Rennie concentrated on behaving normally. If she drank just enough but not too much, she could do it" (164). For Rennie, "behaving normally" is an effort, a shared illusion that is easily shattered. Nevertheless, while acknowledging this fragility and seeking to maintain the illusion, Rennie simultaneously continues to perceive reality and normality as stable, reliable touchstones. Atwood maintains that the role of novels is to challenge such myopia: "for me the novel is a social vehicle. It reflects society.... These days the world is a pretty dismal place. You can blank that out. You can destroy your Amnesty International newsletter without reading it. But that doesn't make it go away. The less you pay attention to it, the more it's going to be there for somebody else" (Twigg 126). The cost of maintaining the illusion of "normality" by ignoring both the darker side of reality or behavioural aberrations and one's complicity therein is great. Nonetheless, there is a serious temptation to do so in privileged Western society, and so, as Atwood observes, someone else often pays the price. This is the lesson which Rennie reluctantly learns in

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[18] Jocasta is an ironic measure of the need to maintain "normality" in relationships since Rennie is drawn to Jocasta precisely because she is distinctly beyond the norm: "Rennie liked Jocasta because Jocasta was much more bizarre than Rennie felt she herself could ever be. Partly she admired this quality, partly she felt it was dangerous, and partly, being from Griswold after all, she had a certain contempt for it" (25).

Bodily Harm as Atwood demonstrates that there are serious consequences for maintaining the illusion that Western norms are stable and universal.

Atwood creates a novel which not only suggests the contradictions in Rennie's views but also confronts the reader with the implications of Rennie's wilful ignorance or blindness in an attempt to draw attention to the reader's own perceptual limitations. The novel is peppered with murmurings of psychological instabilities and the stigma of "mad" behaviour, subtly indicating the persistent social undercurrent of aberrant behaviour. Notably, the incidents of madness are centered in Western culture, that sphere which Rennie presumes to be stable. The first indication of these deviations from normative behaviour occurs at the airport in the West Indies, which may indicate Rennie's suspicion that if such things occur, they occur elsewhere. Upon initially meeting Prince's grandmother, Elva, Rennie wrongly assumes she is "a religious maniac," yet this association immediately recalls an incident from Rennie's university days when "an economics student was rumoured to have run through his dormitory one night, claiming to have given birth to the Virgin Mary." Remembering that the incident "was put down to pre-exam tension" soothes Rennie (37), thereby indicating her unease with aberrant behaviour and her need for rational explanations. Yet the "intrusive" existence of such background pathology is heightened by its existence in what Rennie perceives as the most stable realm of all, not just Western society, but Griswold itself.

This existence is conveyed subtly in an explanation of why Rennie's grandfather was such a highly respected figure in the community. Not only was he "the doctor," as opposed to "a doctor," but Rennie explains, "he risked his life by walking into a farmhouse where a man had gone crazy and was holding a shotgun on him the whole time, he'd blown the head off one of his children and was threatening to blow the heads off the other ones too.... My grandfather saved the lives of the remaining children, who were then put in an orphanage" (55). Significantly, the threat of heredity is so great that "[n]o one wanted to adopt children who had such a crazy father and mother: everyone

knew such things ran in the blood. The man was sent to what they called the loony bin. When they were being formal they called it an institution" (55-56). It is interesting to note that in Griswoldian thinking, madness is inevitable in such conditions, or to borrow Atwood's terms, Griswold considers madness to "come from the inside out -- from heredity, from bad blood" as opposed to the opposite, equally controversial theory of madness "com[ing] from the outside in" ("Ophelia"). Such a view is necessary to enable Griswold's belief that madness is containable in the Other. The ostracism of these children may indicate a fear of social disruption; in this case, the madness may be seen as containable but disruptive. Perhaps less overtly, the ostracism may also indicate a fear of contamination, which undermines the concept of madness being solely an individual internal threat.

This false distinction of madness as an internal, hereditary condition illuminates the role of Rennie's own grandmother in the novel. Her grandmother's condition of severe memory loss, to a degree which has been termed "dementia" (Staëls, *Margaret* 127), involves a loss of sensation which she perceives as a literal loss of her hands: "[m]y hands, she said. I've left them somewhere and now I can't find them.... My other hands, the ones I had before, the ones I touch things with" (57). Her grandmother's deep distress at this dissociation of mind and body is juxtaposed with Rennie's lack of awareness of her own alienation. In *Bodily Harm*, the grandmother not only highlights Rennie's blindness, but simultaneously functions as a sign of this dissociation in Rennie since, in Griswoldian terms, "everyone knew such things ran in the blood." In direct contrast to her earlier reaction of disgust -- "Rennie cannot bear to be touched by those groping hands, which seem to her like the hands of a blind person, a half-wit, a leper" (297) -- once she is in the West Indies, Rennie dreams of reaching out but being unable to touch her grandmother (115) and of having left her own hands in a drawer (116). In Annette Kolodny's words, "Rennie's emotional withdrawal has become so complete that her grandmother's delusion is now her own nightmare" (101). Through these nightmares,

Rennie's unconscious is using its most potent medium of dreams to highlight her dissociation in order to further integration, or to attempt to restore balance. Jung contends that

> [f]or the sake of mental stability and even physiological health, the unconscious and the conscious must be integrally connected and thus move on parallel lines. If they are split apart or 'dissociated,' psychological disturbance follows. In this respect, dream symbols are the essential message carriers from the instinctive to the rational parts of the human mind, and their interpretation enriches the poverty of consciousness so that it learns to understand again the forgotten language of the instincts.
> ("Approaching" 37)

Rennie's eager dismissal of these dreams (115-16), however, suggests her reluctance to engage with the unconscious and instinctual responses.

This initial reluctance imputes a poignancy to Rennie's gesture of compassion in prison where she finally touches Lora's brutally beaten body. In this moment, Rennie concedes their shared humanity, and her action suggests a move towards psychic integration. This image of the healing hands echoes that of Rennie's mother, who "takes hold of the grandmother's dangling hands, clasping them in her own" (298), thereby soothing the distress. It also recalls the novel's other grandmother figure, Elva, who claims to have healing hands (192-93). In contrast to Rennie's aversion to her own grandmother's touch, Rennie longs to be touched by Elva "even though it will hurt. She wants to know what it will feel like, she wants to put herself into the care of those magic hands. She wants to be cured, miraculously, of everything, of anything at all" (194). Such a shift in thinking from aversion to a desire for being touched not only prefigures Rennie's own tactile engagement, but signals a new willingness to acknowledge and assimilate the unconscious, the irrational, the unknown through these symbolic "magic hands."

Consequently, I would contend that Rennie is characterized by her alienation and that this alienation is more encompassing than some critics will allow. Staëls, for example, asserts that "Rennie automatically distrusts and dismisses individuals whose

frame of reference is alien to her, because she fears they will perturb her ordered world. She keeps at a distance from those who deviate from the 'normal,' fearing their contaminating touch and speech will interfere with her stable, finished and polished identity" (*Margaret* 128). While the observation of Rennie's fear of the "normal" is fully justified, this reading remains problematic. On the one hand, such a reading grants Rennie too much agency, for it suggests that she is fully conscious of the vulnerability of her assumption of a "stable," "ordered world." One might argue that Rennie recognizes this instability instinctively but that the novel reveals only inklings of such awareness as it follows Rennie's slow progression towards an understanding of normative instability. On the other hand, such a reading suggests that Rennie's distancing is limited to individuals she perceives as "individuals whose frame of reference is alien to her," or as Other. In this view, Rennie's distancing of self from others enacts Griswold's attempts to contain madness by ostracizing it, as in the case of the rifle-wielding father's children being placed in the orphanage.

Other critics, such as Coomi S. Vevaina, perceive Rennie's alienation as a broader character trait. Vevaina argues that, in fact, Rennie's "tourist mentality also causes her to maintain a safe distance from all those around her. As a result, she does not know even the name of her old Chinese nextdoor neighbour and hardly seems to care for the woman who lives on the ground floor of her house." Vevaina further notes that Rennie not only studiously avoids eye contact with people at the Barbados airport, but realizes during her hospitalization that she has "contacts" rather than friends (*Re/Membering* 175). As with the background pathology in the novel, these individuals are also part of the Western sphere whose "frame of reference" is not "alien" to Rennie but, pointedly, is shared by her. Thus, if Staëls' argument concerning alienation as a means of preserving "normality" is to be upheld, it must be conceded that the threats to this perceived stability come not only from without, but also from within. Since those whom Rennie distances also come from within the "stable" Western sphere, then perhaps the most significant difference

between these readings -- of Rennie as distancing herself from only the identified Other, as opposed to distancing herself from everyone -- is that the latter directly challenges the reader to recognize this dissociation and its implications. The reader is positioned to engage in determining the normative limits of the society wherein the protagonist is placed, from the Western "frame of reference" shared by Rennie. In that sense, Rennie's consistent disengagement with individuals is highlighted by the movement between two cultural realms. As Coral Ann Howells notes, Atwood structures *Bodily Harm* to achieve this complicity:

> the novel becomes an exercise in deciphering clues, not only for the protagonist ... but for the reader as well, for Rennie's activity is mirrored in our own attempts to make sense of this fragmented narrative. Reality is a very malleable substance here.... But is reality inside or outside the protagonist, and how much is external reality reshaped through the subjectivity of the viewer? (*Margaret* 106)

The reader then becomes the determinant of reality and its allowable boundaries or norms, and as Iser contends, this activity occurs both within the novel and, subsequently, without (*Act* 74).

In particular, Atwood constructs *Bodily Harm* to challenge the protagonist's and thereby the reader's assumptions of the existence of stable "normality." Through the juxtaposition of two cultural realms, Atwood creates a situation wherein the protagonist must learn that where the line of allowable behaviour is drawn depends on who is drawing it. Contrary to Rennie's beliefs, "normality" is an unstable social construct. Notably, this subterfuge does not manage to implicate every reader, for some remain disengaged. Marilyn Yalom, for example, terms *Bodily Harm* "a potboiler that treats grave human and political matters with facile superficiality" (86). This view is opposed by others, such as George Woodcock, who places it among Atwood's best novels (Introduction, Fiction 19). Arguably, Yalom's failure to cite any reasons for her assertion suggests that she also fails to recognize what Howells notes above: that is, Rennie's perception -- which is indeed largely focused on surfaces or the superficial -- colours the

reader's view, thereby increasing the importance of the reader's role in interpretation and, ultimately, in judgment. Contrary to Yalom, I contend that *Bodily Harm* is Atwood's most successful representation of the brutal dangers inherent in any attempt to disengage from "human and political matters."[19] As Alice Palumbo notes,

> *Life Before Man, Bodily Harm,* and *The Handmaid's Tale* concern themselves with the necessity for the individual to reject individual retreats from the external world and to become involved in resistance to power. This entails a rejection of the idea of powerlessness.... Atwood expands on her earlier themes of the collapse between the social and personal, depicting worlds in which the boundary between the two has been completely erased. (78)

Significantly, Palumbo focuses on Atwood's insistence on individual responsibility within the communal context.

While one may thus characterize Atwood's presentation as a "collapse," it can also be viewed as a connection of social and personal through the political. In Atwood's view, the novel itself is a political instrument; she describes writing as "a view of society and the world at large," and the novel as "a moral instrument. *Moral* implies political, and traditionally the novel has been used not only as a vehicle for social commentary but as a vehicle for political commentary as well....By 'political' I mean having to do with power: who's got it, who wants it, how it operates; in a word, who's allowed to do what to whom, who gets what from whom, who gets away with it and how" ("End" 353). In this view, personal involvement includes those who are powerless and is the foundation for social politics. Consequently, in *Bodily Harm*, Atwood presents both the overtly political and the personal "political" as a measure of the variability of normative constructs. While the novel details the political climate and urges Rennie's specific involvement through Dr. Minnow, her refusal to be involved begins at the personal level; Rennie excuses

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[19] While the amount of critical attention paid to *The Handmaid's Tale* may indicate its predominance in any measure of relative "success," I maintain that *Bodily Harm* offers a more accessible version of "realistic" consequences to one's social and political disengagement. Undoubtedly, *The Handmaid's Tale* is, in many ways, more severe and restrictive in its representation of consequences, as well as more encompassing; however, as mentioned in my introduction, it is also more easily distanced from the reality of contemporary society precisely on the basis of this extremism or its categorization as dystopia.

herself from social politics on the basis of her personal disengagement. Similarly, Lora depicts the social affecting the personal, for her lover is campaigning against the current government of Ellis. Prior to the rioting and her imprisonment, Lora laments Prince's political involvement and its intrusion; she longs to "'get back to some kind of a normal life'" (231), meaning a return to the personal from the social. Atwood's own view of politics as power relations is taken to extremes in the novel by Paul, a small-time American drug-runner who has taken up residence in St. Antoine, is currently Rennie's lover, and has been Lora's lover in the past. Paul warns Rennie that "'[d]emocracy and freedom and the whole bag of tricks... don't work too well in a lot of places and nobody's too sure what does. There's no good guys and bad guys, nothing you can count on, none of it's permanent any more, there's just a lot of improvisation.'" In fact, Paul observes, "'[t]here's only people with power and people without power. Sometimes they change places, that's all'" (240). Such relativity is problematic but effectively contrasts Rennie's belief in absolute normative stability -- perhaps suggesting that such a static tenet is equally problematic and, potentially, dangerous. Thus through Paul's assertions, Rennie's assumptions are further challenged, not only is "normality" posited as a construct, but social stability itself becomes suspect.

This challenge to social structure and normative limits is figured in the novel through Atwood's varying presentation of law enforcement officers. In the Western sphere, Rennie's encounter with the police results from the break-in to her apartment. The police seem to reinforce Rennie's view of this intrusion as abnormal, for even the officer who makes her somewhat uneasy refers to the sexual predator as "'some nut.'" However, he also undercuts Rennie's assumption of social stability by conspiratorially suggesting that this incident is merely one sample of a prevalent problem: "'[i]f you knew what was walking around loose out there,'" the officer tells Rennie, "'you'd never go out'" (14). Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, Rennie's initial calm reaction transforms into intense fear, nightmares, and a tendency "to see herself from the outside, as if she was a moving target

in someone else's binoculars" (40). As in her encounters with Jake, Rennie condemns her own reactions, "decid[ing] she was being silly and possibly neurotic as well" (40). In an attempt to overrule her inner reaction with logic, she browbeats herself for not focusing on being "saved": "[y]ou should be grateful, you should be serene and profound, but instead you're projecting onto some pathetic weirdo who's never going to bother you again" (40-41). Rennie's attribution of her actions to the concept of projection suggests her awareness of complicity since projections involves the externalization of one's own unconscious. However, instead of self-recognition, Rennie berates herself and disparages the act of projection itself in this attempt to negate the threat of evil or aberrant behaviour. Despite the self-chastisement, Rennie cannot escape the fact that "the man existed; he was an accident that had almost happened to her; he was an ambassador from some place she didn't want to know any more about" (41). Atwood suggestively notes Rennie's willed blindness to aberrant behaviour and normative constructs. Rennie desperately attempts to push the image of the man from her mind based not only on an understandable feeling of violation but because she does not "want to know any more about" that place from whence he came -- a place which Rennie tellingly assumes is elsewhere, removed, Other, and so can be ignored.

An equally suggestive revelation is made through Rennie's ambivalence about her mastectomy scar. Rennie perceives the officer's insinuation of her complicity in the break-in as an affront and begins to reveal her scar to prove that she is neither promiscuous nor to be blamed for provoking such an intrusion (15). Rennie thinks this scar will "save" her in the eyes of the police and, in her imagination, in the eyes of the perpetrator; Rennie is "certain" that he has a wife and children at home, and would instantly release her upon viewing the scar (41). Presumably her conclusions are based on the assumption that these imagined retractions would be the "normal" reaction. It is particularly significant that Rennie perceives the intruder as a normal or typical man, for her next immediate thought is to wonder if the scar, rather than dissuading him, "turned

him on" (41). That both alternatives seem equally plausible to Rennie demonstrates a glimpse behind the surface of social normality, but it is a fleeting vision that she hurriedly pushes aside. Bouson notes that "[a]s self and other meld, Rennie discovers that there is no escape from the faceless man. An agent of male oppression, he is also an internalized aspect of self" (128). While Bouson's reading is a feminist one, the same point applies to Rennie's eventual acknowledgement of the existence of aberrant behaviour: "there is no escape." It is the novel's final goal to position Rennie where she internalizes normative fluidity and engages with the other.

Before such acknowledgement is possible, Rennie must recognize and confront her own normative assumptions. The challenge to social structure and normative behavioural limits is further presented through the contrast of the Western sphere with the Caribbean. As Vevaina notes, "St. Antoine represents the 'shadow' side of Griswold in the Jungian sense of the term" (*Re/Membering* 178). Consequently, the relatively reassuring interaction with the police in Toronto is starkly opposed by the brutality of the events Rennie witnesses in St. Antoine. Here, she watches the police not regulating aberrant behaviour but perpetrating the malicious, brutal beatings of the deaf-mute man (146-7) and of prisoners (288-90) -- including Lora (292-93), whom the guards also manipulate for sexual favours (285). Interestingly, after witnessing only the first of these events, the brutal beating of the deaf-mute man, Rennie abandons her Western view of police. In its place, she adopts the opposing stance that these police, then, are the obvious source of violence, an equally simplistic view which Paul dispels. As Staëls also observes, "Paul disturbs her fixed ideas by emphasizing that what is 'normal' and 'real' is not given, but is culturally relative" (*Margaret* 144). In his account of crime on the islands, he comments on the good fortune of a thief who was caught and then taken onto a police boat, thereby escaping with his life. Paul contrasts this with a similar crime in which the thief was also caught but "'they pounded him to death, no questions asked.'" Rennie, horrified, erroneously assumes Paul is referring to actions of the police and,

apparently, is prepared to accept that the social structure, in the sense of legal allowances, is different in another country. However, she refuses to believe it when Paul tells her that it was not the police but local people, the pig owners themselves, who did the beating. Paul explains that "'[a]s far as they're concerned, stealing's worse than murder'"(225) or, more graphically, is worse than "'chopping up your woman'" (226); the former is considered a premeditated act, whereas the latter is "a crime of passion" (225). While Rennie might accept that laws differ, she cannot assimilate the tolerance and complicity of the community members in such violent, "mad" behaviour, for the participation of the community translates into normative rather than legal boundaries.

Rennie is unprepared to view norms as so malleable, and contradictory to the reality she has constructed. She refuses the view that Atwood posits in *Surfacing*, that "society has become an evil force" (Gibson 12). This attempt to maintain a separation of norms and laws closely resembles any attempt to maintain a personal distance from social politics. Both segregations are artificial and so, ultimately, collapse. Vevaina argues that Rennie's "deliberate silence on 'political' matters implies her complicity in evil" (*Re/Membering* 179). This complicity exists even though Rennie does not recognize that her silence is not disengagement but a form of consentual participation. In Atwoodian terms, through her silence Rennie chooses to be a victim. In the personal sphere, this silence allows Jake to continue his aggressive sexual behaviour, and in the social sphere, in Rennie's initial persistent refusal to write the article Dr. Minnow requests about the political upheaval, her silence as a writer doubly implicates her. What Rennie fails to see is that norms are not stable but, as Paul explains, it is the use and abuse of power which creates behavioural norms.

In Atwood's structuring of the novel, Rennie only becomes aware of her complicity and the instability of social constructs, including those of normative behaviour, through her cultural dislocation. She must be removed from her familiar surroundings in order for her inklings of suspicion and doubt to surface. Like Rennie, the

reader must struggle to decipher and so to determine reality; moreover, Rennie's limited perspective increases the difficulty of the reader's role of interpretation by adding another filter (Howells, *Margaret* 106). Once Rennie is removed from Western culture, she is able to assess the norms of the unfamiliar culture, though badly. As Carrington observes, however, the reader is not precluded from the perceptual limitations that Atwood figures in Rennie, for "we are all locked within our own memories and perceptions that have been distorted through repression and projection" ("Margaret" 55). That is, Rennie's position of removal in order to enable assessment is precisely the reader's position. According to Iser: "[t]he fact that we have been temporarily isolated from our real world does not mean that we now [following the act of reading] return to it with new directives. What it does mean is that, for a brief period at least, the real world appears observable" (*Act* 140). Significantly, however, Diana Brydon states that Atwood prevents complete identification with her narrators: "[s]ome readers dislike the way that her first person narrators refuse to let us subsume ourselves in total identification with them; yet this refusal of identification is essential to her desire to help us to know and respect the other" (54). In fact, I would contend that in addition to enabling the reader better "to know and respect the other," the distance between reader and protagonist is equally necessary for the character to be observable. Iser claims that in reading, "[s]uddenly we find ourselves detached from our world, to which we are inextricably tied, and able to perceive it as an object" (*Act* 140). Similarly, the reader must maintain enough distance from the characters to perceive them as objects -- distinct from yet aligned with the reader her/himself -- figures which can be assessed without being dismissed as Other. For this reason, Atwood structures the novel to allow the reader to recognize Rennie's wilful clinging to her belief in social and normative stability; that is, the reader is placed in a privileged position of knowledge, thereby ensuring a sense of involved distance from the protagonist. Carrington asserts that Atwood allows "Rennie [to] cling to her hope of rescue, [and] in letting her imagine her wish-fulfilment" of release from the

imprisonment, Atwood "insist[s] on the readers' duty of massive involvement" ("Margaret" 90). Ironically, then, the reader is both identified with and distanced from the protagonist, thereby able to assess Rennie but, simultaneously, unable to dismiss her.

Upon finding herself in an unfamiliar culture, Rennie initially attempts to transpose her perceptions and expectations onto her surroundings and experiences therein. In Laingian terms, she perceives her experience as the experience of the other, although this collapse is impossible: "I cannot avoid trying to understand your experience, because although I do not experience your experience, which is invisible to me (and non-tastable, nontouchable, nonsmellable, and inaudible), yet I experience you as *experiencing*" (Laing, *Politics of Experience* xii). Nonetheless, it is equally impossible for Rennie, in her present state, to perceive her surroundings from any angle other than the dissociated, purblind condition, for "[n]o one can begin to think, feel or act now except from the starting point of his or her own alienation" (Laing, *Politics of Experience* xii). Consequently, Rennie perceives the situations she encounters as surreal, absurd or comical and remains oblivious to the real danger surrounding her.[20] This ignorance is aptly demonstrated in Rennie's reaction to the machine gun she is duped into picking up at the airport, believing it to be heart medication for Elva. After her hotel room has been ransacked -- in a violation that recalls the apartment break-in that occurred in Canada -- Rennie discovers the actual contents of the box. She forcibly thrusts the gun back into the styrofoam and out of view, demonstrating her desire to ignore it (158). Her refusal to believe in the reality of the situation is exposed in her reaction: "[t]his, thinks Rennie, is an exceptionally tacky movie.... It's not even a good lunchtime story, since the main point of it would have to be her own stupidity. Dumb, gullible, naïve, to believe people.... Now

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[20] Although other critics also note that Rennie deludes herself and misjudges her surroundings (for example, Vevaina, *Re/Membering* 175 and Carrington, "Margaret" 88), it is also interesting to note that Rennie shares this claim to "expertise" in surfaces with *Lady Oracle*'s Joan Foster. In both cases, this claim is ironic since Rennie and Joan are purblind and seriously misread not only their surroundings but other characters as well; both protagonists fall prey to the illusion of surfaces.

she must try not to panic" (159). She fends off panic by wilfully denying the persistent reality of the situation.

Similarly, during the rioting, Rennie observes Paul carrying a small machine gun "casually" and so attempts to deny its reality: "[t]o Rennie it looks like a toy.... She doesn't believe it could go off, and surely if it did nothing would come out of it but rubber bullets. She is afraid, but even her fear seems inappropriate. Surely they are not in any real danger. She tries hard for annoyance" (255). Once again, Rennie suppresses her internal reaction, her fear, and diligently attempts to relegate her surroundings to movie-plot fiction and to convince herself that the situations are not real. Howells notes that "Rennie's story emerges as a warning against disabling female fantasies of innocence and victimization which displace women's recognition of the dangers of real life. Rennie is implicated; after all the first threat to her came from within herself with the cancer. Such a correspondence has all the characteristic Atwoodian doubleness, where external threats are not only paralleled but also prefigured by threats inside the self" (*Private* 62). Similarly, the political question of power not only involves the social or external, but more immediately, it involves the individual or internal.

In order for Rennie to move outside of her condition of alienation, she must recognize her involvement and that social structure is a fluid construct. Lora challenges Rennie's assumptions and attempts to draw her attention to the reality of the situation surrounding them. As Staëls observes, "Lora suggests that the meaning of events shifts, depending on where you are. She thereby exposes the arbitrariness of Rennie's ethical norms and laws" (*Margaret* 144). In prison, Lora details her own aversion to Prince's involvement in the political situation and reveals her own fear: "'once in a while I thought, well, they [Prince and Marsdon, who threatened political revolt] might just do it. You know why? They're crazy enough. Sometimes crazy people can do things other people can't. Maybe because they believe it'" (266). At this point in the narrative, the revolt and rioting have already occurred, enacting Lora's fears. Significantly, however,

the romanticized notion of great achievement through "mad" behaviour is undercut by the reality that the revolt has led to chaos and Prince's death, not to democracy or even a political coup. Rennie's response is similarly revealing, as she clings to her passport as a symbol of democracy and freedom: "Rennie wonders where her passport is. She feels naked without it, she can't prove she is who she says she is. But she believes that other people believe in order, and in the morning, once they find out she's in here, once they realize who she is, they'll let her out" (267). Despite Lora's overt scoffing and assurances that the guards put salt in their tea not in error but "'[b]ecause they can'" (279-80), Rennie persists in expecting release and better treatment. Ironically, "[s]he [Rennie] longs for late-night television, she's had enough reality for the time being" (269). Rennie tries to will her rescue from prison, assuring herself that "[i]f she can only keep believing it, then it will happen" (280). As Annette Kolodny notes, however, "[t]here is no rescue from the realities on which this novel insists," and "in the end, what will save her [Rennie's] sanity is what she had once most feared: massive involvement" (100).

In her attempts to fend off fears of death, torture, and madness, Rennie strategically avoids thinking about "her own lack of power" or "what could be done to her" (273), suggesting avoidance but also a dawning awareness that reality is not limited to her orderly Western version of it. Notably, she tries to maintain her sanity by talking; though Rennie remains entirely uninterested in Lora's "life story," she is convinced that talking will stave off panic (270). As Marta Caminero-Santangelo observes, silence defines the role of the madwoman by indicating a complete loss of agency (11-12). Tellingly, Rennie resists this role. Rennie focuses on images from her Western world: first, the mechanized symbols of tidy civilization -- refrigerators, vacuum cleaners, bathtubs, "the small routines" (273). As her ability to think clearly deteriorates, Rennie, the dissociated "normal" figure, tries to think of "someone she's loved," yoga classes and, finally, the surgeon with whom she was infatuated (282-84). From among these tangibles, Rennie admits that Dr. Daniel Luoma remains a symbol of the "[n]ormal" and of

"[o]rdinary human decency" for her; she clings to this image: "[h]e's a mirage, a necessary illusion, a talisman she fingers, over and over, to keep herself sane" (284). This belief in normality, stability, and even what she once scoffed at as banality is Rennie's talisman, her life-source; she simply cannot assimilate the co-existence of these two normative realms. Grace contends that "Atwood identifies human failure as acquiescence in those Western dichotomies which postulate the inescapable, static division of the world into hostile opposites: culture/nature, ... head/body, reason/instinct, victor/victim " ("Articulating" 5). In this view, Rennie's inability to assimilate these realms of existence marks her "human failure," as does her condition of alienation; her humanity depends on acknowledgement of the complexity of reality and of her complicity in determining it.

Rennie's involvement in the West Indies demonstrates that norms are not transferable because they are not static. Consequently, her cultural dislocation involves a shift of normative limits, a shift which she resists accepting. Staëls also notes the role of the two cultural realms in the novel from a linguistic viewpoint:

> [f]or the signification of, for instance, 'lucky' or 'normal,' Rennie totally relies on the strict ideological context of Griswold or popular magazines. The recurrence of these terms, spoken by diverse individuals from different viewpoints in different cultural contexts, exposes the fact that the coded concepts in Rennie's mind reduce both the potential polysemy of language and the complexity of reality. These words are positioned in different discursive fields of meaning. (*Margaret* 144)

That said, 'normality' as a term or concept only becomes meaningful in the physical, and in *Bodily Harm*, the title is indicative of the physical manifestation of norms required before Rennie is shocked into awareness. In Jungian terms, her psyche must face a jarring experience in order to dislodge the individual from the imbalanced condition of "normality": "[t]he actual process of individuation... generally begins with a wounding of the personality and the suffering that accompanies it. This initial shock amounts to a sort of 'call,' although it is not often recognized as such" (von Franz, "Process" 69). Thus

Rennie's apparent lack of awareness and wilful blindness or disengagement by no means negate the fact that Atwood portrays her as involved in a process of self-realization.

The source of Rennie's shock is most evident, perhaps because most unavoidable, in the physical beatings which she sees as a "breach" of norms or as "mad" behaviour. Rennie cannot dismiss the brutality of the beatings she witnesses, but it is essential for her to see beyond the surface created by normative behavioural constructs. In order to increase in self-knowledge, Rennie must accept her own implication in this outcome by recognizing shared humanity. As Jung notes, "[e]ven if, juristically speaking, we were not accessories to the crime, we are always, thanks to our human nature, potential criminals.... None of us stands outside humanity's black collective shadow" (*Undiscovered* 52-53). The capacity for evil, then, is a part of humanity in Jung's construction. To ignore this human condition is inherently dangerous, for "[h]armlessness and naïveté ... lead to projection of the unrecognized evil into the 'other'" and creates fear that intensifies the threat of that created "other" (Jung, *Undiscovered* 53). This "evil" will take on an individualized form, for any projection is always a manifestation of the individual psyche. Jung contends that "we are unable to give a definition of good and evil that could be considered universally valid. In other words, we do not know what good and evil are in themselves" (*CW* 9.2.15). By contrast, Rennie's assumption that the behaviour she witnesses is "mad" or a breach of norms implies both stable norms and morals. In general, the act of projection has significant consequences when it goes unrecognized; in Jung's terms, "[w]hat is even worse, our lack of insight deprives us of the *capacity to deal with evil*" (*Undiscovered* 53). Consequently, Rennie's condition is not merely unfortunate but dangerous, and as a representative of contemporary Western society, she sounds a warning against such egocentric myopia and dissociation.

The way out of such a condition requires remedying both the internal and external division; in Jung's view, "[i]t is considered essential that he [the individual] recognize the shadow side in order to promote real human relationships between individuals and inner

cohesion within society.... [R]eason alone is not sufficient for accomplishing this task; a deeper self-knowledge, encompassing the entire psyche, is required" (*CW* 10:19; *Abstracts* 123). *Bodily Harm* involves the reader in recognizing this same need through Rennie's experiences. As Barbara Hill Rigney also observes of this novel: "Atwood's point ... is that we are all somehow guilty of being human and that malignancy is, quite possibly, a metaphor for the human condition. Atwood argues, as she also does at the conclusion of *Surfacing*, for a recognition of and a commitment to that human condition, no matter how malignant, and for an engagement with life, with reality, no matter how brutal or absurd." Rigney further notes that such a view permeates Atwood's writings: "[f]or Atwood, the genteel and the complacent are merely surfaces for the disguise of the horrible.... Thus Atwood forces her readers to see beneath surfaces, to confront a [different] kind of reality" (*Margaret* 109).

Perhaps the most poignant example of this complex reality is the deaf-mute man whom Rennie encounters on St. Antoine. Her fear and avoidance are foregrounded in these encounters which simultaneously emphasize the parallelism between the Western and Caribbean realms. By contrast, Rennie perceives her encounter with him as entirely alien; when she is unable to decipher his gesticulations, her uneasiness mounts: "Rennie feels very suddenly as if she's stepped across a line and found herself on Mars" (74). As he gives chase when she flees, Rennie begins to panic, feeling increasingly threatened, until Paul intervenes to explain that the deaf-mute man wishes to shake her hand for luck (74-75). In an ironic echo of Rennie's own perception, Paul terms her reaction "[a]lien reaction paranoia," explaining to Rennie that "[b]ecause you don't know what's dangerous and what isn't, everything seems dangerous" (76). In contrast to what Rennie perceives as Paul's patronizing explanation, Timothy Melley argues that *Bodily Harm* demonstrates that "paranoia toward stalkers does make some sense" (Nel 482). Melley further contends that the anonymity of the stalker increases the threat by suggesting that "'the problem of stalking may not stem from single deviant individuals but from a larger

complex of social institutions, narratives, and conditions'" (121 qtd. in Nel 482). This view aligns the sexual intruder to her apartment with the nameless deaf-mute man, highlighting the social construction of behavioural limits and one's reliance on these norms being upheld. The tenuous nature of prescribed normative limits is emphasized by the cultural comparisons in the novel. In Bouson's terms, "the Atwood novel ... has the power to make critic/readers [*sic*] anxious as it invites them to identify with female characters who are subject to ... persecutory fears"(12). By extension, then, the reader will also engage in Rennie's desperate wish for "things to return to normal; she wants the situation to normalize" (151). Nonetheless, Rennie's fears are not easily categorized as paranoia, for in Jung's construction, "paranoia ... usually ends in the total isolation of the subject" (*CW* 6.11). Atwood's representation of Rennie pointedly inverts this expected outcome.

The novel traces Rennie's slow recognition that the normative constructs on which she relies are malleable and that she is involved, whether she admits it or not. Rennie watches the brutal police beating of the deaf-dumb man with rapt attention, although fully aware that "her own fascination appals her" (146). Her act of observation physically implicates her in the crime which she perceives as a breach of norms. The man is a graphic physical representation of the complexity of reality as opposed to Rennie's expectation that the surface created by normative constraints will be maintained. Roberta Rubenstein terms the deaf-mute man "an icon of the victimization that accompanies muteness" (*Boundaries* 107). It is telling that Rennie is most disturbed not by the sight of the battered man -- disturbing as that is -- but by his vocalization: "there's a sound of some kind coming out of him, a moaning, a stifled reaching out for speech which is worse than plain silence" (147). Rennie's reaction is suggestive, for the moaning prefigures the nightly screaming she will hear in prison; more generally, its ability to affect her indicates a level of involvement as well as her recognition of the power of discourse and the need to engage therein. In fact, this forcible relegation to silence aligns the deaf-mute man with

the madwoman figure: he is both silenced and lacks agency. Thus, Rennie's bafflement, fear, and fascination which the deaf-mute man elicits can be seen, more generally, as reactions to madness. Politics is an issue of power, but in contrast to brute physical force, the source of power derives from language -- a foundational tenet of all propaganda and marketing, perhaps the two most apt representations of the Caribbean and Western cultures portrayed in the novel. Rennie's reluctant engagement in dialogue with Lora indicates her resistance to involvement. Even as Lora tells of having endured rape, Rennie expresses her astonishment but remains detached: "Rennie knows what she's supposed to feel: first horror, then sympathy. But she can't manage it" (271). The novel moves from this extreme detachment to what Nora Foster Stovel describes as a literal collapse of the two characters, wherein "Lora takes Rennie's place, and, as a result, her face is beaten to a pulp by the guards until her identity is literally effaced" (64).[21] In short, Rennie becomes inextricably involved.

In *Bodily Harm*, Atwood portrays Rennie's increasing awareness of social constructs and of her own involvement, ultimately leading to a change in her perception. As Atwood asserts in an interview, "Rennie makes a very big move. She accepts responsibility for another human being, which this society does not encourage. This is a society of individuals. You're supposed to be 'me first'" (Meese 190). Interestingly, Atwood does not distinguish between the two cultures in her remarks, but "this society" implies contemporary thought patterns in general. In this sense, her view coincides with those of Jung and Laing who contend that contemporary thought is focused on the ego-conscious and is seriously alienated from the unconscious and from others. Mirroring Jungian thought, Atwood uses the medium of dreams to portray Rennie's movement from a disengaged position to one of involvement. While imprisoned, Rennie is haunted by dreams about "the man with the rope, again, again." Recalling Joan Foster's imagined

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[21] Stovel, in fact, asserts that Lora and Rennie function as alter egos (64). The parallels and contrasts between the two women are equally striking.

confrontation at the centre of the maze with multiple male and female figures collapsed from her gothic romance and her actual lovers, Rennie is faced in her dreams with an indeterminate man who is all of her lovers, consecutively, and then is none: "[t]he face keeps changing, eluding her, he might as well be invisible, she can't see him, this is what is so terrifying, he isn't really there, he's only a shadow, anonymous, familiar, with silver eyes that twin and reflect her own" (287). Through these intrusions of her unconscious, Rennie begins to recognize her self in this image of evil, a crucial step towards the recognition of human duality which Jung argues is necessary for self-development. In the "split condition," one is able to avoid both the involvement and the responsibility, "prefer[ring] to localize the evil in individual criminals or groups of criminals, while washing our hands in innocence and ignoring the general proclivity to evil" (*Undiscovered* 53). Conversely, Rennie recognizes the intruder in her dream, her criminal figure of evil, as one simultaneously "anonymous" and "familiar" through whom she stares back at herself, suggesting that he is the figure of everyone, including Rennie herself. As Carrington notes, Atwood's novels "dramatize her protagonists' developing consciousness. Although they see themselves menaced by external enemies, they repeatedly discover the same enemy within" ("Margaret" 39).

Following her dream, Rennie views the brutal treatment of the prisoners through the small window in their cell, and the scalping of the deaf-dumb man in the guise of hair-cutting. In an eerie re-enactment of his beating in the street shortly after her arrival, Rennie again watches: "the hurt man's face is on a level with Rennie's own, blood pours down it, she knows who it is, the deaf and dumb man, who has a voice but no words, he can see her, she's been exposed, it's panic, he wants her to do something, pleading" (290). Suddenly, she is utterly shaken by the reality of her situation and her own powerlessness, her own lack of voice: "she's shaking.... [I]t's not done with ketchup, nothing is inconceivable here, no rats in the vagina but only because they haven't thought of it yet, they're still amateurs" (290). This parallel to the incident which triggered

Rennie's uncertainty in the Western world signifies the extent to which Rennie is affected; she is terrified by her sudden awareness of instability. It is a moment of revelation: "Rennie understands for the first time that this is not necessarily a place she will get out of, ever. She is not exempt. Nobody is exempt from anything" (290). In this moment, Rennie relinquishes her tenacious grip on the false security of her assumptions and constructions.

Rennie's recognition of the real danger of her situation and her own complicity is an important step, but must be borne out in the physical sphere. In Jungian terms, "[t]he evil witnessed in the world outside, in neighbors or neighboring peoples, can be made conscious as evil contents of our own psyche as well, and this insight would be the first step to a radical change in our attitude to our neighbors" (Jaffé 316). This internalization of perceived evil, resulting in an attitude change, is evident in Rennie's interaction with Lora. She who grudgingly conversed, in the end extends compassion to Lora's near-lifeless body after the police have beaten her until her face is no longer a face but a bruise. Rennie's attempts to dissociate herself no longer have power. Notably, Rennie attempts to dissuade herself from becoming involved: "it's no one she recognizes, she has no connection with this, there's nothing she can do, it's the face of a stranger" (298). Nevertheless, she is forced to admit to herself that "there's no such thing as a faceless stranger" (299). Like the deaf-mute man, Rennie must now function without the power of words; she takes Lora's hand, "gritting her teeth with the effort, she can hear herself, a moaning, it must be her own voice" (299). The parallel between Rennie and the deaf-mute man as well as the tortured prisoners, in general, is suggestive; all are marginalized, powerless, and relegated to moaning or screaming as a means of expression. Consequently, only when Rennie pronounces the name "Lora" and re-enters the realm of discourse does the body she holds respond.

Rennie's reclamation of agency through discourse requires recognition of her involvement. Carrington notes that "this compassion can occur only after Rennie has

recognized her own complicity in the evil she has hitherto seen only in other and only in men" ("Margaret" 87). This change marks the climax of the novel and so supersedes the critical debate over whether the novel's conclusion depicts an actual release from prison or Rennie's fantasy. Atwood has remarked on the significance of "the internal change" that occurs for Rennie, stating that "whether she gets out or not, she has still undergone an experience that has changed her way of seeing" (Lyons 228). Atwood indicates Rennie's own awareness of this change as an internal paradigm shift; she has experienced a fundamental change in perception as she sits (or imagines she sits) on the plane. Rennie paradoxically remarks that "[w]hat she sees has not altered; only the way she sees it. It's all exactly the same. Nothing is the same" (300). Moreover, the description of her release involves returning home, but "home" is also inherently different. Rather than a return to the familiar and the comfortable, Rennie characterizes her return to Toronto as "walk[ing] up the stairs and through her own front door, into the unknown" (299). Whether she leaves the prison or not, Rennie is entering a different sphere of existence.

This new sphere -- this connection with others and awareness of social constructs, particularly of her complicity in creating society and reality -- is intimately connected to the power of discourse that Rennie had previously exploited so frivolously in her career. As Jerome H. Rosenberg observes, "[t]hrough her experiences, Rennie ... comes finally to understand that she cannot divorce herself from the rest of humanity, cannot proclaim innocence, and cannot renounce the power she and the words she writes hold over others" (130). Her stint in the Caribbean involves not only being removed from familiar surroundings but also being stripped of agency -- entirely, for the first time, and in a way that her feminist vision of marginalization could not begin to imagine. In Laing's view, loss of agency is what most clearly marks the mad person and separates her/him from the rest of society, from the rest of humanity: "[m]ore completely, more radically than anywhere else in our society, he is invalidated as a human being" (*Politics of Experience* 122). Marta Caminero-Santangelo bluntly states this connection: "insanity is the final

surrender to such [dominant] discourses, precisely because it is characterized by the (dis)ability to produce meaning -- that is, to produce representations recognizable within society" (11). Caminero-Santangelo adds that "madness is thus the final removal of the madwoman from any field of agency" (12), resulting in the fact that "the madwoman loses her title to humanity" (13). Rennie renounces agency in her choice to write about superficial trends and in her refusal to write the article requested by Dr. Minnow; moreover, she is stripped of agency when imprisoned, through her loss of a voice in society (symbolized in the confiscation of her passport and papers) and through her literal loss of words, her moaning. Through this utter loss of agency, Rennie is temporarily transformed from the figure of normative society to the madwoman figure. Yet as a writer, she is positioned to overcome this silencing and thus the relegation to madness through discourse.

This enunciation must be chosen, an act which is arguably the premise of the novel *Bodily Harm*; not only do Lora and Rennie exchange life stories, but Rennie is telling the story to an implied audience -- whether to an actual listener or, perhaps more significantly, to Atwood's reader. In either case, Rennie is reclaiming her agency. Speaking generally, Yalom claims that "sanity is predicated on the ability and the opportunity to communicate one's personal history, through speech or writing, to a receptive audience" (111). Although Lora and Rennie are, at times, a hostile, captive audience, Atwood's reader may be seen to take on the role of the "receptive audience." In this view, Rennie's role as storyteller collapses with Atwood's, but in both cases, the reader retains her/his role. Thus Diana Brydon's remarks about *The Handmaid's Tale* seem equally relevant to *Bodily Harm*; Brydon notes that "Offred offers readers of *The Handmaid's Tale* their own agency, calling us into existence as witnesses. We become students who learn our own humanity through vicariously suffering its denial to others" (54). Although Atwood does not frame Rennie's storytelling as explicitly, Rennie also "call[s] us into existence as witnesses," as is suggested by her opening remark, "[t]his is

how I got here" (11).[22] The reader's role in the novel is essential to its existence, on the one hand, and for Rennie's dialogue to exist, on the other. Vevaina asserts that "[a]ccording to Atwood, silence and powerlessness go together" (*Re/Membering* 77). Consequently, when Rennie rejects her position of dissociation and disengagement and accepts her complicity, by extension she accepts the necessity to engage in discourse.

Through engagement with Rennie's speech, the reader is positioned to experience her revelation through the act of ideation in a way and to a degree that is impossible in actual human contact. In Laingian terms, the experience of the other is exclusive (*Politics of Experience* 17-45). Ironically, awareness that the experience of the other is conveyed by a book and is transferred through ideation may provide precisely the opposite reaction in some readers. As Janice Kulyk Keefer asserts, "we want both judgement and absolution from the novels we read. We understand that fiction can show us things about ourselves, our world and our condition therein to which we'd previously been blind; and yet we also know that if the text tells us things we do not wish or cannot bear to hear, we can dismiss it: after all, it's 'just a book', something made and, by corollary, made up" (154). Atwood seems to circumscribe such dismissal in her readers not only by insisting on their participation through means such as ambiguous endings, but by positing a dual role for the writer. Kulyk Keefer further remarks that "[w]riting, she [Atwood] declares, is the giving of a voice to the silenced or the mute" through the act of witnessing; moreover, this enunciation involves responsibilities: "it is not enough, Atwood suggests, for writers merely to tell the terrible or tedious truths of how we live and how things are, truths most readers would rather forget about. The writer's other fundamental duty as Dr. Minnow reminds the 'fallen writer,' Rennie Wilford in *Bodily Harm*, is to 'imagine

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[22] Brydon notes an interesting dilemma in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's theory of subaltern agency: "*Subaltern* is Spivak's term for an oppressed and silenced subject position. Since the subaltern is someone who by definition has been denied the power of independent action or speech, theorists question how such a person may achieve agency and change that status" (50). A similar dilemma seems to plague the mad figure once s/he has fully removed her/himself from society. Rennie, however, avoids such a situation since she is constantly recounting her tale. Thus, she cannot be considered either to have fully "been denied the power of independent ... speech" or to have fully become a mad figure.

things being different'" (Kulyk Keefer 164). This reading actually enhances the significance of Atwood's inclusion both of the possibility that Rennie has been released and also of her conviction to report on what has happened. Rennie's recognition of normative instability and ideological constructs has positioned her differently: "she is a subversive. She was not one once but now she is. A reporter. She will pick her time; then she will report. For the first time in her life, she can't think of a title" (301). Even if this is a fantasy of reporting, both Atwood and Rennie are fulfilling their writerly duty: they are imagining things being different.

Chapter Two

Normality as a Misleading Construct: *Lady Oracle* and *Life Before Man*

"A lot of normal people aren't happy."

-- Margaret Atwood (Twigg 126)

If *The Edible Woman* introduces psychology with a wry grin, it also offers a serious glimpse of the problematic nature of socially constructed normality through its marginal, abnormal characters. *Bodily Harm* amplifies this awareness of normative constructs and variability through the protagonist's stark physical and psychic dislocation. A similar pairing of the comical and serious is found in *Lady Oracle* (1976) and *Life Before Man* (1979). However, Atwood's focus on social paradigms shifts to a particular examination of the individual effects of the "normal" condition. The protagonists of these novels -- Joan, Elizabeth, and Lesje -- reveal their fear of the unknown through avoidance of their unconscious. Jung and Laing argue that modern Western society fosters such a limited view of the self as merely the ego-conscious, and thereby silences the unknown, the irrational, the unconscious. In this respect, Joan, Elizabeth, and Lesje are thoroughly "normal," modern Western women. Their mental imbalance is a result of their divided selves wherein the conscious/unconscious, mind/body, and self/others are artificially segregated, and the novels portray their struggles within this condition. Despite the characters' attempts to ignore their psychic imbalance, the psyche reveals its compensatory and insistently autonomous nature. The unconscious intrudes on each of these women, and each reacts differently to "madness" in the forms of fantasy, animus figures, periods of unconsciousness, and suicidal tendencies. Although comical, the consequences of Joan's actions and reactions are no less serious than the bleakness experienced by Elizabeth and Lesje. Coomi S. Vevaina observes that *Lady Oracle*, in

particular, "parodies ... the numerous fictions we live by" (*Re/Membering* 49). The constructs of "madness," "normality," and "reality" are concepts which, ironically, Atwood's novels expose as created "fictions."

Joan Foster is, thus far, Atwood's most successful comedienne. Her wild fluctuations from chubby, woolly-costumed child-mothball stomping through the ballet pageant to the svelte, tablecloth- and widow-boot-adorned woman dreamily waltzing with the Royal Porcupine are highly comical. More seriously, however, the intensity and transience of her experiences are overt attempts to live beyond the designated boundaries of "normality" and "reality." These attempts are potentially constructive but, in spite of their humour, are ultimately unrealized. Joan is a woman whose bumbling attempts to escape these normative restrictions are applauded by the reader, on the one hand, and are disparaged as irresponsible and clownish, on the other -- doomed to fail. Yet, in Joan, Atwood has created a figure who, in a sense, is the reader. Although presented as an extreme, Joan grapples with her unconscious in the same way that Jung argues every individual must, and so paradoxically her escapist tendencies actually enact an attempt to maintain "normality." That is, Joan outwardly resists conformity to social norms -- most drastically, through maintaining her obesity in contradiction to her social-climbing mother's designs -- yet inwardly Joan's resistance to the autonomous intrusions of the unconscious results from adherence to the social norm of Self as ego-consciousness. As Hilde Staëls notes, "Atwood generally maintains an ironic perspective that exposes ambivalences, among other things the limits of consciousness on the part of her protagonists" (*Margaret* 215). Certainly, Atwood exposes Joan's limits of consciousness, but she simultaneously exposes Joan in the process of challenging those limits through her fascination with fantasy, the irrational, and the supernatural. Moreover, the unconscious continually intrudes on Joan's consciousness, asserting its existence and demanding her acknowledgement -- to no avail.

As a result, Atwood's presentation of Joan is highly deceptive. The reader perceives Joan as extreme, dissociated from reality, mentally imbalanced, and so as radically different from her/himself, one who is normal, stable, perhaps even average. Yet the reader's latter, comforting notion is neatly debunked as a false, artificial construct. In a conversation regarding human behaviour and cultural differences, Atwood observes that "[w]e have an unconscious assumption that the way we live is normal and average, and that everybody else is strange. I've never been able to buy that. I think we're strange, too" (Hancock 214). Despite all appearances and the reader's tendency to dismiss her as "strange," Joan is a figure of the "normal" Western condition whose struggle to maintain mental balance actually mirrors our own. Rather than being the reader's opposite, Joan is the reader taken to an extreme, just as madness is normal behaviour taken to an extreme. In a psycho-social reading, she teeters on the brink of madness. Conversely, both Laingian and Jungian readings place Joan closer to sanity than the average, for she risks encounters with the unknown; she is indeed "abnormal," but in this sense, that is to be admired. In the end, however, these encounters fail spectacularly, for she remains in a divided state or "normal" condition, still lacking the self-realization or integration that could have resulted from her encounters. Joan's mental balancing act is seen particularly through three focal points: her association with Louisa K. Delacourt, spiritualism, and animus figures.

Louisa K. Delacourt is a dual figure in the novel, suggestive of the mind/body split, for she exists in the physical world as Joan's aunt, offering companionship and acceptance to the lonely girl but, more importantly, after her death Aunt Lou functions as Joan's false identity or second self, signalling Joan's withdrawal into the mind. Joan relishes her secret double existence, jealously guarding it even from her husband, Arthur (*LO* 214). In her adoption of her deceased aunt's name as pseudonym, Joan enacts the dissociation of mind and body which she fostered through her obesity and which Laing regards as the first step towards a schizoid existence. Susan Maclean notes that "Joan is

imprisoned in a body which, at first, she refuses to recognize as her own. She thus exhibits a dissociation between mind and body that is typical of Atwood's protagonists." Significantly, Maclean further notes that "Joan represents an extreme case of self-alienation. Her hold on the self is only tenuous"(183). In her obese state, then, Joan's mental connection to her body is nearly severed -- an ironic result, considering the constant attention she gives to it. This attention is Joan's desperate attempt to fix her existence (both to establish it and to correct it) through the physical because she is so perilously dissociated. In some moments, Joan recognizes this tendency: "I ate to defy her [Joan's mother], but I also ate from panic. Sometimes I was afraid I wasn't really there, I was an accident. ... Did I want to become solid, solid as a stone so that she couldn't get rid of me? (76). The uncertainty Joan reveals is, in Laingian terms, the condition of "the ontologically insecure person." Such people "experience themselves as primarily split into a mind and a body. Usually they feel most closely identified with the 'mind'" (Laing, *Divided* 67). Even when Joan loses the excess weight, she retains this ontological insecurity which becomes a withdrawal into the world of fantasy.

As Joan's own comments also suggest, her dissociation is directly linked to her relationship with her mother. Her separation from the body, using it as a weapon, becomes a war of wills that can have no victor. Roberta Rubenstein asserts that such a connection of the mind and body is common in Atwood's novels: "most of her central characters experience themselves as internally divided, a feeling that may also be expressed in the way they perceive their bodies. Often, distorted images of the self or the body are manifestations of crucial unresolved psychological issues." Moreover, she adds that "[i]n several of the novels, the relationship between mother and daughter is revealed as a central aspect of the narrator's problems with identity, self-image, and selfhood" (Rubenstein, *Boundaries* 65). Certainly in the case of Joan, this psycho-social connection is evident. As Joan observes, "[t]he war between my mother and myself was on in earnest; the disputed territory was my body. I didn't quite know this though I sensed it in

a hazy way" (67). Her unconscious reaction to her mother emphasizes the psychological level of their relationship.

Joan's mother, Frances, also seems to recognize this connection, for she sees Joan's physical rebellion as a sign of mental instability or abnormality and so sends her to a psychiatrist. On her first visit, Joan's divided state is instantly revealed in the dichotomy between her speech and actions: "'I like being fat,' I told him, and burst into tears" (81). Interestingly, Joan is not subjected to these sessions for long: "[t]he psychiatrist gave up on me after three sessions of tears and silence. I resented the implication that there were yet more things wrong with me in addition to being fat, and he resented my resentment." While this standstill is not at all surprising considering Joan's confrontational history with her mother, the overt reason that the sessions are terminated is revealing: "[t]he psychiatrist told my mother it was a family problem which couldn't be resolved by treating me alone, and she was indignant. 'He has his nerve,' she said to my father. 'He just wants to get more money out of me. They're all quacks, if you ask me'" (84). At the mere suggestion of implication, Joan's mother becomes highly defensive, attacking the psychiatrist's integrity, ability, and motives. The echo here to Laingian methods is unmistakable; Laing emphasizes the significance of the interpersonal relationships between the so-called mentally disturbed person and her/his family, indicating as a premise to much of the research "the impression that, if the patients were *disturbed*, their families were often very *disturbing*" (*Politics of Experience* 112-13). Yet it is important to recall that counter to common condemnations of his work, Laing does not argue that families are the causal factor, rather that "what are called the signs and symptoms of a disease process are seen to be much more socially intelligible than has come to be supposed by most psychiatrists" (Mullan 168-69). Similarly, Jung emphasizes the limitations and even danger of considering the individual in isolation, elaborating on the fact that "[t]o understand human psychology, it is absolutely necessary that you study

man also in his social and general environments" (Evans 151).[1] Joan's mother, however, will have none of it. The psychiatrist is denied access to the family dynamics.

Nevertheless, Atwood does include some insight into Joan's family sphere and some of the particulars are indeed disturbing. Joan's father, an anesthetist at the Toronto General Hospital, uses experimental methods to "resurrect" patients who have attempted suicide and remain unresponsive to any other treatments (70). This practice results in abusive phonecalls and threatening visits from angry, unstable individuals -- intrusions which Joan's mother deeply resents. Her reaction to what she perceives as a breach of etiquette and privacy is to dismiss their value as human beings: "'[i]t's a waste of time, if you ask me. They'll simply try it all over again. If they were serious they'd just stick a gun in their mouth and pull the trigger. That takes the chance out of it.'" Joan's father grimly replies that "'[n]ot everyone ... has your determination'" (71).[2] Although he seems to be the voice of compassion and reason, Joan's father is a complicated figure. His "resurrectionist" side is juxtaposed to a secret past as a military Intelligence agent whose "'job was to kill the people they thought were fakes.... He had to just take them out and shoot them. In cold blood.'" According to Joan's mother, "'he told me once that the frightening thing about it was, he started to *enjoy* it'" (73). Faced with this disturbing information, gained by eavesdropping on her parents, Joan begins to imagine her father as a source of all sorts of secretive truths and fabricates having conversations with him "about jealousy and madness," among other things (74). In reality, however, her father is mostly silent, and when asked directly about why people attempt suicide, he sidesteps the question which Joan recognizes as "far too complicated for him" (70). Thus, Joan is faced with conflicting and confusing psychological responses in her parents and is placed in close proximity to the outbursts of suicidal individuals.

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[1] For a specific, detailed consideration of the need for social contextualization, see Laing's *Self and Others*, particularly chapter 6, "Complementary Identity" (65-80), and Jung in interview with Richard I. Evans (150-54).

[2] Of course, this method of suicide is employed by Chris in *Life Before Man* with disastrous consequences for himself and others.

This contradictory environment may contribute to Joan's inability to associate psychological stability with her parents. Her mother is an alcoholic who begins drinking more heavily once her dinner parties and networking no longer contribute to furthering her husband's career (71). The conflict with Joan further drives her to take refuge in alcohol, to the point that she no longer bothers to get dressed and is drunk in the afternoons (123). In this alcoholic stupour, when confronted with Joan's ill-judged announcement that she will be leaving home as soon as she has fulfilled Aunt Lou's condition of weight loss and can collect the inheritance, Joan's mother loses control. Frances begins to rage at Joan about God's punishment and lashes out physically. Joan describes the situation as melodramatically as possible, as a stabbing in which her mother takes a paring knife "and stuck it into my arm, above the elbow." The horror becomes comical, however, as she adds that "[i]t went through my sweater, pricked the flesh, then bounced out and fell to the floor." Realistically, it is Joan's sweater that has been stabbed; even she admits that it was a "scratch." Nevertheless, based on her mother's actions and sudden "religious sentiments," Joan "decide[s] she is crazy" (124). This same instability is apparently expected in her father as well, for after her mother's accidental death, Joan considers the alternative. She wonders whether her father might not have murdered his wife (179-80) and then whether her mother had committed suicide (180). Tellingly, Joan decides that the latter scenario is more likely, reflecting on her mother's loneliness: "[s]he used to say that no one appreciated her, and this was not paranoia" (179). Guilt is also a factor, as Joan adds that "[f]or the first time in my life I began to feel it was unfair that everyone had liked Aunt Lou but no one had liked my mother, not really. She'd been too intense to be likable" (181). In her musings, Joan realizes that although possible neither death scenario is probable, yet she remains clearly dubious about her parents' mental stability. This reaction is contrary to the tendency to normalize and to rationalize behaviour of one's family or society in order to avoid any stigma being attached to

oneself (Jodelet 55). Joan's reaction, then, may suggest her suspicion of her own mental state.

Joan's selection of Aunt Lou's identity as a pseudonym reflects the diametrical relationship between Lou, her father's sister, and Frances, Joan's mother, as well as the division within Joan herself. Lou is messy, overweight, has a job with a feminine products firm, and has a married lover; in Joan's mother's opinion, Lou is entirely inappropriate. Frances, on the other hand, is presented as "a Walt Disney version of evil, an anomaly in Atwood's complex fictional world in which characters are seldom so simplistic." Based on this representation, Barbara Hill Rigney further observes that "it is, then, altogether possible that she represents, at least partly, Joan's subjective projection" (*Margaret* 64). Hilde Staëls concurs, adding that this psychological link, in fact, results in Joan's internalization of her mother's normative standards; Staëls argues that "[h]er mother becomes Joan's double, her alter ego, and her tyrannical judge. Joan indeed evaluates everyone and everything from the normative viewpoint, from the prohibitions of her mother. Though she reacts emotionally against the latter's regulations, she (unconsciously) desires to give in to her demands" (*Margaret* 73). Notably, since Joan's mother creates the norms, they cannot be considered a definitive, objective standard. In Laing's view, fear of uncertainty is the sole reason norms exist; he asserts that "what we fondly appeal to as normality is a cruel fiction based on no more or less than what most people at a given time guess that they, and the others, think is so -- a narrow majority agreement fraught with terrible contradictions ... that we enforce out of fear of too much uncertainty, and at the cost of appalling alienation" (Evans xxiv-xxv). In Joan's case, the rigour of this normative standard does indeed contribute to her divided state; although she resents the social expectations and rebels against them, Joan does not seem to recognize their nebulous existence and so is ruled by the expectations of others.

Joan's conscious association with her aunt is an attempt to distance herself from her mother as well as from the unconscious retention of her fat self-image. Not

surprisingly, then, even after her weight loss, Joan continues to be bombarded by Fat Lady fantasies which represent autonomous intrusions of her unconscious. Vevaina notes that Joan's mother and the Fat Lady represent Joan's "many selves" in the form of alter egos or the multiple, projected shadows of Atwood's protagonist (*Re/Membering* 67). Conversely, Staëls sees the fantasies as representative of the power of social norms: "[t]he grotesque images with which she [Joan] continuously enlarges her body tragically reinforce the power of the stereotype, of the 'normal' or normative perspective of society" (*Margaret* 83). Both of these views are suggestive of the unconscious effect the fantasies have on Joan, as indicated in Jung's discussion of unconscious fantasies; in fact, Joan's fantasies themselves become unconscious.

The Fat Lady fantasies begin as Joan's fanciful dreams of acceptance (88) and are a means of escaping monotony through seemingly harmless, conscious daydreaming. Later, however, Joan's fantasies become less escapist, for they are accompanied by her certainty that Arthur, her husband, would analyze these fantasies as "destructive ... attitudes of society, forcing me [Joan] into a mold of femininity that I could never fit." However, Joan dismisses these rational explanations as "[v]ery true, very right, very pious" but too simplistic, for she recognizes that she desires those "feminine" things (101-102). Finally, these fantasies gain complete autonomy and enter Joan's life uninvoked, much to her dismay. As she tries to confess her affair with the Royal Porcupine to Arthur, the Fat Lady fantasies take over the serious moment; Joan begins to imagine the Fat Lady floating over an ice skating arena while others prepare "to shoot her down in cold blood" with a harpoon. At this point, Joan forces herself to stop fantasizing only to find herself faced with questions she cannot answer: "*Why am I doing this?* I thought. *Who's doing this to me?*" (275-76). It is telling that Joan voices both questions, indicating that the fantasies are no longer under her conscious control. "The activation of unconscious fantasies," Jung observes, "is a process that occurs when consciousness finds itself in a situation of distress." Jung further notes that pathological "effects develop only

when the individual is faced with a situation which he cannot overcome by conscious means," the effects usually manifesting themselves as a dissociation of the individual (*Undiscovered* 37). Not surprisingly, then, Joan feels herself both acting -- "*Why am I doing this?*" -- and being acted upon -- "*Who's doing this to me?*" The assumptions behind both of her questions are simultaneously true; she is consciously acting, but she is also being acted upon by the unconscious.

As the unconscious struggles for acknowledgement and assimilation, it becomes increasingly stronger -- until Joan finds herself clearly in distress, afraid and alone in Italy, being overtaken by the fantasy: "[i]t was the Fat Lady. She rose into the air and descended on me as I lay stretched out in the chair. For a moment she hovered around me like ectoplasm, like a gelatin shell, my ghost, my angel; then she settled and I was absorbed into her. Within my former body, I gasped for air. Disguised, concealed.... Obliterated" (322). Susan Maclean explains Joan's encounters as the return of a repressed self-image: "[h]er psyche will not allow her to forget her fat days, and she is pursued by the past in the form of the Fat Lady fantasies" (183). While Maclean recognizes the insistence and autonomy of the psyche, her explanation is based on the Freudian premise of seeking a causal factor in the past for a complex in the present ; by contrast, a Jungian approach would seek to understand what the intrusions reveal about the present and what the individual is unwilling to acknowledge. The hostile insistence of the fantasy can also be explained by Joan's unwillingness in the present to assimilate her mind and body, for "[t]he shadow becomes hostile only when he is ignored or misunderstood" (von Franz 182). The situation exemplifies Jung's observation that "[n]eurotic symptoms ... might be *compensatory*; part of a self-regulating mechanism whose aim was the achievement of a better balance within the psyche" (Storr 17). Not surprisingly, then, Joan's conscious struggle with her unconscious and her apparent loss to the power of the unconscious are much more encompassing than her secret Fat Lady fantasies.

Joan constructs an entire second identity for herself that links her to the world of fantasy. Joan adopts Louisa K. Delacourt as a pseudonym for the purpose of writing gothic romance novels as a source of income, an activity she keeps secret from Arthur but views with some satisfaction. In comparison to the wives of Arthur's friends, Joan feels her method of dealing with fantasy as a separate aspect of her life is more realistic and, tellingly, more effective. Joan inwardly boasts, "I had the edge on them: after all, when it came to fantasy lives I was a professional, whereas they were merely amateurs" (217-18). Nevertheless, she begins to find this dissociation unfulfilling: "[i]t was true I had two lives, but on off days I felt that neither of them was completely real" (218). Through Joan's own awareness, Atwood signals the dissociation that Joan feels from both spheres of her existence; that is, Joan's attempts to escape reality through fantasy are unsuccessful and they indicate Joan's dissociated condition in so-called "reality." Her "real" life -- although based on a multitude of falsehoods -- and the gothic romances that she creates can be viewed as representative of Joan's conscious and her unconscious, reality and fantasy respectively (Maclean 184). Nevertheless, Atwood's use of the gothic romance as a genre obscures the possibility of any simplistic division between the two realms, for in the gothic romance "the laws of nightmare replace the laws of probability ... [and] repressed anxieties and terrors rise to the surface of the narrative" (Abrams, "Restoration" 2064). In writing the gothic romances, then, Joan re-creates the irrational realm and the fear of the unknown, something at which she is adept because she shares these same fears. As the genre plays with and preys on the unconscious fears of the characters and the readers, Joan's creation of the plot similarly plays with her own fears of the irrational -- fears which she tries to displace onto the characters and readers of the genre. Consequently, the plot actually replicates Joan's own condition of fear.

Interestingly, the popularity of these gothic romances largely hinges on a subtle recognition by writers and readers that social norms are an unstable construct, and the novels inhabit a world outside of the rational. Thus, "fiction -- Gothic or sentimental --

that indulged in extreme states of feeling, freed many writers to question the norms of behaviour. Identifying with characters in novels, readers might find themselves" (Abrams, "Restoration" 2067). Joan occupies the position of both writer and reader in her creation of the gothic romances, and she fulfils each of these roles badly. Joan finds herself unable to adhere to the expected plot in which "all wives were eventually either mad or dead, or both," nor can she sympathize any longer with the virtuous maiden (321). Unlike the expected reader of gothic romance, Joan cannot find herself in the novel, for she does not exist in a simplistic world of good (sanity), evil (insanity), and the inevitable "happy endings" that she claims to crave (321). In Joan's world, sanity and insanity are neither readily distinguishable nor such discrete, stable states of existence. Significantly, classic gothics included extensive use of "dark villains in subterranean places (so metaphorically appropriate as motifs of the unconscious)" (Johnson xi). The eighteenth-century gothic novels are considered to have "opened up to later fiction the dark, irrational side of human nature -- the savage egoism, the perverse impulses, and the nightmarish terrors that lie beneath the controlled and ordered surface of the conscious mind" (Abrams, "Romantic" 19). Joan's gothic romance novels claim this inheritance; thus, her foray into the genre involves engagement with the irrational, fear, and the unknown, often tinged with the supernatural.

Nevertheless, this engagement is unsuccessful, for Joan cannot integrate the two realms. The mutually reflecting episodes within *Lady Oracle* indicate that fantasy (in the form of the gothic) begins to take over her life. Not only does Joan act out the plots to get past writer's block (220), but she begins to live out these plots in her own life -- most graphically in her physical attacks of Arthur early on (164-65) and of the reporter at the end of the novel (343-44). Joan is "unable to maintain clear distinctions between reality and fantasy"; consequently, Sherrill Grace observes that "the reader is able to perceive the irony of Joan's position because that irony exists in our expectations of realist fiction and Joan's absurd 'autobiography,' and in the *absence* of a gap between Joan's life and her

Costume Gothics" (*Violent* 124-25). Joan, in fact, tries to re-create reality based on the plot of fantasy, thereby exhibiting a condition of imbalance which places her in psychological danger. Jung observes that schizophrenia is generally characterized by "the special tendency of these patients to construct an inner fantasy world of their own, surrendering for this purpose their adaptation to reality"; they lack "emotional rapport" and eventually the fantasies progressively increase until "the dream world becomes more real for the patient than external reality" (*CW* 4, Storr 55). Jung's research further revealed that "invasions of fantasies into conscious life" were most often viewed as the initial stages of mental instability by both the individual experiencing them and by psychiatrists (Evans 132-33). That is, an individual's failure to recognize and to integrate the intrusions of the unconscious into consciousness are interpreted as indications of madness because of the acknowledged potency and inherent dangers of fantasy.

The potential for self-realization through the integration of these divided realms is not considered and, in Laingian terms, the behaviours are preconceived as symptoms of a mental disease. Many critics interpret the novel in just this fashion, exemplifying Jung's assertion. Barbara Hill Rigney argues that "Joan never comes to terms with a reality beneath the surface of her schizophrenic existence" (*Margaret* 62). Similarly, Francis Mansbridge asserts that in *Lady Oracle* "paranoid schizophrenia ... seems more a condition of modern society" (113); Mansbridge argues that unlike Atwood's other novels, in *Lady Oracle* "[t]here is less of an attempt to reconcile this split and more of an acceptance of schizophrenia, if not paranoia, as an aspect of modern life" (114). The language employed here demonstrates the ease with which such medical terms of psychological states are designated and such disorders are assumed to exist; however, there remains a large gap between asserting that the modern condition is a divided state and claiming that it is a schizophrenic one.[3] Nevertheless, such comments clearly indicate

[3] It is likely that these critics are alluding to Atwood's own statement -- made in 1970 in *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* -- of Canada's national mental illness being "paranoid schizophrenia." Nevertheless, one must be careful to observe that making such a statement is not equivalent to an endorsement of the condition

that the socially constructed dichotomy between sanity and insanity, normality and abnormality, is just that: a social construct with a very fine line of demarcation.

Jung's view of the "normal" condition being one of ego-consciousness and ignorance of the unconscious psyche indicates that the unconscious will intrude on consciousness in a compensatory effort and that its actions will often be misunderstood. While these intrusions are indeed evidence of mental imbalance -- that is, of a mind balanced in favour of the conscious psyche -- the unconscious intrusions hold the potential for integration through acknowledgement. Unfortunately, they are often erroneously perceived simply as psychological instability or "crazy" tricks of the mind. In this view, Joan's attempts to re-create and act out the irrational through the gothic -- actions which are typically viewed as escaping reality -- can also be seen as attempts to integrate her own fear of the unconscious. Susan Maclean contends that "[h]er [Joan's] Costume Gothics, then, are antidotes to consciousness. They provide the relief sought by her alter ego in the bizarre" (184). Maclean's comments insightfully suggest that the conscious psyche is both limiting and limited; they also indicate that a solution is to be found "in the bizarre" as a form of "relief" or escape from the confining state of consciousness. The difficulty with this view is that it seems to suggest that Joan's "alter ego" temporarily escapes to the unconscious and that this is a sufficient compromise position. Such a claim undercuts the Jungian notion that the goal is for consciousness to integrate the unconscious psyche as a means of self-realization; it is not simply to get a quick "fix" in order to maintain the dissociated state of "normality," nor is it to seek escape in the irrational or, in Maclean's words, "the bizarre." Jung does, however, posit "the process of individuation [as] an antidote to alienation" (Vevaina, *Re/Membering* 28), but this process requires the integration of the unconscious psyche.

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as a desirable one. Interestingly, in a more recent interview Atwood claims that "Joan is not schizophrenic" (Vevaina, "Daring" 154).

Rather than being perceived as escapism, then, Joan's encounters with the unconscious can be seen to hold the potential for her own psychic healing. In Joan's case, this potential remains unrealized possibly because she does not consciously undertake the process of psychic integration; her actions seem to be instinctive and driven by the unconscious. Nevertheless, in modern society, any attempts to integrate the unconscious (fantasy) into her conscious existence (reality) as well as the goal of integration itself must be viewed as "abnormal." This is an experiment to which gothic is particularly suited; as Coral Ann Howells notes, "[g]othic finds a language for representing areas of the self (like fears, anxieties, forbidden desires) which are unassimilable in terms of social conventions" (*Margaret* 63). Ironically, then, Joan's failure to achieve integration indicates her "normality"; she remains in a divided state on the levels of conscious/unconscious and mind/body. Atwood wryly reveals her awareness that many readers may be uncomfortable with the association of Joan with normality: "[t]he hypothesis of the book, insofar as there is one, is: what happens to someone who lives in the 'real' world but does it as though this 'other' world is the real one? This may be the plight of many more of us than we care to admit" (Oates 75). Interestingly, Atwood's comments also implicate the reader in recognizing her/himself in Joan -- the very expectation whose fulfilment popularized the original gothic novels, and as Iser would contend, the novel in general. In effect, Joan's use of the gothic novel retains and confirms the "normal" division of the individual since the genre functions on the basis of exploiting unconscious fears and the irrational. However, her own use of the gothic simultaneously challenges this division through her (perhaps unknowing and certainly failed) attempt to integrate the unconscious and conscious psyche.

In addition to the gothic romance writing, Joan's dissociated state and the attempts to balance her psyche as well as the rift between her mind and body are evident in her dabbling in spiritualism. The appeal of spiritualism is particularly strong because, as Vevaina notes, Joan's "innate spirituality [is] ruthlessly truncated"; in modern fashion,

her life is "arid, amputated" due to her internal divisions and failure to acknowledge her unconscious (*Re/Membering* 28). Notably, Aunt Lou is the figure who introduces Joan to spiritualism through their visits to the Jordan Chapel with Lou's lover, Robert, in hopes of gaining a message from the dead (104-111). Despite her attachment to Aunt Lou, Joan is reluctant to accept any such contact with the unknown and dismisses the whole experience as irrational. This attitude is evident in Joan's reaction to the spiritual leader, Leda Sprott's explanation about astral body theory to explain an apparent vision of Joan's mother. Joan is "frightened, but ... also outraged" by the spiritual manifestation or vision of her mother in Jordan Chapel (110). Joan's "normality" and psychic imbalance are revealed in her fear -- a reaction which is based on an inability to rationalize the experience. Her conscious mind cannot accept the possibility of this irrational and uncontrollable occurrence: "I did not like this theory at all." Joan confesses, "I particularly didn't like the thought of my mother, in the form of some kind of spiritual jello, drifting around after me from place to place.... Nor did I want to hear that she was concerned about me: her concern always meant pain, and I refused to believe in it" (110-11). Consequently, Joan's fear leads her to vehemently dismiss the theory: "'That's crazy,' I said, in as rude a voice as possible" (111). Contrary to her expectations, this denial has absolutely no effect; Leda Sprott merely laughs, saying, "'Oh, we're used to being told *that* .... We can certainly live with that'" and proceeds to tell Joan that she has "'great gifts'... and [g]reat powers,'" encouraging her to try Automatic Writing (111). Through this encounter, the reader discovers Joan's fear, her conscious refusal to consider the unknown or the irrational, her reliance on the norm as the decisive factor in acceptability, and her expectation of norms as stable constructs to which she can appeal. Joan's unease at the shattering of her expectations mirrors our own; like Joan, the reader remains suspicious.

In contrast to Atwood's inclusive claim that "I don't necessarily think there's only one appearance versus only one reality" (Hammond 108), Joan clings to her view of

stable reality and is convinced that Leda Sprott is a charlatan. Despite herself, Joan is simultaneously fascinated and afraid: "Leda Sprott's opinion of my great powers was even more terrifying [than the vision of her mother], especially since I had to admit I found the thought appealing" (111). Her suspicion seems to be substantiated when, months later, Aunt Lou claims that she was told "the same thing" about possessing great powers (112). Further, encountering Leda Sprott some years later, re-created as the Reverend Eunice P. Revele who performs the wedding ceremony for Joan and Arthur, Joan's suspicions seem to be confirmed by Leda's own regretful admission that she did fabricate many (most?) of her supposed visions (207). Within her candour, however, Leda continues to insist on Joan's talents, accurately gauging that Joan has "'been afraid to develop them.'" Using perhaps the most effective avenue of approach possible, Leda invokes the name of deceased Aunt Lou to preface her warning to Joan: "'I could tell you a lot of mumbo jumbo .... But I liked your aunt, so I won't. You don't choose a gift, it chooses you, and if you deny it it will make use of you in any case, though perhaps in a less desirable way'" (207). These words bear striking resemblance to Jung's description of the autonomous intrusions, and possible hostility, of the unconscious. Both the hostile intrusion and the conscious allowance of the unconscious are evident in the character of Joan.

Joan's initial reluctance and her fear of the unknown are significant factors in Atwood's portrayal of spiritualism in the novel. Based on Joan's own awareness of her fear and her admitted fascination, it is possible to read the "astral body" visions of Frances as part of Joan's psychological complex: a neurosis that attempts to integrate the unconscious into her consciousness. Like the later Fat Lady fantasies, the visions of Joan's mother occur unwilled and in moments of distress, thereby exhibiting the characteristics of Jungian unconscious fantasies (*Undiscovered* 37). The theory which Joan called "crazy" manifests itself in her life through her psyche. Tellingly, Joan begins to dream about falling to her peril while ignored by her mother (62), or about trying to

prevent a man from discovering the truth of her mother possessing three heads; as time passes, Joan herself changes in this latter dream from protecting the monstrous secret to wishing for its discovery (63-4). Her unconscious is relentless, for years later, Joan continues to "dream about her often, my three-headed mother, menacing and cold." Suggestively, Joan reveals that "[i]n the worst dream, I couldn't see her at all" (215). Ironically, in this unconscious psychic manifestation, Joan's unrecognized alienation is figured in physical terms which she fully recognizes. In the dream, Joan is separated from voices that are discussing her, blocked by a door and "locked in, or out" while becoming increasingly aware that "something very bad was going to happen." Joan describes her physical response: "I back into the farthest corner of the cubicle and wedge myself in, press my arms against the walls, dig my heels against the floor. They wouldn't be able to get me out. Then I would hear the footsteps, coming up the stairs and along the hall" (215). Not only does Joan recognize her separation but a threat of discovery instills panic.

Herein Jungian dream analysis is relevant, for it seeks to discover the purpose of dreams as a "symbolism that guides." Freudian dream analysis differs significantly, for it seeks to discover a causal factor and, more fundamentally, "Freud posits a wish fulfilment function to dreams, while Jung assigns them a compensatory function" (*CW* 8:27, *Abstracts* 84). From a Jungian view, "all figures in the dream are interpreted as personified features of the dreamer's personality, rather than reflections of external reality" (*CW* 8:27, *Abstracts* 84). In Joan's case, her defensive posture is unmistakable; if all of the dream figures represent aspects of Joan, then she is clearly avoiding -- even to the point of hostility -- what her unconscious psyche is trying to convey. She perceives the revelation as dangerous and so fears its exposure; as a result, the potential for self-realization through integration of the unconscious is lost. Interestingly, Arthur's inability to understand why Joan has nightmares results from his own causal reasoning: "[s]urely nothing that terrible had ever happened to me, I was a normal girl with all kinds of advantages, I was beautiful and intelligent" (216). While Joan disparages Arthur's lack of

insight, she herself remains equally ignorant. Even near the end of the novel after a dream of her deceased mother beckoning her, a dream that results in sleepwalking, Joan remains unable to see the function of her dreaming: "[w]hy did I have to dream about my mother, have nightmares about her, sleepwalk out to meet her?" (330). Her psyche attempts to signal physically the need for integration through the sleepwalking, which is a metaphor for how the dissociated live, especially Joan. However, Joan continues to "dig [her] heels against the floor" and only sees these dreams of her mother as dangerous, characterizing them as "a vortex, a dark vacuum" (330). Joan refuses to believe in any potentially positive outcome just as she refuses to believe in the possibility of her mother's concern; she clings to her fear, at the back of the cubicle, evading the voices. In other words, despite being haunted by these unconscious fantasies, Joan retains her skepticism and her "normality."

In spite of her resistance, the unknown does intrigue Joan and she eventually gets involved in experiments with automatic writing. Interestingly, this aspect of spiritualism also retains a connection to Aunt Lou, an association which may partly explain Joan's willingness to experiment with it. Years earlier, Joan had discovered that, on the advice of Leda Sprott, Aunt Lou also tried automatic writing. At the time, Lou expressly warns Joan against it: "I didn't like that feeling of being, well, taken over. I felt I should leave it alone, and I would too if I were you, dear" (112-13). Significantly, Joan rebels against her aunt's advice and indulges her temptation to try it, only to inadvertently set her bangs on fire. While the result is comical, Joan is playing with fire -- literally and figuratively -- and she seems to recognize this danger; in an echo of Aunt Lou, Joan states, "I decided I'd better leave the Automatic Writing alone" (113). Years later, however, Joan changes her mind and returns to this means of making contact with the unknown.

Ostensibly, Joan is acting out a scene in one of her gothic romance novels to break a case of writer's block, but automatic writing also signifies a means of connecting directly with one's own unconscious. Automatic writing is described in Jungian terms as

a process "in which the words and phrases arising from the unconscious are set down without any conscious control." The difficulty and danger of this process is that "the important or even decisive part to be played by consciousness is ignored.... Only in an *interplay* of consciousness and the unconscious can the unconscious prove its value" (Jaffé 297). That is, in the act of automatic writing another form of psychic imbalance occurs which inverts the "normally" unbalanced roles of the conscious and unconscious aspects of the psyche. An overbalance of the unconscious is to be avoided; not only would such a psychic condition hinder the individual's self-realization (as does an overbalance of ego-conscious), but an overbalance of the unconscious poses a greater danger both to self and others. Aniela Jaffé observes that "[i]f the unconscious, once in action, is left to itself, there is a risk that its contents will become overpowering or will manifest their negative, destructive side" (297). Joan, however, does not remain in the maze of her unconscious long enough for these dangerous effects to occur. Staëls similarly observes that Joan "retreats as soon as she reaches the unexplored and unexpressed visionary realm within"; consequently, "[o]nly near transformation occurs by the end of the narrative" (*Margaret* 101).

It would seem that Joan's reluctance to engage in automatic writing is a prudent one, yet it indicates her deeper resistance to the unconscious. This reaction demonstrates Joan's "normality," for she fears contact with the unknown. The mirror, which is required in order to stare at the image of the candle flame, represents an avenue to the unconscious. Jes Simmons' discussion of Atwood's Susanna Moodie is an equally apt description of Joan:

> Moodie's unwillingness to look into the mirror is not an act of cowardice; Jung explains that 'this confrontation is the first test of courage on the inner way, a test sufficient to frighten off most people' (*Archetypes* 20). Moodie does not want to see her unconscious self, this other side which she has never known, and this makes her hesitate in her process toward individuation. (141)

Joan's reaction, then, emphasizes her "normality" by mirroring the response of "most people." As soon as Joan gains a sense of her loss of conscious control, she is frightened

off by the mirror. More generally, such loss of conscious control characterizes madness, and Atwood's characterization of Joan suggestively recalls Foucault's assertion that "[m]adness fascinates because it is knowledge" (21). Once Joan's initial experiment results in a word on the page, she is gripped by a combination of fear and fascination: "I was convinced it was real.... I wanted to go down that dark, shining corridor again, I wanted to see what was at the other end.... On the other hand, I didn't want to. It was too frightening. It was also too ridiculous" (222). Joan's inability to rationally explain the process causes a reflex reaction of dismissal.

Despite these attempts to dismiss automatic writing as irrational, negligible, and laughable, Joan cannot set it aside. She is drawn to her unconscious and so continues the experiments for three months, occasionally wavering in her belief and commitment: "in the daytime, ... I would have moments of sudden doubt about this activity. What was I doing, why was I doing it?" Tellingly, as Joan moves further from the ego-conscious state, she begins to doubt her sanity: "[w]as I going (perhaps) just a little crazy?" (224). Joan even wonders if the resulting poems, her *Lady Oracle* manuscript, should be taken to a psychiatrist or a publisher. Ironically, Joan only dismisses the thought when she recalls her childhood experience with the psychologist (234). Based on this encounter, Joan resists psychological analysis -- whether by an analyst or by self-assessment -- and considers her experience as Other. Modelling the common erroneous collapse of Freudian and Jungian approaches, Joan rejects all psychological views, expecting them to mirror her earlier experience wherein the analyst sought external causal factors. As a result, the unconscious remains unacknowledged; Joan approaches but then flees. Thus, Atwood's use of spiritualism in *Lady Oracle* incorporates the fear and fascination of the unknown, the autonomous intrusions of the unconscious, and the persistent dissociation of the psyche and of the mind/body. All of these traits are held by the "normal" individual and so eccentric Joan is, in fact, an unlikely representative of the reader.

Joan's involvement with the gothic is particularly appropriate since the gothic novel provides an ideal link between the supernatural and the psychological. As Coral Ann Howells remarks, "[o]n the level of the supernatural, there is the phenomenon of ghosts transgressing boundaries between life and death, while on the psychological level there is the erosion of boundaries between the self and the monstrous Other" (*Margaret* 63). The gothic enables Joan to indulge her fascination with the unknown even though she fully recognizes neither its overlap with her own life nor, in Howells' terms, that "erosion of boundaries between the self and the monstrous Other." This unrecognized connection of the supernatural and the psychological is particularly striking in the autonomous intrusions of the unconscious into Joan's consciousness. The astral body visions of her mother fulfil the role which Howells outlines for the supernatural, and Joan's male animus figures represent the eroded boundary between self and other. Significantly, Joan has as much difficulty recognizing the animus figures as she does recognizing the meaning of the unconscious intrusions in the form of her mother.

This lack of awareness signals that Joan's dissociated condition characterizes multiple aspects of her existence, figured as divided states between self and other, mind and body, as well as the conscious and the unconscious psyche. In this respect, Robert Lecker asserts that Joan exemplifies "a modern fall from any meaningful sense of self or community" (203). Similarly, Sherrill E. Grace argues, somewhat expansively, that "Atwood's emphasis on ... the individual's need to be part of a social context" is one element that "place[s] her within a broadly-defined Canadian tradition" (*Violent* 131). The interconnectedness of the individual to society is thus deemed essential for identity and, as Laing notes, for psychotherapy as well: "each and every man is at the same time separate from his fellows and related to them. Such separateness and relatedness are mutually necessary postulates" (*Divided* 25). However, this form of recognition and identification is increasingly difficult for Joan since the men she encounters seem to be as much self as other, and yet Joan persists in treating them as entirely other. The male

figures function in the projected role of animus, providing unrecognized contact with the unconscious. Nonetheless, Joan's inability to recognize the men as animus figures should not be surprising. Jung explains that this is, in fact, the normal and expected response: "[b]ecause of the opposite sex nature of animus/anima projections, they are almost impossible to recognize as emanating from one's own psyche.... The difficulty of dissolving such projections is seen to reside in the nature of archetypes as elements of the collective unconscious; although the contents of the animus/anima can be integrated into the conscious, they themselves remain separate as constituents of basic psychic structure" (*CW* 9.2:3, *Abstracts* 110). Despite this difficulty, recognition of the animus is critical for self-realization, and so Atwood portrays Joan's struggle for awareness.

Part of Joan's difficulty lies in her inability to recognize the other intrusions of her unconscious: the Fat Lady fantasies and the visions of her mother. Vevaina identifies both the Fat Lady and Frances as Joan's personal shadow figures (*Re/Membering* 66), and Jung observes that "realization of the shadow ... makes possible a recognition of the animus or anima" (*CW* 9.2:3, *Abstracts* 110). Hence, Joan's inability to assimilate or overcome these shadow figures has the additional negative effect of hindering her ability to recognize the male projections of her animus. This indicates a serious limitation on her self-realization, for the animus has valuable potential on the psychic level: "[h]e [the animus] has a very positive and valuable side; he too can build a bridge to the Self through his creative activity" (von Franz 203). That is, in Jungian terms, the animus can facilitate integration by acting "as a mediator between the ego and the Self" (von Franz 195). Responding to these projections of the animus is, then, a means of gaining awareness of the unconscious and, potentially, of integrating the divided realms of the psyche. Notably, Joan continues to avoid such an encounter because of her fear. As such, Joan -- the figure the reader perceives as so distant and different from her/himself -- actually occupies the position of the "normal," dissociated individual.

As revealing as Joan's encounters with the unconscious fantasies are, her encounters with the male animus figures hold yet greater potential for integration of her psyche. Jung affirms that "the most intense projections arise not from the shadow, but from the animus in a woman or the anima in a man" (*CW* 9.2:2, *Abstracts* 110). The men in Joan's life have been variously characterized by critics as representations of "duplicity -- deceit and doubleness" (Grace, "Poetics of Duplicity" 55), "alter egos" (Godard 21), and even "figments of Joan's imagination" (Lecker 196). While the man with "burning eyes and icicle teeth" (*LO* 343) has been identified as "the figure from her [Joan's] unconscious who appeared in her poetry" (Mansbridge 116), this is only the most obvious example of the animus figure in the novel. In fact, each of the men Joan encounters fulfils this function; despite their stark differences, Paul, Arthur, and Chuck all reveal Joan's dissociation.

Paul, the Polish Count, first exposes Joan to his career as Mavis Quilp, author of nurse romances, an avenue which leads to Joan's writing of the gothic romances. On the surface, it would appear that Paul offers a means for Joan to integrate her body/mind schism. She loses her virginity based on naïveté which blinds her to Paul's assumption that sharing his apartment means being his mistress. Yet, afterward Joan views it as a victory of sorts: "I was glad it had happened. It proved to me finally that I was normal, that my halo of flesh had disappeared and I was no longer among the untouchables" (151). Nevertheless this equation of the body with normality is impossible for Joan to sustain since she continues to be haunted by the unconscious Fat Lady fantasies. Her psyche refuses to allow Joan to define herself solely by the physical. As Joan becomes disillusioned with her expected role of mistress and Paul grows increasingly jealous, she begins to convince herself that he is dangerous, even mad: "what was I doing with this madman, how did I get into this thoroughly sealed place, and how could I get out?" (159). Eventually, Joan confesses, "Paul was beginning to frighten me" (161). She sees her fear as being externally created, but, interestingly, as soon as Joan acknowledges her fear, she

discovers an avenue of escape. At this point, Joan's life physically overlaps her gothic romance; she feels a hand on her arm while writing a passionate, menacing scene and panics. In other words, fantasy overtakes reality momentarily, causing Joan to retract from her imaginative flight; her jarring return to physical "reality" enables Joan to maintain "normality" -- her psychic imbalance tips from total fantasy to complete rational consciousness. This panicked response marks the beginning of her relationship with Arthur (164-65), but, contrary to Joan's expectations, it does not mark the end of her encounters with Paul.

As an intrusion of the unconscious, the animus is insistent, autonomous, and unsolicited in its actions and appearances. Hence, years later, Paul returns to rescue Joan from Arthur, assuming that she is miserable and in danger, ignoring her protests and explanations. As Vevaina notes, "he is hell-bent on rescuing his damsel-in-distress and tells her that he will even steal her if need be. Paul mirrors Joan's inability to distinguish between fiction and fact" (*Re/Membering* 56). Significantly, Paul and Joan both react to others based not on the real circumstances but on fictional roles they construct. Davey notes that Joan's "story is her discovery of how her projections of Gothic malevolence and glamour onto everyday reality have prevented her from seeing the actual rewards and dangers of the everyday. She finds she has prevented herself from experiencing those around her as real people" (*Margaret* 59). This latter comment is particularly revealing, for Joan is unable to assimilate the real and the fictional; one could argue that, for Joan, everyone is a character fulfilling a prescribed role in a standard (surreal) plot. In such cases, Laing observes, "[t]he self avoids being related directly to real persons.... *The self can relate itself with immediacy to an object which is an object of its own imagination or memory but not to a real person.*" More often than not, Laing adds, this reaction is not recognized by the self and remains hidden from others (*Divided* 91). Such is certainly the case with Joan; if Paul, as an animus figure, represents Joan's tendency to fictionalize,

imagine and fabricate at the expense of reality, then Arthur can be viewed as her (earnest but failed) attempt to connect with that "real life."

Joan does not perceive these two realms -- fantasy and reality -- as discrete, but their co-existence is factious, uneasy, and unpredictable. Unsurprisingly, then, her involvement with Arthur also blurs these boundaries. Although Arthur represents social activism and material change, the physical here and now, Joan sees the "vision of a better world, however preposterous" offered by her gothic romances "just as realistic" as his flighty commitment to various political and social causes (32). Yet Arthur's circle of friends, the footnoted books he reads, and his "causes" all intimidate Joan, making her "feel deficient and somehow absurd, a sort of intellectual village idiot" (30). Joan is unable to assimilate this frenetic individual engagement with social ideology, this equation of self with other; she prefers avoidance and tenuous engagement -- the latter only when absolutely necessary. Arthur's drastic swings from obsessive, perhaps even manic, activity to depressive stupour indicate his own mental instability, and as an animus figure, potentially indicate Joan's as well (213).

Joan reacts to Arthur just as she did to Paul: once she is involved, her fear of the unconscious, which is manifested in these figures, takes over. Thus, just as Marian in *The Edible Woman* begins to imagine that Peter is masquerading as the Underwear Man, Joan begins to imagine that Arthur is the one who is issuing the anonymous threats and leaving the dead animals on her doorstep (277). Joan concocts a rationale which is implausible even to herself in an attempt to explain Arthur's methods and motive for such aberrant and menacing behaviour. Suggestively, she reenacts her speculations about Paul's sanity and momentarily considers the possibility that Arthur, too, is a madman. However, Joan herself recognizes the improbability of this scenario: "[t]he easy explanation would be that he'd gone crazy, in some very deep and undetectable way. But it didn't have to be that at all. Every man I'd ever been involved with, I realized, had had two selves.... Why should Arthur be any exception?" (295). Joan's reasoning indicates that madness is not an

exclusive, readily-definable condition; that is, what could be considered "crazy ... didn't have to be that at all." Through this acknowledgement, Atwood signals Joan's vague awareness that "madness" is a variable construct. Characteristically, however, Atwood embeds ambiguity in Joan's posited alternative. The concept of multiple selves -- which Joan views as sane -- may indicate, on the one hand, that madness is a state of "possession" by an unrecognized self; it is an uncontrolled overbalance of the unconscious. On the other hand, as previously discussed, this explanation of multiplicity is also linked to multiple personality disorder, a form of madness in which the self is drowned out by competing voices and identities. Interestingly, then, Joan unknowingly undermines her own dichotomous conception of sanity and, consequently, is unable to use insanity as a role into which she can categorize and dismiss Arthur. As the animus figure, he is the unrecognized projection of the contrasexual part of Joan's own psyche. Try as she may, Joan cannot escape the insistent intrusions of her unconscious -- that part of the psyche which is shut out by "normality."

The sudden awareness of complexity and the lack of neat roles wherein to slot Arthur, thereby dismissing her animus, overwhelm Joan and fill her with fear. She is suddenly wary of him: "Arthur was someone I didn't know at all.... I was afraid now, almost afraid to move; what if he woke up, eyes glittering, and reached for me...? For the rest of the night I listened to him breathe. He sounded so peaceful" (295). Joan's fear is recognizable to the reader by now; she is confronted by her animus, refuses to acknowledge it or thereby to assimilate it, and so is overtaken by her fear. In other words, Joan falls into what Atwood terms "one of the perils of Gothic thinking," which she explains thus:

> Gothic thinking means that you have a scenario in your head which involves certain roles -- the dark, experienced man, who is possibly evil and possibly good, the rescuer, the mad wife, and so on -- and that as you go to real life, you tend to cast real people in these roles as Joan does. Then when you find out that the real people don't fit these two-dimensional roles, you can either

> discard the roles and try to deal with the real person or discard the real person. (Struthers 64)

Joan proves herself unwilling to discard the roles and so is forced into the alternative: she discards the real person on the basis of her fear which is disguised as madness in the other. The absurdity of Joan's situation increases its comedic effect, for as Vevaina observes, "[w]eak-spined Arthur with his numerous escape fantasies does not seem a potential killer at all" (*Re/Membering* 70). Vevaina's assessment of Arthur as an unlikely killer bears an eerie resemblance to the child-shooting headline in *The Edible Woman* wherein a newspaper article also describes the shooter as an unlikely killer in order to heighten the effect of the fact. Vevaina here voices a typical assumption that external threats are recognizable and appearances, reliable. Although such is clearly not the case, her point is well-taken: Joan's perception of an imminent threat, though not impossible, is grossly exaggerated. Ultimately, Joan's fear leads to her scheme of a staged suicide attempt, an act that borders madness in both its conception and execution.

Madness is, in fact, on the fringes of Joan's experience throughout her contact with the animus figures. She is perilously close to moving beyond the ego-conscious state of normality - most notably in her encounters with the novel's two marginally mad figures, the Daffodil Man and the Royal Porcupine. The Daffodil Man is a comic-serious figure similar to *The Edible Woman*'s Underwear Man; both figures skirt the limits of sexual perversity allowed by social norms. Whereas the latter engages in obscene phonecalls, the Daffodil Man exposes himself to young girls in the ravine. Ironically, Joan -- who is so quick to attribute madness as a convenient excuse for her alienation from others -- echoes Marian's reticence to dismiss the marginal character as mad. She recognizes the ordinariness of this figure and is reluctant to label the Daffodil Man either as "sick" (which is how Marian's co-workers react to the Underwear Man), or as "a bad man" (which is how Joan's mother and companions react) (58). Instead, Joan perceives him as "a nice-looking man, neither old nor young, wearing a good tweed coat, not at all

shabby or disreputable" who is characterized more by his smile and his daffodils than by his errant action (57). Interestingly, this encounter with the Daffodil Man is directly connected to Joan's relationship with her mother, for he is the manifestation of her mother's paranoia; as Joan reports, "[m]y mother was terrified of this ravine: ... it was dense with willow trees and bushes, behind every one of which she pictured a lurking pervert, an old derelict rendered insane by rubbing alcohol, a child molester or worse" (49). Moreover, Joan notes that her mother "never suggested what these men would look like or what they would do if they caught me.... And the way she put it made me somehow responsible" (49).

Joan's reluctance to categorize this man, despite her subsequent tendency to cling to (gothic) roles, forms a telling contrast to her willingness to attribute madness to Paul and Arthur. The "exhibitionist" (49) is potentially dangerous since he represents a form of sexually aberrant behaviour which is a step closer to sex crimes, the extreme form of such benign abnormal activities. Nevertheless, Joan's response is not to categorize the man as abnormal and other, but to consider his ordinariness and his complexity. Similarly, in childhood Joan puzzles over the possibility that the man in tweed who rescues her from being tied and stranded in the ravine by her Brownie companions could also be the Daffodil Man. While she is able neither to assimilate these men nor to definitely segregate them, Joan's mother has no such difficulty. Joan's tentative assertion that this man may be what her mother terms "a bad man" meets with instantaneous and definitive denial: "'Don't be an idiot,' she [Frances] said. 'That nice man?'" (61). Although Frances' paranoia is all-encompassing and envisions danger everywhere, she relies on appearances to delineate the boundaries of normality and safety. Joan seems intuitively to recognize the incongruity of appearance with "reality," but over time this potential link to her unconscious, this awareness of her shadow, remains ignored. Consequently, the potential for assimilation which is manifested in the Daffodil Man resurfaces in Joan's adulthood in the animus figure of the Royal Porcupine.

While also a marginally mad figure, the Royal Porcupine shifts away from the potential danger of sexual perversions to a comical incarnation of Joan's sexual fantasies. The Royal Porcupine fulfils Joan's fantasies precisely, a fact which signals his role as a projection of her animus. Joan describes the manifestation of these fantasies during her early days of marriage when she outfits herself in gold and draping silks, indulging a part of her which Arthur seeks to suppress: "I would dab myself with perfume, take off my shoes, and dance in front of the mirror, twirling slowly around, waltzing with an invisible partner. A tall man in evening dress, with an opera cloak and smoldering eyes. As he swept me in circles ... he would whisper, 'Let me take you away. We will dance together, always.' It was a real temptation, despite the fact that he wasn't real" (18-19). Physically, the Royal Porcupine is a perfect match: "he had an elegant moustache and beard, the moustache waxed and curled upward at the ends, the beard pointed. He was wearing a long black cloak and spats, and carrying a gold-headed cane, a pair of white gloves, and a top hat embroidered with porcupine quills" (240-41). Not surprisingly, Joan finds herself attracted to him -- "[h]im or the cape, I wasn't sure which" (241) -- and she indulges temptation as he urges her to do: "'Come on, let me sweep you off your feet. You're the type, I can tell'" (244). The Royal Porcupine, that "con-create" artist who uses roadkill as his poetic art form, becomes Joan's incarnated fantasy. "Finally," Joan explains, "I had someone who would waltz with me, and we waltzed all over the ballroom floor of his warehouse, he in his top hat and nothing else, I in a lace tablecloth.... When we weren't waltzing or making love, we frequented junk shops" (256). In many ways, this indulgence of fantasy has the potential for Joan's self-realization but is obscured by the form of the fantasy. In a Jungian view, this manner of distraction is a common occurrence; despite an inner prompting toward individuation or assimilation, "there are times when the clown we call 'I' behaves in such a distracting fashion that the inner voice cannot make its presence felt" (von Franz 184-85). In order to sustain this clownish distraction, Joan

fixates on the external relationship -- its objects, eccentricities, and physical pleasure -- and forbids herself serious psychological involvement, so silencing her inner voice.

On the contrary, Joan's perfect match, like Paul and Arthur before him, is unsustainable. Once involved, she resists assimilating this part of her animus and wishes to keep the involvement isolated, partial, "light" (256). This reticence on Joan's part is conscious: "[t]he Royal Porcupine had opened a time-space door to the fifth dimension, cleverly disguised as a freight elevator [to his warehouse loft], and one of my selves plunged recklessly through." She adds significantly: "[n]ot the others, though" (247). Although this fragmentation of self is a condition which Jung and Laing identify as the modern Western norm, Joan consciously admits the difficulties of such an existence: "[t]he difficulty was that I found each of my lives perfectly normal and appropriate, but only at the time. When I was with Arthur, the Royal Porcupine seemed like a daydream from one of my less credible romances.... But when I was with the Royal Porcupine, he seemed plausible and solid ... whereas it was Arthur who became unreal" (261). Consequently, Joan's awareness of the problems with coexistence suggests that the intrusions of the unconscious are not entirely fruitless despite her attempts to ignore them. In spite of her jealous guarding of the distance between self and other, Joan's perception of her life as "perfectly normal" in the immediate present is, in fact, an accurate assessment of so-called normality: dissociated, fragmented, myopic.

Perhaps it is this sense of fragmentation which prompts Barbara Hill Rigney's claim that "the Royal Porcupine ... alias Chuck Brewer, commercial designer, is as schizophrenic as Joan" (*Margaret* 75). Her assertion coincides with Jung's early discovery that one feature of patients termed schizophrenic is the "lack of adaptation to reality [which] is compensated by a progressive increase in the creation of fantasies, [and] which goes so far that the dream world becomes more real for the patient than external reality" (*CW* 4, Storr 55). In this view, Joan seems to sense the danger of indulging in her fantasy too heavily, for she withholds her involvement with the Royal Porcupine. Thus,

her reticence prevents self-realization but simultaneously guards her from the fall into madness. The apparent contradiction emphasizes the proximity of these conditions and supports Jung's caution against the inherent risks of embarking on the process of individuation. Atwood's structuring of Joan's condition is thus enigmatic. On the one hand, Joan indulges her fantasies and transposes them onto her own life, acts which the reader perceives as escapist but which are, in fact, normal. On the other hand, Joan limits the degree of her involvement, acts which the reader may perceive as ineffectual, perhaps even self-delusional but which are, in fact, vital to prevent a form of schizophrenia in which fantasy overtakes reality entirely. Thus, Grace's assessment of Joan's condition -- that "[t]he need for a fantasy life in the midst of obdurate reality is innocuous enough. Only when the individual becomes confused between reality and fantasy, between life and art, do the problems commence" (*Violent* 126) -- while true, does not state the situation boldly enough. The problems may commence with this confusion between reality and fantasy, but only when fantasy usurps reality can one argue (as Rigney does) that both Joan and Chuck Brewer are schizophrenic.

Conversely, in Atwood's representation, both Joan and Chuck relish the existence of fantasy specifically within their ordinary lives. Ironically, considering Chuck's outward enactment and elaborate costume, Joan is the one who is more dependent on the presence of fantasy. Thus, the manifestation of her fantasy life in the Royal Porcupine is shattered by normality. Chuck proposes that they run away together, to which Joan replies, "'[y]ou must be crazy'" (271). Despite appearances, it is normality and not madness that frightens Joan. Chuck's frank confession that he "'want[s] to live a normal life with [Joan]'" (271) is met with vehement refusals and genuine fear. Although Joan believes that "[f]or him, reality and fantasy were the same thing, which meant that for him there was no reality" (272), her assessment is incongruous. As with the narrator of *Surfacing*, the reader is in peril if s/he simply accepts Joan's view as "truth." Chuck strategically maintains a separate identity as the Royal Porcupine, complete with costume and (superhero?) cape.

Since this is the only Chuck that Joan has known, the Royal Porcupine (the fantasy figure) is the reality for her, but not for him. Thus, Joan projects her own views onto this animus figure, whereas the reader's role is to recognize Joan's unconscious. As Maclean remarks, "the reader, in interpreting Joan's observations, must take into account the baroque and grotesque nature of her imagination" (187). Moreover, when Chuck demonstrates his serious commitment by shaving his beard and discarding his costume -- that is, by offering her a glimpse and share of his reality -- Joan is nearly hysterical. Her reaction reveals her continuing flair for melodrama; she laments that "by doing this he'd murdered the part of him that I loved" (273). Joan is devastated and, predictably, she flees (272-73).

This time, Joan is afraid that normality (reality) will subsume fantasy. She claims that assenting to Chuck's request would mean abandoning her encounters with fantasy: "for me it would mean there was no fantasy, and therefore no escape" (272). Herein Joan displays a now radically dissociated mentality through her insistence on viewing life as dichotomous and these realms as absolutely discrete. Consequently, Joan perceives Chuck's offer of reality as threatening, thereby contradicting herself. On the one hand, she claims to require fantasy within reality, but she has allowed fantasy (her view of the Royal Porcupine as "hero") to overtake reality. Joan's conception of the tenuous co-existence of fantasy and reality has changed to discrete modes of experience. In this view, Joan exhibits what Laing terms the "normal" limitation on modes of experience -- particularly in relation to fantasy, which is typically excluded (*Politics of Experience* 20-21). Ironically, then, Joan's reaction aligns her more closely with the "normal" condition. Thus, Atwood's representation of Joan is increasingly threatened by madness in the form of an overbalance of fantasy and, simultaneously, is increasingly normalized since excluding fantasy is a feature of "normality." Although Joan has seemingly reversed her position -- from blurring fantasy and reality to segregating them -- her inability to

assimilate them remains; the real need is to integrate fantasy and reality, the unconscious and consciousness, other and the self.

Through the source of Joan's fear Atwood clearly indicates that a lack of psychic balance is central to the novel. In Lecker's terms, *Lady Oracle* makes the ultimate point that "reality and fantasy are one, and to believe that it is possible to escape from either is the greatest delusion" (198). Jung makes a strikingly similar claim that the lack of balance between fantasy and reality in the modern psyche contributes to the neurotic, dissociated condition of the modern individual (*Symbols* 84-85). Joan's reliance on this mentality of exclusion causes her to distort Chuck's attempt to lighten the moment of her refusal with his obviously melodramatic remarks: "'Well, I guess there's only one thing to do. How about a double suicide? Or maybe I could shoot you and then jump off the Toronto Dominion Centre with your body in my arms.' He managed a white smile, but he didn't fool me. He was completely serious'" (273). Once again, Joan imaginatively transforms her lover into a madman and so becomes convinced that he is the one leaving the dead animals, making threats, and breathing at her over the phone (278). Consequently, in Joan's imagined outcome, it is Chuck in the form of the Royal Porcupine who gives chase, "pounding down three flights of stairs, shedding his clothes, to confront me on the ground floor, stark naked" (273). Similarly, it is Chuck as the Royal Porcupine whom she begins to view as "a homicidal maniac," while implausibly and comically blaming Arthur for her involvement with Chuck (274). This latter response signals Joan's desperation to maintain distance between self and other and to avoid responsibility. Interestingly, Joan attempts to restrict madness to the sphere of fantasy, yet Joan also insists that she cannot live without fantasy.

Although Joan's reaction to Chuck bears a resemblance to how she handles Paul and Arthur, this time Joan's fear is both of involvement with the man and, explicitly, of the loss of the fantastical element in her life. Consequently, she is able to say, "I wasn't afraid, exactly," for she perceives the strange activities and phonecalls as "a prolonged

and revengeful practical joke" executed by the Royal Porcupine (279). Despite her tendency to attribute blame, Joan is unconvinced that he wants to kill her (277). Contrarily, Vevaina argues that Joan does fear Chuck and that her fear is unsubstantiated; she argues that "[f]ar from being a malevolent killer, the Royal Porcupine strikes one as a childish, narcissistic, pretentious person who is incapable of serious emotional involvement" (*Re/Membering* 69). Surely such descriptors more accurately apply to Joan. Chuck demonstrates a willingness to commit to the relationship, but Joan distorts and rejects this action, perceiving it as highly threatening and characterizing it as fatal. It is precisely the threat of involvement and the loss of the physical trappings of fantasy which Joan is incapable of assimilating and indeed which she fears.

Ultimately, Joan's divided psychic condition causes her to react in fear and to take melodramatic actions. In Laingian terms, Joan is a divided self who possesses a "*false-self system*" composed of "an amalgam of various part-selves." This condition is neatly figured in the multiple women who inhabit the centre of the maze in Joan's gothic romance, and helps to explain her behaviour. Laing explains that

> [c]lose acquaintance with such a person reveals that his observable behaviour may comprise quite deliberate impersonations along with compulsive actions of every kind. One is evidently witness not to a single false self but to a number of only partially elaborated fragments of what might constitute a personality, if any single one had full sway....
>
> These changes in the relationship between the different aspects of the person's relation to himself are constantly associated with his *inter*-personal relationships. These are complex and never quite the same from person to person. (*Divided* 76-7)

It is notable how similar this condition is to what is medically termed "schizophrenia" in its multiplicity and also how directly such a condition factors into the individual's ability to engage with others. Thus, Joan's feeling that once she takes up the affair with the Royal Porcupine she is living a "double life" (247) is certainly true. She "casts" Chuck into the role of fantasy which, for Joan, precludes inhabiting any other role. As a result, Joan continues to guard her involvement with him, fearing the integration of her

unconscious. In Laing's terms, this condition describes the "schizoid individual," who is characterized most directly by the reticence of self from others in the withdrawal from relationships (*Divided* 77-8). The schizoid perceives isolation as the only safe condition, wherein the self will not be overwhelmed by the other (Laing, *Divided* 45-6). Ultimately, the degree of Joan's withdrawal from relationships is figured in her mock suicide and attempted escape to Italy. Even this drastic move fails since, in Terremoto, Joan continues to be plagued by fear (8), panic (11, 287), and paranoia (23) -- that is, by an all-encompassing fear which even she recognizes is "irrational" (25).

Laing notes that "[t]he paranoic has specific persecutors. Someone is against him.... The person ... *feels* at this phase *persecuted by reality itself.* The world as it is, and other people as they are, are the dangers" (*Divided* 85). Now that Joan is distanced (literally) from her relationships and animus figures, her imagination creates a vague "other" to fear. Everything and everyone become dangerous and threatening; Joan remarks, "doubtless I was being watched" (330). Joan is convinced that *someone* is out to get her and begins indulging in fantasy plot scenarios with grisly outcomes which degenerate into images of her being force-fed pasta, stuffed into black satin underwear, and kept as "one of those Fellini whores, gigantic and shapeless." The gruesome outcomes seem probable to Joan, but the comical exaggeration of this latter image causes her pause: "*This is serious*, I told myself. *Pull yourself together.* Perhaps," she muses, "I was becoming hysterical" (329). Interestingly, this image of the "gigantic and shapeless" woman collapses her Fat Lady fantasy with her fear, thereby suggesting that at base her fear is of the unconscious.

Finally, although the reader is tempted to dismiss Joan as a misguided, paranoid, and inept figure, her condition is not so easily segregated as "other." Conversely, Atwood asserts that fear, even to the point of paranoia, is a regrettable contemporary social condition: "fear takes the form often of a generalized anxiety or paranoia. You don't know who the enemy is. You don't know what direction you'll be attacked from. So

everybody ends up constantly swivelling around, looking for the next threat. People are afraid of whatever's out there" (Twigg 124). These comments implicate the reader in Joan's predicament. Riitta Myllylä argues that Atwood provides realities that incorporate aberrations: "although Atwood usually remains in the general confines of our world, a slip into another reality is but a hair's breadth away. Time and our senses may fail us; the dead may appear among the living, spirits conveying messages" (285, my translation).[4] Perhaps most notably, Myllylä indicates that Atwood leaves the reader to determine the boundaries of this variable reality. The remarks of some critics even suggest that Atwood's novel has the ability "to communicate Gothic fears to some readers" (Bouson 78). That is, some readers may become too involved and find that the reading experience can transmit these fears, making them, like Joan, feel "threatened by the ordinary" (Maclean 186). Ironically, then, any firm distinction between the reader and Joan begins to waver even if she is perceived as paranoid and abnormal -- even neurotic or schizophrenic. Both Jung and Laing concur that such distinctions are slight and are actually degrees of the same human condition. Viewing reality as the persecutor is not a condition from which the reader is immune. "In fact," Laing argues, "we are all only two or three degrees Fahrenheit from experiences of this order. Even a slight fever, and the whole world can begin to take on a persecutory, impinging aspect" (*Divided* 48). Even the extreme form of this condition, which might be termed madness, retains a connection to normality since it differs only in degree.

Not surprisingly, then, critics are divided in their assessment of Joan's resolution. Some argue that "she has exorcised herself of some of her fears and dependencies" (Mansbridge 116), while others contend that any changes "remain external only" (Staëls, *Margaret* 102). Palumbo argues that Joan's inability to abandon writing at the close of the novel "shows the possibility of the unconscious (represented by Joan's writing, both

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[4] "Vaikka Atwood useimmiten pysytteleee suurin piirtein meidän maailmamme rajoissa, on ero toiseen todellisuuteen hiuksenhieno. Aika ja aistit saattavat pettää meidät, kuolleet ilmestyä elämään, henget tuomaan viestiä" (Myllylä 285).

Gothic and poetic) synthesizing identity more clearly than the conscious" (78), but the fact is that Joan remains alienated from her unconscious. It may be argued, however, that she has gained some awareness of the existence of the unconscious through its autonomous intrusions; as a result, the potential for individuation, or "synthesizing identity," does exist -- perhaps it is even foregrounded now -- but it is not realized. Joan remains trapped in her dissociated, normal state, unable to surmount her fear despite the insistent intrusions of the unconscious. Nonetheless, Joan's condition does not determine the reader's condition and, in the end, the reader's reaction is most significant. The novel possesses the ability to engage the reader in interpretation and so, in Iser's terms, in subsequent self-assessment. Howells insightfully remarks that Atwood "transgresses the boundaries between realism and fantasy, between what is acceptable and what is forbidden. Of course these are fictions; *Lady Oracle* and *The Robber Bride* are illusions created by Atwood's narrative art, but they speak to readers in the present as they challenge us to confront our own desires and fears" (*Margaret* 85). That is, the novel's power resides in its provocation and display of the dangers of an imbalanced psyche. Atwood challenges readers to examine their own psychic balance and so to align themselves, perhaps even unwillingly, with a most unlikely manifestation of the normal condition.

Atwood's representation of "normality" in *Lady Oracle* (1976) is heightened in *Life Before Man* (1979), and figures in both novels as a tenuous balancing of the psyche. *Lady Oracle* focuses on Joan Foster's attempts to ignore the unconscious, creating a condition of imbalance that, in both Jungian and Laingian readings, characterizes the "normal" Western individual's predominantly conscious existence. Such an imbalance will be redressed by the psyche itself and so positions the individual to experience some "abnormal" and "disturbing" experiences -- that is, experiences with the power to disturb one's "normal" complacency. In a Jungian view, "if the consciousness represses strongly

the unconscious forces within the personality, the unconscious will surge back into the consciousness in the form of oppressive dreams, violent sudden emotion, or bodily pain, or illness" (Roper 55). As a result of Joan's attempts, her psyche exhibits its compensatory nature through such autonomous intrusions of the unconscious. These intrusions include dreams, fantasies, and "violent sudden emotion" triggered by the form of animus figures, all providing Joan with unrecognized contact with her unconscious. Significantly, Joan's reluctant involvement with her unconscious demonstrates both the psyche's persistence in the attempt to regain balance and the inherent dangers of such repeated endeavours. As Gordon Roper remarks, "[t]he invasion [of the unconscious] will continue until the conscious part of the personality somehow recognizes the opposing force and comes to some accommodation with it, a balancing which often requires outside help to achieve" (55). In this respect, Joan's unconscious exhibits its positive role; in Jung's terms, it acts as "the great guide, friend, and adviser of the conscious" (Freeman viii). In the impulse to regain balance in the psyche, Joan represents the potential for the Jungian notion of individuation: "the process by which the conscious and unconscious within an individual learn to know, respect, and accommodate one another" (Freeman xi). Nevertheless, Joan remains unfulfilled, evasive, and struggling with psychological imbalance; while "normal," she is simultaneously perceived by the reader as extreme.

And in many ways Joan is extreme, yet she is an extreme of normality rather than its opposite. For instance, her Gothic romances provide a means of casting people in roles, a tendency which transfers to Joan's relationships. This behaviour, while exaggerated in Joan, is a normal psychological and sociological response. Laing terms this behaviour "depersonalization," explaining that it " is a technique that is universally used as a means of dealing with the other when he becomes too tiresome or disturbing" (*Divided* 48); "[a] partial depersonalization of others is extensively practised in everyday life and is regarded as normal if not highly desirable" (*Divided* 49). Atwood concurs, describing this tendency in writerly terms:

> everybody is involved in fiction. Because people fictionalize themselves. They turn themselves into characters in their own dramas and they turn other people into characters in their own drama, so they fictionalize other people constantly. They project onto other people roles that they carry around inside their heads, probably left over from their childhoods and families, and they see other people in their lives as those roles. Often quite unjustly. So that by studying real fiction they might gain an insight into how they themselves are fictionalizing and they might gain more insight into what is really fiction, that is, what they've made up about other people, and what is real, that is, what is really there. So they might gain some insight into the process that they themselves are constantly doing. (Metzler 283-84)

Atwood emphasizes not only the inclusiveness of role projection but also the means by which such a psycho-social response is reflected in fiction, thereby offering the reader a means of self-assessment. Such observation coincides with Iser's view of the novel's potential role in illuminating the reader's unrecognized complicity in the construction of social norms (*Act* 74, 78-79). Suggestively, both Atwood and Iser position the reader alongside fictional characters rather than allowing them to remain safely removed, and so the reader's temptation to dismiss Joan outright is called into question. Ultimately, even if she is held at arm's length -- which, to some extent, the reader's position outside of the text requires -- Joan is positioned to represent the normal condition inclusive of the reader: a condition of imbalance and division. In fact, the reader's aversion to aligning her/himself with Joan reinforces Jung's observation of the common denial of "the existence of an unconscious psyche," or "the existence of two 'subjects' ... within the same individual" ("Approaching" 5). Jung argues that this tendency to cling to the ego, or the conscious, as the sole "subject" is not only naïve and severely limiting but is also epidemic, calling it "one of the curses of modern man that many people suffer from this divided personality" ("Approaching" 5). As Joan further demonstrates, attempting to restrict oneself to the conscious realm results in the autonomous intrusions of the unconscious, an outcome which Jung characterizes as distinctly normal: "it is by no means a pathological symptom; it is a normal fact that can be observed at any time and everywhere. It is not merely the neurotic whose right hand does not know what the left

hand is doing" ("Approaching 6). Thus not only the internal division but the manifestations of the unconscious, as seen in Joan, are representative of the "normal" condition.

Arguably, it is Joan's fascination with and foray into fantasy that causes most readers to dismiss her as extreme without acknowledging the significance of her endeavour -- albeit an unconscious and unfulfilled one -- to move beyond dissociated "normality." As Eleonora Rao asserts, the use of fantasy by Atwood's characters tends to be perceived negatively: "[c]ritical readings of Atwood's novels have highlighted the dangers of the characters' flights into fantasy or their habit of casting fictitious patterns to the reality of their lives which renders them unable to face real life" (*Strategies* xviii). Such readings fail to acknowledge that Joan's encounters with fantasy demonstrate that in "Atwood's novels, ... self-knowledge is presented as experimental rather than definitive" (Rao, *Strategies* xix). In fact, not only is self-knowledge a work in progress, but Atwood challenges the extent of that knowledge by engaging her characters in the process of negotiating "normal," socially-prescribed boundaries. One means of this negotiation involves the exploration and potential integration of the unconscious which Atwood formulates, among other things, as encounters with fantasy. While Rao accurately cites Frank Davey's *Margaret Atwood: A Feminist Poetics* as criticism which is misguidedly dismissive of fantasy, it is significant to note that in an earlier discussion of the novel, Davey draws a vital connection between fantasy and the unconscious.[5] Davey notes that *Lady Oracle* includes "two levels of reality -- Joan's conscious beliefs about event and her more perceptive unconscious beliefs that are manifested in her gothic fantasies"; moreover, he adds that "the reader soon learn[s] that the latter contain insights into the

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[5] Davey's dismissal of fantasy seems to stem from his Freudian interpretation of the unconscious as the fully knowable site of repression. Thus, fantasy is presented as a distortive influence, obscuring one's self-awareness: "[i]n psychotherapy the subject descends to his unconscious to explore the fantasies, rationalizations, illusions, projections, and transferences which have distorted his vision of himself and his experiences" (Davey, *Margaret* 73). While this reading contradicts a Jungian one, the foundational connection of fantasy with the unconscious remains a crucial similarity that is not negated by the contrasting interpretations.

anxieties of the former" ("Lady" 165). In spite of his devaluation of fantasy as distortive escapism, Davey affirms the significance of the reader's role, particularly in recognizing the unconscious in the form of fantasy.

Tellingly, Davey is not the only critic to maintain such an ambivalent stance towards the function and effect of fantasy in Atwood's work. For example, in assessing Atwood's broader use of fantasy, Coomi S. Vevaina posits it in contradictory roles in *Life Before Man* and *Lady Oracle*; she argues that "[t]he fantasies of Elizabeth, Lesje and Nate are necessary to their psychic health for they provide them with temporary respite from the feeling of 'angst' caused by the repetitive nature of their lives. In contrast to them, the obsessive, wildly romantic fantasies of Joan Foster ... prevent her from coming to grips with reality" (*Re/Membering* 48). Vevaina seems to waver in her assessment, initially refuting the interpretation of fantasy as negative and distortive, but then in the case of Joan, that extreme figure, retracting any ascribed value.

Contrarily, I would argue that fantasy is necessary for self-realization in both of these novels and that Atwood's presentation is complementary rather than contradictory. In *Lady Oracle*, Joan's fantasies are not destructive; instead, they enable her to seek psychic balance, simultaneously demonstrating the inherent danger of such an endeavour. Moreover, Joan's unconscious or instinctual response to an overbalance of ego-consciousness demonstrates the autonomous, compensatory nature of the psyche. Jung observes that "[p]sychosis considered from the psychological viewpoint is primarily a mental condition in which unconscious elements replace reality in the mind of the patient" (*CW* 3:10; *Abstracts* 24). Thus while individuation involves integrating the conscious and the unconscious, one must take heed that the psychic imbalance is not inverted, allowing the unconscious to subsume consciousness. For this reason, Gordon Roper describes Jungian individuation as "a balancing which often requires outside help to achieve" (55). Similarly, Jung himself warns that even the analyst must proceed with caution, for "excessive personal involvement, unless adequately controlled, may produce

an induced psychosis in the therapist" (*CW* 3:14; *Abstracts* 25). As Atwood demonstrates in *Lady Oracle*, however, this existence of danger does not diminish the value of seeking self-realization through psychic balancing.

Critical readings which posit Joan's use of fantasy as detrimental typically agree with Vevaina's comment that Joan is "[u]nable to distinguish between fantasy and fact, ... [and] fails disastrously in her numerous attempts to live out one trashy, melodramatic script after another" (*Re/Membering* 48-49). Yet such readings fail to acknowledge the converse; that is, the moments in which fantasy and reality physically overlap in Joan's life serve abruptly to halt her wildly imaginative fantasies, thereby counterbalancing the unconscious. This function is perhaps most clearly signalled in the park scene by Joan's scream and bewildered response to Arthur's physical touch, an action coinciding with her imaginary Gothic romance (164-65). The shock can be interpreted as a moment of regaining mental balance, for Joan here is teetering on the brink of allowing fantasy to dominate reality. To preserve herself from this madness, her psyche registers the physical contact -- connecting the self with the other, and the mind with the body -- and so Joan's retraction to "reality" enables her to maintain a condition of "normality."

In a different respect, criticisms of Joan's flights of imagination often agree with my positive rendering of the function of fantasy. For example, despite Vevaina's harsh critique of Joan, she also observes that "Atwood's *Lady Oracle* makes us re-vision our notion of reality and see every human being as a fascinating mixture of reality and fantasy" (*Re/Membering* 50). The significant point of intersection between positive and negative readings of the function of fantasy hinges on the reader, for Atwood's presentation of fantasy powerfully engages her/him. Whether fantasy is construed favourably or unfavourably, the effect on the responsive reader -- that need to "re-vision" her/his assumptions and perspective -- is presented as a distinctly positive outcome. Consequently, I maintain that this positive effect on the reader is a significant focus in both *Lady Oracle* and *Life Before Man*, an effect that is heightened by Atwood's discrete

approach in each novel. Just as Atwood's reader is complicit in the construction of norms -- as s/he most clearly discovers through Rennie's experience in *Bodily Harm* -- so the reader must create reality from and within the world of the text. As Sherrill Grace notes, not only does Atwood "point out that the world we perceive is, in some measure, a world we create," but also "the work of art shapes its mirror world in significant patterns that allow us to see ourselves in new ways" (*Violent* 2). Through these comments, Grace indicates Atwood's focus on the role of the reader and on the interactive experience of reading. These foci indicate the correspondence of Atwood's novels to Iser's theories and their foundational assumptions.

Somewhat more expansively, Maclean asserts that the act of re-creating one's reality is not exclusive to the reader but begins with the author: "[f]iction, then, is not simply the mere symptom or product of a pre-existent psychological condition but also the very means by which a writer apprehends himself and, in some sense, creates himself.... [T]he writer strives for an enlarged vision of reality, a magnified perspective on the self" (194-95). Such reasoning runs parallel to the position that writing is a means -- at times, the only means -- by which madness may be kept at bay. Whereas Foucault claims that madness is segregated and silenced by the discourse of reason, the converse is equally illuminating: to retain a hold on discourse is to retain a hold on "sanity." In a similar vein, Linda Hutcheon argues for the significance of Atwood's "interest in the creative potential (and danger) of fantasy" evident in *Life Before Man*. Hutcheon further notes that "[a]ll of Atwood's heroines are highly imaginative; their creative processes, however extreme or comic, also in a sense mirror that of the novelist herself, which in turn mirrors our own as readers" (*Canadian* 152). Thus fantasy, or the "creative imagination," becomes the link between author, character, and reader. Since fantasy taken to the extreme becomes madness, then the psyche of the mad figure can also be perceived as the site of the author-character-reader dynamic. Moreover, in this view, the need for psychic balance -- conscious/unconscious, reality/fantasy -- is no longer limited to the

mad character but includes the author and reader. In fact, Atwood affirms that once the book is published, the latter categories collapse, for the author then inhabits the role of a reader (Mendez-Egle, "Witness" 169).

Through the character, then, the reader strives to balance the conscious and unconscious in the form of reality and fantasy. In Eleonora Rao's terms, "Atwood's novels discard binary oppositions, such as truth/fantasy in so far as the dialectics established by dichotomies implies that one term excludes the other. In the reformulation of oppositions achieved in the text we see how one term of the antithesis can be inherent within the other." As a result, Rao notes, the novels "show the necessity of achieving a balance between fantasy and reality" (*Strategies* xviii). Significantly, Rao draws attention to the interrelation of oppositions in Atwood's fiction, a premise shared by Grace's influential early study *Violent Duality*. Atwood's methodology of challenging oppositional dichotomies coincides with the Jungian notion of compensatory functioning, or the balancing of psychic energies. In fact, Jung asserts that "psychology basically depends upon balanced opposites" (*Symbols* 96). In dealing with fantasy and reality, such balancing carries inherent dangers and complications in practical application. Margery Fee states that "[t]o see the world as multiple, or as a mix of fantasy and reality, is probably less mistaken than believing that there is only one correct view of it." To counter the sensation of being overwhelmed by the instability of these aspects and their "indeterminate mix," Fee posits as a mediating factor the external force of "social reality, however crazy and unfair it seems" (79). In other words, the expectations held by others, based on their view of reality, will limit the extent of one's allowable fantasy. Somewhat problematically, however, Fee does not indicate how this "social reality" is determined and implies that it is a stable construct. If individuals perceive the world as "a mix of fantasy and reality," then it seems contradictory that society, a group of those individuals, would see it as a single, mutually agreed upon "reality." While Jungian thought allows for consideration of the "social milieu to which the individuals belong," it also requires

that the individual's "own mental equilibrium" be taken into account. As Jung explains, "[t]his does not mean that the final result must be the complete collectivization of the individual, for this would be a most unnatural condition. On the contrary, a sane and normal society is one in which people habitually disagree" (*Symbols* 96). Fee herself seems to recognize this need, for she warns against mediocrity and asserts that "[f]antasy and reality need to be played off against each other, not further divided" (82).

More convincingly, Lillian Feder focuses on the individual psyche as the site of such a dynamic, describing the conscious mind as enacting "its complex function as mediator between the inner realm of instinct, dream, and fantasy and the limitations, compromises, and challenges of the world outside" (282). Feder's assessment coincides with Jung's view that while the psyche is compensatory, or self-regulating, individuation requires a conscious determination to integrate the conscious with the unconscious: "[f]rom one point of view this process takes place in man ... by itself and in the unconscious; it is a process by which man lives out his innate human nature. Strictly speaking, however, the process of individuation is real only if the individual is aware of it and consciously makes a living connection with it" (von Franz, "Process" 163-64). Herein lies the difficulty for the modern Western individual: not the threat of dissolving into fantasy (the unconscious) but rather the complete absence thereof. The unconscious is subsumed and this imbalance is unrecognized because it is the "average" or "normal" condition. Jung describes the "modern 'cultural' mind" as "show[ing] an alarming degree of dissociation and psychological confusion. We believe exclusively in consciousness and free will, and are no longer aware of the powers that control us to an indefinite degree, outside the narrow domain where we can be reasonable and exercise a certain amount of free choice and self-control" (*Symbols* 123). Thus the modern condition is one of lost fantasy, a state of imbalance that is serious and largely unrecognized. In Jungian and Laingian terms, this "normal" state is one of alienation.

Jung views fantasy primarily as a feature of the primitive mind, an aspect excised from the "modern 'cultural' mind." He describes the loss of fantasy as a consequence of an unbalanced focus on reason:

> as daily adaptation to the reality of things demands accurate statements, we have learnt to discard the trimming of fantasy, and have thus lost a quality that is still characteristic of the primitive mind. Primitive thinking sees its object surrounded by a fringe of associations which have become more or less unconscious in civilized man.... With us such things are kept below the threshold; and when they occasionally reappear, we are convinced that something is wrong.... We are so used to the rational surface of our world that we cannot imagine anything untoward happening within the confines of common sense. If our mind once in a while does something thoroughly unexpected, we are terrified and immediately think of a pathological disturbance, whereas primitive man would think of fetishes, spirits, or gods but would never doubt his sanity. (*Symbols* 84-85)

Modern Western society's dissociation from the unconscious leads to suppositions of madness because the fantasy -- what Jung terms "the *participation mystique*" (*Symbols* 85) -- is completely unrecognized. The unknown, the irrational, the unconscious are all highly suspect to and segregated from the rational mind, as opposed to their integration in the "primitive mind." In this respect, *Life Before Man* is an ideal site of examination, for the most prominent fantasies therein involve the titular primitive world and occur in the psyche of the least socially adept character, Lesje Green. While some critics, Davey among them, note Atwood's allusion to the Frygian notion of the "Green World" of Romance (*Margaret* 82), others, such as Carrington, note the connection of Lesje's surname with the primitive world and its ironic suggestion of respite ("Demons" 84). However, the figurative connotation of Green as young, awkward, and inexperienced is also noteworthy. Lesje's gauche behaviour and social unease juxtapose her to modern culture and society, thereby aligning her with the Jungian "primitive." Such a link offers an explanation for Lesje's tendency to fantasize and her ability to see the "fringe of associations" to which others are blind.

Life Before Man also neatly fulfils Philip Stratford's assessment of Atwood's fiction, which he bases on the novel *Surfacing* -- her other representation of the

"primitive." Stratford observes that "[a] rankling sense of alienation permeates all her fiction, expressed in the neurotic edginess of her prose...yet not leading to total despair but to the desire for a more inclusive life reconciling hitherto unmanageable complexities" (113). Notably, Stratford focuses on how the alienation in Atwood's novels is manifested in the reader as a rejection rather than an acceptance of that portrayed condition. This interpretation avoids romanticizing the novels and the act of reading because Stratford limits his claim; he argues not for a fulfilment of those positive desires for an inclusive life, but simply for their existence. Significantly, in this view, the reader desires improvement as well as a reconciliation -- though not an elimination -- of complexities. In other words, Atwood's novels prompt the reader's desire for a balanced life.[6] Paradoxically, Atwood encourages this reaction in the reader through the representation of the current bleakness of life and the imbalance in her characters. Of Atwood's ten novels to date, *Life Before Man* is arguably the most successful in this endeavour.[7]

If fantasy can be seen as the predominant basis upon which readers dismiss Joan in *Lady Oracle*, viewing her as an embodiment of the other, then *Life Before Man* can be seen in some measure as a "corrective" novel. In *Life Before Man*, Atwood extends the representation of the dissociated modern individual by removing fantasy from her "normal" character and segregating it into a separate complementary character. Thus, Elizabeth Schoenhof is the pivotal figure in the novel; she functions as the modern "normal" individual with Lesje Green representing the site of fantasy. Although the novel

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[6] Interestingly, Kristina Carlson concludes her article by describing Atwood as "tasapainoinen" or well-balanced (43; my translation).

[7] Critics vary on what they describe as Atwood's bleakest work: for example, Atherton cites *Bodily Harm* as "Atwood's most depressing" (13) and Rosenberg terms it "especially dark" (112) and profoundly pessimistic (133); conversely, Solecki finds *Life Before Man* most pessimistic (28-29) while Bouson finds *The Handmaid's Tale* disturbingly bleak (137). Without trying to resolve such disparities, the following discussion nonetheless seeks to demonstrate that *Life Before Man* so effectively conveys its internal bleakness-- due to its proximity to the reader's own existence -- that the novel awakens a desire in the reader to prevent such a condition in her/himself. In Atwood's words, "[c]haracters have a tendency to be the flip side of the coin -- to be what you are afraid of becoming" (Slopen 6). This inverse relationship applies to the reader as well as to the author.

is divided among diary-like entries for three characters -- Elizabeth, her husband Nate, and Lesje -- many critics concur that Elizabeth is the central figure in Atwood's structuring of the novel.[8] *Life Before Man* expands on the "normal" condition to emphasize the problematic dissociation which characterizes the modern individual: the separation of conscious from unconscious, mind from body, and self from others. Elizabeth most starkly demonstrates this dissociation, as Staëls explains:

> [o]f the three protagonists, Elizabeth is most fully adjusted to a society that holds in high regard the ordering and structuring subject, the logical and rational operations of the mind. Elizabeth has never managed to free herself from the constraints which her aunt imposed on her mind and body. Her psychological stance largely resembles that of her aunt: the indomitable will; the reign by tyranny, which she thinks of as her 'strength'; the repression of visible signs of 'weakness'; the fear of vulnerability and loss; the fear of excess and unsettling events in her life. Like her aunt, Elizabeth believes that safety resides in 'sanity,' that is, only in rational decisions that should guarantee a life that falls into proper patterns. Elizabeth maintains her sanity, her illusion of a firm identity, at the expense of a dimension of herself, namely of her capacity for process. She worsens her emotional numbness by holding onto the culture [*sic*] norm that she inherited, because it provides a sense of safety. (*Margaret* 112-13)

Such a notion of "sanity" relies on segregation in the form of conscious exclusion of the unknown, the irrational, and the unconscious, as well as on the isolation of self from others. It is a state of self-delusion and of false security in a constructed norm. Significantly, Staëls associates Elizabeth with a society ruled by reason, a link which highlights the implications of Jung's views on the modern cultural mind as outlined above.

It is also noteworthy that although Elizabeth is representative of the individual condition, the consequences of dissociation are not limited to the individual but affect the novel's Western society. While the social effect of this dissociation is not overlooked by critics, it frequently provides a basis for devaluing the novel. Vevaina offers a summary

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[8] For example, Carrington notes, "Elizabeth is much more important than Nate or Lesje.... Elizabeth's experiences structure the novel. In addition, she is the only character with first-person interior monologues" ("Demons" 71). Staëls makes strikingly similar observations about Elizabeth's "dominant ... status" and "interior monologue," claiming that "[h]er experience structures the novel" (*Margaret* 107).

of such criticism which dismisses *Life Before Man* and its characters as unengaging and unimportant (*Re/Membering* 30-31). She catalogues those views in order to challenge them: "[w]hat those critics fail to realize is that what Atwood is saying through her socially and politically real 'anatomy of melancholy' is that the grief of normal people is 'real' and that it should neither be ignored nor dismissed as trite" (Vevaina, *Re/Membering* 31). Moreover, Vevaina metaphorically describes the novel as one "which sounds more like a stifled sob than an outburst of anguish" (*Re/Membering* 30). The subdued tone does not minimize the significance of the novel's social representation. Such apparent "normality," bleakness, and perhaps even banality serve a paradoxical purpose: the "normality" hides the novel's social critique under the guise of a readily recognizable state, while the bleakness simultaneously heightens its degree. Such duality underscores the tenuous positioning of the reader and the demanding role of interpretation. Bouson notes that Atwood's use of multiple narrative entries -- offering perspectives from Nate, Lesje, and Elizabeth -- is deliberate and "problematizes the process of interpretive reconstruction" (108). However, such structuring also serves to highlight the role of the reader: "[p]ositioned as co-conspirators and empathic [*sic*] listeners, readers are made privy to the empty despair and radical disconnection of Atwood's troubled and troubling characters" (Bouson 108-109). Thus, instead of being precluded from the condition and consequences of dissociation, the reader is strategically implicated.

Within this society, dissociation and limitation of the psyche to its conscious state have some immediate consequences -- the most extreme of which is suicidal tendencies. Vevaina observes that "[t]he psychic imbalance caused by this lop-sided world view makes almost all the characters in the novel repeatedly vacillate between the twin desires of survival and potential suicide. Though Elizabeth's lover, Chris, is the only one who actually commits suicide, Elizabeth, Nate, Lesje and even Nate's energetic and idealistic mother are tempted to end their lives in different ways" (*Re/Membering* 31-32). While

this list might seem overwhelming, it is not complete. To the list of suicidal individuals, one can add Nate's previous lover, Martha, who feigns an overdose, is taken to hospital, and plaintively utters, "'I want to die'" (96). Moreover, Atwood includes enough ambiguity in the account of Caroline's death that Elizabeth's sister may well represent another act of suicide rather than an accidental drowning: "an attendant was called away while she was in the bathtub.... Caroline slipped down. She drowned rather than making the one small gesture, the turn of the head, that would have saved her life" (76-77). It is perhaps unsurprising that the society in *Life Before Man* is readily dismissed by some readers since even the characters seem eager to escape it. However, such an effect is precisely its power: the reader can physically put the book down but, more importantly in Iser's view, analysis of the fictional society precedes subsequent analysis of the reader's own surroundings by "enabling the reader to observe how such social regulators function, and what effect they have on the people subject to them. The reader is thus placed in a position from which he can take a fresh look at the forces which guide and orient him, and which he may hitherto have accepted without question" (*Act* 74).

The characters, Elizabeth predominant among them, function as negative role models who, through their dissociated state, both implicate and repel Atwood's reader. Although Elizabeth seems to be in total control -- both of herself and of others -- the defiant act of suicide by her most recent lover, Chris Beecham, shatters that image. Elizabeth's dissociation is exposed, thereby revealing the proximity to madness in her psychic imbalance. As Jung states, in their inability to allow for or to recognize anything beyond the purely rational and conscious, "some so-called normal but unimaginative individuals ... show how close dull normality is to a neurosis" (*Symbols* 131). Because Elizabeth imagines herself in control of people and situations touching her, she fails to preserve the ability to imagine that there are forces beyond her control; consequently, her mental imbalance is a form of "neurosis." Barbara Hill Rigney similarly notes the proximity of (to borrow Jung's terms) "dull normality to neurosis"; she argues that in *Life*

Before Man the characters themselves recognize and respond to this pending threat: "[p]ervasive in the novel ... is a sensation of panic at the possibility of madness.... And always there is the realisation of inevitable death" (*Margaret* 83).[9] This association between madness and death is illustrative of the extreme position of these states, yet Rigney draws a crucial distinction between the two: whereas madness is a frightening possibility, death is an inevitability. That is to say, although both cause fear, unlike death, madness is avoidable. Consequently, Atwood's characters, including but not limited to Elizabeth, seek to preserve their "normal" dissociated state and fear propels them to avoid madness by whatever means possible -- even if that means embracing death. An important result of Atwood's structuring of the novel is the subversion of romanticized readings which seek to equate madness with escape, for madness itself is what her characters seek to escape -- overtly or implicitly.

Arguably, this hope of escaping madness is a condition that plagues not only Atwood's characters but the reader as well. Allen Thiher forthrightly asserts that "insanity impinges upon all of us throughout our lives" (5). Similarly, Jane Ussher claims that our fear of madness is based on recognition of our own proximity to or even of our own participation in that very state:

> [p]erhaps we fear it will happen to us. That it is "in our genes." That one day too our nerves will snap. That we will crack. That we will split in two, fall in a heap, face the terror head on. That this madness now called depression, or schizophrenia, or neurosis, will afflict us, and we will lose control. Or perhaps it is a wider issue: that madness ... leaves us all with a sense of loss and a sense of foreboding. For we recognize something of ourselves in the mad. And we don't know the answer to the question of madness, but turn away from it lest we find that the path which takes us there is one we are on ourselves. (*Women's* 4)

Ussher's remarks tellingly suggest that such a "sense of foreboding" and recognition of "something of ourselves in the mad" may or may not be conscious. If madness is the

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[9] As noted in the introductory chapter, despite this observation, Rigney does not further explore madness in her analysis of *Life Before Man* but restricts her remarks to an earlier discussion of *Surfacing*, thereby typifying the focus of existing criticism (see *Madness* 91-115).

unknown, is an unanswered question, and is eschewed on the basis of fear by individuals who are not mad, then Ussher's comments can be read as an echo of Jung's own claim. He asserts that the ignorance of the unknown and the unconscious which characterizes "normal" individuals results from fear: "devaluation of the psyche and other resistances to psychological enlightenment are based in large measure on fear -- on panic fear of the discoveries that might be made in the realm of the unconscious" (Jung, *Undiscovered* 27-28). In these terms, the reader shares the ignorance and fear of the characters as well as their potential for madness. Admittedly, the characters may represent a more extreme dissociation, yet they firmly retain the condition of "normality" also inhabited by the reader. Atwood concurs, calling the prospect of madness "one of our deepest human fears" and ominously observing in a lecture that "[t]he so-called mad person will always represent a possible future for every member of the audience -- who knows when such a malady may strike?" ("Ophelia"). That is not to say that everyone recognizes this possible fate, yet, in Atwood's rendering, such lack of awareness does not preclude anyone from the potential of "so-called" madness -- a condition which her terminology signifies is a construct. Since the characters in *Life Before Man* remain blind to their own psychological condition, they do not seek to regain psychic balance but see death -- self-inflicted, if necessary -- as their only apparent means of averting madness.

Paradoxically, however, death can also be figured as an extreme state of dissociation, thereby representing a physical condition parallel to the psychological state of madness. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar draw a similar conclusion in their discussion of Emily Dickinson's poetry, observing that "[d]eath ... is ultimately a metaphor for madness, specifically for the madness attendant upon psychic alienation and fragmentation" (*Madwoman* 627). This assessment is strikingly applicable to Atwood's fictional representation of alienation in *Life Before Man*. Death can metaphorically represent madness in the sense that both states can be described as the ultimate loss of agency. Thiher, for example, defines madness as "rupture," or "a break with the social

world and the community whose worldview we share through language" (13). In that sense, the characters' suicidal tendencies can be seen as a tempting means of removal from social agency, and so as representative of allowing their dissociated psychological state to complete the fall into madness. However, it is noteworthy that with the exception of Caroline and Chris, in *Life Before Man* the characters retain a position of agency in their community, operating through language, and being acknowledged through their interaction with others -- flawed and limited as that interaction may be. Thus their "normal" state of alienation *approaches* madness but does not occupy the extreme position of madness which entails an utter loss of agency. Hence, the characters' leanings towards physical death may figuratively be termed leanings towards madness. As such, the fulfilment of those tendencies remains the exception, for most characters retain a tenuous hold on their state of dissociated "normality."

The tenuous nature of this hold makes it particularly apt that death hangs over the novel, for the suicidal tendencies emphasize the mental instability of the characters. In his assessment of the novel, Davey notes that "[t]he central paradox of *Life Before Man* is that Chris' suicide is both the most life-affirming act of the book and its most life-denying. It effectively ends Chris' possibilities for a richer life while causing small changes within the lives of customarily passive Elizabeth, Nate, and Lesje" (*Margaret* 88). While Davey's recognition of the significance of this suicide in the structure of the novel is accurate, I would argue that Chris' act causes more than "small changes" and that these effects are centered upon Elizabeth. Even though the outward changes in the characters' relationships and lifestyle might be described as "small," the psychological influence is considerable. Elizabeth's reality is disordered by Chris' suicide, as the opening of the novel clearly indicates. While "lying on her back, clothes on and unrumpled.... Arms at her sides, feet together, eyes open" and reflecting on the current state of events, Elizabeth admits, "I don't know how I should live. I don't know how anyone should live. All I know is how I do live. I live like a peeled snail.... I want that

shell back, it took me long enough to make. You've got it with you, wherever you are" (3). With the exception of her open eyes, Elizabeth's posture is eerily and appropriately funereal: a figurative corpse reflecting on an actual one.

Nearly three months later, Elizabeth lies in the same posture, eyes open, in a vain effort to imagine Chris' funeral and family, and becomes aware at last that "Chris disappeared without her help or connivance" (142-44). Clearly, such stasis underlines Davey's assertion of only negligible changes taking place in the characters. However, the extent of psychological disruption caused by this suicide is evident in a parallel scene where Elizabeth actually attends the funeral of her Auntie Muriel, a scene of pyrrhic victory for Elizabeth. Whereas the demise of her authoritarian, self-righteous mother-substitute should herald relief in Elizabeth, instead of celebration, she succumbs to the darkness that has been oppressing her since Chris' suicide: "there's nothing to push against, hold on to. A black vacuum sucks at her, there's a wind, a slow roar. Still clutching [her daughter] Janet's hand, Elizabeth falls through space" (277). When alive, Auntie Muriel makes Elizabeth, even in adulthood, feel "'[p]art prisoner, part orphan, part cripple, part insane'" (109). However, as figured in her slip from consciousness, Elizabeth's defenses only fail her once her aunt is deceased. This lack of control frightens Elizabeth: "[i]t maddens her, this need everyone has to be told she's all right. She isn't, she's frightened. She's done other things but she's never blacked out like this before. She foresees a future of sudden power failures, keeling over on the subway, at intersections, with no one to drag her out of the way. Falling down stairs" (277). Elizabeth's reaction to this incident may be viewed as a fear of madness -- the fear of lack of control over her own consciousness, which she associates with inevitable death.

In a similar nod to the link of madness to death, Atwood presents Chris as a madman. Although Caroline is the overtly mad character in the novel, as will be discussed, Chris' form of madness is equally significant in relation to Elizabeth. Chris represents the abnormal figure in the literal sense that he consciously and blatantly rebels

against social norms. His aberrant behaviour seems only to be exaggerated in regard to normative limits that intensify from mere niceties to actual legalities. On the level of social etiquette, Chris drinks beer out of bottles rather than glasses, and in a strategic game of challenge, he plays chess with Nate ferociously, impatiently, "like a Cossack" (157), while flaunting his possession of Elizabeth's pendant in a taunting gesture of sexual aggression. On the legal level, Chris intentionally ignores by-laws by parking illegally and driving a car without a muffler: "[h]e exploits this aggressively, revving the engine like a thunder gun at each stoplight" (156). In Vevaina's terms, Chris is a foil character: "[h]is unbridled passion and vitality and his reckless rebellion against the norms of genteel behaviour stand in direct contrast to the repressed, often hypocritical behaviour of the 'civilized' Schoenhofs" (*Re/Membering* 36). This difference becomes obvious in the reactions of Chris and Elizabeth to their love affair. Elizabeth's reaction is reminiscent of Joan's (more exaggerated) disbelief in Chuck Brewer's offer of a "normal life" together; both women feel utterly unable and unwilling to take a step of serious commitment with their lovers. Elizabeth muses, "Chris wanted her to quit her job, leave her home and her two children. For him.... She'd have to be crazy, he'd have to be crazy to think she ever would. No visible support. He should have left things the way they were" (124). In an eerie echo of Elizabeth's judgment, Nate also wonders if Chris is "crazy" or "insane" (158) and disparages his "extravagance, hysteria" as "distasteful" (7). Davey argues that "Nate ... has consistently misread Chris" (*Margaret* 87), and that "[o]n most occasions when Chris appears in the novel the version we are given of him is Nate's version, a fantasy character into whom Nate projects all the violence he has repressed in himself"; consequently, Davey argues, the reader is put in danger of a similar misreading (*Margaret* 88-89). Indeed, the reader should consider the relationship of the two characters and question the accuracy of Nate's assessments of Chris. As with other characters, Atwood structures the representation to require the reader's careful assessment -- an act for which s/he is ultimately responsible.

Nonetheless, the bare fact that Chris disregards behavioural norms suffices to position him as abnormal -- a designation that flirts with and is often collapsed with madness. Even if Nate's observations are suspect and even if the reader retains some admiration for the rebel figure, these exceptions are likely dispelled by Chris' bloody act of suicide. The reader, instead, is inclined to share Elizabeth's reaction of disgust and to recognize her anger in the novel's opening scene: "I'm not impressed, I'm disgusted. That was a disgusting thing to do, childish and stupid. A tantrum.... I'm so angry I could kill you. If you hadn't already done that for yourself" (3). An act of suicide in itself can be termed temporary insanity, marking both the pervasive nature of suicidal tendencies in the novel and Chris' role, in particular, as increasingly significant. Lillian Feder observes that such results are characteristic of the mad figure's existence: "[i]n literature, as in daily life, madness is the perpetual amorphous threat within and the extreme of the unknown in fellow human beings.... The madman, like other people, does not exist alone. He both reflects and influences those involved with him" (4-5).

Following from this view, Chris' action involves a telling method of suicide. By blowing off his head with a shotgun, Chris severs mind from body in a literal, physical sense. Vevaina argues that through this act, Chris causes a reciprocal mind/body split in Elizabeth: "[b]y physically separating his body from his head, Chris punishes Elizabeth by forcing the same fate on her psychologically" (*Re/Membering* 37). Although Chris' suicide does cause considerable psychological damage, it is important to distinguish that his act furthers Elizabeth's dissociation but is not solely responsible for it. On the contrary, Elizabeth exists in a state of alienation well before her relationship with Chris; indeed, as revealed by her attitude towards their involvement, Elizabeth favours detached, undemanding, terminable relationships; these retain the segregation of mind and body, thereby causing alienation from one's self and from others. This attitude is not limited to her lovers but is inclusive of her family, a situation that is exacerbated -- rather than created -- in the aftermath of Chris' suicide. Elizabeth's home life is a feigned

"normality," for she is isolated from her husband and children. Although Elizabeth isolates herself from her family, she projects this distance, suggestively claiming that "they are remote from her" (4). While this sensation is understandable in the midst of grief, Atwood makes clear that this turn of events is neither new nor unexpected. In the case of the children, Nancy and Janet, the distance is evident to Elizabeth even as she lies passively on the bed:

> She can see them, they can see her. They know something is wrong. Their politeness, their evasion, is chilling because it's so perfectly done.
>
> They've been watching me. They've been watching us for years. Why wouldn't they know how to do it? They act as though everything is normal, and maybe for them it is normal. (4-5)

The latter comment is particularly revealing, for Elizabeth seems aware both that "normality" is a created illusion and that the manifestation of distance is so pervasive that it is the "normal" state of affairs for the Schoenhofs. This inkling is verified in the moments following, as Nate steps into the bedroom, thereby "breaking the invisible thread she habitually stretches across the threshold to keep him out" (5). Nevertheless, in addition to this pre-existent state of alienation, Elizabeth begins to "lose her grip" on consciousness, and this "slippage" indicates the serious psychological repercussions of Chris' suicide.

The unconscious begins to intrude as Elizabeth lies physically inert but mentally alert. Significantly, she initially attempts to persuade herself that everything is normal and under control -- specifically, in her control. While gazing at a crack in the ceiling, Elizabeth tells herself that "[n]othing will happen, nothing will open, the crack will not widen and split and nothing will come through it. All it means is that the ceiling needs to be repainted" (3). Despite her protests, Elizabeth clearly is not in control: "[s]he is not in. She's somewhere between her body, which is lying sedately on the bed, ... and the ceiling with its hairline cracks. She can see herself there.... She knows about the vacuum on the other side of the ceiling.... Into the black vacuum the air is being sucked with a soft barely

audible whistle. She could be pulled up and into it like smoke" (4). It is notable not only that Elizabeth "knows about the vacuum" but that her vulnerability to its effect is exposed by this extreme mind/body dissociation. Nora Foster Stovel observes that Elizabeth suffers from "splintered consciousness" (60), and that this scene is a manifestation of the extent of Elizabeth's dissociation: "[i]n this state, Elizabeth is separated from other people, alienated from life, and divided from herself" (61). In this sense, Elizabeth is the Laingian schizoid: psychically alienated from self, others, and "reality."

This scene on the bed is also notable for Atwood's strategic introduction of the "soft, barely audible whistle" which develops into the ear hum that plagues Elizabeth. The condition becomes so intolerable that Elizabeth seeks medical advice only to discover that it has no discernible physical cause. After a physical examination, her doctor announces that "'[t]here's absolutely nothing wrong with your hearing.... Your ears are clear and your range is normal.'" Nevertheless, no sooner has she left the office than "the humming has begun again, high-pitched, constant, like a mosquito or a child's tuneless song, or a power line in winter" (52). In contemplating her condition, Elizabeth recollects a tale of "an old woman who started hearing angel voices in her head and thought she was going mad"; ultimately, this woman's hum is traced to a radio signal's bizarre transmission through her bridgework (52). Although society treats this situation as comical, reprinting it as a joke in *Reader's Digest*, Elizabeth does not seem to share this view. The hum in her own ears is only interrupted by a driver's irate shout in a narrowly averted collision as Elizabeth exits the medical clinic, recklessly jaywalking across a busy street; she ignores the trucker but considers his question: "[d]oes she want to get herself killed. The hum in her right ear shuts off like a cut connection" (52). Suddenly, she realizes that the doctor was right: "[t]here's nothing wrong with her ears. The sound is coming from somewhere else. Angel voices" (52). The physical manifestation of this phenomenon in her own life makes it impossible for Elizabeth to dismiss the hum --

regardless of how desperately she wishes to do so. On the contrary, she is forced to acknowledge it as a link to something beyond the physical, conscious realm.

Although Elizabeth considers angels as a more viable possibility than madness, a consideration of death -- particularly of suicide -- is required before she is able to make even this concession to her rational view of the world. Staëls reads Elizabeth's experience through one of the novel's epigraphs, a quotation from Andrei Sinyavsky's short story, "The Icicle": "'[l]ook, I'm smiling at you, I'm smiling in you, I'm smiling through you. How can I be dead if I breathe in every quiver of your hand?'" Staëls notes that following Atwood's selected lines, Sinyavsky's piece continues, "'[t]he dead are singing in your body; dead souls are droning in your nerves. Just listen! It's like ... the hum of telegraph wires'" (*Margaret* 116). Based on this excerpt, Staëls concludes that

> Elizabeth's equilibrium is unexpectedly menaced by the voices of the dead, who are a dimension of herself from which she tries to disconnect herself. These "angel voices" ... are the excluded voices of the lost/loved ones, underneath the artificial layer of certainties and fixities. Elizabeth wants to keep these voices down.... She refuses to make sense of these "irrational" voices that she nevertheless knows are there. Forgotten, or repressed, they take revenge on her and feed on her mind and body. (*Margaret* 116)

Although Elizabeth refuses to associate this "irrationality" with herself or to admit that the unconscious is part of her, the hum insists on her acknowledgement of its existence even as she attempts to distance herself from it in order to remain in control. The persistence of this physical manifestation forces her wary recognition: "[i]n the room someone is singing. Not singing but a hum; Elizabeth realizes she's been hearing it for some time... and she knows she should be careful. No openings.... 'Shut up,' Elizabeth says. Even this much acknowledgement is bad" (77). Her wary reaction suggests a fear of acknowledging this irrational realm. Atwood presents Elizabeth as consciously attempting to suppress her unconscious; however, the intrusions are persistent, demonstrating the autonomy of the psyche and its compensatory nature.

Elizabeth not only recognizes the hum as a threat to her hard-won, constructed "normality," but also specifically associates the voices with madness: "[s]he hadn't found those people in the sixties who'd torn their cats apart and jumped out of high-rise windows because they thought they were birds in the least glamorous: she'd found them stupid. Anyone who had ever heard those voices before or seen what they could do would have known what they were saying" (77). The threat of this madness is precisely what Elizabeth fears and, pointedly, she links madness to death. Consequently, Elizabeth fiercely strives to maintain a psychic distance from both madness and death by structuring her "reality" and limiting her involvement with others. Although she refuses to consider herself unstable, Elizabeth tellingly entertains thoughts of suicide -- that act which is a figuration of madness and death -- and not for the first time. She thinks of her sister, Caroline, and wonders whether her death was an act of suicide; Elizabeth's reactions are ambivalent: "[s]he has wondered why. Sometimes, though, she's merely wondered why she herself has never done the same thing. At these times Caroline is clear, logical, pure" (77). Similarly, in reflecting on Chris' recent suicide, Elizabeth questions her own will to live, metaphorically figuring herself as an hourglass: "[s]and runs through her glass body, from her head down to her feet. When it's all gone she'll be dead. Buried alive. Why wait?" (78). Roberta Rubenstein argues that "[t]he [hourglass] image evokes the sensations of engulfment and suffocation that periodically plague her" (*Boundaries* 74).[10] Stated more generally, these suicidal thoughts can be seen as the result of Elizabeth's psychic imbalance and dissociation.

This reading positions Elizabeth in proximity to madness; however, if madness is an extreme condition of normality as Jungian thought maintains, then this proximity neither inevitably positions Elizabeth at risk nor presupposes a fall into madness or suicide. Conversely, such a situation can also be interpreted as a potential -- though, in

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[10] See Chapter 3, "Ontological Insecurity" of Laing's *Divided Self* for fuller discussion of engulfment (40-64). Laing's main observation is that the individual who fears engulfment relies on isolation as the primary means of self-preservation.

Elizabeth's case, an unrealized -- means of psychic integration. Denise Russell argues that such possibilities are consistently and erroneously dismissed in modern Western society in favour of an assumption of mental illness: "there are many people who are desperately unhappy, some who hear voices that others don't hear, etc. But is it appropriate or desirable to regard such people as 'ill'?" Russell denotes the latter as "one of the central questions" she seeks to address, "arguing that there may be advantages in breaking this [division between sanity and madness] down" (2). Jung and Laing propose a similar reevaluation of so-called psychological diseases, desiring the recognition both of cultural influence on determining normative limits and also of the limitations of modern Western "normality." In particular, Russell focuses on the cultural interpretation of hearing voices, a phenomenon which Western society commonly terms "'having hallucinations'" (150). However, as she observes, such an interpretation is not the only possible one and may be rather misleading:

> hearing voices that others don't hear, believing things that others don't believe, are human traits which may be devalued or valued depending on one's culture. If they are valued then they may bring about certain benefits to the individual -- for example, high social status -- or the group -- for example, healing. If they are devalued then they may jetison [*sic*] the person into certain ceremonies of degradation, including forced hospitalization. These traits are very dangerous ones to admit to in Western culture so they are not usually intentionally adopted here. However, given that they mean something quite different in other cultures, perhaps we should be questioning whether it is appropriate to view them as signs of a mental illness. Perhaps they do have some adaptive function for the individual which is obscured by viewing them through the medical model. (Russell 151)

Although Elizabeth does not "intentionally adopt" the hearing of voices, neither can she rid herself of this phenomenon, suggesting that an "adaptive function" may be possible but remains unaddressed.[11] Elizabeth seems well aware of the dangers of admission, for

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[11] Such a reading avoids romanticizing madness by positing it neither as an escape nor a superior form of sanity; rather, Russell highlights the cultural variability of psychological "symptoms" and the limitations of broad designations of "illness" or "disease." Moreover, as Jung observes, it is important to discover why such intrusions of the unconscious are occurring -- always with the goal of psychic integration. In Jungian terms, "madness" construed as escape is an illusion, for the psyche remains unbalanced; it simply inverts to a psychic overbalance of fantasy or the unconscious.

her spoken attempt to silence the voices prompts self-censure: "[e]ven this much acknowledgement is bad" (77). Clearly, the unconscious resists silencing through will or force, and Elizabeth's tenuous "stability" is threatened. Because of her fear of the irrational or the unconscious, Elizabeth resists psychological assistance -- a decision that may also reflect her recent futile experience with seeking medical assistance.

In this resistance to psychological assistance, Elizabeth retains her "normality" while simultaneously demonstrating its proximity to madness. Although she cancels the appointment with a psychiatrist that Nate suggests, Elizabeth still imagines what she would have revealed in the encounter: "[y]es, I know I've suffered an unusual shock. I'm quite aware of that, I can feel the waves.... I also realize that my reactions are normal under the circumstances..." (86). Interestingly, she expects that a psychiatric assessment will find her reactions "normal under the circumstances"; this qualifying phrase suggests that the situation must be exceptional to warrant behaviour that would otherwise be considered "abnormal." Even in this imagined situation, Elizabeth adamantly denies having suicidal thoughts:

> I know I have to keep on living and I have no intention of doing otherwise. You don't have to worry about that. If I were going to take a carving knife to my wrists or do a swan dive off the Bloor Street Viaduct I'd have done it before now. I'm a mother if not exactly a wife and I take that seriously. I would never leave an image like that behind for my children. I've had that done to me and I didn't like it. (86)

Ironically, specifying the means of suicide contradicts Elizabeth's own protests by suggesting that she may have considered her options.

In the midst of these denials, Elizabeth embeds a significant acknowledgement: "[m]y mother, my father, my aunt and my sister did not go away. Chris won't go away either" (86). Despite her apparent recognition of these deceased individuals -- all shattered relationships -- Elizabeth flatly refuses to seek any mental or emotional resolution; she retains her dissociation: "[n]o, I don't want to discuss [them]" (86). In fact, it is through this imagined speech of rationalization that Elizabeth dissuades herself

from attending the psychiatric appointment at all. Nevertheless, it is clear that a psychic imbalance is manifesting itself in her life. Ironically, Elizabeth's impulse to resist external assistance suggests the need to address the issues internally, and in this sense, she is correct. Appropriate psychological assistance could further this internal exploration, for in Jungian terms, "one task of analysis is to help the patient become aware of neglected aspects of his personality" -- particularly through "the study of dreams" (Storr 21). By contrast, Elizabeth specifically equates the psychiatric visit with mood-altering drugs, an external "fix," which she firmly but politely refuses in her imagined dialogue (87). As for internal exploration with professional assistance, Elizabeth considers this nothing more than detailed descriptions of "mood," which she skeptically dismisses as readily as the pills; ultimately, she concludes that "the psychiatrist ... has nothing either to give her or to tell her" (87). In this conclusion, Elizabeth firmly situates herself in the "normal," modern Western condition, turning a blind eye to the unconscious and proclaiming herself to be well.

The unconscious, however, is not so easily dismissed and manifests itself in that predominant means of intrusion: the dream. Elizabeth is haunted by dreams that her children are lost or stolen: "[t]hey are only babies, both of them, and through carelessness, a moment of inattention, she's misplaced them. Or they've been stolen. Their cribs are empty, she's hurrying through unfamiliar streets looking for them." Elizabeth is powerless to help them: "[s]he would call, but she knows the children will not be able to answer her, even if they can hear her. They're inside one of the houses, wrapped up; even their mouths are covered by blankets." Significantly, the dream is recurrent, "an old one, an old familiar," one that Elizabeth both fears and anticipates; in the present and future, "[s]he will go on having the dream" (171). Nate believes she is fretting over their children, Nancy and Janet, but Elizabeth herself is under no such illusion: "even then she had known, though she hadn't told him, that the lost babies were her mother and Caroline. She's shut them out, both of them, as well as she could, but they

come back anyway, using the forms that will most torment her" (171). Although Elizabeth seems to expect this persistence, she also continues to attempt to maintain control, "shut[ting] them out ... as well as she could."

While this dream reflects Elizabeth's alienation from her children, she is aware that it simultaneously draws a parallel to her own childhood. Elizabeth and Caroline's mother was unable to cope with life and became alcoholic, which leads to her neglect of the two girls, and culminates in her selling them into adoption to her own sister, Auntie Muriel. In a telling scene, the girls view their mother through the window of Auntie Muriel and Uncle Teddy's house:

> Caroline at the third-floor window. *That's Mother. Where?* Down below on the sidewalk, her face upturned in the streetlight.... Opening the window, smell of new leaves. Calling, *Mummy, Mummy,* both of them. Auntie Muriel's footsteps on the stairs, along the hall. What are you yelling about? That's not your mother. Now close the window or the whole neighborhood will hear. The woman turning, walking away, head sadly down. Caroline screaming through the closed window, Auntie Muriel prying her fingers from the ledge, the catch. (123)

Auntie Muriel's attempts to silence Caroline and to pull her away from the ledge are revealing, prefiguring Caroline's future institutionalization, silence and fall into madness. Caroline and Elizabeth are taken away from their mother and then kept away, acts which cause Elizabeth to view her aunt as responsible -- indirectly yet also entirely -- for the deaths of both her mother and her sister (107). This emphasis on generational continuity is significant, particularly in its suggestion of the heredity of madness. Ironically, Auntie Muriel's bizarre reading and hymn selections for her own funeral cause Elizabeth to wonder at the congregation's assessment of her aunt as "[p]ossibly not entirely sane: look at the sister, the niece" (275). More directly, Atwood aligns Elizabeth and Caroline with Janet and Nancy; in both cases, the younger sister exhibits emotional and mental fragility. Whereas Nancy "bursts into tears" during a strained birthday celebration for Elizabeth after Nate's departure, Janet remains stalwart and dismissive, claiming that "'[s]he's just showing off.... There's nothing wrong with her really'" (228). Similarly, Elizabeth's

parallel to her mother is emphasized. On this same evening of Elizabeth's thirty-ninth birthday, she finds herself drawn to Nate and Lesje's house, standing outside in a reenactment of her own mother's longing gaze through the window. At this symbolic moment of utter alienation, Elizabeth most closely approximates a state of madness characterized by the complete loss of agency. She is physically outside of the house and entirely unrecognized by Nate and Lesje who represent the community; Elizabeth imagines that "[t]hey've locked her out. They're ignoring her, giggling in the bedroom while she stands down here in the night discarded, invisible." This time, Elizabeth is unable to control the situation or to demand acknowledgement: "[l]ook at me, I'm here, you can't get rid of me that easily. But she can't scream; her voice has been stolen. The only power she has left is negative" (230). Thus, like the madwoman figure, Elizabeth is relegated to silence.

Elizabeth's similarity to the mad figure is heightened by Feder's conclusion that the characteristic features of madness may show themselves intermittently. She notes, "although his [the mad figure's] aberrant thoughts and behavior may determine his essential role, ... madness is but one aspect of his nature, and it may emerge only in extreme or extraordinary circumstances." Feder continues by specifically noting the significance of this figure for the surrounding society, which she terms "the familiar world of civilized people": "the mad protagonist not only symbolizes but reveals the very psychic processes that account for strange and violent behavior and the inextricable connection of such processes with the most ordinary relationships and conduct of daily life" (3-4).[12] Elizabeth's slip from consciousness, behaviour which is "strange" though not violent, may be read as a link to madness predicated upon "extreme ... circumstances." When she recognizes that Nate's actions are no longer under her control and his departure is both real and immanent, she longs for Chris and begins to black out:

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[12] It is important to note that although Feder employs masculine pronouns, one of the first few sentences of her book carefully notes that her discussion concerns "the mad man or woman" (4).

"[t]he crack between the boards of the table are widening; grey light wells from them, cold. Dry ice, gas, she can hear it, a hushing sound.... [S]he can't move...." Despite Elizabeth's attempts to focus on solid everyday objects in the kitchen, she sees only "the dark of outer space, blackness shot with fiery bubbles. Somewhere out there the collapsed body floats, no bigger than a fist, tugging at her with immense gravity. Irresistible. She falls towards it, space filling her ears" (187-88). Her mind/body separation is manifested in these absences which also symbolize her suicidal tendencies in their connection to death.

While Elizabeth cannot prevent the lapse of consciousness, she takes assurance in the fact that "[s]o far she can always get back" (188), yet even the wording of this claim is tenuous, predicting a time when this return may no longer be possible. Perhaps not surprisingly, then, Elizabeth herself links these "slips" to suicide, remarking that she is always plagued by darkness. After fainting at Auntie Muriel's funeral, Elizabeth wonderingly recognizes her own tenuous hold on "sanity" and life: "[h]ow close has she come, how many times, to doing what Chris did? More important: what stopped her? ... [S]he feels the horrified relief of someone who has stopped just in time to watch an opponent topple in slow motion over the edge [of a cliff]." Notably, Elizabeth also realizes that both sanity and reality are constructs, the tangibles in her life -- her self, her job, her children, her house -- do not preclude "the rushing of wind, the summoning voices she can hear from underground, the dissolving trees, the chasms that open at her feet; and will always from time to time open" (278). It is in the face of this new reality that she must exist.

Through these connections of unconsciousness, darkness, and death, Atwood suggests Elizabeth's proximity to madness. Carrington offers a similar reading of Elizabeth, outlining Julian Jaynes' *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* and remarking that schizoid behaviour is a residual of bicamerality: "[s]chizophrenics and even normal people under great emotional stress relapse to the

bicameral mind. They may then hear voices, speak in other people's voices, feel split in two, experience an erosion of the ego and a loss of body image boundaries, fall through space or time, and even lose consciousness" (Jaynes 404-32 qtd. in "Demons" 71). Based on this summary, Carrington pointedly observes that "Elizabeth eventually experiences all these forms of behaviour" ("Demons" 71). By implication, then, Carrington suggests that Elizabeth is, or at least acts as, a schizoid. This concept and terminology echo the Laingian notion of a divided self. Conversely, Jung offers a potentially positive reading of this darkness which characterizes Elizabeth's condition. As previously noted, "[t]he actual process of individuation ... generally begins with a wounding of the personality and the suffering that accompanies it" (von Franz, "Process" 169). However, this type of initial shock -- which often goes unrecognized -- is not the only means of triggering psychic integration. Alternatively, one may be plagued by a stifling sense of bleakness: "perhaps everything seems outwardly all right, but beneath the surface a person is suffering from a deadly boredom that makes everything seem meaningless and empty.... Thus it seems as if the initial encounter with the Self casts a dark shadow ahead of time" (von Franz, "Process" 169-70). Interestingly, Atwood positions Elizabeth in both circumstances: the shock and the meaninglessness.

If one is to turn such moments of recognition to advantage, then Jung cautions against relying on logical suggestions from others: "[i]n such moments all well-meant, sensible advice is completely useless -- advice that urges one to try to be responsible, to take a holiday, not to work so hard (or to work harder), to have more (or less) human contact, or to take up a hobby. None of that helps, or at best only rarely" (von Franz, "Process" 170). Ironically, Elizabeth tries to convince herself that such techniques are just "what she needs: small goals, projects, something to keep her busy" (189). On the contrary, one must look inside the self: "[t]here is only one thing that seems to work; and that is to turn directly toward the approaching darkness without prejudice and totally naïvely, and to try to find out what its secret aim is and what it wants from you" (von

Franz, "Process" 170). Elizabeth tries to resist the darkness and, ultimately, reaches the place where she is able to acknowledge its existence without seeking to understand it. Interestingly, Jungian thought recognizes that "[t]he hidden purpose of the oncoming darkness is generally something so unusual, so unique and unexpected, that as a rule one can find out what it is only by means of dreams and fantasies welling up from the unconscious" (von Franz, "Process" 170). In this view, Elizabeth's inability to fantasize increases the significance of dreams as messengers from the unconscious.

Nevertheless, positive results require conscious effort and still cannot be guaranteed: "[i]f one focuses attention on the unconscious ... it often breaks through in a flow of helpful symbolic images. But not always. Sometimes it first offers a series of painful realizations of what is wrong with oneself and one's conscious attitudes. Then one must begin the process by swallowing all sorts of bitter truths" (von Franz, "Process" 170-71). This latter possibility coincides with Nate's reply to Elizabeth's claim of sudden hearing loss when she was trying to rationalize the ear hum: "'Maybe,' said Nate, 'there are just some things you don't want to hear'" (52). Such "bitter truths" are unlikely to be welcome to anyone, and Elizabeth is no exception. Thus she projects these "realizations" onto Nate, securing their easy dismissal: "[l]iving with Nate has been like living with a huge mirror in which her flaws are magnified and distorted" (189). In Elizabeth's case, her refusal to listen to the real voices of others may also symbolize her unwillingness to listen to her own unconscious. In a Jungian view, Elizabeth characterizes the reaction of "most people," for "[t]he fact that recognition of its unconscious reality involves honest self-examination and reorganization of one's life causes many people to continue to behave as if nothing at all has happened. It takes a lot of courage to take the unconscious seriously and to tackle the problems it raises" (von Franz, "Process" 185). Although Jung posits a potential positive result of dreams and darkness, this remains unrealized because of Elizabeth's resistance to engage with her own unconscious.

Through this psychic resistance, Atwood emphasizes Elizabeth's similarity to her younger sister, Caroline. Bouson notes that "[a]lthough backgrounded and rendered almost totally silent in the text, the insane Caroline represents Elizabeth's unacknowledged reflection, her psychic 'twin'" (94). Whereas Elizabeth represents the "normal" condition, Caroline is diagnosed and treated as clinically insane, thereby representing the extreme condition. In Feder's words, madness can be defined as "a state in which unconscious processes dominate over conscious ones to the extent that they control them and determine perception of and responses to experience that, judged by prevailing standards of logical thought and relevant emotion, are confused and inappropriate" (5).[13] That is, "normality" is an imbalance of the conscious psyche, and madness is an inverted psychic imbalance, wherein the unconscious predominates. Atwood's presentation of Caroline is a physical enactment of the unconscious overtaking an individual. In the culmination of her madness, Caroline becomes inert and unresponsive, abandoning her body: "Caroline would not talk or even move. She would not eat by herself and she had to be diapered like a baby." Watching her sister, absent and in the fetal position, Elizabeth assumes this abandonment is a conscious decision and refuses to accept it: "[d]amn you, Caroline, she whispered. I know you're in there" (76). Interestingly, Elizabeth is convinced that Caroline's "self" is intact but isolated, and that it can be restored to a position of agency.

Laing argues that such a condition is not exclusive to the mad figure, nor is it abnormal. Conversely, he notes that "temporary states of dissociation of the self from the body occur in normal people" (Laing, *Divided* 82-83). More specifically, Laing observes that "[t]he 'normal' individual, in a situation all can see to be threatening to his being and to offer no real sense of escape, develops a schizoid state in trying to get outside it, if not

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[13] It is important to note that Feder's definition recognizes the arbitrary and constructed nature of norms as predicating the standards of judgement. This awareness allows for cultural diversity and the fluctuating nature of "sanity" as "prevailing standards of logical thought" change.

physically, at least mentally" (*Divided* 84). Similarly, Atwood suggests that Caroline attempts to remove herself physically from the threatening situation before retreating to a mental dissociation; nonetheless, her division differs from Laing's definition of a "normal" response since it is not temporary. In addition to the scene at the bedroom window, the girls are confronted by their mother on a downtown street. The woman -- unkempt, drunk, and crying -- grabs Elizabeth's arm, who, in turn, grabs Caroline's hand and pulls her away. Caroline resists her sister: "*That was Mother,* Caroline said. *No it wasn't.... Don't say it was. That was Mother*, Caroline said. Elizabeth punched her in the stomach and Caroline doubled over, crouching on the sidewalk, screaming. *Get up,* Elizabeth said. *You can walk, we're going home*. Caroline squatted on the sidewalk, howling, faithful" (259).[14] The physicality of this incident is forceful; although Caroline is not silenced, neither does she employ speech but is reduced to the unspeakable: "howling."

In the removal from speech, Caroline's actions prefigure her later, catatonic state. Her dissociation is gradual, emerging as a vision during an Easter church service where Auntie Muriel has taken the girls -- only to have Caroline make "a spectacle of herself" (75). In the middle of the sermon, Caroline stands up, pointing at the stained glass window of Christ dressed in purple, knocking at the door; she says, "*Look, look*" while trying to push into the next pew. Auntie Muriel, mortified, grabs her coat, causing Caroline to scream, break free, and run down the aisle. Although Caroline tries to explain that "the purple was falling on her," Auntie Muriel silences her and tries to minimize the behaviour by calling her "excitable" (75). The reaction to Caroline's behaviour typifies the Jungian tenet that in modern Western society, "[i]f anyone claims to have seen a

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[14] In her feminist reading of the novel, Barbara Hill Rigney traces Caroline's condition to alienation from the mother, arguing that through her own rejection and denial of their mother, Elizabeth contributes to Caroline's breakdown and death by denying her the possibility of reconciliation (*Margaret* 89). It is notable, however, that when their mother is hospitalized after the fire and is dying, Caroline refuses to go to the hospital or, later, to the funeral, saying "she didn't want to see their mother" (*LBM* 164). Elizabeth, on the other hand, attends both.

vision or heard voices, he is not treated as a saint or as an oracle. It is said he is mentally disturbed" (Henderson 97). In retrospect, Elizabeth points to this incident as a clear indication of "[s]omething wrong" that went unrecognized: "[t]hey should have known, right then and there" (75). Seven years later, Caroline's "scream took final shape" (75) in the silence of a ritual "death," which again suggests the association between madness and death. Elizabeth finds Caroline lying on a blanket on the floor of their bedroom, "arms folded across her breasts, eyes open and fixed on the ceiling. Above her head and at her feet are the silver candelabra from the mahogany buffet downstairs. Beside her there's a bottle of lemon furniture polish. The candles in the candelabra have burned to stubs, gone out. She must have been like this for hours" (164). In Marta Caminero-Santangelo's terms, the madwoman surrenders and "retreat[s] into silence" (11). Although Caroline has not ingested the polish, Elizabeth reads it as "a sign, Caroline's last message; an indication of where she'd gone, since for all practical purposes she was no longer in her body" (165). The posture, of course, is one that Elizabeth adopts repeatedly in later years, suggesting her association to Caroline and to the conditions of madness and death. Interestingly, the bottle of polish is open but apparently not required, for Caroline's dissociation is as complete a silencing as physical death.

Caroline never recovers from this catatonic state, but is removed from the hospital to a mental institution where, three years later, she drowns. As noted earlier, Atwood suggests that Caroline's drowning may well have been suicide, a physical enactment of her dissociation and complete removal from agency: "[s]ometimes Elizabeth has wondered whether Caroline did it on purpose, whether all along, inside that sealed body, she'd been conscious and waiting for the chance" (77). Similarly, Elizabeth's initial reaction to Caroline's "mock" suicide suggests its predictability: "Elizabeth knows as soon as she sees her that she's been expecting this, or something like it.... Caroline had been so silent lately it was easy not to notice her" (164). Although Elizabeth's assessment is based on her sister's gradual withdrawal into silence, Staëls suggests that Caroline's

behaviour has become increasingly wild: "[f]rom the point of view of Auntie Muriel, Caroline's regular hallucinations and hysteric outbursts are symptoms of insanity. As a result, her aunt decides it is reasonable that Caroline be temporarily put into a mental institution" (110). Staëls, however, gives no indication of what these "regular" occurrences are nor of the sequence of events, which makes the claim somewhat misleading. Auntie Muriel's view is, in fact, equivocal; Caroline's "mock" suicide, which leads to institutionalization and her ensuing catatonic state, is "a judgement. Or a lack of willpower, depending on how Auntie Muriel was feeling that day" (76). Elizabeth's view is more clearly defined as recognition and terror. Elizabeth's fear of the darkness she experiences while fainting at Auntie Muriel's funeral is connected to her ultimate reflection on Caroline's fate: a tinge of envy and wondering why she has not committed suicide herself (77). Ironically, it is fear of the utter dissociation represented in madness and in death which prevents Elizabeth from "falling." Nevertheless, her "normal," dissociated condition is not so far removed from the threatening state of madness figured in Caroline, Chris, and her own lapses of consciousness; rather, it is Elizabeth's proximity to madness that propagates her fear.

Perhaps the most effective means Atwood uses to emphasize Elizabeth's proximity to the extreme condition of mental imbalance is by removing fantasy from her and segregating it into another character. In this way, Elizabeth starkly contrasts *Lady Oracle*'s Joan Foster, and Atwood prevents the reader from dismissing Elizabeth on the basis of perceived over-indulgence in fantasy. On the contrary, Elizabeth offers a sober -- even disturbing -- dose of reality. The reader may actually long for some of Joan's forays into fantasy. For example, when asked "why so many of her characters seem to be somewhat unstable," Atwood unflinchingly replied that "there is nothing wrong with her characters; these are people we meet everyday, who are going about their business just as we are" (Mendez-Egle, Preface v). Although the reader may find Atwood's characters disturbing -- or to

use Bouson's terms, one may feel disturbed, compelled, and at times even brutalized by Atwood's presentation (xi-x) -- she tenaciously refutes the suggestion that these people are anything other than "normal." In this view, the reader's recognition of a lack of fantasy in Elizabeth simultaneously becomes a comment on her/his own need for psychic balance. Notably, fantasy is not simply minimized in Elizabeth but is entirely removed, and is figured in the character of Lesje Green.

As if to foster the reader's recognition of Elizabeth's need for balance, Atwood strategically links her with Lesje -- ostensibly through their relationships with Nate and their jobs at the Royal Ontario Museum. More importantly, the women are aligned through their inverse relationship with the unconscious: Elizabeth's intrusive ear hum and blackouts correspond to Lesje's purposeful dinosaur fantasies. Carrington reads this connection through Jaynes' *The Origin of Consciousness* to indicate the duality of the novel's title as well as the link between Atwood's two characters: "*Life Before Man* not only refers to the paleontological fantasies of Lesje Green about the dinosaurs who lived before man, but also alludes to the pre-conscious men who lived before us. Just as Elizabeth's hallucinations link her with this pre-conscious past, so do Lesje's symbolic fantasies. These tenuous links, however, are ironic" ("Demons" 69). It is significant that Elizabeth does not indulge the voices as Lesje does the dinosaur fantasies; however, Atwood complicates the link between the two women through Elizabeth's falls from consciousness. Elizabeth recognizes that the slips from consciousness, temporary absences from which "so far she can always get back," would be described by Auntie Muriel as "self-indulgence" (188); this suggests Elizabeth's own faint awareness that these intrusions emanate from a part of her self -- a part she cannot readily control. The connection between the two women and Lesje's uncomplicated association with her own unconscious, together, enable Atwood to concentrate the representation of fantasy in the character of Lesje while still reflecting on Elizabeth's condition.

Lesje is completely aware of her reliance on dinosaur fantasies, psychological excursions which are a regular feature of her life. Her actions parallel a technique called "active imagination" wherein "Jung encouraged his patients to enter a state of reverie in which judgment was suspended but consciousness preserved" (Storr 21). The preservation of consciousness differentiates this process from hypnosis; it is essentially a process of activating one's imagination without the restrictions of probability -- or, in more general terms, fantasizing. This imaginative process reveals the positive potential for Lesje's self-realization, or in Jungian terms, "to rediscover hidden parts" (Storr 21), through her fantasies. Despite this potential, Lesje's use of fantasy ultimately does not enable rediscovery of the self; this result emphasizes Atwood's alignment of Lesje with Elizabeth. Initially, Lesje uses her dinosaur fantasies to create a sensation of isolation: "Lesje is wandering in prehistory.... None of the dinosaurs takes the slightest interest in her. If they do happen to see or smell her, they will not notice her. She is something so totally alien to them that they will not be able to focus on her.... It's the next best thing to being invisible" (10). In this imagined space, Lesje seeks a dissociation from all relationships: "[i]n prehistory there are no men, no other human beings, unless it's the occasional lone watcher like herself, tourist or refugee, ... minding his own business" (11). Similarly, she seeks dissociation from "reality" as it has been constructed or is assumed to be: "Lesje knows, when she thinks about it, that this is probably not everyone's idea of a restful fantasy. Nevertheless it's hers; especially since in it she allows herself to violate shamelessly whatever official version of paleontological reality she chooses" (10). Significantly, Lesje not only recognizes her flaunting of reality but reasons that her status as a paleontologist actually qualifies her to re-create it: "[i]n general she is clear-eyed, objective, and doctrinaire enough during business hours, which is all the more reason, she feels, for her extravagance here in the Jurassic swamps" (10). In fact, she recognizes that this version of reality is "postulated by the experts ... [o]f which she, in a minor way, is one" (10), thereby implicating herself in the construction of

reality and, by extension, allowing fantasy to co-exist. It is significant, however, that Lesje pits fantasy in a struggle against reality; in her formulation, their co-existence is not characterized by balance, but fantasy grapples to retain a hold in reality.

This struggle may be seen to foreshadow the final dominance of reality and reason over fantasy -- an outcome suggested by Atwood's inclusion of Lesje's ambivalence towards her own fantasizing. Although Lesje consciously allows it, she simultaneously perceives the fantasizing as a negative, almost shameful activity: "Lesje knows she's regressing. She's been doing that a lot lately. This is a daydream left over from her childhood and early adolescence" (11). Lesje's awareness of this evasive function persists throughout the novel, reaching its height late in the narrative: "[t]here's nowhere else she wants to be [than the Upper Jurassic], but this time it isn't exploration; she knows the terrain too well. It's merely flight" (244). Significantly, once Lesje acknowledges her fantasy as one of "merely flight," "[s]he cuts herself off" (244). Any "exploration" is impossible since she is seeking neither to discover new regions in her imagined world nor to rediscover hidden parts of her self. Consequently, Lesje terminates the psychological activity, suggesting her responsiveness to the preclusion of positive potential, her ability to control the action, and perhaps her implicit recognition of the dangers of an over-indulgence of fantasy; that is, she reacts to the threat of madness. Coral Ann Howells observes that Lesje's use of fantasy signals a threat to "the conventions of realism" and describes it as the means "through which she speaks the secret part of herself which is floating around loose outside the limits of the real and the rational, and which at some level relates to her sense of [cultural] otherness" (*Margaret* 86). This alienation is emphasized by her uneasy, clashing multicultural background, which is figured in the rage of her Jewish and Ukrainian grandmothers (56-57), who are warring but strangely alike (82). Ironically, Lesje concurrently occupies the positions of the "other" and of the "normal," modern Western woman. A Jungian view describes this position as, essentially, a distracted one: "[n]owadays more and more people, especially those who live in large

cities, suffer from a terrible emptiness and boredom, as if they are waiting for something that never arrives. Movies and television, spectator sports and political excitements may divert them for a while, but again and again, exhausted and disenchanted, they have to return to the wasteland of their own lives" (von Franz, "Process" 227-28). Although Lesje's "escapism" is less external than "[m]ovies and television," the imaginative aspect is similar and, pointedly, so is the result.

Lesje's life is a "wasteland" to which she must return from the "green" world of her fantasies. Thus, although she is in a more likely position for self-discovery, this outcome is not achieved. Instead of finding that "in the midst of ordinary outer life, one is suddenly caught up in an exciting inner adventure" by attuning to the unconscious part of the self (von Franz, "Process" 228), on the contrary, Lesje becomes increasingly consumed and distracted by her outward existence. As Jung notes, "[t]he more our consciousness is influenced by ... the lure of external objects, the more the already existing gap will widen out into a neurotic dissociation" (*Symbols* 89). Lesje begins to recognize her own dissociation and, in an echo of Rennie Wilford in *Bodily Harm*, Lesje realizes that "she has no close friends" (178). Similarly, her involvement with Nate entangles Lesje in what she describes in bewilderment as the adult world: "[s]he feels she's blundered into something tangled and complex, tenuous, hopelessly snarled. She's out of her element" (190). This so-called adult world is directly opposed to what Lesje terms her childhood and adolescent world of fantasy where she is in her element. Rather than using her fantasies to explore the inner realm, Lesje consciously uses them to preserve her dissociation, particularly from others. Many of Lesje's fantasies occur in social situations (22, 36-7, 125, 140), which indicates her use of them to regain her composure or to alleviate boredom by distancing herself. Vevaina focuses on the increasing threat to survival in Lesje's fantasies and observes that "the change in her psyche is carefully charted by the change in the content of her fantasy" (*Re/Membering* 41). In this view, Lesje's fantasies may actually reflect the threat to her psychological

balance. Grace notes that Lesje's fantasy separates her, in some measure, from Elizabeth and Nate: "with the partial exception of Lesje, their inner lives are as devoid of drama or interest as their outer lives. Lesje at least has a fantasy life.... She can indulge in these fantasies -- regressive ones she knows -- because she is something of a paleontology expert herself" (*Violent* 136). In this assessment, Grace captures the duality of fantasy's positive potential -- implicit in her criticism of the bleakness of an inner life "devoid" of fantasy -- and its possible stultifying, "regressive" effect. Jungian thought also acknowledges this duality in the recognition that "[a]nother threat to the inner balance comes from excessive daydreaming" (von Franz, "Process" 229). This reading suggests the definition of madness as a condition of psychic imbalance in which fantasy replaces reality.

While both Lesje and *Lady Oracle*'s Joan Foster (in her early phase) choose to daydream, the results are strikingly different. Joan finds herself in a position where the Fat Lady fantasies take over as Joan's unconscious exhibits its autonomous nature, intruding on her consciousness in an attempt to regain psychic balance. In Lesje's case, however, the progression is a dramatic contrast; she succumbs to depression (181) and eventually loses the ability to fantasize at all. Thus, in these two novels, Atwood posits the psyches of her characters in direct contrast, with fantasy eliminated in Lesje and autonomously increasing in Joan. Contrary to many critics, I would argue that the loss of fantasy is the more damaging condition for the character, stifling her potential for self-realization. Hutcheon exemplifies the opposing reading of Lesje's eventual condition; she views the character's discarding of fantasy as a positive action, an acceptance of "life and creativity" rather than escapism (*Canadian* 148-49). Hutcheon maintains that "[l]ike the narrator of both *Surfacing* and *Bodily Harm*, Lesje in *Life Before Man* finally renounces at once the passivity that permits victimization and also the evasion offered by fantasy, and opts for life and responsibility" (*Canadian* 152). Such conclusions -- as well as similar interpretations of Joan's fantasies in *Lady Oracle* -- rest on the assumption that

fantasy is the opposite of reality and, consequently, that it is negative and escapist or, as Hutcheon suggests, that it fosters passivity and irresponsibility.

The positive potential of fantasy and the need for balance are entirely dismissed, and such a reading unwittingly contradicts Atwood's strategic destabilizing of such easy binaries -- a strategy which Hutcheon herself identifies in a stringent argument for Atwood's postmodernism (*Canadian* 138-39). Carrington also notes this predominantly negative view of fantasy in *Life Before Man*, asserting that "[c]ritics scolding Lesje ... fail to recognize the religious purpose of her need" ("Demons" 75). That is, fantasy signals an imbalance, which Carrington identifies as a spiritual need, in the character. In Jungian terms, such an imbalance and one's recognition thereof both precede the process of individuation. Consequently, fantasy itself is not negative -- unless it dominates the psyche. Jung explains that "[t]he neurotic's bondage to fantasies ... develops gradually, as a habit, out of innumerable regressions from obstacles since early childhood." Moreover, "[t]heir habitual evasion" causes a distortion in their perception, "mak[ing] them take it for granted that they should live out their fantasies instead of fulfilling disagreeable obligations. And this bondage to fantasy makes reality seem less real to the neurotic, less valuable and less interesting, than it does to the normal person" (*CW* 4.2:8). Thus, the existence of fantasy is not problematic unless it dominates to such an extent that the individual has "great difficulties adapting himself to life" (*CW* 4.2:8). Either extreme condition -- absence or dominance -- creates an imbalance that the psyche's compensatory nature will seek to redress. In Margery Fee's terms, "[f]antasy and reality must be played off against each other, not further divided" (82).

Ultimately, Lesje is unable to strike such a balance and succumbs to the modern plight in her suicidal tendencies and loss of fantasy. Atwood presents the stages culminating in this loss as distinctly negative: Lesje's depression leads her to thoughts of suicide, that condition analogous to madness. After an argument with Nate about Elizabeth and their children, Lesje locks herself in the bathroom, desperately angry: "[o]n

the spur of the moment she'd decided to kill herself. She was amazed by this decision; she'd never considered anything remotely like it before. People like Chris had merely puzzled her. But at last she could see why Chris did it: it was his anger and this other thing, much worse, the fear of being nothing" (269). Notably, this lure of suicide based on fear aligns Lesje with Elizabeth. Lesje considers slashing her wrists, vacillates, and relents, realizing "this wasn't really what [she] wanted to do" (269). Instead, she flushes her birth control pills and the next morning, Lesje clings to her hope of pregnancy, firming her conviction with the assessment that "[s]he wants no more encounters, spurious or otherwise, with the grapefruit knife" (270). Madness in the form of suicidal tendencies grips Lesje and although she struggles free, it looms threateningly. Thus, the tendency of some critics to extol Lesje's pregnancy seems to be overstating the case; Hutcheon, for example, privileges the "creative act of her pregnancy" (152). By contrast, Atwood's presentation is more equivocal; Lesje characterizes the impregnation as "a wrong and vengeful act," musing that "[s]urely no child conceived in such rage could come to much good. She would have a throwback, a reptile, a mutant of some kind with scales and a little horn on the snout" (270). In this image, the features of Lesje's beloved dinosaurs have become threatening as she imagines her two worlds colliding; she can no longer imagine fantasy and reality co-existing -- not even uneasily.

This radical shift from Lesje's earlier condition suggests her submersion into the "normal" condition and so foreshadows the absence of fantasy. Lesje has come to the point of believing life before man is the only condition worth preserving -- at the very moment that its existence in fantasy is lost to her: "[i]t's long been her theoretical opinion that Man is a danger to the universe, a mischievous ape, spiteful, destructive, malevolent. But only theoretical. Really she believed that if people could see how they were acting they would act some other way. Now she knows this isn't true" (270). Interestingly, Laing posits "fantasy as a modality of experience" and notes its absence from the alienated condition of "normality" (*Politics of Experience* 26-28). In fact, Laing argues that the lack

of fantasy is partly responsible for the dissociation of the modern individual: "[f]antasy as encountered in many people today is split off from what the person regards as his mature, sane, rational, adult experience. We do not then see fantasy in its true function but experienced merely as an intrusive, sabotaging infantile nuisance" (*Politics of Experience* 31). Conversely, "[f]antasy is a particular way of relating to the world.... [It] is always experiential and meaningful; and, if the person is not dissociated from it, relational in a valid way" (*Politics of Experience* 31). Lesje's initial relationship with fantasy can be explained in these positive terms. As Howells observes, because she violates the scientific versions of reality, "Lesje's fantasy ... is also creative and recreational, opening up spaces where she feels at home in a way she never does in the real world" (*Margaret* 96). Thus, Howells suggests the potential for reintegration or rediscovery inherent in Lesje's experiences with fantasy. In this view, their loss becomes a serious one indeed.

Atwood presents Lesje as cognizant of the dangers of succumbing to her dark thoughts and suicidal impulses, whose darkness and lifelessness so starkly contrast the "green" world of her fantasies. Yet despite her wishes to avoid such "grapefruit knife" incidents in the future (270), the fact that she can no longer fantasize does not bode well for her psychic balance or self-realization. Instead of engaging in a restful fantasy, as was her want, Lesje finds herself wishing she could imagine the dinosaurs coming to life: "[s]he'd like to; she'd like to sit here for an hour and do nothing else.... But she can't do it. Either she's lost faith or she's too tired; at any rate she can no longer concentrate. The fragments of new images intrude" (286). Lesje is unable to connect with her inner life because of the chaos of her outer time; even she realizes that this externality consumes her: "[i]n the foreground, pushing in whether she wants it to or not, is what Marianne [her co-worker] would call her life. It's possible she's blown it" (286). As Vevaina concludes, once Lesje is unable to fantasize, she inhabits the normal condition: "[l]ike Elizabeth, Nate and the others, she learns to survive on her own amidst dull reality, conscious of the futility of her actions yet desiring paradise" (*Re/Membering* 41). This is hardly an

achievement. Far from being a positive step, Lesje's loss of fantasy positions her more firmly as the modern alienated individual. Perhaps more starkly, by the end of the novel, Lesje becomes more like Elizabeth. Carrington observes that "Lesje gradually changes places with Elizabeth and becomes her double" ("Demons" 73). While there is extensive "blurring" between the characters, as Carrington contends, to claim that the two women change places can be somewhat misleading. Lesje comes to inhabit the "normal" condition as completely as Elizabeth does; however, Elizabeth does not take up the ability to fantasize. Rather, both women face the bleakness of a reality entirely devoid of fantasy. Elizabeth, that alienated, imbalanced, "normal" individual becomes all the more the "average" individual.

The strength of *Life Before Man* is Atwood's unrelenting exposure of the "normal" condition of dissociation characteristic of the modern Western individual. The bleakness of the novel makes *Life Before Man* starker than the humourously revealed "normality" in *Lady Oracle*. Atwood portrays Elizabeth as completely alienated from her self (her unconscious psyche) and from others. As Sherrill Grace observes, "[t]he most alarming aspect of Elizabeth's life, however, is not her recognition of chasms, but her inertia and her final sense that life consists of surface realities and that ideals are lies. Like the speaker in Beckett's *The Unnameable*, she will merely 'go on'" (*Violent* 137). Indeed, the "recognition of chasms" provides an avenue of hope for reintegration but Elizabeth insistently clings to her "normality." Carrington identifies a similar "theme of meaninglessness" in the novel ("Demons" 75), and he notes that Atwood's structuring of the novel reinforces this theme: "[t]o stress the meaninglessness of a present divorced from any significant link with the past as it erodes into a formless future, *Life Before Man* is narrated primarily in the present tense, sometimes even in the flashbacks" ("Demons" 73-74). The novel's title, of course, makes such timelessness and collapse of the past and future into the present highly ironic. Further, such segregation from the past, in particular,

coincides with Jung's notion of the alienated, modern human condition. He argues that dissociation from the past obscures associations, thereby distorting the individual's extent of self-knowledge and self-control. In Jung's terms,

> there are many people who believe that the psyche or the mind invented itself and thus brought itself into being. As a matter of fact, the mind has grown to its present state of consciousness as an acorn grows into an oak or as saurians developed into mammals. As it has been, so it is still, and thus we are moved by forces from within as well as from without.
>
> In a mythological age these forces were called *mana*, spirits, demons, and gods, and they are as active today as they ever were.... The one thing we refuse to admit is that we are dependent on 'powers' beyond our control.
>
> The motto 'Where there's a will there's a way' ... is the superstition of modern man in general. In order to maintain his credo, he cultivates a remarkable lack of introspection. He is blind to the fact that, with all his rationality and efficiency, he is possessed by powers beyond his control. The gods and demons have not disappeared at all, they have merely got new names. They keep him on the run with restlessness, vague apprehensions, psychological complications, and invincible need for pills, alcohol, tobacco, dietary and other hygienic systems -- and, above all, with an impressive array of neuroses. (*Symbols* 121-22)

In Jungian thinking, this condition of distraction and self-medication typifies the modern individual, dissuading her/him from self-realization or rediscovery of the self and positing, instead, a number of psychological problems. The truth of this latter claim is continually borne out in the ever-expanding American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. In Allen Thiher's words, "the famous *DSM* ... makes headlines as it is regularly revised and clinical entities are invented, updated, or discarded" (225).

Nonetheless, Atwood's snapshot of this average modern society and these "normal" Western individuals is not entirely without hope. Ironically, the bleakness of this presentation is essential to unearthing a sense of hope in the reader through her/his recognition of the dire condition of Atwood's characters. As Atwood has recently observed, in "the act of reading a text ... the reader becomes his own interpreter" (*Negotiating* 50); moreover, the literature "hold[s] a mirror up to the reader" and, significantly, "paint[s] a portrait of society and its ills" (*Negotiating* xx). In gazing into

this mirror, the reader is challenged to transfer analysis of the fiction to her/his own condition and, by extension, to her/his society. Notably, Atwood's comments derive from her recent book on writing, *Negotiating with the Dead* (2002), but she has articulated this connection as early as 1972 in *Survival*, where she claims that "[t]he reader looks at the mirror and sees not the writer but himself; and behind his own image in the foreground, a reflection of the world he lives in" (15). Similarly, her critics note early on that Atwood's presentation of that modern Western society is a revealing one. In the 1977 special issue of *The Malahat Review*, for example, Rowland Smith remarks that "Margaret Atwood's prose fiction is most compelling in its observation of the grotesqueries of middle Canadian life. A distinctive feature of her novels is their coolly observed charade: the bizarre ordinariness of settings and characters, their absurdly materialistic world in which thoughts or emotions are quagmires, and actions cannon into and around objects" (134). Smith further observes that Atwood's "claustrophobic interiors and the devouring banality of their inhabitants" dominate the novel, absorbing the reader's attention (134). In Smith's view, this absorption is a deficiency for it obscures the humour of the novels (134). Conversely, I would contend that the humour enables such stark revelations by moderately distancing the reader and thereby enabling Atwood's "compelling ... observation" to powerfully engage her/him.

In fact, when the "devouring banality" becomes utter bleakness, as in *Life Before Man*, the reader is challenged to assess her/himself in light of that presentation. Sam Solecki, another early critic, makes this point in a review of *Life Before Man*: "[s]ince Atwood's novels are set in near present-day Toronto ... and since, for the most part, they are realistic it is inevitable that we respond to them not just as self-contained works of art but also as commentaries upon our society and ourselves" (28). Unfortunately, however, Solecki dismisses Atwood's novel as "her version of the modernist nightmare [which] is ultimately irrelevant to most of our lives" (29). In this respect, he typifies criticism which fails to see beyond Atwood's presentation of bleakness, finding the novel's "inescapable

message ... that ultimately life is not worth living" to be "extreme and untenable" (29). That is, Solecki recognizes the novel as a commentary but fails to imagine any solutions to prevent such a condition from overtaking himself or society. Worse, he suggests that such a lack of alternatives is the fault of the novel and perhaps even of the novelist when such analysis is firmly the reader's role.[15] Ironically, Solecki's dismissal seems to echo Jung's description of the modern individual seeking an external source of direction rather than following an internal one. Perhaps this inability to recognize preventable dissociation in the characters results from a degree of dissociation in the reader.

Nevertheless, such criticism is valuable for drawing attention to the role of the reader as a particularly demanding one in Atwood's novels. Iser observes that while the impetus to interpretation is the effect of the text, the action of interpretation is taken by the reader: "if the reader and the literary text are partners in a process of communication, and if what is communicated is to be of any value, our prime concern will no longer be the *meaning* of that text (the hobbyhorse ridden by the critics of yore) but its *effect*" (*Act* 54). Iser further notes that in the act of reading, "actual structures are transmuted through ideational activities into personal experiences" (*Act* 38). This "functionalist" approach, he insists, "must focus on two basic, interdependent areas: one, the intersection between text and reality, the other, that between text and reader" (Iser, *Act* 54). Interestingly, Hutcheon identifies *Life Before Man*, in particular, as a notable site for these intersections: "[r]ather

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[15] While Solecki's review appeared in 1979, Atwood is consistent enough in her work to cue her readers, then as now, to expect open endings; similarly, her view of the reader's role was well established and articulated by this time. Ironically, Atwood is often criticized by others for being too didactic in her works. Frank Davey, for example, professes to "have reservations about the didactic tone that characterizes much of Atwood's writing.... Most of Atwood's fiction, in particular, seems written at least in part to render a commentary of contemporary society" (*Feminist* 165). Solecki, on the contrary, criticizes Atwood for not being didactic enough. The diametric opposition of these reactions suggests that the degree of perceived "didacticism" will necessarily vary among readers. Nevertheless, it is telling that Atwood has no compunction about attributing a positive social function to literature: "I believe that fiction writing is the guardian of the moral and ethical sense of the community. Especially now that organized religion is scattered and in disarray, and politicians have, Lord knows, lost their credibility, fiction is one of the few forms left through which we may examine our society not in its particular but in its typical aspects; though which we can see ourselves and the ways in which we behave towards each other, through which we can see others and judge them and ourselves" ("End," *Second Words* 346).

than signalling a change in Atwood's work, *Life Before Man* is the culmination of her integration of the moral and aesthetic dimension within the context of that modern narrative self-consciousness that, while directing the reader's attention to the fictive nature of the world of the novel, will nevertheless *not* allow him to evade its moral implications." Hutcheon pointedly adds that "[t]he reader of Atwood's novels can never be passive; he must accept responsibility for the world he too is bringing to life by his act of reading" ("From Poetic" 29).

Part of such construction is the formation of norms, a process which the act of reading highlights. Iser observes that "in general, literary texts constitute a reaction to contemporary situations, bringing attention to problems that are conditioned though not resolved by contemporary norms" (*Act* 3). In this view, the reader bears a great deal of responsibility for both the fictional and actual realms; s/he may accept or reject presented norms but, in both cases, the act of interpretation draws attention to the constructed nature of those norms and the reader's complicity therein. The novel does not determine the reader's norms but "is a discourse which constructs versions of reality.... Modern self-conscious texts often play with narrative levels to question the borderline between reality and fiction, to suggest that there may be no reality apart from the narration" (Rao, *Strategies* 126-27). Thus in novels which focus on "reality and fiction," or reality and fantasy as in *Life Before Man*, the reader's role becomes increasingly important.

Through Atwood's representation of the "normal" condition as problematic, *Life Before Man* signals the need for the characters and, by extension, for the reader to seek balance through psychic reintegration. Specifically, Howells notes that Atwood conveys an awareness of the limits of sanity, perhaps surprisingly, through the character of Elizabeth; after fainting at Auntie Muriel's funeral, "Elizabeth returns from that dark fantasy world while remaining aware that those forces continue to rage just beyond the borders of sanity" (*Margaret* 102). Howells' suggestion of the constructed nature of sanity -- and, by extension, of madness -- is a significant one. Such an assessment

corresponds with Hutcheon's observation that "[e]ven Nate's mother entered into her charity and political injustice campaigning as an alternative to suicide ..., deciding to change, rather than exit from, a kind of world she did not want to live in" ("From Poetic" 23). Hutcheon implies that despite the preponderance of suicidal tendencies, Atwood's novel advocates neither passivity nor suicide, for both of these states require a complete removal from agency -- and a loss of agency is a defining feature of madness. Conversely, Atwood depicts the threat of madness and advocates action in both her characters and the reader.

Though voluntary, if acted upon, the reader's engagement with the novel has a reciprocal action. Iser explains that such interaction with the text broadens the reader's reality (*Act* 79) and "can bring to light a layer of his personality that he had previously been unable to formulate in his conscious mind" (*Act* 50). In this sense, interpretation of the novel mirrors the Jungian interpretation of dreams or fantasies, which also enables rediscovery of hidden aspects of the self. In Vevaina's terms, Atwood causes the reader to "re-vision" her/his view of the world (*Re/Membering* 50). Recognition of such complexity is, as many critics note, an Atwoodian trait. Rao, for example, remarks that "[d]ichotomies such as subject and object, fact and fiction, conscious and unconscious body and mind, are scrutinized and discarded [by Atwood's fiction]. Indeed the narratives privilege their coexistence" (*Strategies* 99). Furthermore, one may add that Atwood's action of "scrutiniz[ing] and discard[ing]" includes the dichotomies of despair and hope, insisting on the need for their coexistence. Atwood's presentation is bleak in order to stir the reader's recognition of this need for balance.

Such a goal mirrors Jung's focus on individuation, a slow life-long process of self-realization. In an interview, Atwood confirmed that such self-development is worthwhile; when asked whether "the idea that though it is possible to catch glimpses of the true self during certain numinous experiences, the Jungian quest for wholeness (individuation) is itself largely a myth," Atwood tellingly replied, "[b]etter glimpses than

nothing.... I think the whole self is probably more or less a hidden guide." Significantly, in this same interview, she also made clear that such self-realization can only occur in "stages," noting that "[i]ncidentally, the word 'stage' comes from 'stagecoach'. So you arrive at a stage but there is another stage beyond that" (Vevaina, "Daring" 154). The fact that the process is, by necessity, gradual does not preclude or even minimize its value. Atwood observes that various such stages are represented in her novels, thereby perhaps fostering Hutcheon's insistence on the recognition of process as opposed to product in Atwood's novels (*Canadian* 152). Although *Life Before Man* is decidedly bleak, the characters also represent a stage of individuation -- the stage before consciously engaging in it. Lesje and Elizabeth are just embarking on their respective "stagecoach" journeys, coming to the place of utter alienation. The reader may well react with an aversion to this bleak, mad "normality." If Atwood stirs a recognition of the reader's need for integration and balance through their absence in her characters, then *Life Before Man* achieves no mean feat. The novel may even enable some readers to begin their journey to reconnect with life before "modern man."

Chapter Three

In the Shadow of Madness: *The Robber Bride*

"There is thus no way of understanding others than through oneself."

-- Klaus Peter Müller (241)

The complexity of Klaus Peter Müller's claim is obscured by its apparent simplicity; couched in his conclusion that "[t]here is thus no way of understanding others than through oneself" (146) is the implicit assumption that the self is known and understood. Jungian thought both refutes this claim, proposing that most people only recognize the ego-conscious aspect of the self, and supports it, arguing for the unparalleled significance of one's inner journey to self-discovery. Müller's assessment of Atwood's work also indicates the strong focus on perception and, by extension, on its corollary of distortion found in both her poetry and fiction. As Sherrill Grace notes in an introduction to Atwood's first major poetry collection, *The Circle Game* (1966), "Atwood explores the fallibility of human perception and the concomitant dangers of the egocentric self. Whether in our use of language, our relationships with others, or our understanding of history and place, we distort and delimit life; our eyes are 'cold blue thumbtacks,' our words are barriers, and our cities are straight lines restraining panic. Freedom, these poems proclaim, is both necessary and dangerous" (Introduction xiii). The acuity and blindness that, by turns, plague Atwood's characters implicitly affect the reader, as well. Self-knowledge is the only means by which such wild fluctuations can be regulated to any degree, yet all such endeavours are difficult and dangerous. As a result, most individuals refrain from scrutinizing the self too closely or purposefully, thereby making the "normal" condition of purblindness also the average condition.

Atwood's novels subtly critique this state of affairs as debilitating in her characters and, consequently, in her readers. *The Edible Woman* presents psychology as pervasive but also as comical and seemingly negligible; conversely, *Bodily Harm* insists on the constructed nature of norms and the complicity shared by the characters and reader in the creation thereof. Meanwhile, *Lady Oracle* dances into the spotlight with Joan clad in her lace tablecloth, depicting the clash of the unconscious and conscious, fantasy and reality in an extreme representation of the "normal" dissociated condition; and, from an alternate angle, *Life Before Man* intensifies this presentation of the problematic, alienated modern condition, demonstrating its bleak consequences through the segregation and subsequent loss of fantasy. Madness skirts the edges of each of these novels, figured variously as background characters, normative transgressions, imbalances of the unconscious, suicidal tendencies, or simply as the extreme unknown. It is feared and avoided by Atwood's characters, yet it is also pervasive, and so demands the reader's attention.

This call for attention is perhaps most direct in Atwood's inclusion of identifiable mad figures. Viewed chronologically, *Life Before Man* (1979) is the first novel to contain a representation of clinical insanity in the figure of Elizabeth Schoenhof's younger sister, Caroline, as well as the suggestion of a generational link to instability in the characters of their mother and even Auntie Muriel.[1] While the designation of clinical insanity recurs in the institutionalized characters of Cordelia in *Cat's Eye* (1988) and Laura Chase in *The Blind Assassin* (2000), Atwood explores the links of madness to alienation and self-

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[1] Admittedly, most critiques of Atwood's novel *Surfacing* (1972) present it as an explicit descent into madness; Yalom's assessment is typical: "[t]he weird events of the book's final section are certainly to be understood, from a psychological perspective, as an experience in madness" (77). However, I am distinguishing here between characters whom Atwood specifically labels as clinically insane and critics' interpretations of her characters' mental conditions. Moreover, it is important to recall that madness certainly does appear in Atwood's other works prior to *Life Before Man*. For example, musings of madness appear in her early poetry collections, such as "The City Planners" in *The Circle Game* (1966) and "Progressive Insanities of a Pioneer" in *The Animals in that Country* (1968); similarly, the collection *Dancing Girls* (1977) contains several short stories with mad figures -- most notably, "The War in the Bathroom" and "Polarities." (See Lee Briscoe Thompson, "Minuets and Madness: Margaret Atwood's *Dancing Girls*" for an extensive examination of madness in this collection.)

knowledge most directly in *The Robber Bride* (1993). In this novel, Atwood collapses clinical insanity as a generational link in the novel's most explicitly divided character, Charis or Karen, whose alienation involves mind and body as well as self and others. The process of self-realization, which is the opposite of such alienation, requires acknowledging the unconscious; an important part of this phase is the recognition of the shadow in one's psyche -- a recognition that often involves projection of one's undesirable traits onto another figure. As Jung notes, "the individual has an ineradicable tendency to get rid of everything he does not know and does not want to know about himself by foisting it off on somebody else" (*Undiscovered* 55). If Cordelia and Laura can be seen as shadow figures for Elaine Risley and Iris Chase Griffen in *Cat's Eye* and *The Blind Assassin* respectively, then Zenia is the culmination of the shadow figure, functioning in this capacity not only for Charis but for all three of Atwood's protagonists in *The Robber Bride*. This intensified focus makes *The Robber Bride* an ideal site for examining the links of dissociation, madness, and the unconscious in the form of the shadow.

The generational link of insanity is most fully developed in Charis' lineage, clearly traced back through Karen's mother, Gloria, to her maternal grandmother. Before Charis renamed and refigured herself, she was a physically abused seven-year-old girl named Karen who only comes to know her grandmother because of her mother's own fragile mental state. In the absence of other alternatives, Karen is deposited at her grandmother's farm one summer in order to give her mother a rest. Even before arriving, Karen is aware that Gloria considers her own mother to be a "crazy old bat" (261), and once they have arrived on the farm, it is clear that her opinion of the grandmother has not changed. In the first few moments, Gloria flees the room, panic-stricken at the sight of a pig in the house (268) and hearing the grandmother rationalize allowing the animals to lick their dinner plates confirms her opinion: "'[y]ou're crazy, you know that?' said Karen's mother in a choking voice. 'You should be locked up!' She jammed her hand

over her mouth and ran out into the yard. The grandmother watched her go. Then she shrugged and went back to drinking her tea" (270). For her part, Karen's grandmother considers her daughter equally unstable. Upon arrival Karen is greeted with these ominous words from her grandmother: "'[y]our mother's weak-minded. Hysterical. Always has been. I hope you're not'" (267). The truth of both this assessment of her daughter and hope for her granddaughter is borne out in the narrative.

Interestingly, on the train ride over, Gloria tells Karen that "'[y]ou're a lot like your grandmother in some ways'" (261) -- a puzzling statement, considering what Karen knows of her mother's views. Yet in some respects Karen does resemble her grandmother -- perhaps most significantly in their tendency to sleepwalk (274). In contrast to the "normal" condition that Jung terms "chronic woolly-mindedness" (Jung, *Undiscovered* 52), Karen and her grandmother inhabit the world differently. Their nocturnal ambling is suggestive of the connection Karen and her grandmother share with the world beyond the rational and seen; both characters see the auras of objects, animals, and humans in colours. The starkest association of these colours to the irrational is the blue glow that characterizes the grandmother's hand while healing her neighbour, Ron Sloane's severed arm: "[w]hat Karen sees is light, a blue glow coming out from her grandmother's hand, and then it's gone and the blood has stopped" (279). In an echo of Elva, Prince's grandmother in *Bodily Harm*, Karen's grandmother's ability to heal also stupefies and frightens others. Although the neighbours fear her grandmother for these healing hands, Karen's fear is mitigated by and mingled with desire: "[s]he would like to touch blood too, she would like to be able to make it stop" (280). This healing moves outside of the bounds of the rational, and Karen's wistfulness as well as her visions of auras suggest her openness to accepting the irrational as a vital part of existence. Thus she is positioned to become either a more integrated person, acknowledging and even embracing the unknown, or a person subsumed by the irrational; that is, in a more obvious way than the

"normal" alienated individual who has yet to recognize the challenge of self-realization, Karen is on the brink of psychic integration or collapse.

The position of collapse is clearly occupied in *The Robber Bride* by Karen's mother, Gloria, whose accusation of the grandmother needing to be "locked up" ironically becomes her own fate. Gloria is deemed to suffer from nerves -- a condition strongly suggestive of the history of women's madness as outlined by Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English in *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Experts' Advice to Women*, among others. Ehrenreich and English trace the changing views of women's psychological health, concluding that a fundamental change occurred in the twentieth century with the abandonment of "nineteenth-century medical theory -- with brains 'battling' uteruses for control of woman's nature. The psychological interpretation of hysteria ... and the other vague syndromes of female invalidism, established once and for all that the brain was in command" (140). Although Ehrenreich and English argue from a strictly feminist position, largely examining social modifications in relation to gender roles, their recognition of this new focus on "the brain" is more broadly relevant, corresponding to the development of psychoanalysis as the dominant twentieth-century medical theory. Based on these views, hysteria and other forms of behavioural "aberrations" become questions of specifically mental health, categorized and designated as illnesses, as outlined in my introductory chapter. Significantly, this medical model is not able to determine the sources of these "illnesses" with any more certainty than the seemingly archaic explanations offered by nineteenth-century thought. Perhaps the most recognizable of these earlier medical theories posits hysteria as "a disease of the uterus" (Ehrenreich and English 138; see also Felman, "Women" 2 and Ussher, *Psychology* 4, 51). Jane Ussher notes that in the nineteenth century, "[a]ll women's madness, illness and deviant behaviour was traditionally located in the womb" (*Psychology* 3). Despite the medical advances of the modern age, the debate over the sources and forms of madness continues to rage (Russell 27-51, Thiher 10-11). One might even venture to say that the

proliferation of diagnoses offered by contemporary medicine and psychology makes the determinations of source and type more elusive than ever. Although attention is now focused on the brain rather than the womb, the terms of debate have not substantially changed.

As Atwood observes in a lecture on madness, "[i]t must be said at the outset that the field of mental illness has always been debatable ground.... Standards have fluctuated wildly, and abuses have been numerous.... Similarly debatable have been the causes of so-called madness." As for the latter, Atwood offers a useful and humourous summary of some possible external and internal causes of madness:

> Did it come from the outside in -- from God or the gods as a judgment on sin, from the Devil as a temptation, from a knock on the head or a sudden shock, from thwarted love, riotous living, too much meat, an exposure to the influence of the moon, too much alcohol, too much religion, too much studying, a poverty-stricken upbringing, an indulgence in solitary sex, a trauma in childhood? Or did it come from the inside out -- from heredity, from bad blood, from being a poet, from a disease -- such as syphilis -- passed on by a sinful parent, from a physical deficiency -- a wandering womb, too much black humour, female orgasm, something wrong with your liver, something wrong with your nerves, something wrong with your brain? All have had their proponents. ("Ophelia")

In *The Robber Bride*, the mental instability of Karen's mother, Gloria, is attributed to several of these causes, both external -- "a sudden shock," "thwarted love," "a poverty-stricken upbringing," "a trauma in childhood" -- and internal -- "something wrong with your nerves." Interestingly, the internal condition of nerves itself is also attributed to external factors. Even the grandmother who seemingly attributes her daughter's mental state to an internal deficiency -- as demonstrated in her claim that Gloria is "'weak-minded. Hysterical. Always has been'" (267) -- admits that there may be other, external factors. The grandmother posits two: a childhood of poverty and a childhood trauma. The poverty of Gloria's childhood is both material and emotional (273-74), and she traumatically witnesses her father's death. Karen's grandmother recounts that "'[h]e didn't grow up with tractors, ... [o]nly horses. Damn thing rolled on him. Your mother

saw it happen, she was only ten at the time. Maybe that's where she went off the rails" (275).

Others confirm this opinion of external factors causing a condition of weak nerves. Gloria's older sister, Viola, voices social opinion on the issue: "[h]er [Karen's] mother needed a long rest in the summers because of her nerves. *Well, who wouldn't have nerves, considering?* said Aunt Vi with disapproval, as if what could Karen's mother expect. She was speaking to Uncle Vern but looking sideways at Karen as if the nerves were Karen's doing. But surely not all of them were, because Karen tried to do what she was told" (262). The circumstances Viola implies are the war and its consequences: "Karen's father was killed in the war when Karen wasn't even born yet, leaving Karen's mother to bring up Karen all by herself -- a thing that was understood to be very hard, practically impossible. There was something else too, which had to do with Karen's mother's wedding, or else the absence of it.... She [Karen] wasn't quite an orphan but she had the taint of one" (262). Karen often stays with Aunt Vi and Uncle Vern to allow her mother to rest during her summer holidays from teaching and, eventually, Karen goes to live with her aunt and uncle. Her mother's instability manifests itself as periodic beatings of "Karen's legs with one of her shoes, or else the pancake flipper or the broom handle, whatever was nearby," involving screams, curses, threats, and tears followed by anguished apologies (264). Before Karen is taken to her grandmother's for the summer, a required compromise since her aunt and uncle are travelling, Gloria is "heading into a patch of bad nerves," which triggers the beatings (264). Karen recognizes that her mother is on edge: "[s]he had to go because her mother needed a rest. She needed it badly; Karen knew how badly.... [L]ast night her mother had used the pancake flipper, not the flat way but sideways; she had used the cutting edge and there had been blood" (265). As a result of this incident, Karen experiences the healing power of her grandmother's hands (273), discovering that "[a]ll she could feel, instead of the sticky welts that had been there [the night] before, were some tiny thin lines, like hairs; like the cracks in a mirror" (274).

Unlike Karen, her mother is not healed during the summer; rather, she becomes more unstable.

Gloria recalls the condition of many characters in *Life Before Man*; she, too, is plagued by suicidal tendencies which mark her mental instability. She takes an overdose of pills, attempting suicide for the third time, unsuccessfully (287). Arguably, as in *Life Before Man*, in *The Robber Bride* suicidal tendencies may be seen as a form of madness. In this view, Gloria may be seen to recognize her mental instability and also to fear the fall into madness, for her overdose attempts are accompanied by telephone calls to her sister, Viola, who later marvels, "'[i]t's just a wonder we were in time. Something in her voice, I guess; well, it's not like I hadn't heard it before!" (287). Phyllis Chesler's observation is illuminating here; she notes that "in our culture, it [madness] is a cry of powerlessness which is mercilessly punished" (101). Thus, the telephone call that "saves" Gloria also condemns her to clinical insanity, since Viola has her committed to an institution. There, Gloria incurs shock treatments and is a potential candidate for a lobotomy (287); she becomes unrecognizable: bloated and clumsy, with a vacant expression (286-87). Initially, Karen misreads her mother's condition: "her mother comes into the room. She walks slowly, putting a hand out to touch the furniture as if to guide herself. *Sleepwalking*, thinks Karen" (286). But unlike the affinity Karen feels with her grandmother upon discovering that they both genuinely sleepwalk, Karen is shocked and is frightened of her mother: "Karen brings her two hands up to her mouth and breathes in, a gasp, the reverse of a scream" (286), and "[s]he feels sick to her stomach" (287). Gloria enacts the role that, in Chesler's rendering, is most commonly inhabited by women whom society terms mad: "[m]ost were simply unhappy.... Their experiences made it very clear to me that help-seeking or help-needing behavior is not particularly valued or understood in our culture. Help-seekers are pitied, mistrusted, tranquilized, physically beaten, given shock therapy, lied to, yelled at, and ultimately neglected -- and all 'for their own good'" (xxii-xxiii). Instead of being cured or helped, Karen's mother experiences the shock

therapy and is pitied by Viola: "'I can't stand it,' says Aunt Vi. She dabs at her eyes with a hanky" (287). Karen's visits to her mother become less and less frequent, until Aunt Vi tells her that "'[y]our mother is very ill'" (288). By this time, Karen actually anticipates her mother's death, knowing that "[n]obody could stop her [mother from dying], because that was what she wanted to do" (288). Although Gloria seemed ambivalent about choosing death over her semblance of normality, achieved by relying on periods of rest to deal with her weak nerves, now that she is clinically deemed mentally ill, her will to live evaporates.

Karen's own withdrawal coincides with her mother's progressing "illness," thereby subtly emphasizing the generational link to so-called madness. Karen attends school perfunctorily, "let[ting] her hands do whatever is required," and finding that she "hardly need[s] to be in the classroom at all" (288). In addition to withdrawing mentally, Karen withdraws from others, and "[s]ometimes she banged her head softly against the wall, so she wouldn't have to think" (288). In these respects, Karen exemplifies a Laingian divided self; in Laing's terms, "there is a rent in his relation with his world and ... there is a disruption of his relation with himself.... [H]e does not experience himself as a complete person but rather as 'split' in various ways, perhaps as a mind more or less tenuously linked to a body" (*Divided* 15). This is an interesting and ironic twist of characterization, since in other respects -- such as her ability to perceive coloured auras and her tendency to sleepwalk -- Karen is more attuned to the unconscious and irrational than the typically alienated "normal" individual. The "rent and 'split'" which impinge upon Karen during her mother's institutionalization sever her completely when she is sexually molested by her uncle. Karen attempts to excuse and then to ignore Uncle Vern's behaviour: "[i]t hurts, but Karen knows that people who love you can do painful things to you, and she tries hard to believe that he does love her" (292). As Uncle Vern's perverse sexual appetite increases (292), Karen proportionately dwindles: "Karen loses her appetite: the effort of not thinking about Uncle Vern, both when he's there and when he

isn't, is making her weak. She becomes thinner and paler" (293). Not surprisingly, Aunt Vi assumes this is a lingering reaction to Gloria's death, and so urges Karen to confide in her. Once Karen dejectedly reveals her dislike of Uncle Vern touching her, Aunt Vi is livid, "her eyes are sparkling dangerously.... 'You're exactly like your mother,' says Aunt Vi. 'A liar. I wouldn't be surprised if you went crazy, just like her. God knows it runs in the family! Don't you ever say such an evil thing about your uncle! He loves you like a daughter! Do you want to destroy him?'" (293).

Psychologically, however, it is Karen who is destroyed; Aunt Vi's disbelief furthers Uncle Vern's abuse, for Karen is left with no recourse. This state of affairs emboldens Uncle Vern; instead of touching, he now violates her completely: "he falls on top of Karen and puts his slabby hand over her mouth, and splits her in two. He splits her in two right up the middle and her skin comes open like the dry skin of a cocoon, and Charis flies out" (294). Dissociation becomes Karen's coping mechanism; "[a]ll she can do is split in two; all she can do is turn into Charis, and float out of her body and watch Karen, left behind with no words, flailing and sobbing" (295). In Laingian terms such an enactment of splitting is "the unembodied self" in which "the individual experiences his self as being more or less divorced or detached from his body. *The body is felt more as one object among other objects in the world than as the core of the individual's own being.* Instead of being the core of his true self, the body is felt as the core of a *false self*, which a detached, disembodied, 'inner', 'true' self looks on at with tenderness, amusement, or hatred as the case may be" (*Divided* 71). Karen copes with her anger and disgust by "seal[ing] them off. She has to or else she will be destroyed. She splits herself in two and stays with the cooler part, the clearer part of herself.... [S]he is Charis" (297). Although Karen is damaged and destroyed, her true self is preserved by this radical division of self. Many years later, when she is twenty-six, Karen changes her name to Charis, thereby acknowledging her view of Karen as a false self, "a leather bag" full of "everything she didn't want," "the old wounds and poisons," a bag she ominously

imagines sinking into Lake Ontario; "[t]hat was the end of Karen. Karen was gone. But the lake was inside Charis really, so that's where Karen was too. Down deep" (298).

The coping method utilized by Atwood's character bears a striking resemblance to documented cases. Marta Caminero-Santangelo observes that in the documentary, *Dialogues with Madwomen*, there is a "persistent connection, in interview after interview, between madness and abuse. A woman who had suffered from multiple personality disorder, for example, relates how the generation of alternate personalities was a form of self-defense against the sexual abuse and neglect to which she was subjected as a child." Caminero-Santangelo convincingly argues against a romanticized reading of madness in such circumstances: "[a] feminist interpretation of this woman's story from the Gilbert and Gubar school might take this information as evidence of the 'resistant' powers of madness, and rightly so; through her madness, the woman 'resisted' sexual abuse in the only way she could as a child. But then to *privilege* the resistance as anything but a last-ditch effort in the face of despair is to accept the abuse as inevitable and unchangeable" (181). In other words, Caminero-Santangelo insists that madness is "an illusion of power that masks powerlessness" (12). Atwood's representation of abuse and dissociation in Karen suggests a similar frank awareness; this is not a romanticization of madness but a glimpse of its reality.

If Karen's choices are either destruction or extreme division of self, then her election to divide and survive is both regrettable and understandable. That is, under the circumstances, the schizoid state of utter dissociation becomes comprehensible -- as Laing contends in *The Divided Self*. In fact, Denise Russell asserts that since 1985, "there has been a proliferation of papers published in the medical literature on the widespread influence of child abuse in the causation of many psychiatric problems in women" (47). It is telling, then, that in *The Robber Bride*, because of her powerlessness or lack of agency, Karen clings to her alternate personality whenever her uncle sexually abuses her: "Karen knows she is trapped.... [A]ll she can do is turn into Charis.... and watch Karen, left

behind with no words" (295). Significantly, Karen recognizes her relegation to silence in Aunt Vi's outraged disbelief, followed by denial of the abuse: "'[w]e'll just forget that you ever said that, dear,' she [Aunt Vi] says. 'We'll both forget it'" (293). Of course, Karen cannot forget it but feels that "[s]he will have to go on like this forever because Aunt Vi will never hear her, no matter what she says" (295). This hopelessness resulting from a lack of agency mirrors the state of the madwoman, "rob[bed] of the power to represent herself through speech" (Caminero-Santangelo 16). Similarly, Karen is utterly silenced and so, in her divided state, occupies the role of the madwoman.

Superimposed on this background of madness, all three of Atwood's protagonists -- Charis, Tony, and Roz -- face their own nightmare incarnate in the figure of Zenia. In response to her own question -- "[w]ho is Zenia?" -- Coral Ann Howells notes that "Zenia seems to be real but she has a double existence for she belongs to two different fictional discourses, that of realism and of fantasy. She is a very transgressive figure who exists both as a character in the realistic fiction and also as the projection of three women's imaginations" (*Margaret* 81). In this respect, then, *The Robber Bride* reenacts the fantasy/reality dilemma which Atwood posits in *Lady Oracle* and *Life Before Man*, affirming the Jungian view that the principle of opposition is required for balance. Jung asserts that "[a] psychological theory, if it is to be more than a technical makeshift, must base itself on the principle of opposition; for without this it could only re-establish a neurotically unbalanced psyche. There is no balance, no system of self-regulation, without opposition. The psyche is just such a self-regulating system" (*Essential* 167). However, more intensely than these earlier novels, *The Robber Bride* collapses these two realms, fantasy and reality. In *Lady Oracle*, when fantasy and reality collide, Joan avoids the fall into madness and preserves her mental balance by physically jarring herself back to reality. In *Life Before Man*, Atwood represents the dangers of the opposite psychic imbalance; the utter bleakness of Elizabeth's existence completely removed from fantasy

is reinforced by Lesje's loss of fantasy and the haunting threat of suicide overhanging the novel. In *The Robber Bride*, the collapse of fantasy and reality is manifested in the character of Zenia. As Howells observes, Zenia serves as "the projection of the three women's imaginations," which is to say that Zenia is a materialization of their psyches. In Howells' terms, "Zenia is everything they want most and everything they fear, for she represents their unfulfilled desires just as she represents their repressed pain-filled childhood selves. She is the dark double of them all, having multiple identities but no fixed identity.... She is what they most desire and dread to be" (*Margaret* 81-82).

In Jungian terms, then, Zenia as "the dark double" is the manifestation of the protagonists' shadow. *The Robber Bride* offers the most fruitful site of examination of the shadow figure in Atwood's novels not only because Zenia is so well-developed but also because she functions in this psychic capacity for all three protagonists, thereby suggesting the concurrent similarity and individuality of each character's process of individuation. While each of the three women struggles to achieve psychic integration, each wrestles with her own demon; thus, it is both the most shared and the most solitary undertaking. Moreover, Atwood emphasizes this duality of psychic integration by involving the reader and implicating her/him in the same struggle. In Jungian terms, the shadow is both required and problematic to assimilate: "[t]he shadow usually contains values that are needed by consciousness, but that exist in a form that makes it difficult to integrate them into one's life" (von Franz, "Process" 178). By representing this integration attempt from three angles, Atwood's novel underlines its difficulty, complexity, and necessity. While the destructive psychic potential exists, as it dominates in *Life Before Man*, the constructive potential likewise exists, as glimpsed in *Lady Oracle*. Each protagonist in *The Robber Bride* -- Charis, Roz, and Tony -- must confront this aspect of herself and may react to the shadow in one of three ways: ignore it (as do Joan and Elizabeth in the earlier novels), accept it, or reject it. Although Zenia may seem all-powerful, the protagonists' reaction largely decides whether the encounter destroys or

builds up their personality, for each choice has its very real consequences. Similarly, the reader retains decisive power over her/his own psychic state and self-realization through a text to reality transferral which Iser's reader-oriented theories, as outlined in *The Act of Reading*, and Atwood's structure of reader-involvement both support and encourage. As Howells affirms, "she [Atwood] transgresses the boundaries between realism and fantasy, between what is acceptable and what is forbidden. Of course these are fictions; *Lady Oracle* and *The Robber Bride* are illusions created by Atwood's narrative art, but they speak to readers in the present as they challenge us to confront our own desires and fears" (*Margaret* 85). Any negative judgment in the reader's assessment of Atwood's protagonists and their reactions to Zenia is particularly self-condemning, for the novel challenges the reader to confront her/his own "Zenia" or shadow figure.

Much of Zenia's power over and dread fascination for the women lies in her ability to reflect the characters' own desires and fears back to them. Remarks such as those expressed by Howells -- that "she [Zenia] represents their unfulfilled desires just as she represents their repressed pain-filled childhood selves" (*Margaret* 81) -- typify the focus of many critics on Zenia's glib reconstructions of her own childhood history to match those of Atwood's protagonists; she is an exiled White Russian for Tony (184-88), an abandoned partly-Jewish orphan for Roz (405-408), and an orphaned Roumanian gypsy for Charis (305-306). While these fabricated childhoods are significant points of connection, I would argue that the present is more revealing in Zenia's attempts to reinstate herself into the lives of Charis, Tony, and Roz. Such a focus on the present is consistent with a Jungian reading, for it enables a focus on the characters' current psychological state and self-awareness rather than seeking past causal factors. Although Zenia unquestionably utilizes false parallels from the past to gain an emotional advantage, in the present, each of the protagonists is faced with a recognized danger in Zenia.

It is telling that despite their awareness, each woman is drawn into an encounter with Zenia, is damaged in the process, and is forced to determine her reaction to this

shadow figure. Tony was most scarred by Zenia in their past university days -- having violated her academic integrity and been blackmailed for it as well as nearly losing her only male friend, West, who falls apart after being used and deserted by Zenia (189-99). Nevertheless, the shadow falls on Tony's life a second time, suggesting the significance of the women's confrontation with Zenia in the present. The shadow as a figure of the unconscious is autonomous and insistent; it demands their attention. In the present, Roz exemplifies the state occupied by each of the women: she is armed with the stories of Zenia's ravaging in the lives of Tony and Charis, yet she too is drawn in and duped. Her knowledge -- because it is not self-knowledge -- fails to ameliorate the encounter with the shadow. Although Tony explicitly warns Roz about trusting Zenia, Roz is proud and overconfident, believing "that she could succeed where her two friends had failed. Why not? She knew more than they'd known, because she knew their stories. Forewarned was forearmed.... She must have thought she could handle Zenia" (399). This overestimation of her abilities indicates Roz's lack of self-knowledge as opposed to her accurate knowledge of Zenia's role and the destruction that lies in her wake. Thus, the present gains significance, for Zenia's confrontation of the women occurs in spite of their awareness of the dangers. The women have yet to gain sufficient self-knowledge to recognize or to mediate the influence of the unconscious.

The significance of these confrontations is further emphasized by the fact that Zenia couches each of her appeals in specific psychological terms. In her encounter with Charis, Zenia claims asylum as an escape from the supposedly abusive and dangerous West's obsessive control. Zenia claims to be afraid of West killing her: "[h]e has an obsessive personality -- gentle on the outside, but sometimes he goes berserk, and the thought of her dying [of cancer] drives him crazy.... [H]e wants to be in control of her death himself. A lot of men are like that, says Zenia.... Love drives them mad" (301). Although Zenia's assertion directly contradicts West's mild temperament, it is powerful because it resonates with Charis' own experience with men -- not only with Uncle Vern

in the past, but more significantly, with Billy in the present. Unlike Tony, Charis is likely to believe Zenia's claim that "'[a]ll men are warped'" (150). Billy is an American draft-dodger who is assigned to Charis by the co-operative where she is involved and who, almost incidentally, becomes her lover. Billy's mental state is tentative; he is pent up with anger, restlessness, and anxiety, seeking relief in drugs and alcohol. Not surprisingly, then, Billy is sexually aggressive and abusive: "[h]e was always after her then. In the mornings, in the afternoons, at night, it made no difference. Maybe it was just a sort of nervousness, or boredom... [or] the tension of being there illegally.... Sometimes he did things that hurt -- slapping her, pinching.... Once in a while she cried, which Billy seemed to find normal" (234). Like Rennie in *Bodily Harm*, Charis is uncertain of what constitutes "normal" sex: "what was it supposed to be like? What would have been normal? She had no idea" (234-35). Her childhood abuse and ensuing division, that mind-body schism, have left Charis a detached observer of her own physical life.

Although Charis seems unaware of it, Billy's appeal may lie partially in his tinge of danger -- both for his current status as a draft-dodger and for his past related activities; Billy bombed objects and accidentally killed some people in the process (237). As with Zenia, who is posing as a cancer victim, with Billy, Charis takes on the role of nurturer and healer. Billy's violence, however, carries over into the present and with the tension created by Zenia's added presence in Charis' house, Billy loses control. He becomes highly intoxicated and accuses Charis of blind stupidity for believing Zenia's story, adding physical violence to his verbal abuse of pregnant Charis: Billy "slaps her across the face. 'Wake up!' He slaps her again, harder.... He steps back from her, then brings his leg up, knee into her stomach. He's too drunk to aim well, but it hurts her. 'You'll kill it!' She's screaming now. 'You'll kill our baby!'" (312). Ultimately, Charis is abandoned by both Zenia and Billy, left amidst a horrid, bloody scene in which her chickens are slaughtered, their throats slit with a kitchen knife (313). Whether Billy or Zenia committed this heinous act is unknown both to Charis and to the reader, although either is

plausible; Billy represents overt physical violence while Zenia represents covert psychological violence. Ironically, Charis' mother hen instinct -- to shelter both Billy and Zenia under her nurturing, protective wings -- bleeds her dry financially, emotionally, and psychologically. The shadow of madness threatens with the death which Zenia claimed to carry within her, now leaving Charis on the brink of committing suicide with the bloody bread knife.

Zenia's tactic of personally tailoring her psychological appeal to each protagonist is evident in the strong contrast of her approach to Charis and Tony. When Zenia enters Tony's life the first time, she does not claim to fear obsessive control or violence from West. Conversely, she situates the mental instability in herself, arguing that she suffers from depression. This mental condition is supposedly so severe that Zenia is a threat to both herself and to West; she is not only suicidal but also dangerous, wanting to destroy West when stress presses on her (194-95). When Zenia seeks to re-enter Tony's life, she is wary of Tony's keen intellect and past experience. Although Charis is the spiritually-minded one, it is Tony who has gained a degree of self-knowledge since her past experience with Zenia has been personal. Thus, Tony is less accepting of Zenia's claims than is Charis, but Zenia still manages to lure West away just as she does with Billy. Zenia simply reverses tactics and convinces West, instead of Tony, that she is suicidal. To Tony's incredulity, West explains that "'[s]he [Zenia] needs me.... She is suicidal.... She's a deeply scarred person.... She's going to fall apart completely unless I do something'" (206-207). Despite Tony's scornful refutal that "'Zenia is as strong as an ox,'" the result is the same; West deserts Tony to embark on what he perceives as "a rescue mission" (206). Interestingly, the seeds of Zenia's use of suicidal tendencies as a means of appeal hark back to her initial encounters with Tony, thereby emphasizing Tony's continuing dissociation from her unconscious psyche which is manifested in Zenia. Zenia peppers introverted, bookish Tony with extreme questions: "'[w]hat would cause you to kill yourself,'" or how would you have behaved during the panic on the sinking *Titanic,* or

would you turn cannibalistic to survive? (147). Zenia bewilders Tony by "seem[ing] to have her own answers fairly firmly in place, though she does not always reveal them." Tony, by contrast, "finds herself taken aback by such questions. They aren't abstract problems -- they're too personal for that -- and there are no correct solutions to them." Consequently, Tony replies that it is impossible to know "'[u]nless it happened'" (147). Suggestively, Tony's recognition of this lack of self-knowledge only causes Zenia to switch tactics: "'[w]ell then, what would cause you to kill someone else?'" (148). Through these interrogations, Zenia seems to probe the degrees of Tony's awareness not only of her lack of self-knowledge but also of her capacity for evil.

This connection to suicide continues to echo in Tony's life in the present, and Zenia holds appeal for Tony, in part, because of Tony's awareness of mental instability. In the past, Tony is frightened by Zenia climbing in through her dorm window, for Zenia points out that "'[a]ny lunatic could do it'" (194). Interestingly, Zenia's phrasing does not preclude herself from this category. In the present, Tony is confronted in her office by an unstable student . Instead of acquiescing to her fear, as she had done in the past, Tony overcomes her fear and rationally handles this potential "lunatic": the student thrusts "a clasp knife into the middle of her desk. 'I need an A!' he shouted. Tony was both frightened by him and angry. *Kill me and you won't even pass!* she wanted to shout back. But he might have been on something. Doped up or crazy, or both, or imitating those other berserk, professor-slaughtering students he'd seen on the news." Tony collects her wits about her and responds coolly, "'I appreciate your directness.... Now, why don't you sit down, in that chair right over there, and we can discuss it?" Thereafter, she sends him to Psychiatric Services (24). Such recurrent confrontations with potential madness indicate Tony's own vague awareness of the threat of madness, which by implication, also indicates her own potential mental instability. That is, Tony's awareness of these intrusions of potential madness suggests their prevalence in society, acknowledging the existence of madness on the fringes; moreover, these occasional intrusions on Tony's

own existence are subtle reminders that she is not immune. In the shadows, madness lurks.

Specifically, the association of madness and death reemerges in Tony's experience, and the threat of suicide, which is so prominent in *Life Before Man,* lingers in *The Robber Bride*. Tony's university days include the brief presence of a roommate who falls into deep depression, remaining in bed weeping all day. Eventually, the roommate attempts suicide: "the girl who was supposed to be sharing [the room] with her [Tony] had taken an overdose of sleeping pills and had had her stomach pumped, and had then disappeared. People tended to, in Tony's experience" (130). The latter dark allusion indicates the fact that both of Tony's parents are also linked to suicide. Her mother dies by drowning some time after abandoning Tony and her father to run off to California (176). However, Tony is left uncertain of whether her mother was killed, had an accident, or intentionally took her life; Tony wonders, "[h]ad Anthea dived off the boat in her bathing suit for a midnight swim, or had she jumped off, wearing a long, entangling skirt, in a fit of anger?... The latter seemed more probable. Or perhaps Roger [her most recent lover] had pushed her. This too was not out of the question" (177). Unable to cope with life, Tony's father begins drinking heavily, and immediately after Tony's high school graduation, he repeats the startling action of Chris in *Life Before Man* and shoots himself in the head (178). Thus death resounds in the background of *The Robber Bride*, threatening madness in the form of suicide or, at least, in suicidal tendencies, and explaining Zenia's focus on suicide in her encounters with Tony.

The psychological appeal shifts again in Zenia's final encounter with Roz, who challenges Zenia's manipulative tactics and lies. Zenia makes no attempt to defend herself from the allegations but refers to her own psychological condition as unstable. Zenia claims to have been "emotionally disturbed" when she dealt with Tony, and she refers to "some kind of a nervous breakdown" to explain the intricate falsehoods she spun for Charis (409). The terminology necessarily brings Charis' mother, institutionalized for

her "nerves," to the reader's mind and suggests the tenuous division of sanity from madness. In addition to this use of psychiatric terminology, Atwood also comments subtly and ironically on the psychiatric profession. Zenia makes clear to Roz that she has sought professional help and that "her shrink" attributes her actions to the loss of her mother (409-10). Neither Roz nor Zenia endorses this claim, and Atwood's inclusion of it subtly challenges psychiatrists, psychologists, and feminists who make such claims.[2] Interestingly, Zenia also implicates Roz in the construction of the limits of sanity which are excusable by mental breakdown, for she appeals directly to Roz for understanding: Zenia explains, "'I didn't think I could've told them [Tony and Charis] the real story, what really happened to me. They wouldn't have understood it.' ... Roz is touched. She, Roz -- she alone -- has been chosen, to understand. And she does, she does" (410). While the success of this appeal lies in its exclusionary preference of Roz, its significance is deeper as a foreshadow of Roz's own ensuing experience with psychiatrists, nerves, and its suicidal outcomes. Zenia claims to have overcome great odds: "'[i]t took me a long time, but I've finally come to terms with myself. I've worked it through. I was in therapy for years. It was hard, but now I know who I am'" (410). However, Zenia's claims ring hollow in their vagueness and blame-placing on her family as causing "the terrible *absence*" (410).

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[2] Such challenges are also being issued more directly within the medical community itself. In a recent *Queen's Quarterly* article, Mary V. Seeman, a psychiatrist for the past 40 years, traces her own experience with a patient over more than 30 years. She candidly describes the changes in treatments that have occurred during the course of their patient-doctor relationship and her own reservations about these often directly contradictory methodologies. The various areas of focus have included: drug therapy, professional empathy, susceptibility to chemical imbalance, and family pathology. Of this latter area, Seeman notes that "it was very important not to blame the patient for her mental illness, at all costs attribute causation to an outside source. Parents, most often mothers, were convenient targets" (195-96). Interestingly, Seeman also observes that neither absence nor presence precluded the parents from being blamed for causing mental disturbances in their children: "[p]arents, mostly mothers, had been chastized a decade earlier [in the 1960s] for being 'absent,' 'distant,' 'ice box' parents. Now they were being called to task for being 'overinvolved.' Ten years had completely reversed expert opinion on what constituted healthy parenting" (199). Perhaps most frighteningly, Seeman's article stresses her own unwitting complicity in this psychiatric flux: "I didn't recognize it, but all along I was following psychiatric trends, pushed along by the current fashion, a fashion determined not by scientific discovery but by social, political, and economic forces" (200). Clearly, simplistic finger-pointing can neither address such a complex issue nor pinpoint a single causal factor with any degree of accuracy.

That said, Roz recognizes this as "a great story," or "great material" for the women's magazine she runs (411), but fails to recognize the scripted nature of Zenia's claims of overcoming all odds. The artificiality of Zenia's exotic background and neat cause-and-effect explanations form a striking parallel to those hypothetical scenarios "based on fairly extreme scripts" which Zenia fabricated in her early interrogations of Tony (147). Yet Roz fails to see that Zenia's story to her is as much a false construct as those spun for Tony and Charis. Zenia's apparent amazement that her profligate lifestyle as a stripper involved in drugs did not kill her initially impresses Roz. However, Zenia's suggestive statement -- "'It's a wonder I'm not dead. Maybe I was trying to be" (410) -- will only fully resonate with Roz after her own familiarity with breakdowns leading to suicide develops in the present, leading to increased self-knowledge. Like Tony, Roz has lived with the spectre of a family suicide in the background, but unlike Tony, Roz is distanced from the event and the individual, her would-be father-in-law: "[h]is [Mitch's] own father was dead, somewhat too early and too vaguely for total comfort. How was Roz to know then that he'd blown the family fortune on a war widow he'd run away with and then jumped off a bridge? She was not a mind-reader, and Mitch didn't tell her, not for years, not for years and years" (353). Since acquiring the knowledge, Roz has lived with it, and in Zenia's wake, she loses her husband to that same fate. Like Tony's mother, Mitch dies in a boating incident, being found in Lake Ontario in his life jacket but dead of hypothermia. Roz is fully aware that Mitch has staged this apparent accident to disguise the suicide from their children: "[h]e didn't want to leave a bad package for them. He did love them enough for that. But he knew all about the temperature of the water, he'd lectured her about it often enough.... You numb, and then you die. And so he did. That it was deliberate Roz has no doubt, but she doesn't say. *It was an accident*, she tells the children" (433). Darkly, Roz accepts her complicity for having turned Mitch away, despite his obvious desperation, after he was abandoned by Zenia: "[i]f there wasn't enough left for him to live for -- whose fault was it? Zenia's, yes, but also her own. She

should have remembered about his own father, who took the same dark road. She should have let him back in" (434). Roz's comments are filled with self-blame, but also suggestively link herself with Zenia and the outcome of suicide, which embraces the darkness figured as death and as a form of madness. Although Zenia approaches each of the women differently, ultimately her encounters with them result in this confrontation with suicide, a threatening form of madness.

Many critics recognize Zenia's significance in the structure of *The Robber Bride*; however, it is important to specify that Zenia's significance derives from her relation to the three protagonists and their inner journeys. Alice Palumbo, for example, observes that "Zenia is one sustained fiction, and Atwood indicates that what is more important than the facts of her life is the impact she has on others" ("On the Border" 83). Conversely and somewhat surprisingly in an otherwise comprehensive post-Jungian study of Atwood's novels, Coomi S. Vevaina overestimates the independent significance of Zenia and excludes *The Robber Bride* on this basis. Vevaina argues that "the central character Zenia, is depicted as not even remotely aware of her alienated state. While Zenia's 'victims' Tony, Roz and Charis, struggle to survive spiritually, Zenia does not take even the first step towards psychic wholeness" (*Re/Membering* x). This interpretation, while misguided, is nevertheless useful in the sense that it reinforces the novel's focus on Charis, Roz, and Tony. Zenia's function, by extension, is to reflect these characters back to themselves and to the reader, thereby precipitating the process of self-realization or, as Vevaina would have it, the journey "towards psychic wholeness." In Hilde Staëls' terms, "[t]he confrontations with Zenia enact a mental conflict within the protagonists: the text explores the tension between the self and the self as 'other'.... Zenia externalizes the unrecognized part of the self" (*Margaret* 195). In other words, Zenia is a projection of the Jungian shadow.

This shadow is both enigmatic and necessary. In a Jungian view, knowing whether to accept or to overcome the shadow is problematic in the process of self-realization:

"[d]ivining in advance whether our dark partner symbolizes a shortcoming that we should overcome or a meaningful bit of life that we should accept -- this is one of the most difficult problems that we encounter on the way to individuation" (von Franz, "Process" 184). Following from this view, each of Atwood's protagonists must face the shadow in her confrontation of the unknown in her self; this unknown is manifested in the enigmatic figure of Zenia. Thus, Zenia so closely mirrors each of the characters' childhood stories and draws each of them out through the false intimacy created by these constructed backgrounds with the intention of manipulating them to her own advantage. Howells contends that the women create themselves through Zenia: "[t]hey need her, or their stories about her, in order to define themselves.... Zenia is inside each one, for she represents their unfulfilled shadow selves" (*Margaret* 83). Howells' remark coincides with a Jungian reading of the novel, for an increase in self-knowledge requires a confrontation with the shadow.

Although Zenia seems to be evil incarnate -- ruthless, manipulative, greedy, and destructive -- the shadow is not so one-sided. This complexity is suggested in the novel by the fact that Zenia, with her cover girl beauty, aura of mystery, and sharp wits, also fascinates Charis, Roz, and Tony. Contrary to popular belief which tends to oversimplify Jungian concepts, the shadow also contains positive aspects that hold the potential for self-improvement. As Joseph L. Henderson notes, "Dr. Jung has pointed out that the shadow cast by the conscious mind of the individual contains the hidden, repressed, and unfavourable (or nefarious) aspects of the personality. But this darkness is not just the simple converse of the conscious ego. Just as the ego contains unfavorable and destructive attitudes, so the shadow has good qualities -- normal instincts and creative impulses" (110). Such an observation explains why the shadow cannot simply be categorically rejected but, at times, is to be accepted for self-realization. The individual's focus in a confrontation, once the shadow is recognized, must be to determine what reaction will be helpful to her/his process of individuation. This determination is rarely

easy or obvious; rather, its value lies in the necessity for constant scrutiny of the psyche and attention to the cues arising from the Self.

Jung compares the shadow to the trickster, a figure which deceptively appears negative in itself: "[i]n his clearest manifestations the trickster figure is described as a faithful representation of the absolutely undifferentiated human psyche which has hardly left the animal level." Jung carefully draws the parallel to the individual psyche by further remarking that "[t]he trickster is defined as a parallel to the individual shadow.... Although the shadow appears negative, sometimes traits and associations arising from it can suggest a positive resolution to conflict" (*CW* 9.1:42, *Abstracts* 102).[3] Notably, this view does not focus on the shadow itself -- that is, on Zenia -- but specifically on the effect of the shadow's confrontation with the self -- as represented in Charis, Roz, and Tony. Some critics agree that Zenia, while central to the novel's structure, functions as a developmental character. Staëls, for example, posits Zenia as both a positive and negative shadow -- simultaneously constructive and evil, "stand[ing] for what they would like to be...[and] bear[ing] connotations of the demonic, destructive, malicious side of the characters' selves.... Zenia is the 'other self' who violently takes possession of the protagonists because she is not acknowledged as part of the self" (*Margaret* 198). Karen Stein concurs, positioning Zenia as both negative and positive: "Zenia is a shadow self, a mirror of the darker side, the hidden fears and anxieties of each character.... Each character recognizes both her fear of what Zenia represents and her wish to be like Zenia: powerful, beautiful, daring, outrageous, sexy" (98). Stein further remarks that "[b]ecause the women perceive Zenia to be their enemy, they invest a great deal of energy in hating, fearing, and planning to attack her. But through encountering her, they achieve self-knowledge and build a stronger bond with each other. For she is the trickster who teaches" (98). In a manner complementary to my own, these recent criticisms utilize both

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[3] Jung's most extensive discussion of the Trickster appears in volume 9.1 of his *Collected Works* (see "On the Psychology of the Trickster Figure").

of Jung's terms, shadow and trickster, emphasizing not only Zenia's role as the pivot point of the protagonists' journey of self-discovery but, more generally, the fruitfulness of a Jungian examination of *The Robber Bride*.

Zenia is a shadow for each of the three protagonists; therefore, she is a projection of three psyches, confronting each and which each must ignore, reject, or accommodate. In Zenia, each protagonist is confronted with the unknown, the unconscious, and, specifically, with the threat of madness. The following discussion seeks to examine how Charis, Roz, and Tony react to the final return of Zenia, as she wafts into the ironically named Toxique restaurant, and how each woman deals with her shadow. Atwood has claimed that "the prospect of losing our self and being taken over by another, unfamiliar self is one of our deepest human fears" ("Ophelia"). This threat may be seen as an external infringement of the unknown "other" overtaking the self, or just as plausibly -- but perhaps more frighteningly -- this loss of self may also be an internal threat; the self which one recognizes, the ego-conscious, may be subsumed by "another, unfamiliar self" that comes unbidden from within the psyche itself. In this view, the unknown within the self may be what is most feared, for facing the "other" within means conceding that the understanding of the self is only partial -- a revelation which Jung insists is the basis of self-knowledge. As Jung notes, what most people view as the self is but a fragment, including solely the known aspects of the ego-self: "[m]ost people confuse 'self-knowledge' with knowledge of their conscious ego-personalities....But the ego knows only its own contents, not the unconscious and its contents.... What is commonly called 'self-knowledge' is therefore a very limited knowledge" (*Undiscovered* 5). In Jungian terms, then, this process of facing the unknown within the self means confronting the unconscious and acknowledging that one's understanding of the psyche is limited: "[p]eople measure their self-knowledge by what the average person in their social environment knows of himself, but not by the real psychic facts which are for the most part hidden from them" (*Undiscovered* 5). The

threatening unknown is both internal and external; as Lillian Feder notes, "madness is the perpetual amorphous threat within and the extreme of the unknown in fellow human beings" (4). In *The Robber Bride*, Zenia is the extreme unknown -- that simultaneous embodiment of the unknown emanating from within the self and the unknowable, mysterious "other." Thus, Atwood's protagonists and, by extension, the reader grapple with the threat of madness in the character of Zenia.

A Jungian reading of the three characters' encounters with Zenia necessarily implicates the reader who is a part of the modern society which Atwood portrays and Jung describes as plagued by neuroticism. Jung traces this dissociation to an overbalance of the rational which alienates the individual from the unconscious or the irrational: "it is quite natural with the triumph of the Goddess of Reason a general neuroticizing of modern man should set in, [creating] a dissociation of personality" (*Undiscovered* 36). Since this alienation includes dissociation from the archetypes (as a part of the collective unconscious), it can more specifically be examined as a dissociation from the shadow. Consequently, the shadow is perceived by the individual as "other" and so it is projected -- that is, kept at a distance -- rather than being recognized as a part of the self. For this reason, as Jung notes, projection of the shadow is both a common and unrecognized action in "normal" modern Western society: "just as the typical neurotic is unconscious of his *shadow side*, so the normal individual, like the neurotic, sees his shadow in his neighbour or in the man beyond the great divide [that is, the foreigner -- particularly one from the Eastern culture]" (*Undiscovered* 36). The reader is not exempt from this tendency. Conversely, the "normal" modern Western condition of alienation, described by Jung and Laing, and the reader's involvement, as described by Iser and Atwood, together insure the reader's shared attraction to and repulsion from Zenia, a figure who then represents the reader's shadow as well.

As with Joan of *Lady Oracle* or Elizabeth of *Life Before Man*, the reader may feel a sense of discomfort in being associated with the protagonists of *The Robber Bride*. This

discomfort may be most pronounced in relation to Charis, the character most overtly associated with madness as a result of her generational links. Interestingly, the reader's uneasiness can be aligned with Charis' own awareness that Zenia has the potential to disrupt her "normal" radically alienated condition. Charis worries about the effects of thinking about Zenia and, particularly, about the power that act of thinking confers on Zenia. While Tony does not want to focus on Zenia enough to talk about her disturbingly sudden reappearance at the Toxique, Charis is more wary: "'I don't even want to *think* about her,' says Charis [to Roz and Tony]. 'I don't want her messing up my head.' But there is no hope of thinking about anything else" (36). Notably, earlier this same day, Charis feels uncertain, mentally "fuzzy" and so attempts to reassure herself that there is nothing out of the ordinary by consulting her quartz pendulum, another cue of her link to the irrational. The pendulum's prediction is ambivalent, giving a response both normal and curiously abnormal, emphasizing that these are not mutually exclusive conditions but, more often, coexistent ones: "'[w]ill this be a good day?' she [Charis] asks it. Round and round means yes, back and forth means no. The pendulum hesitates, begins to swing: a sort of ellipse. It can't make up its mind. *Normal*, thinks Charis. Then it gives a sort of jump, and stops. Charis is puzzled: she's never seen it do that before" (49).

Significantly, it is Charis' own interpretation that terms ambiguity and uncertainty "*[n]ormal*"and which is immediately followed by a stark reminder of the unknown and unknowable; such a combination of characteristics accurately reflects the psyche. Charis, though "puzzled," is not frightened by this reminder of the unconscious or irrational, alluding to her proximity to and awareness of that "other" realm. She frankly admits that she is faced with the unknown and decides to confer with Shanita, her employer at Radiance, a New Age store specializing in crystals. Charis was initially drawn to the store by the name and products; she began working there, and often takes her pay in the form of products, including her pendulum. However, Charis is aware that others -- Tony, Roz, and her own daughter, Augusta, among them -- scorn both her willingness to work for

trade and her belief in these items (60-61). Consequently, Charis often keeps her insights and visualizations to herself, intimidated by Roz and Tony's opinions and rationality. Earlier at the Toxique, when Roz and Tony are discussing war and death, Charis reminds herself that "if you dwell on it you make it happen, and she can never explain this to Tony in a way that Tony will understand, and also she's afraid they'll decide she's being silly. Hysterical, a nitwit, a flake. She knows they both think that sometimes" (72). Armed with this awareness, Charis, like the mad figure, momentarily chooses silence.

Nevertheless, Charis is not completely relegated to silence or a loss of agency, for she also recognizes the need, at times, for clarity of thought, for deductive and inductive reasoning as opposed to hunches and intuitions or visions; in this admission, she acknowledges the need for psychic balance. Reason is perhaps most clearly embodied in the novel by Tony.[4] While Charis' connection to the irrational enables her to see the coloured auras of things and to graphically visualize situations, what often poses a greater difficulty for her is that "she can picture the response of anyone -- other people's reactions, their emotions, their criticisms, their demands." She is baffled by the fact that others "don't reciprocate," tentatively wondering if "[m]aybe they can't. Maybe they lack the gift, if it is one" (61). Charis' dubious "gift" is certainly not possessed or valued by Tony, who is irritated by Charis' apparently unflagging optimism: "[s]uch innocence pains Tony, two ways at once. She wants to console Charis; also to shake her" (34). Tony recognizes the juxtaposition between herself, the intellectual, and Charis' somewhat ethereal essence, suggestively comparing Charis to "[w]hat Ophelia would have looked like if she'd lived, or the Virgin Mary when middle-aged -- earnest and distracted, and with an inner light. It's the inner light that gets her in trouble" (30). Nevertheless, Tony is

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[4] While not denying that Charis' daughter, Augusta, is also a stark manifestation of reason, I would argue that Tony is more revealing as a contrasting manifestation of reason to Charis's irrationality. Tony's proximity in age, her history with Charis (from university days), her shared experience with Zenia, and her role as a protagonist in the novel are all significant factors. Conversely, as a character, Augusta lacks development and detail, remaining minor. Interestingly, even practical, academic, and military-minded Tony remarks that "up close Augusta is faintly chilling -- she's so intent on success" (452).

also fully aware that although "they don't have much in common except the catastrophe that brought them together, if Zenia can be called a catastrophe... they've developed a loyalty to one another, an *esprit de corps*. Tony has come to like these women [Charis and Roz]; she's come to consider them close friends" (31). The term "*esprit de corps*" is telling, for it signals their joint venture, the journey of self-realization that both unites and separates the women; moreover, etymologically, it focuses on the "spirit of the body," thereby subtly indicating that Tony, the symbol of reason, does value the irrational realm with which Charis is linked as a counterbalance to her self.

Charis is equally aware of the contrasting tension between them and, in turn, disparages Tony's rationality which she views as "[s]ticking everything into labelled boxes. Leaving no space, no space for the unsayable" (69). Because she recognizes the stark contrast between them, Charis perceives that Tony is a counterpoint to her own perception: "[t]here are quite a few times when she doesn't like Tony. Tony can use too many words, can grate on her.... But she loves Tony all the same. Tony is so calm, so clear-headed, so grounded" (69). Moreover, Charis recognizes that even she needs the balance which Tony offers, and so Charis holds Tony as a talisman against an excess of the irrational. This is particularly evident in Charis' perception of suicide, for her connection to the irrational positions her in proximity to voices -- including the suicidal voices that she hears, which are a form of madness. Within this proximity, Charis acknowledges that the lure of suicide is strong but Tony, with her rationality, would assist Charis in regaining her mental balance: "[i]f Charis ever hears any more voices telling her to slit her wrists, Tony is the one she'd call, to come over on the Island ferry and take charge of her, to defuse her, to tell her not to be an idiot. Tony would know what to do, step by step, one thing at a time, in order" (69). In other words, the temptation of suicide, which is a form of pending madness, can be controlled or rebuffed by balancing with its opposite: reason, the known, and, significantly, language. Charis depends on Tony's words as well as her actions to control madness or the "unsayable"; Roz' gushing

emotion would not suffice. Charis recognizes that "[s]he wouldn't call Roz at first, because Roz would freak out, would cry and sympathize and agree with her about the unbearability of it all.... But afterwards, after she felt safe again, she would go to Roz for the hug" (69). In this realization, Charis acknowledges that, at times, the articulation of reason through language is the only means "to stave off madness," a strategy noted by authors who have undergone the experience of madness (Caminero-Santangelo 19).

Part of Charis' worldview is a holistic form of reasoning that sees all living things as integrated. In this view, Charis recognizes, with some horror, that she and Zenia are also part of one another: "[w]e are all a part of everybody else.... We are all a part of everything. That's a cosmic insight, if you can keep it at arm's length. But then Charis has an unpleasant idea. If everyone is part of everyone else, then she herself is a part of Zenia. Or the other way around" (62). While Charis describes this idea as "unpleasant," it is an accurate assessment of Zenia as the shadow figure. As the Jungian shadow, Zenia is a projection of Charis' own psyche. Interestingly, in a discussion of *The Robber Bride*, Atwood confirms the significance of projection and its use by her protagonists; she claims to have modelled the characters' reactions on observable human reactions: "we project our repressed psychic contents onto other people in real life, particularly people that we either fall in love with or that we hate.... People like Zenia ... are recipients of that kind of psychic content.... They are presented as archetypes." Atwood further notes that by the end of the novel, "they [Charis, Roz, and Tony] have absorbed the elements of themselves that they projected on to her [Zenia] back into themselves, as it were" (Staëls, *Margaret* 209). By extension, the reader is aligned with the protagonists in this shared tendency to project the unconscious elements of the psyche. In her discussion of *Lady Oracle*, Margery Fee specifies that projection often involves the frightening aspects of the self which are not consciously recognized as a part of the self: "what frightens us most is our own destructive and dark impulses, which we escape and deny by projecting onto others" (65). Her comments are equally relevant to *The Robber Bride*, where the three

protagonists must confront their fears and "dark impulses" as manifested in Zenia. Since the "evil" or the unknown aspects of the self are seen as "not self but other," the shadow figure is the archetype, or aspect of the collective unconscious, which is most often projected. The very idea of what Fee terms "destructive and dark impulses" are, as Charis understates, "unpleasant" enough to be rejected from the self by distancing them onto the other.

Despite this negative reaction to her thoughts of being one with Zenia, Charis' awareness of this integration positions her to confront the projection. She recognizes that the holistic, positive energy view -- one which teaches Charis to visualize negative energy and experiences as a colour of pain in order to bring it into focus and then "[w]ipe the tape!" (77) -- demands conscious effort. Charis knows and reminds herself that such a view requires "[*c*]*ompassion for all living things*.... Zenia is alive, so that means compassion for Zenia" (79). Yet Charis is also aware that she feels no such compassion (79) and that "Zenia can't be meditated out of existence" (77); rather, Charis' own negativity and Zenia must both be confronted. Somewhat paradoxically, then, spiritually-minded Charis proceeds to enact this confrontation on the physical level, secretively tracking Zenia down the street as she leaves the Toxique. Charis is less than discreet, comically banging into people and even a lamppost (221-24); she loiters around a hot dog vendor's stand until he irately dismisses her: "'[c]razy broad, shove off,' says the vendor. 'Get back in the bin'" (223). Charis' distracted state causes the vendor offhandedly to dub her "crazy," thereby demonstrating a typical use of the terminology of madness: casual, derogatory, and loose. Nevertheless, this gruff rebuff does serve a positive function, as it signals Charis' well-intentioned but unsuccessful attempt to confront the shadow solely on a physical level and at a distance. Such an encounter must involve both the psyche and an actual confrontation with the manifest shadow figure. Moreover, this confrontation cannot be a psychic dismissal through one-sided meditation (which Charis correctly recognizes as unfeasible), for the shadow is autonomous; rather, it must include the

psychic integration of the shadow as part of the self, through a physical encounter with the manifest shadow figure.

In a Jungian view, the ego-conscious and the unconscious are intertwined but at odds with one another: "[e]go and shadow, indeed, although separate, are inextricably linked together.... The ego, nevertheless, is in conflict with the shadow" (Henderson 110). More generally, the unknown, unacknowledged, and unconscious part of the self is in conflict for control of the known, acknowledged, and conscious part of the self. In *The Robber Bride*, Charis becomes aware of this inner conflict when her knowledge of the need for compassion -- that tenet by which she strives to live in harmony with all things -- is subsumed by what Fee terms "dark impulses." Charis must acknowledge that compassion fails her when it comes to Zenia: "[o]n the contrary, she has a clear picture of herself pushing Zenia off a cliff, or other high object (79). Yet this admission in itself is not a failing. In fact, Charis' rationale is entirely in keeping with a Jungian view of confronting the shadow:

> [o]wn the emotion, she [Charis] tells herself, because although it's a thoroughly unworthy one it must be acknowledged fully before being discarded. She concentrates on the image, bringing it closer; she feels the wind against her face, senses the height, hears the release of her arm muscles inside her body, listens for the scream. But Zenia makes no sound. She merely falls, her hair streaming behind her like a dark comet. (79)

Charis attempts to harness her own energy, visualizing herself confronting and then dismissing Zenia: "Charis wraps this image up in tissue paper and with an effort expels it from her body." However, Atwood suggests that this dismissal is not entirely successful, for as Charis tries to convince herself that "[a]ll I want to do is talk to her," her thoughts are interrupted by a mental disturbance: "[t]here's a confusion, a rustling of dry wings" (79). This suggestion is also in keeping with Jung's views, for Charis' acknowledgement of Zenia remains divided. She either visualizes or acts, thereby retaining a false division between the psychic and the physical -- or, in Laingian terms, Charis remains a divided self, separated in mind and body.

In fact, Charis' confrontation with the shadow is only made possible by her reintegration of the self, particularly of her mind-body schism. Prior to her pursuit of Zenia from the Toxique, Charis has experienced a disturbing re-engagement with her repressed self, Karen, an event figured as a re-engagement with her physical body.[5] Charis finds herself unable to contain Karen, the part of her self which has been silenced; this part of her psyche surfaces from the unconscious and is irrepressible: "it's banished Karen... demanding to enter her, to rejoin her, to share in her body once again.... She [Charis] pushes away with all her strength, pushes down towards the water, but this time Karen will not go under. She drifts closer and closer, and her mouth opens." Notably, Charis' unconscious self seeks to regain agency through language: "[s]he wants to speak" (260). Thus, Karen returns in a ghostly figure, significantly, transformed into Zenia: "Karen is coming back, Charis can't keep her away any more.... She no longer looks like Karen. She looks like Zenia. She walks towards Charis and bends, and blends into her, and now she's inside Charis's body" (299). As Charis experiences the reintegration of Karen into her physical body, the incident is manifested as the abrupt return of sexual feeling: "[t]his other woman has taken over; but Charis doesn't float away, doesn't watch [herself with Billy] from behind the curtain. She's in the body too, she can feel everything. She can feel the body moving, responding; she can feel the pleasure shoot through her like electricity.... She forgets about Karen, she forgets about herself. Everything in her has been fused together" (299).

This fusion also involves the psyche, for Charis is no longer psychologically dissociated from the physical experience; she experiences both sensuality and desire. Charis is confused by and frightened of her inability to disengage during intercourse with Billy, as she had done since her childhood abuse. Suddenly, Charis, who was accustomed

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[5] It is important to note that Jung does not entirely dismiss the possibility of repression of the conscious contents of the psyche into the unconscious. Nevertheless, the Jungian view of repression is readily distinguishable from the Freudian. Jung disputes the concept that the entire contents of the unconscious consists of repressed, knowable, sexual materials; in his rendering, repressed materials form only a small part of the unconscious contents (see, for example, *CW* 10.1 "The role of the unconscious").

to a detached relationship with Billy on the physical and emotional levels, finds herself fully engaged: "[s]he loves Billy more now, in some ways; but in some ways less. Once greediness comes into a thing, the greediness of the body, it gets in the way of pure giving. She wants Billy's body now, for itself, not just as a manifestation of his essence" (300). In Laingian terms, Charis experiences the change from an unembodied to an embodied self; he describes the unembodied self as follows:

> The self by its detachment is precluded from a full experience of realness and aliveness. What one might call *a creative relationship* with the other, in which there is mutual enrichment of the self and the other (benign circle), is impossible, and an *interaction* is substituted which may seem to operate efficiently and smoothly for a while but which has no 'life' in it (*sterile relationship*). There is a quasi-it-it interaction instead of an I-thou relationship. This interaction is a dead process. (*Divided* 87)

In the movement from a "*sterile relationship*" to one characterized by desire, Charis reflects what Laing terms the necessary outcome of embodied existence: "[t]he embodied person, fully implicated in his body's desires, needs, and acts, is subject to the guilt and anxiety attendant on such desires, needs, and actions. He is subject to the body's frustrations as well as to its gratifications" (*Divided* 70). The anxiety Charis feels is complicated and is exacerbated by her background of abuse: "[w]hat she feels is difficult: guilt, relief. Anguish. Resentment, because Billy has the power to do that; resentment also, because she has lived for so many years without knowing about it. Deep inside, far inside her body, something new is moving" (299-300). Charis is overwhelmed by her ability to experience pleasure, but sees her newfound desire as greed: "[i]nstead of simply ministering to him, she wants something back. Maybe this is wrong; she doesn't know" (300).

After this moment of fusion, Charis loses track of Karen within her body; having reabsorbed this part of her self, she can no longer pinpoint the aspects as "other." Significantly, Charis cannot locate Karen with her "mind's eye... although there is a dark patch, a shadow, something she can't see" (300). This inability to identify Karen suggests

that the integration is not complete, for Charis still sees "a shadow" that remains obscure. In a positive light, however, this change also points to the path of self-realization in the imagined fusion of her self with her shadow. Tellingly, Charis sees the shadow within and when making love, imagines herself as Zenia: "she doesn't think about being Karen, or Charis either. She thinks about being Zenia" (300). This projection of self -- including an inner shadow -- onto the external shadow figure of Zenia suggests Charis' changing perception and increasing self-knowledge; however, it simultaneously suggests her persistent tendency to view desire and pleasure as negative (greed) and Zenia as "other" rather than as part of the self. While such a perception has important implications for a feminist reading of the novel, the segregation of self also has significant psychological implications, revealing Charis' tentative progress on the journey to self-realization.

Although Charis is aware of the shadow, she associates it solely with evil and negative thoughts. Ironically, at one point in the narrative, Charis even tells Zenia about the shadow side as a source of self-condemnation and negativity: "'I'm a terrible person,' she [Zenia] would tell Charis, her voice tremulous. 'I'm not worth all this trouble.' 'Oh, don't say that,' Charis would say. 'We all have those feelings. They're from the shadow side'" (308). Charis' description represents the common misperception of the shadow as simply evil; in a Jungian view, the shadow is more complicated, representing the "hidden... aspects of the personality" and "not just the simple converse of the [positive] conscious ego" (Henderson 110-12). Charis' view also indicates that the appropriate tactic is simple dismissal of the negative shadowy thoughts, suggesting that they are easily controlled by the conscious psyche. Conversely, Jung emphasizes that the ego and the shadow are in conflict, a struggle described as a battle between the hero (ego-conscious) and the dragon (unconscious manifested as shadow): "[t]he hero ... must realize that the shadow exists and that he can draw strength from it. He must come to terms with its desructive [*sic*] powers if he is to become sufficiently terrible [that is, powerful] to over come the dragon. I.e., before the ego can triumph, it must master and

assimilate the shadow" (Henderson 112). Thus, Charis' impulse is correct: the negative aspects of the shadow must be overcome, but this result cannot come about by ignoring the shadow; the encounter will be the equivalent of a bloody battle to the death.

In an interesting corollary, Charis' initial confrontation with the shadow takes the form of suicidal voices. She discovers her chickens with their throats slit and instantly attributes this evil deed to Zenia: "[i]n the sink she finds the bread knife, with blood on the blade. It was Zenia. Zenia murdered her chickens" (314). The shadow of madness then falls on Charis and suicide threatens to overcome her: "[a]s for the dead chickens and the bread knife, it's a message. *Slit your wrists*. She hears a voice from a long time ago, more than one voice. *You are so stupid. You can't win this fight*." Charis recognizes this suicidal tendency as coming from her inner shadow: "[t]hat is Karen speaking. Karen is back, Karen has control of their body. Karen is angry with her, Karen is desolate, Karen is sick with disgust, Karen wants them to die. She wants to kill their body. Already she has the bread knife in her hand, moving it towards their shared arm" (314). Charis menacingly clutches the knife but struggles against her dark impulse: "she wrestles Karen silently for possession of the knife. When she gets it, she pushes Karen away from her as hard as she can, back down into the shadows. Then she throws the knife out the door" (314-15). In wrestling Karen, Charis struggles with both madness in the form of a suicidal tendency and the shadow, the part of her unconscious that likewise threatens to overpower and unbalance her.

Interestingly, Charis' encounter with the shadow in the past is inverted in the present. Whereas in the past, she wrestles with and overcomes the urge to kill herself, in the present, this urge is directed at Zenia, the external manifestation of her shadow. To use Jungian terms, this inversion suggests that Charis has not fully "master[ed] and assimilate[d] the shadow." She still feels herself threatened by Zenia, that figure of the unconscious and of madness. In her final physical and psychological encounter with Zenia, Charis finds herself filled with rage and violence despite herself: "[i]nside Charis,

something breaks. Rage takes her over. She wants to squeeze Zenia, squeeze her and squeeze her by the neck until Charis' life, her own life that she has imagined, all of the good things about her life that Zenia has drunk, come welling out like water from a sponge. The violence of her own reaction dismays her but she's lost control" (482-83). As Staëls notes, this scene "suggests that the characters' repressed energy needs to be released, because repression may lead to an uncontrollable breakout of irrational violence" (*Margaret* 196). Staëls' comments coincide with Charis' focus on harnessing energy, but also note that suppressing these energies can be detrimental -- a point Charis has yet to acknowledge. Atwood, however, does suggest that Charis' encounter with Zenia directs her to this recognition, for Charis admits that "she's lost control."

Perhaps the most notable aspect of this confrontation is Charis' ability to segregate her self from Zenia while still acknowledging that Zenia is an embodiment of "her own life." In striking contrast to the past scene in which Charis wrestles with Karen as the shadow within, now her imagined murder of Zenia explicitly includes her reintegrated self (Charis and Karen) overcoming the externalized self, the shadow of Zenia: "[s]omeone else in in charge of it [Charis' body] now. It's Karen. Charis can see her, a dark core, a shadow, ... grown huge. She's been waiting all the time, all these years, for a moment like this, a moment when she could get back into Charis's body and use it to murder. She moves Charis's hands towards Zenia.... [S]he is irresistibly strong" (483). Perhaps most tellingly, Charis affirms that Karen is both a part of her and is a shadow from which she gains strength to resist the externalized shadow figure. Charis recognizes that "Zenia ... is no match for shadowy Karen" (483). In Jungian terms, "[w]hen an individual makes an attempt to see his shadow, he becomes aware of (and often ashamed of) those qualities and impulses he denies in himself but can plainly see in other people"; the value of such difficult recognition is that it enables an increase in self-knowledge: "[a]fterward the painful and lengthy work of self-education begins" (von Franz, "Process" 174). In this acknowledgement of her own possession of the shadow, then, Charis sees

her self in Zenia, and so she is able to utter words of forgiveness, to see beyond the evil, to find compassion for Zenia (483); though painful, she chooses agency over the silence of madness.

As such, Atwood creates a character who portrays an alternative to madness as a form of romanticized escape or rebellion. As Marta Caminero-Santangelo observes, in modern Western society, there is a need to envision agency for women faced with madness, for madness itself is neither an escape nor a means of rebellion; she urges, "[i]nstead of privileging the retreat into madness, then, let us privilege the forms of agency, and of active creative transformation in all its forms, which women engage in. And in so doing, let us open an imaginative space for women to be able to escape from madness by envisioning themselves as agents" (181). Caminero-Santangelo's plea does not preclude the reader of her text, but directly implicates her/him. Similarly, she is not referring here to the best direction for fiction, but for society. In other words, Caminero-Santangelo encourages Iser's view of the reader's interpretive role relating both to fiction and to society, a view which Atwood's novels likewise endorse.

Zenia's function as the shadow figure in *The Robber Bride* is not limited to her confrontation with Charis but is complexly woven into her interaction with all three protagonists. This tripartite structure is figured in the godmothers of Charis' baby: "Tony and Roz are the godmothers.... Charis is glad she's able to give August two such hard-headed women as godmothers. They won't let her be a wimp, they'll teach her to stand up for herself.... There is a third godmother present, of course -- a dark godmother, one who brings negative gifts. The shadow of Zenia falls over the cradle" (320). Although the role of a godmother is to guide the child into spiritual growth -- "Tony and Roz promise to watch over August and to protect her spirit" (320) -- Zenia's presence suggests that self-realization requires an integration of the conscious mind and body with the unconscious, the known with the unknown. Karen Stein has argued that "[t]he three women are also

three aspects of the personality: Tony the mind, Charis the spirit, and Roz the body" (*Margaret* 99). While these comments seem to encapsulate the characters -- Tony the intellectual, Charis the New Ager, and Roz the overweight, trend-conscious materialist -- such a reading necessarily positions Zenia as the soul, or in Jungian terms, the anima. This is problematic since the anima or animus figure represents the contrasexual part of the psyche; in a Jungian view: "he [a man] will discover a female personification of his unconscious; and it will be a male figure in the case of a woman" (von Franz, "Process" 186). Conversely, reading Zenia as the shadow figure positions her as the unknown or the unconscious female manifestation of each woman's psyche: "[i]t is particularly in contacts with people of the same sex that one stumbles over ... one's shadow" (von Franz, "Process" 175). Stein's reading of body-mind-spirit represented by the protagonists is illuminating, for pairing Zenia with each of these women as the shadow emphasizes that self-division and the need for reintegration is not precluded by an excess of any one of these conditions. Each individual must seek self-realization, though each in her own way.

Roz is the opposite of Charis in many ways -- a nouveau-riche, brisk business executive with all the accoutrements as opposed to Charis' nebulous physical existence eked out in New Age retail or as a yoga instructor who resides in a ramshackle cottage on Toronto Island. Nevertheless, Roz's seemingly firm hold on "reality" and the tangibles of life does not preclude her from experiencing a divided condition. In Laingian terms, Roz can be described as "the embodied person," the condition that Charis comes to habit uneasily over the course of the narrative.[6] Laing is careful to note, however, that such a condition is no more untouchable than the unembodied state:

> Being in his body is no haven from possibly crushing self-condemnation. Being embodied as such is no insurance against feelings of hopelessness or meaninglessness. Beyond his body, he still has to know who he is.... In short,

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[6] Incidentally, Laing's description of the embodied person -- one who "has a sense of being flesh and blood and bones, of being biologically alive and real: he knows himself to be substantial" (*Divided* 69) -- is highly ironic as a description of Roz, a character who is far too aware of her physical weight, of being "substantial."

> the body-self is not an inviolable stronghold against the corrosion of ontological doubts and uncertainties: it is not in itself a bulwark against psychosis. Conversely, the split in the experience of one's own being into unembodied and embodied parts is not more an index of latent psychosis than is total embodiment any guarantee of sanity. (*Divided* 70-71)

In fact, Roz herself seems aware of this susceptibility to mental imbalance, for she actually seeks professional psychiatric assistance to improve herself. The formulaic attempts she engages in with the psychologist to slot her life into a "plot" or neat role become an exercise in frustration: "[t]ogether the two of them labour over Roz's life as if it's a jigsaw puzzle, a mystery story with a solution at the end. They arrange and rearrange the pieces, trying to get them to come out better. They are hopeful" (431). Eventually, Roz abandons the psychologist, having found no relief but quite the opposite: "Roz gives up going to the shrink. It's the optimism that's getting to her, the belief that things can be fixed, which right now feels like just one more burden" (434).

Through these psychiatric sessions, however, Roz does come to the realization that she is afraid of Zenia even though Zenia is supposedly dead: "Zenia is nothing if not vengeful. Being dead won't alter that. She'll think of something" (432). This irrational fear suggests that Roz perceives Zenia as evil incarnate. In this view, Roz typifies the over-simplification of the shadow. As M. L. von Franz points out, however, in a Jungian view, "every personification of the unconscious -- the shadow, the anima, the animus, and the Self -- has both a light and a dark aspect" ("Process" 234). For Roz, the darkness overwhelms her, and she accidentally overdoses on sleeping pills. Tony and Charis bind forces to care for Roz after this incident, unifying their energies and talents of logic and nurture with restorative effects (435-37). Notably, Roz's "normal" state is aligned with Tony's rational approach but disparages the unknown and irrational which she associates with Charis: "[w]hen she's herself, when she's normal, Roz finds Charis an endearing nincompoop -- let's face it, a polymath she's not -- and mostly dismisses her gauzy metaphysics" (436). However, when recovering from her brush with death, this easy dismissal changes: "[n]ow though, Charis reaches down ... and takes hold of Roz's foot,

and Roz feels grief travelling through her like a wave, up ... and out. Then she feels a tug, a pull, as if Charis is a long way away, on the shore, ... and is hauling Roz in, out of the water, the water of the lake, where she has almost drowned.... She's strong enough, she can make it. 'Yes,' says Charis. 'You will'" (436). Reason alone cannot save Roz; she needs the balance of the irrational and the unknown.

As the shadow figure, then, Zenia's function is to challenge Roz's view of her "normal" self by confronting her with the unknown aspects of her unconscious psyche. Staëls notes that "Zenia wages a war against the characters' attempt at 'normality,' against their illusion of a unified self, and she reminds them of their divided, multiple condition. She disturbs their illusory stability, makes them feel disoriented and unsettled" (*Margaret* 196). While this overt war takes place as the *femme fatale* shattering any sense of outward stability experienced by the three protagonists, the covert war is a psychological one. Each woman is confronted with Zenia as the shadow figure who challenges the accepted version of their "normal" selves. As Elizabeth discovers in *Life Before Man*, such confrontations of the unconscious are neither welcome nor palatable. In fact, this is precisely the role of the Jungian shadow: "whatever form it takes, the function of the shadow is to represent the opposite side of the ego and to embody just those qualities that one dislikes most in other people" (von Franz, "Process" 182). Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, Roz perceives Zenia as monstrous, while also recognizing her own complicity in the construction of this dark figure. Roz muses tellingly about Zenia: "[m]y own monster, thinks Roz. I thought I could control her. Then she broke loose" (106). The Frankensteinian echo of Roz's claim is notable. In her recent biography, *The Red Shoes*, Rosemary Sullivan draws attention to Atwood's early interest in *Frankenstein* as a revealing commentary on humanity, which contains the idea that "wrapped in our loneliness, we contain the destructive shadow self within us" (174). Atwood affirms the Frankensteinian allusion: "Frankenstein would be appropriate [as a comparison] because Zenia rebuilds herself. She is both doctor Frankenstein and the monster and of course she

is a vampire" (Staëls, *Margaret* 211). Perhaps more suggestively, Gilbert and Gubar comment on the expendability of the monstrous mad figure; they argue that "the mad character is sometimes created only to be destroyed: ...[such as] Victor Frankenstein's monster. Yet even when a figure of rage seems to function only as a monitory image, her (or his) fury must be acknowledged not only by the angelic protagonist to whom s/he is opposed, but, significantly, *by the reader as well*" (*Madwoman* 78).

Indeed, this acknowledgement is a crucial element of Roz's interaction with Zenia. Although Zenia is destroyed by death twice in the narrative, she must be recognized as part of the self before this destruction can be constructive for the other characters. Zenia as the shadow embodies the unknown and therefore also the extreme -- the unknowable that is also a part of the self. Ironically, such extremes attract Roz as an antidote to her known self, her "normal" dissociated condition which is already imbalanced: "[i]t's the extremes that attract her. Extreme good, extreme evil: the abilities required are similar. Either way, she would like to be someone else. But not just anyone. Sometimes -- for a day at least, or even for an hour, or if nothing else was available then five minutes would do -- sometimes she would like to be Zenia" (443). In this wish, Roz voices the unspeakable: she harbours a deep desire to be that which she fears and abhors. Significantly, in Jung's view, "the shadow is described as composed of the dark elements of the personality, having an emotional and primitive nature which resists moral control," yet it is also "the most accessible of the archetypes" and "represents primarily the personal unconscious" (*CW* 9.2:2; *Abstracts* 110). Moreover, as Jung further notes, the shadow plays a vital role in the process of individuation, for "the realization of the shadow ... is the first stage of the analytic process" (*CW* 9.2:3; *Abstracts* 110). Thus, Roz's admission of her desire ultimately points to a positive recognition of Zenia as part of the self, as the manifestation of her own unconscious. If Zenia is to be destroyed, as Gilbert and Gubar suggest, that fact does not minimize her power; this madwoman insists on being recognized -- both by the characters and the reader.

In contrast to both Charis and Roz, Tony's stark intellectualism seems to situate her as the most resistant to such psychic intrusions. Nonetheless, Tony's association with the mind does not protect her any more than Roz's association with the body does, for a Jungian view of the psyche acknowledges that "[t]here is such a passionate drive within the shadowy part of oneself that reason may not prevail against it" (von Franz, "Process" 182). In fact, Tony's form of imbalance can be seen to make her most susceptible both to dissociation and to projection. Of the three protagonists, Tony is most directly associated with "the Goddess of Reason" -- an over-reliance which, in Jung's view, is a causal factor of "a general neuroticising of modern man" (*Undiscovered* 36). Arguably, Atwood herself signals the existence of this division through Tony's quirky ability to write with both hands -- the left, significantly, simultaneously writing backwards, mirroring the script of her right hand -- and, more generally, through her imagined life in the backwards realm. Tony Fremont is also Tnomerf Ynot, her imagined twin since childhood, "the incarnation of her sense that part of her was missing. Although she was a twin, Tnomerf Ynot was a good deal taller than Tony herself. Taller, stronger, more daring" (155). Tellingly, Tony imagines this part of her self as a vicious barbarian, envisioning her on a rampage, "her long ragged hair flying in the wind, a sword in each of her hands.... Tnomerf Ynot herself drinks from a skull, with silver handles attached where the ears used to be. She raises the skull high in a toast to victory" (166-67). Atwood creates in Tony not only an awareness of but also a secret appreciation for her divided state. Unlike Charis who fiercely seeks to repress her shadow self, Karen, Tony nurtures her imagined existence as Tnomerf Ynot; she revels in the sense of her own shadow within: vicious, strong, and victorious.

At times, Tony senses that her opposite halves are in balance, but this is the exception and is never complete. Her own recognition of these days suggests as much: "today she's synchronized. Her left hand knows what her right hand is doing. Her two halves are superimposed: there's only a slight penumbra, a slight degree of slippage" (9). Such awareness emphasizes Jung's contention that the left and the right do not exist in

synchronicity in modern Western society, for the "normal" psyche remains dissociated and only partially known ("Approaching" 5-6). Also in keeping with Jungian views, Tony's alienated state is revealed through her dreams: "[s]he is having a dream, a recurring one; she has the feeling that this dream has been waiting for her a long time, waiting for her to enter it, re-enter it; or that it has been waiting to re-enter her" (211-12). This intrusion of her unconscious is particularly telling: the dream occurs underwater, where Tony drops over a chasm, "slid[ing] diagonally through the increasing darkness," and is surrounded by "larger and more dangerous, brighter" fish; "[s]uddenly she knows she isn't in the sea at all but miniaturized, inside her own brain. These are her neurons." While Tony watches "the electrochemical process of her own dreaming," at the very bottom of this chasm, she sees "[s]omeone walking away from her," someone whom she cannot reach although she desperately tries. "*Reverof*, she hears. The backwards dream language," and Tony awakens in a panic, "her face streaming with tears" (212). Through this dream Atwood clearly indicates Tony's fear of the depths of her own unconscious psyche, for although Tony admires her shadow as Tnomerf Ynot, that is a controlled, fantasy image of her shadow; Tony still fears the unknown part of her psyche which manifests itself in dreams. According to Tony, "sleep is fatal. Fatal and unavoidable" (212).

That said, Frank Davey's observations in a discussion of dreams in Atwood's poetry collection *Procedures for Underground* (1970) are equally relevant to *The Robber Bride*; he notes that "[u]nderwater... is a mythic and instructive realm. Going underwater in Atwood's writing usually means entering an instructive, ominous, and potentially transforming experience" (*Margaret* 111). Davey convincingly alludes to the lake or water scenes in *Surfacing, Lady Oracle,* and *The Edible Woman*; however, he concludes that "[b]eing underwater invariably suggests that the narrator is herself searching her personal unconscious for repressed insights" (*Margaret* 112). Here, Davey reveals the Freudian basis of his view of the unconscious as a knowable site of repressed contents.

Conversely, in a Jungian reading, the unconscious retains its autonomy; dreams are not always welcome nor are the insights they bring consciously sought out. Therefore, Tony's desire to avoid dreams is attributable to her fear of the unknown within herself; her dreams are not the result of a conscious undertaking to scrutinize the unconscious. Nevertheless, Davey's comment that "[i]n particular the dream world is dangerous because it is unacknowledged by the waking life, not included within it" (*Margaret* 111) is insightful; he suggests that the artificial segregation of the conscious, or "waking life," and the unconscious, figured as dreams, is a problematic condition. Indeed, such a segregation is the basis of the "normal" divided condition and perpetuates a fear of the unconscious. Conversely, the "transforming experience" to which Davey alludes can only occur with the integration of these realms of the psyche.

As Davey further notes, "[o]nce behind the mirror, or behind the photograph, or under the surface of picturesque nature, we may see unsettling and unwanted things" (*Margaret* 98). Significantly, then, upon Zenia's return to the Toxique, Tony is puzzled by Zenia's reappearance "on this side of the mirror" (37) -- that is, her presence back in the conscious realm. Yet Tony is not entirely surprised, for, like Roz, she has been unable to accept the safety offered by the thought of Zenia being dead: "[d]espite the rational part of herself, Tony keeps expecting her to turn up, stroll in through some unlocked door, climb through a window carelessly left open. It seems improbable that she would simply have evaporated.... [A]ll that malign vitality must have gone somewhere" (11). Interestingly, Tony associates Zenia not only with "malign vitality" but with shadows -- specifically, with the shadows of her own mind: "[s]he frequently thinks of Zenia, more frequently than when Zenia was alive. Zenia dead is less of a threat, and doesn't have to be shoved away, shoved back into the spidery corner where Tony keeps her shadows" (11). Thus, Tony acknowledges that Zenia is the shadow figure, who exists in Tony's own mind but also has the ability to intrude on her consciousness.

This link of Zenia to the shadow side and to Tony's psyche is a significant indication of Tony's movement towards self-realization and away from her "normal" state. As Laing observes, "[w]hat we call 'normal' is a product of repression, denial, splitting, projection, introjection, and other forms of destructive action on experience.... It is radically estranged from the structure of being" (*Politics of Experience* 27). In *The Robber Bride*, Tony seems fully aware of the constructed nature of normality -- even of reality. For Tony, the world is, in fact, a conscious, willed illusion: "[e]ven in the best of times the daily world is tenuous to her, a thin iridescent skin held in place by surface tension. She puts a lot of effort into keeping it together, her willed illusion of comfort and stability, ... but underneath is darkness. Menace, chaos, cities aflame, towers crashing down, the anarchy of deep water" (38). Zenia has the power to shatter this "illusion of comfort and stability," powerfully bringing on the darkness, chaos, and anarchy, thereby exposing the construct. Although Tony recognizes that such darkness is behind this tenuous construct of "normality" and "reality," in contrast to Elizabeth in *Life Before Man*, she does not feel its pull as frighteningly irresistible. For Tony, that darkness is simply frightening, a place of death and shadows which she associates directly with Zenia.

The projection of darkness onto Zenia signals Tony's area of psychic blindness. As Jung notes, "[t]he greatest obstacle [to psychology] ... is considered to be the individual's fear of discovering himself, particularly in the realm of the unconscious" (*CW* 10:17; *Abstracts* 122). However, as Jung further observes, it is critical for the individual to understand "the role of the unconscious [including] as a source... of evil," for "ignorance of the unconscious" has serious implications. Primarily, it will "blind him [the individual] to his capacity for evil, hence making it possible for this evil to be projected.... It is considered essential that he recognize the shadow side in order to promote real human relationships between individuals and inner cohesion within society" (*CW* 10:19; *Abstracts* 123). Perhaps most significantly in relation to Tony, Jung notes that

such fostering of outer cohesion requires inner cohesion and so must involve the unconscious: "reason alone is not sufficient for accomplishing this task; a deeper self-knowledge, encompassing the entire psyche, is required" (*CW* 10:19; *Abstracts* 123). In this view, Jung suggests the dichotomy of one's encounter with the shadow: confrontation can be dangerous and even painful, but, without exception, so is ignorance. The potential for a positive outcome, then, is restricted to the former.

Early on, Tony's view of Zenia already reflects this duality. While Tony sees Zenia as unquestionably evil, she also recognizes that the perceived segregation between them is as artificial as "her willed illusion of comfort and stability." Both Tony's constructs of Zenia and of reality are illusory, tenuous, and partial. Atwood includes indications of Tony's awareness that this posited division between herself and Zenia is artificial -- perhaps even false: "Tony looks at her [Zenia], looks into her blue-black eyes, and sees her own reflection: herself, as she would like to be. *Tnomerf Ynot.* Herself turned inside out" (188). Significantly, Tony associates Zenia with her beloved, heroic version of her self as ruthless, dark, vengeful, and ultimately victorious. Tony comes to perceive Zenia, then, as manifesting this dark side of her self in the real world. Tony uses this rationale to excuse her lapse of academic integrity -- the darkest act imaginable for Tony, as it flouts the regulations and expectations of her intellectual sphere. As Tony remarks, "Zenia is doing Tony's rebelliousness for her so it's only fair that Tony should write Zenia's term paper. Or that is the equation Tony makes at some level below words. Tony will be Zenia's right hand, because Zenia is certainly Tony's left one" (190). In the novel, the left hand, of course, retains its association with evil and the forbidden: "[w]hen Tony was younger the teachers at school would slap her left hand or hit it with rulers" (155); "despite its good performance her left hand was scorned" (156). Notably, even though it takes considerable effort, Tony covertly resists these social norms: "[s]ecretly Tony continued to write left-handed; but she felt guilty about it. She knew there must be

something shameful about her left hand or it would not have been humiliated like that. It was the hand she loved best, all the same" (156).

These associations affirm a Jungian reading of Zenia as the shadow figure. While Tony sees her as a segregated faculty of evil, Tony herself is enabling this psychological duality through projection. Jung observes that by projecting the shadow, paradoxically, one supports its existence rather than silencing it. In addition to obscuring one's view of others, projecting the shadow has "an additional disadvantage"; that is, "[i]f we identify our own shadow with ...[our external enemy], a part of our own personality remains on the opposing side. The result is that we shall constantly (though involuntarily) do things behind our own backs that support this other side, and thus we shall unwittingly help our enemy" (von Franz, "Process" 181-82). To borrow Atwood's vampire metaphor, Tony is unwittingly Zenia's lifeblood. To counteract the enabling of this parasitic relationship, Tony needs to recognize her capacity for evil, as manifested in her projection of the shadow onto Zenia. Certainly, Atwood includes indications of Tony's own propensity for bloodlust -- most predominantly, her fixation on war. Staëls associates war in the novel with evil in its various forms: "hatred, violence, cruelty and pride" (*Margaret* 194). Similarly, Tony recognizes that, as a military historian, her penchant for war is uneasily tolerated by her colleagues, but as a student, it would have been considered "truly pathological" (132-33). Moreover, she associates war with the creation of an exaggerated, abnormal social condition, one that tellingly mirrors the effects of plagues: "a panic, a hothouse forcing, a sort of greedy hysteria"; in fact, Tony considers herself an authority on the issue (183). This recognition casts an interesting light on Tony's own fascination with war, suggesting an underlying fascination with a form of madness, an extreme psychological condition.

Tony's capacity for evil eventually manifests itself in her confrontation with the shadow figure of Zenia. In her moments of devastation after being abandoned by West for Zenia, Tony finds herself considering acts of violent destruction; she toys with her

father's pistol, that instrument of suicide, and even imagines destroying her bed with a meat cleaver (209). Similar to Charis and Roz, Tony also experiences the self-destructive impulse and entertains thoughts of suicide. This destruction, a quality Tony associates with Zenia, is appealing; in retrospect, Tony recognizes that Zenia's dark evil, in general, is not simplistically repugnant: "part of what Tony feels is admiration. Despite her disapproval, her dismay, all her past anguish, there's a part of her that has wanted to cheer Zenia on, even to encourage her. To make her into a saga. To participate in her daring, her contempt for almost everything, her rapacity and lawlessness.... *No! No! On! On!*" (208). This duality suggests the complex role of the shadow as potentially both positive and negative. Tony must confront, overcome, and assimilate the shadow as the first stage of her self-realization.

This process begins with her recognition of Zenia as part of her self: "[t]he blood Zenia wants to drink is Tony's, because she hates Tony and always has.... There's no rational explanation for such hatred, but it doesn't surprise Tony. She seems to have been familiar with it for a long time. It's the rage of her unborn twin" (214-15). To this point, Tony has identified her unborn twin as Tnomerf Ynot; notably, she now collapses that inner shadow with the external projection of her shadow in Zenia. Alice Palumbo expands Tony's own recognition, arguing that Zenia is the figure of the lost twin for all three protagonists and emphasizing the need for psychic integration: "[a]s the lost twin of Tony, Charis, and Roz, Zenia enacts the return of the repressed, and is the repository of their submerged aggression and anger. Coming to terms with Zenia means accepting their own potential for hostility, anger, and rage, and integrating it into themselves" (83). Similarly, Staëls terms Zenia the characters' double (*Margaret* 195); however, specifically in relation to Tony, Staëls asserts that "she does not recognize her own capacity for evil" (*Margaret* 198). On the contrary, I would argue that *The Robber Bride* traces Tony's increasing realization of her need to acknowledge the dark, shadowy part of her self. Significantly, Tony prepares herself for the final confrontation with Zenia by

using a military deductive strategy -- that link to death, blood, madness, and war which is Tony's passion. Incidentally, it is Zenia who first enables Tony to view war as her passion and to voice it as her "obsession" in so many words; Zenia inverts Tony's assumption that "[o]nly criminals and creepy people have obsessions, and if you have one yourself you aren't supposed to admit to it" (144-45). Now, Tony draws on her "obsession," transferring her knowledge of military strategy onto her own confrontation. Tony comes to the inevitable conclusion that to overcome the shadow, she has to become Zenia on a psychological level: "[i]n order to defeat Zenia she will have to become Zenia, at least enough to anticipate her next move" (215).

This recognition is pivotal for Tony, for she then focuses her destructive impulse away from her physical self or the objects around her and onto Zenia. The fact that Tony harnesses and controls suicidal tendencies is signalled by her plan to kill Zenia using her own father's pistol. Her military strategy breaks down in the translation to reality, for her plan is undermined by its uncharacteristic lack of clarity; Tony has only a vague idea of potentially and somewhat comically aiding the attack with her second weapon of choice: a cordless drill (454-55). In entertaining the thought of this confrontation and destruction, Tony acknowledges and releases the irrational, unknown part of her self, envisioning the possibility of "an ambidextrous murder: gun in the left hand, cordless drill in the right, like the rapier-and-dagger arrangements of the late Renaissance" (455). Moreover, Tony recognizes that she is releasing the "backwards language" part of herself that has been within since her neglected childhood: "[s]he is not just Tony Fremont, she is also *Tnomerf Ynot*, queen of the barbarians, and, in theory, capable of much that Tony herself is not quite up to" (455). Erroneously, however, Tony perceives this division as an element that separates her from Charis and Roz, and so "[s]he hasn't shared her plans with Roz or Charis. Each of them is a decent person; neither would condone violence. Tony knows that she herself is not a decent person, she's known that since childhood. She does act like one, most of the time, because there's usually no reason not to, but she has

another self, a more ruthless one, concealed inside her" (455). Notably, Charis has a similar expectation of Roz and Tony's reaction to her own vision of destroying Zenia: "[s]he needs to see Zenia because she needs to know the end. She needs to get rid of her, finally. She won't tell Tony or Roz about this need, because they would discourage her.... Behind her eyes there is a dark shape falling" (322). Each of the women longs to overcome Zenia, her manifest shadow.

Thus, when Tony later ruefully confesses her destructive impulse to Charis and Roz, they are understanding: "'I must've been a little crazy,' she [Tony] says. 'To think I could actually kill her.'" Roz contradicts Tony's negative assessment of herself: "'[n]ot so crazy... [t]o *want* to kill her, anyway. She does that to people'" (468). In other words, to get beyond the confrontation with the shadow requires firmly facing the darkness, the evil, the madness -- both within and without the self -- and redefining sanity, "normality," and the self as inclusive. Since ignorance leads to the divisive condition of projection, the characters need to assimilate the evil which Zenia represents. As Jung contends, "if one can no longer avoid the realization that evil, without man's ever having chosen it, is lodged in human nature itself, ... [t]his realization leads straight to a psychological dualism, ... prefigured in the ... unconscious dissociation in modern man himself." Moreover, he is careful to emphasize that "[t]he dualism does not come from this realization; rather, we are in a split condition to begin with" (*Undiscovered* 53). Jung underlines the fact that such self-deception eventually disintegrates, arguing that "one would therefore do well to possess some 'imagination for evil,' for only the fool can permanently disregard the conditions of his own evil" (*Undiscovered* 53). In this view, acknowledging one's complicity in evil is a positive step towards increased self-knowledge and individuation. The potential outcome -- whether positive or negative -- of confrontation with the shadow is not arbitrary. Jung insists that the outcome depends on the preparation of the conscious mind: "[w]hat our age thinks of as the 'shadow' and inferior part of the psyche contains more than something merely negative.... They are

potentialities of the greatest dynamism, and it depends entirely on the preparedness and attitude of the conscious mind whether the irruption of these forces ... will tend towards construction or catastrophe" (*Undiscovered* 58). Although confronting the shadow may seem to lead inevitably to a negative outcome, a positive outcome is possible.

More specifically, such recognition of the shadow can promote human relationships; in Jung's words, "[r]ecognition of the shadow ... leads to the modesty we need in order to acknowledge imperfection. And it is just this conscious recognition and consideration that are needed whenever a human relationship is to be established" (*Undiscovered* 57). Such deepening is certainly reflected in the relationship of Charis, Roz, and Tony. Each woman faces her own worst nightmare in Zenia; her "normality" is exposed as a flimsy construct and is destroyed, leaving her on the brink of suicide. Each protagonist looks at the darkness of unknown evil and therein recognizes herself; she sees madness as a reflection of her own possible mental state, yet is able to accept that and move beyond it. As Laing notes, such recognition is the necessary basis of deep human interaction: "[o]ur alienation goes to the roots. The realization of this is the essential springboard for any serious reflection on any aspect of present interhuman life" (*Politics of Experience* xii). Thiher concurs that for modern Western society, "alienation [is] our normal condition. The normal state of being abnormal is the absurd condition of the alienated modern" (243). Consequently, "normality" becomes redefined as alienation. Such a shift in perspective is suggested in the novel; for example, even Charis' attempt at suicide -- a form of madness and literal mind-body division -- is accepted by Tony rather than dismissed as irrational or abnormal: "Charis explains about trying to slit her wrists, and Tony doesn't scold her. She simply says that bread knives are not a viable solution, and washes it off and puts it back in the knife rack" (318). The potential effect of confronting one's shadow, then, is determined by the characters; to be positive, such an encounter requires an acceptance of alienation and evil.

The Robber Bride demonstrates a movement towards reintegration, a positive outcome figured in the women's deepening and lasting relationship. This inversion of alienation to a positive step towards individuation is a significant contrast to the alienated condition faced by the characters in *Life Before Man*. Roberta Rubenstein aptly describes the bleakness of that novel: "the void is not only the inner vacuum experienced by people whose relationships with others are disturbed; it is implicitly the condition in which we are all suspended as a consequence of the irreducible difference between 'inside' and 'outside.' One becomes more acutely aware of it in direct proportion to one's sense of separateness and isolation from others" (*Boundaries* 101). Rubenstein specifically indicates that the isolation is both internal (solitary) and external (relational). *The Robber Bride*, by contrast, demonstrates through its darkness that the outcome is neither predetermined nor inevitable. Notably, few critics of the novel recognize that the protagonists have a significant amount of agency. Howells typifies criticism which posits Zenia as a dominant figure who ultimately subsumes Atwood's three protagonists; she remarks that "Zenia represents the otherness which these women cannot acknowledge, but which is necessary for self-definition" ("Transgressing" 148). I would argue, however, that rather than negative definition -- that is, self as not-Zenia -- each of the characters comes to the place where she both recognizes and accepts Zenia as a reflection of her self. That is, each of the protagonists redefines her self by integrating the unknown and the dark aspects of the unconscious which are figured in the shadow figure of Zenia. This acknowledgement of their own "otherness" is, in fact, precisely what unites the three women. Zenia draws Charis, Roz, and Tony together and changes them; despite their disparate personalities, the women acquire a new recognition of shared affinity as they embark on their various stages of self-realization. For example, rigidly intellectual Tony finds she is able to appreciate and to affirm Charis, despite their stark contrasts: "'[y]ou have a rich inner life,' says Tony firmly. 'More than most'" (485). Staëls notes that Zenia's role is transitory; she brings revelation: "[a]fter she has been remembered as part

of the self, Zenia returns to 'the other side'.... Through Zenia's interventions, the three protagonists are made to see the raw material of the past in a different light" (*Margaret* 204). This awakening is entirely in keeping with a Jungian view of the process of individuation, which carefully distinguishes the erroneous belief that individuation creates an isolating state of solipsism from the fact of its relational affirmation (von Franz, "Process" 238-40).[7]

Joyce Carol Oates suggestively observes that the author is implicated in the condition of her/his characters. She remarks that "critics often 'fail to see how the creative artist shares to varying degrees the personalities of all his characters, even those whom he appears to detest -- perhaps, at times, it is these characters he is really closest to'" (44, qtd. in Gilbert and Gubar, *Madwoman* 68-69). In this sense, a disturbing or unsavoury part of the author's self is figured in the dark characters of her/his own creation; moreover, according to Oates, despite the demonstrated ignorance of critics to this fact, the author her/himself acknowledges this representation as part of the self. Gilbert and Gubar stress the significance of this statement being made by a female writer, arguing that "the remark suggests the extent to which a female artist in particular is keenly aware that she must inevitably project herself into a number of uncongenial characters and situations" (*Madwoman* 69). Contrary to their feminist claim, I would argue that such increased awareness is not necessarily restricted to a female artist, nor are women any more susceptible than men to such projections of the shadow figure. A Jungian reading posits a broader relevance, noting that both genders are confronted with the shadow figure and that neither sex is privileged in the recognition of this part of the unconscious. However, Jung does recognize that the individual tends to project her/his unconscious shadow onto figures of the same sex (von Franz, "Process" 175). Following

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[7] Incidentally, Atwood clearly delineates her own view of Zenia's function in the novel: "[i]n Jungian terms she's a shadow for the women.... So, she is an aspect of each of the three women"; in the same interview, Atwood affirms that "their repressed wounded side... presents itself in the form of Zenia" and that the women come to a certain degree of acceptance that Zenia is a part of themselves (Staëls, *Margaret* 208).

from these views, Zenia, the "uncongenial" female shadow figure projected by Atwood's three protagonists, can also be seen as a projection of the author. By extension, Atwood must also confront that projection of her own shadow as figured in Zenia. Gilbert and Gubar posit the fact that "the witch-monster-madwoman becomes so crucial an avatar of the writer's own self" as a significant result of the author's identification with these characters (*Madwoman* 79). Such a reading suggests that the confrontation with the shadow is not only a fictional encounter but an encounter in which the author is directly implicated. As a complement to Jung's views, I would contend that such a link of madness to dark character personalities, or identification with the shadow, is not limited to the author any more than to the female, but that it is more broadly relevant. Since the author becomes a reader, these claims necessarily also implicate the reader in a confrontation with the projected shadow through the act of ideation.

If the reader -- a category inclusive of the author -- is confronted by the shadow figure in the act of reading, then this engagement also holds the potential for a positive effect on the reader. As with the characters, the outcome of this confrontation as positive or negative is largely determined by the individual reader. In a similar vein, Howells observes that "Atwood's novels are characterized by their refusals to invoke any final authority as their open endings resist conclusiveness, offering instead hesitation, absence or silence while hovering on the verge of new possibilities. Their indeterminacy is a challenge to readers" (*Margaret* 10). These "new possibilities" are, in fact, perpetually changing with the dynamic act of reading. As Vevaina and Howells note, "the mindscape of the reader too undergoes metamorphosis with each reading/re-reading of Atwood's works" (viii). More specifically, as these comments suggest, the degree of the reader's involvement determines the outcome on her/himself of the novel's portrayal of the shadow. Such an interpretation coincides with Wolfgang Iser's views, for he emphasizes that reading is a dynamic process, focused on the reader's engagement (see *Act* 107-59).

Iser remarks that the reader's involvement with the fiction is transferred onto her/his apparent reality; thus the reader imaginatively creates an act of self-assessment through assessment of the text: "'transfer' of text to reader is often regarded as being brought about solely by the text. Any successful transfer however -- though initiated by the text -- depends on the extent to which this text can activate the individual reader's faculties of perceiving and processing" (*Act* 107). Within this process, the degree of agency held by the reader is not only important but paramount, for according to Iser, the exercise of agency defines the act of reading.

Similarly, the extent of the reader's involvement is a key aspect of *The Robber Bride*. Ljungberg notes that the novel "is a story of reflection and projection which depends on our [the readers'] willingness to be duped" (180). In other words, the reader's willingness to engage in the narrative is vital. As Ljungberg further explains, "[w]hereas in *Lady Oracle, The Handmaid's Tale,* and *Cat's Eye* Atwood tricks her readers into participating by making us identify with her speaker, she invites her readers to participate in a more dangerous game in *The Robber Bride*. This time, ... like Zenia, she holds up the mirror to us, to make us face our own fantasies and unconscious, 'shadowy' desires, and to recognize them for what they are" (180). Ljungberg explicitly links the reader to a confrontation with the shadow, figured in Zenia, noting that Atwood "makes us aware of the 'shadow side' and the 'left hand' in all of us" (181). That is, Atwood structures the novel to foster the reader's identification with the unsavoury aspects of her/himself -- recognition from which Atwood as reader herself is not exempt (or as author, as Oates contends above). Despite such authorial structuring, Iser emphasizes that the reader's involvement with the narrative cannot be forced; the reader maintains her/his agency:

> author and reader are to share the game of the imagination, and, indeed, the game will not work if the text sets out to be anything more than a set of governing rules. The reader's enjoyment begins when he himself becomes productive.... There are, of course, limits to the reader's willingness to participate.... [B]oredom and overstrain represent the two poles of tolerance, and in either case the reader is likely to opt out of the game. (*Act* 108)

In complementary Jungian terms, then, the reader can choose to ignore or engage with the unconscious when confronted by the shadow figure -- either in the fiction or in "reality" -- and both choices have their inevitable consequences. In addition to the reader's agency, Iser's comments draw in the element of fantasy, another means, which Jung identifies, of the unconscious manifesting itself. Part of the writer's artfulness, then, is to create a novel and characters which challenge the reader to engage in the fantasy without pressing her/him to the point where, in Iser's terms, s/he will elect "to opt out of the game."[8]

Implicitly, then, the reader's act of engagement counteracts the "normal" state of alienation in two ways: by invoking the imagination and by precipitating a recognition of the divided state. Together, these acts of engagement have the power to activate the individuation process in the reader. First, the reader's engagement with the novel invokes the imagination as a means of challenging the state of "normal" alienation; the activation of fantasy initiates a confrontation with the unconscious, which exists in the novel as the shadow figure. The reader recognizes the characters undergoing this process of confrontation and so, as Iser observes, a similar awareness can transfer from the novel to the reader's own experience. My interpretation here of the reader's activation of fantasy as a means of challenging her/his state of "normality" coincides with Laingian views, wherein fantasy is simply a different modality of experience; therefore, segregation from fantasy circumscribes the individual's experience and so is necessarily both divisive and distinctly negative (see *Politics of Experience* 20-21). Atwood's novels challenge the neat binary and, instead, foster the broadening of fantasy in the reader. Eli Mandel similarly observes that Atwood is particularly adept at countering such "devastation of experience"; he remarks that "[t]he genuine courage of Atwood's poetry is her reversal of this process of devastation, the reconstruction of a devastated world. This is not without terror. For one thing, it requires facing up to the ghosts: ghosts, ... repressed contents of

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[8] Interestingly, in interviews, Atwood herself has echoed these views; she has acknowledged the need for a surprise element in fiction for the writer (Hancock 198) and for the reader (Hancock 196) as well as the need for reader involvement (Mendez-Egle, "Witness" 169).

the imagination, social rigidity" ("Atwood's Poetic" 59-60). This same courage is evident in Atwood's novels, particularly in the manifestation of the shadow in *The Robber Bride*. Reintegration or, to borrow Mandel's term, "reconstruction" of the individual's fragmented experience is a terrifying and courageous endeavour. The act of reading, then, broadens the reader's experience or reality by engaging an often-dormant element of fantasy to re-imagine the self -- including its shadow side.

Second, reading not only invokes the imagination but, by doing so, precipitates in the reader a recognition of alienation as a condition affecting both the characters and her/himself. Thiher specifically identifies this activation of the individual's imagination as a similarity between literature and madness: "both madness and literature enable us to believe in and be moved by what in a sense does not exist, by fictions, imaginations, hallucinations, inner voices" (2). Notably, this association of madness and literature to an activation of fantasy can be described, more broadly, as an encounter with the unconscious and the unknown which exists both in the reader's self and in the fictional characters. In a metaphorical sense, then, reading is a self-induced encounter with madness. As Iser explains, "the reader is absorbed into what he himself has been made to produce through the image.... [As readers,] we are preoccupied with something that takes us out of our own given reality. This is why people often talk of escapism with regard to literature, when in actual fact they are only verbalizing the particular experience they have undergone" (*Act* 140). In other words, Iser concurs with Laing and Jung that fantasy is a modality of experience and so is positive -- and even potentially revealing -- for the reader. Although the reader removes her/himself from "reality," engagement with the novel and the subsequent act of transfer can lead to a meaningful increase of self-knowledge, a result which is actually fostered by this imaginative removal.

In this view, the commonly-held negative connotations of reading as "escapism" can be seen as misleading; if the act of reading offers escape, it also has the paradoxical potential to grip the reader and to reveal unknown (even unwelcome) aspects of

her/himself. Gilbert and Gubar observe that, in a radical sense, "since literary texts are coercive, imprisoning, fever-inducing ...[and] since literature usurps a reader's interiority, it is an invasion of privacy" (*Madwoman* 52). Nonetheless, this reading fails to acknowledge the reader's retention of agency. Although the text fosters involvement to varying degrees, such an "invasion of privacy" ultimately derives from within the self through the activation of fantasy. In Jung's terms, fantasy is an element of the unconscious psyche, and so the act of reading encompasses both consciousness and the unconscious. Iser similarly emphasizes that the reader retains agency in the act of reading and in the process of transfer; s/he cannot be forcibly engaged. The reader not only allows but, in fact, enables such "invasion" through her/his engagement with the narrative. None of the proponents of such involvement with imagined worlds -- Iser, Laing, or Jung -- contends that it is painless, yet the difficulty of the process in no way negates the value of potential discoveries. Conversely, such difficulty is an expected result of re-negotiating boundaries of the self, reality, and -- in all of its components -- "normality." Moreover, such imaginative engagement requires a degree of tenacity and so may suggest the increased value of such hard-won self-discovery. Atwood suggests a similar awareness of the pain of real involvement as opposed to so-called "escapist" reading in her comment that "[t]he literature of one's own country is not escape literature. It tells truths, some of them hard" (Sandler 52).[9]

It is significant that the recognition of such "truths" presupposes the reader's active engagement with the novel, yet some readers limit their involvement to the level of "escapism." That is, the imagination is activated in creating the characters and events of

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[9] Despite this awareness of difficulty, Atwood values the act of engaging with Canadian literature. She notes that "*Survival* was a hard book to write. It was too close to home. I'd much rather write about someone else's culture. That's why I enjoy teaching Victorian literature. That's not my country, that's not my time. I'm not involved and I can have nice aesthetic reactions" (Sandler 52). A task such as writing *Survival* necessarily implicates and involves Atwood on many levels: as a Canadian, an author, a reader, and a critic.

the fiction but these are distanced from the self and perceived as strictly "other." Iser is careful to observe that significance can only arise for the reader upon application:

> [m]eaning is the referential totality which is implied by the aspects contained in the text and which must be assembled in the course of reading. Significance is the reader's absorption of the meaning into his own existence. Only the two together can guarantee the effectiveness of an experience which entails the reader constituting himself by constituting a reality hitherto unfamiliar to himself. (*Act* 151)

That said, if the reader persists in viewing the fiction as "other" and as "just fiction," then "escapism" is certainly possible. Although it is the reader's prerogative to remain disengaged, Atwood employs methods to encourage reader involvement.[10] Iser reinforces that such involvement is essential, emphasizing that "only when the reader has been taken outside of his own experience can his viewpoint be changed. The constitution of meaning, therefore, gains its full significance when something *happens* to the reader" (*Act* 152). This "something [which] *happens*" to the reader, to phrase it in Jungian terms, is an increase in self-knowledge -- an effect which can involve the recognition of her/his own projected shadow figure.

Interestingly, Roberta Rubenstein notes that Atwood's characters are involved in a similar meaning-making experience; in a 1987 discussion of Atwood's novels, which necessarily precludes *The Robber Bride*, Rubenstein makes the general observation that "*Surfacing, Lady Oracle,* and *Life [B]efore Man* conclude somewhat irresolutely: the female protagonists -- particularly those who articulate their own stories -- gain new insight into their personal situations, but that does not inevitably alter their relation to the world" (*Boundaries* 116). Rubenstein's remarks demonstrate a suggestive but limited interpretation. On the one hand, she recognizes that Atwood's characters do not "inevitably alter their relation to the world" despite having gained a "new insight" to

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[10] Recent critical assessments of such structural methods include Christina Ljungberg's 1999 study, *To Join, to Fit, and to Make: The Creative Craft of Margaret Atwood's Fiction* and several essays in Reingard M. Nischik's 2000 collection *Margaret Atwood: Works and Impact* (see Rigney, 157-65; Müller, 229-58; Reichenbächer, 261-76). Among others, Linda Hutcheon convincingly argues for Atwood's postmodernism, in part, as a reader-involvement strategy (see *The Canadian Postmodern,* 1-25, 138-59).

themselves, and Rubenstein praises rather than criticizes Atwood for this presentation. In fact, her feminist reading celebrates Atwood's use of "irony, ambiguity, and paradox" to create "conclusion without resolution" (Rubenstein, *Boundaries* 116). On the other hand, Rubenstein states that all of Atwood's protagonists achieve self-discovery of some degree -- an arguable claim in itself -- but fails to note what distinguishes those characters who apply their knowledge from the others. I am arguing that the basic factor determining which characters do "alter their relation to the world" is their use of agency. Perhaps more problematically, Rubenstein's celebration of Atwood's unresolved conclusions also fails to acknowledge the role of the reader to "read" beyond the text. In a manner similar to Atwood's characters, the reader may choose to exercise her/his agency in application or through extrapolation of the text. Open-ended fiction functions on this very principle; the determination of what the characters' "new insight" achieves is not fatalistic or inevitably prescribed by the narrative (as Rubenstein also recognizes). Conversely, the reader attributes the outcome through her/his interpretation of the characters and events. Ultimately, Atwood's structure implicates the reader in the recognition and possibly in the activation of the self-realization process of her characters.

Notably, Iser argues that such implication has a profound effect on the engaged reader, resulting in the reader's own self-discovery. He states that

> [t]he significance of the work, then, does not lie in the meaning sealed within the text, but in the fact that that meaning brings out what had previously been sealed within us. When the subject is separated from himself, the resultant spontaneity is guided and shaped by the text in such a way that it is transformed into a new and real consciousness. Thus each text constitutes its own reader.... [There is a] reciprocity between the constituting of meaning and the heightening of self-awareness which develops in the reading process.... It is not a one-dimensional process of projections from the reader's past conventions, but a dialectical movement in the course of which his past experiences become marginal and he is able to react spontaneously; consequently, his spontaneity -- evoked and formulated by the text -- penetrates into consciousness. (Iser, *Act* 157-58)

The reader's engagement with the text, then, is an act of self-realization -- specifically, the discovery of "what had previously been sealed within us," that is, of an unrecognized

element of the self. In *The Robber Bride*, this discovery includes the unconscious figured as the shadow through an encounter with madness. In this view, the act of reading causes spontaneous reaction by imaginative removal from "reality" and thereby penetrates the reader's consciousness (Iser, *Act* 158-59). That is, the reader's disengagement from "reality" through the absorption into fiction enables reactions to the narrative and characters that differ from -- and, arguably, are less restricted than -- the reader's reactions to "real" situations and people. This spontaneity, Iser argues, will necessarily influence and broaden the reader's consciousness. Ultimately, this penetration of consciousness caused by the act of reading is similar to the result of an intrusion of the unconscious in the form of dreams, fantasy, or the shadow: the ego-conscious of the reader is challenged and, by extension, so are the definitions of normality and self. Thus, the reader's own condition of alienation is drawn to the fore through the act of reading, prompting recognition and re-definition.

Somewhat paradoxically, then, the imaginative act of reading relies on both distance from and proximity to the reader -- it is recognizably "fiction" but also applicable to "reality." In Iser's terms, the function of "reality" in literature is specifically to refine the reader's perception: "[i]n fiction, ... the use of simulated reality does not merely denote the desire to copy a familiar reality; its function is to enable us to see that familiar reality with new eyes" (*Act* 181). Similarly, Laing recognizes the significance of perception, not only through his view of fantasy as a neglected modality of experience but, more generally, by encouraging a change in the perception of so-called mad behaviour. Laing argues that his studies of schizophrenia represent and advocate "'a shift, *not* in what is seen but in the way you see it'" (Mullan 168), a shift which is largely context dependent. Such a focus on perception is particularly appropriate as a means of reading Atwood's novels, including *The Robber Bride*, for this is a characteristic theme

of her work.[11] In *Survival,* Atwood draws attention to the significance of active seeing on the part of the reader:

> in none of our acts -- even in the act of looking -- are we passive. 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. (246)

Such a view coincides with the active role posited by Laing, Jung, and Iser for the reader or individual, a role which, as Atwood states, can result in "a new way of seeing, experiencing and ... imagining." Not surprisingly, then, vision and perception are enduring key elements of Atwood's own writing. Howells describes this focus in Atwood's work as the "visual dimension ... where 'vision' is often elaborated to include insight and hallucination as well as seeing" (*Margaret* 3). Perception is duplicitous (since it can include illusion) but the implicit suggestion here is that it can also be refined. Similarly, based on his views that "active participation is fundamental to the novel," Iser has coined the term "implied reader" which "incorporates both the prestructuring of the potential meaning by the text and the reader's actualization of this potential through the reading process" (*Implied* xii). More specifically, Iser's "active participation" coincides with Atwood's "active seeing" and both translate into changed perception on the part of the reader.

As Iser states, the reader "discovers a new reality through a fiction which, at least in part, is different from the world he himself is used to; and he discovers the deficiencies inherent in prevalent norms and in his own restricted behavior" (*Implied* xiii). Most significantly for our purposes, then, through the act of reading, sanity, normality, and the

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[11] Perception is a pervasive and predominant theme not only in Atwood's prose but also in her poetry. For example, "This is a photograph of me" -- from *The Circle Game* (1966) and perhaps her most anthologized early poem -- centers on the act of perception as simultaneously deceptive, distortive, elusive, and revealing. Similarly, *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* (1970) is a collection of poems which examine the character's dual vision, and the complexity of perception is also a key feature of her most recent poetry collection, *Morning in the Burned House* (1995). Incidentally, in interviews, Atwood herself affirms her interest in and focus on perception in her work (for example, see Jim Davidson, 90-91).

self are re-viewed and reassessed. Jane Ussher points out that an important feature of defining normality is through negative association; she observes that "[t]he 'Other' is needed to define the 'One.' Through defining what is mad, we denote what is sane, what is 'normal'.... In fact, it is the fear of the fall into madness which determines our need to position the mad person as being fundamentally different from ourselves" (*Women's* 140). In Ussher's view, "normality" is not only a construct, but it is a construct based on fear and artificial distancing of the self. In short, the modern Western concept of "normality" is, as both Jung and Laing repeatedly observe, a false and limited view of the self. Nevertheless, in order to construct "normality," the mad must be defined, recognized, and then carefully distanced from the self.

Following from Iser's views, literature enables a recognition of the constructed nature of the reader's "reality" and of "normal" behaviour by positing an alternative world. Within this world, the so-called mad figure must be recognized -- thus, must be defined -- before s/he can be distanced. Ironically, the very fact that the fictional world differs from the reader's "real" world questions the stability of such categories, and so, by extension, it questions even the possibility of distancing oneself from a figure so tenuously defined. Although the reader must confront madness or the extreme unknown, when it takes the projected form of the shadow, it is an externalized part of the psyche -- the "otherness" from within the self. Thus, madness as figured in the shadow must be not only recognized but assimilated if the reader is to move beyond this confrontation. Just as the protagonists in *The Robber Bride* each come to the place of seeing and acknowledging the self in Zenia, so the reader is confronted with her/his unknown, irrational, and dark possibilities in a shadow figure. Although such movement is not inevitable -- in the views of either Jung or Iser -- it is certainly possible. Just as Jung emphasizes that the individual's potential reactions to the unconscious (including the shadow) are variable -- ranging from ignorance to assimilation -- Iser also emphasizes that the reader's role is potential rather than fixed, noting that "[t]he role of the reader as

incorporated into the novel must be seen as something potential and not actual. His reactions are not set out for him, but he is simply offered a frame of possible decisions, and when he has made his choice, then he will fill in the picture accordingly. There is scope for a great number of individual pictures" (*Implied* 55). This view of virtually unlimited use of agency increases the significance of ambiguity and open-ended texts as well as of the reader's responsibility and complicity in the act of reading.

Through Atwood's novels, particularly *The Robber Bride,* the reader is offered an opportunity not only to view madness and the unconscious in the form of the shadow figure, but also to transfer these perceptions onto her/himself. Through this act of reading and transference, an act occurring in the psyche and through the awakening of the mind's capacity for fantasy, the reader is potentially positioned to discover an unknown aspect of her/his own psyche through its own workings. To borrow Vevaina's words, "she [Atwood] does not expect her readers to respond in certain fixed ways. She values the role of the reader and evolves forms which force the reader to 'do' the fiction, rather than passively consume it.... The magic of Atwood's art is such, that we as readers find our heads placed in new spaces from which we catch the strangest glimpses of ourselves" ("Quilting" 72-73). Notably, these "glimpses" are of a self that may not be readily recognizable to the reader. Consequently, the reader of *The Robber Bride* is situated in eerie proximity to Charis, Roz, and Tony, facing unknown aspects of the self manifested in another figure. For the characters, this figure is Zenia, but for the reader, the situation is multiplied, for s/he simultaneously inhabits the roles of the protagonists and the shadow, all the while being situated outside of the fiction while concurrently creating it. In striking parallel to Atwood's protagonists who discover the irrepressible unconscious in the figure of Zenia, the reader also holds the potential for self-realization through this encounter, enacted through the reading experience. Moreover, the reader must choose her/his reaction, for the shadow, if silenced, will return -- more insistently than before.

The strategic use of structural elements and the significance of the reader's role are key features of Atwood's novels. As Howells notes, "[a]ny one of her novels shows how Atwood challenges the conventions of realism while working within them for she never pretends that words and stories offer an unproblematic access to the real world. Instead, there are always gaps to be negotiated, by the characters in the novels and also by the reader" (*Margaret* 8). Moreover, Howells asserts that Atwood is unrelenting in her expectations of the reader's interaction, arguing that "if there is a single distinguishing Atwoodian marker, it is her insistently ironic vision which challenges her readers' complacent acceptance of easy definitions about anything" (*Margaret* 2). In *The Robber Bride*, each of the protagonists must negotiate the gaps of her existence, seeking to discover the boundaries of her self through an encounter with the unknown. However, the extent to which Atwood utilizes gaps and ambiguities to challenge the reader's complacency in relation to madness is perhaps most evident in *Alias Grace*, as will be discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter Four

Descending from the Madwoman's Attic: *Alias Grace*

> My hair is coming out from under my cap. Red hair of an ogre. A wild beast, the newspaper said. A monster. When they come in with my dinner I will put the slop bucket over my head and hide behind the door, and that will give them a fright. If they want a monster so badly they ought to be provided with one.
>
> I never do such things, however. I only consider them. If I did them, they would be sure I had gone mad again. *Gone mad* is what they say, and sometimes *Run mad*, as if mad is a direction, like west; as if mad is a different house you could step into, or a separate country entirely. But when you go mad you don't go any other place, you stay where you are. And somebody else comes in.
>
> -- Margaret Atwood (*Alias Grace* 33)

Through Grace Marks' musing over the nature of madness, Atwood voices certain implications which reveal essential elements of a condition known varyingly as a disease, a psychological lack, an escape, and a threat. The connection to society is of fundamental significance to Margaret Atwood's conception of madness. Grace's remarks draw attention to the social expectations of madness which are simultaneously stereotypical, comical, melodramatic, and fear-inducing and to their constricting effect of upholding behavioural norms. Madness, then, is a condition of dislocation, a socially-conferred label for a state that is far from being understood and is kept as far from polite society as possible -- both secreted from sight and forcibly silenced. In *Alias Grace*, on the other hand, Atwood roves behind the scenes and below the surfaces to expose this societal construction. Contrary to the comfortable tenet that madness involves a "going away" or a "running off," "a different house" or "a separate country" -- terms which all foster the illusion of distance -- Atwood's novel reveals that madness is always a potential condition of existence whose segregation is illusory. As Grace knowingly observes, "you

don't go any other place, you stay where you are. And somebody else comes in." Madness is a part of society that is pushed to the background but is not obliterated. Consequently, Atwood's protagonist, Grace Marks, represents the social manifestation of what is most feared: the unknown taken to an extreme -- figured here as a psychological condition resulting in a complete loss of control and culminating in murder, yet "inhabiting" a seemingly normal or average girl.

Madness, in this construction, is an infiltration of the known self; who "comes in" at that point of departure from normative limits to delineate the state of madness is the unknown or the unconscious aspect of the psyche. This internal entry, unlike Grace's conscious decision to conform outwardly or to imitate madness, is autonomous and beyond conscious control. Atwood probes these limits of consciousness to underscore this latent "madness" -- the overbalance of the unconscious -- in the psyche of all individuals. Moreover, the novel's removal into the historical nineteenth-century timeframe serves to highlight the similarities between this era and the contemporary reader's milieu, for Jung and Laing both argue that the unconscious remains precluded from modern Western notions of "normality" -- a condition whose roots Atwood suggests in *Alias Grace*. In this respect, the designation of "madness" is exposed for its socially constructed nature and as a means of isolation used to contain any aspects of the personality deemed "irrational" or outside the norm. Consequently, sanity is presented as merely a normative limit rather than a stable construct, and as a limit that Atwood's characters transgress to varying degrees, thereby challenging its illusory nature and authority.

More specifically, the novel self-consciously represents insanity as a social role of which Grace, her psychologist, and the reader all possess variable degrees of awareness. Particularly complicating to this representation is Grace's relationship with the reader who becomes privy to her recognition of these social expectations and her subsequent conscious assumption or rejection of them. Such revelation situates the reader in a position of judgment and of questioning the "expert." A specific consideration of the

psychotherapy sessions and relationship between Grace Marks and Dr. Simon Jordan is thus in order and reveals a Jungian formulation of the psyche as consisting of both the unconscious and the conscious, thereby challenging normative constructs of self and sanity. Further, through this examination of the unconscious psyche, the social need to establish normative limits, and the reader's wary identification with both Grace (the madwoman) and Dr. Simon Jordan (the psychological expert), Atwood moves beyond a now conventional literary critical representation of identifying a link between the madwoman and the author. Rather, Atwood's construction of madness in *Alias Grace* expands the premise of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's pioneering study, *The Madwoman in the Attic,* by implicating herself (as author), other unlikely characters, and, most disturbingly, the reader as all housing the mad figure within the attic of the self.

As noted in my introduction, Gilbert and Gubar remark that the literary mad figure's "fury must be acknowledged not only by the angelic protagonist to whom s/he is opposed, but, significantly, *by the reader as well*" (78). Nevertheless, their study focuses on the madwoman as a figure of the author's "anxiety and rage" (Gilbert and Gubar, *Madwoman* 78). I would argue that these claims demand a broader examination, for their reading draws attention to the mad figure's significant role to the fictional society, as typified through interaction with the protagonist, but no less significantly, to contemporary society, as figured most prominently in the reader. Aritha van Herk observes that "[w]ith Grace, Atwood continues to test her long expressed interest in the configurations of madness, its seductions and designations, its companion role to women" (112). Consequently, I would argue that *Alias Grace* offers an exemplary site for a broader critical examination of madness, including its relation to the reader.

In this novel, Atwood depicts the mad figure as more than a manifestation of a repressed female writer or figure of rage against a patriarchal system. Conversely, Grace Marks' experience in the mental asylum argues strongly against madness as a liberating, revolutionary expression against constricting social conditions since the asylum simply

perpetuates and even intensifies the external conditions. The reader discovers that Grace's voice is ignored and silenced just as effectively within the asylum; in fact, within the asylum both Grace's conscious and unconscious voice is silenced.[1] While such a result offers the potential for feminist arguments about the asylum replicating the patriarchal social structure -- an argument that, indeed, has been made convincingly by Foucault (252-55), among others (Caminero-Santangelo, Chesler, Ehrenreich and English, Showalter, and Ussher, *Psychology* and *Women's*) -- the distinction I am drawing here is that if Grace's sixteen-month period at the Asylum was an attempt at escape or rebellion, it must be viewed as a thwarted one. In Phyllis Chesler's words, "[m]ental asylums rarely offer asylum" (35). Thus, as a madwoman, Grace is thoroughly silenced and loses any potential for agency. This madness, Marta Caminero-Santangelo observes, "ultimately traps the woman in silence" and is "hopelessly disempowering" (3-4), for "the madwoman loses her title to humanity" (13). That said, Atwood's depiction of the madwoman also goes beyond the converse representation of Grace as a disillusioned and thwarted female figure of rebellion.

In order to achieve this effect, Atwood's construction of the madwoman demands more than the reader's recognition of the madwoman as a manifestation of the author's mental fragmentation. Rather, the reader is positioned to recognize her/himself in this "mad" psyche, for Atwood's mad figure represents a manifestation of the unacknowledged -- nonetheless existent -- unconscious psychological aspect of every reader. The fact that this unconscious element of the psyche exists in every individual (author, characters, reader) problematizes facile assumptions of in/sanity, for in a Jungian view, the unconscious is worthy of the most intense psychological investigation but remains wholly unknowable. The irrational cannot be eradicated from the self; conversely, for self-realization, the unconscious psyche must be recognized,

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[1] As I will argue later in this chapter, Grace's unconscious psyche manifests itself in the form of dreams, sleepwalking, and, most intensely, is projected and internalized as the voice of Mary Whitney.

acknowledged, and accommodated in psychic balance -- a task faced equally by Atwood's characters and the reader.

Although the historical distance between Atwood's nineteenth-century novel and the contemporary, twenty-first century reader may appear problematic, this apparent vantage point serves to underline the shared degree of ignorance between the characters and the reader. Rather than distancing the reader from the situation, this distance reinforces the constancy of an individual's engagement with the psyche and the preservation of its mystery. Contemporary psychological awareness -- whether Freudian or Jungian -- does position the reader to recognize the characters' confrontation with the unconscious but, ironically, does not situate her/him in a privileged position regarding her/his own psychic condition. That is, while the reader may have labels and terms for the psychological procedures and experiences which Atwood portrays, Jung emphasizes that contemporary society is no further ahead in regaining psychic balance overall. Conversely, Jung argues that the age of science and statistics has resulted in increasingly dissociated states for the individual within her/his society (*Undiscovered* 8). Thus, the reader is situated to recognize the confrontation and psychoanalytic procedures occurring within the fiction, but this awareness may only highlight her/his own psychic ignorance and imbalance. This awareness can be made only more bitter and baffling by the knowledge of the psychological tools and perspective that contemporary society has at its disposal.

However, the act of engaged reading itself offers a possible corrective avenue by resisting such dissociation and, through transferral, offering the reader an opportunity to confront her/his own social and psychic situation. *Alias Grace*, unassumingly positioned in the nineteenth century, offers an even greater potential for such transferral since the reader is in the paradoxical position of one who is intellectually informed yet psychologically dissociated and physically or historically removed. In *Revels in Madness:*

Insanity in Medicine and Literature, Allen Thiher posits interesting connections among medical history, philosophical history, and literature:

> I call upon the history of medicine for its theories and determinations of the causes of madness; and upon the history of philosophy for its attempts to fix the boundaries of the rational and the irrational. Paralleling these discourses is literature as a form of knowledge that defines, in conjunction with medicine and philosophy, what are the contours of the self and its relation to the world. And with that knowledge comes a desire to know what is on the other side of those contours -- madness, deviance, insanity. (5)

Thiher views these intersections as so fundamental that his study of madness arises out of the dynamic relations of these discourses rather than their discrete existence. I would argue that Thiher's remarks endorse my view that the role of the reader becomes increasingly significant with the perspective offered by historical distance -- in particular, for the reader of *Alias Grace*, through the value of psychological knowledge which tempers her/his interpretation of the literature. Nevertheless, such a view does not exempt the contemporary reader from the fear or threat of that implicit madness represented by the unknown. Thiher shares this awareness, noting that his own study is motivated, in part, by his own recognition that "insanity impinges upon all of us throughout our lives" (5). It is my contention that Atwood confronts her reader in just these terms, for *Alias Grace* is a manifestation of an interstice between history (social, medical, psychological), the self, and madness which the reader must unravel. Similarly, van Herk declares the reader's complicity in Atwood's enigmatic representation of the madwoman, observing that "[a]bove all, the novel makes clear that readers need to take responsibility for their own voyeurism, for a pan-Victorian tendency to lick lips and to believe all the contradictory things that are said about Grace" (112). As will be discussed, this view corresponds to Iser's contention that the reader bears responsibility both for making sense of the fictional representation and, subsequently, for making meaning out of it.

Atwood's representation of Grace -- particularly through her relationship with Simon Jordan, her would-be analyst -- exemplifies Lillian Feder's general comment on madness in literature. Feder remarks that

> [t]he treatment of madness in literature reflects human ambivalence toward the mind itself; madness, comprising its strangest manifestations, is also familiar, a fascinating and repellent exposure of the structures of dream and fantasy, of irrational fears and bizarre desires ordinarily hidden from the world and the conscious self. In literature, as in daily life, madness is the perpetual amorphous threat within and the extreme of the unknown in fellow human beings. In fact, recurrent literary representations of madness constitute a history of explorations of the mind in relation to itself, to other human beings, and to social and political institutions. (4)

Moreover, Simon's manifestation of this ambivalence implicates him as fearing this unknown not only in Grace but within himself, thereby revealing the social relevance of the mad figure. Atwood's presentation of the ambivalence toward the mind and the fear of madness deriving from within the medical community itself is historically accurate, as revealed by its continuation to date, and is especially provocative. The novel emphasizes the degree of ignorance regarding the unconscious, but ultimately inverts any smug self-assurance on the reader's part by squarely implicating her/him in the final interpretation and decision of in/sanity. Ironically, Simon's uncertainty suddenly appears entirely warranted. Even though the reader is privy to much more information than Simon -- both by virtue of her/his contemporary knowledge and by Atwood's revelation of Grace's thoughts (which are often withheld from Simon) -- the reader still mirrors Simon's fascination and confusion.

Jung emphasizes that modern society continues to ignore the extent, nature, and significance of the unconscious (Evans, *Jung* 134); this view is particularly illuminating in regard to Atwood's representation of the analyst-analysand relationship and its similarity to the contemporary situation. The basic Jungian argument for the existence of the unconscious is based on the observation of its unrecognized partnership with the conscious mind, and one of Jung's more common examples involves the collaboration of

the psyche while speaking; he notes that "[w]hen you make a speech, the next sentence is being prepared while you speak, but this preparation is mostly unconscious. If the unconscious does not collaborate and withholds the next sentence you are stuck.... Thus you depend on the goodwill of your unconscious." To underscore the autonomy of the unconscious, Jung pointedly adds that "[a]ny time the unconscious chooses, it can defeat your otherwise good memory, or put something into your mouth that you did not intend at all" (*Symbols* 115). This claim is telling and offers a means of reading Grace's mysterious amnesia and uncontrolled actions as well as Simon's unintended thoughts and responses.

The autonomous intrusions of the unconscious are evident both in Grace's and, more surprisingly, in Simon's disconnected thoughts and speech. Overtly, Atwood situates Grace in closer proximity to the unconscious through her actions. Indeed, the very question of Grace's culpability in the murders of Thomas Kinnear and Nancy Montgomery hinges on such a lapse from consciousness, for she claims to have amnesia regarding much of what occurred that day. Great spans of time are simply obliterated from Grace's conscious memory -- this is the situation which Simon has been commissioned to resolve in order to absolve Grace of the murders by request of Reverend Enoch Verringer and some of Kingston's elite who believe in her innocence. Grace's amnesia traces back to her first job as servant in the home of Mrs. Alderman Parkinson where she witnessed the death of her friend, Mary Whitney; Mary was impregnated by the youngest Parkinson son, George, and gruesomely bled to death from a botched abortion. Grace's first period of amnesia occurs after this death; she hears Mary's voice, faints from shock, loses consciousness for ten hours, and awakens briefly in utter confusion. During this interlude, Grace does not regain her senses; that is, she claims not to be Grace and threatens to drown herself -- only to lapse back into a deep sleep for another day, before regaining consciousness. In reference to this incident, Grace tells Simon, "'I had no memory of anything I said or did during the time I was awake, between the two long sleeps; and this worried me'" (180). Notably, Grace's rendition of her life involves an

overlap of her conscious existence with disturbing, autonomous intrusions of the unconscious and Simon's reaction is cautious. He reflects on Grace's tale, remarking that "she'd lost her memory, too; though only for some hours, and during a normal-enough fit of hysterics -- but still, it may prove significant." Perhaps more suggestively, Simon wonders if the fact that this is the only thing Grace seems to have forgotten is equally significant: "he has an uneasy sense that the very plenitude of her recollections may be a sort of distraction, a way of drawing the mind away from some hidden but essential fact" (185). The analyst, then, seems inclined to credit the unconscious but remains wary of its mystery.

Grace's experience of fainting and loss of consciousness recurs at the Kinnear residence, combined with sleepwalking during dream-like trances. To complicate matters further, not only does Grace slip from consciousness into dreams, but she dreams of slipping from the consciousness of the dream experience. During a thunderstorm preceding the murders, Grace again hears a voice, is "frightened into a fit ... [before] los[ing] consciousness altogether" (279). She has an ominous dream that takes place outside, involving a sensual experience with "Death himself" and headless "angels ... sitting in silent judgment upon Mr. Kinnear's house" (280-81). Grace claims that "[i]n the dream, I then lost consciousness, from sheer terror" and awakens to find herself back in her room, the hem of her nightgown wet and her feet stained with grass and mud. Suggestively, Grace herself connects this incident to the day of Mary's death, remarking that "my heart sank within me" (281). This blurred distinction between dreaming and reality does not subside after the murders but continues to mark Grace's perception in the penitentiary. Even while she is undergoing the sessions with Simon, Grace's sleep -- a slip from consciousness itself -- is disturbed by dreams, those harbingers of the unconscious, which figure as jarring flashes of nightmare scenarios peppered with events from her past and separated only by breaks of complete unconsciousness (297-98). Notably, Grace seems to view these breaks as normal lapses, tentatively describing them

as moments during which "I think I sleep" (297-98). This blurring of consciousness and unconsciousness, dreaming and waking, reminds the reader of Grace's possible unreliability as a narrator. Similarly, Grace's uncertainty of her degree of consciousness indicates that her thoughts as well as her conversation with Simon may be suspect. The keyhole which Atwood offers to Grace's mind still offers only indirect access. Ironically, standing at that keyhole may leave the reader with an even deeper sense of uncertainty than Simon exhibits. Such uncertainty also encourages the reader's engagement with the novel as s/he seeks to form her/his own educated interpretation of events. In this fashion, *Alias Grace* demonstrates Atwood's enduring reader involvement strategies, such as the manipulation of gaps which Helmut Reichenbächer identifies in *The Edible Woman* as Atwood's method of "delegating responsibility to the reader" to reconstruct the novel (273-74).

Although Grace seems to be more closely aligned to the irrational and the unconscious, Atwood inverts this expected connection of the madwoman to the unknown by also positioning Simon, the analyst, in direct contact with his own unconscious, thereby problematizing the designations between sanity and madness. Because of its unexpected nature, perhaps the most striking example of the unconscious asserting itself in the loss of control between thought and speech processes occurs during Grace's hypnosis -- a final measure of attempting to determine her guilt or innocence. While Grace's own experience during the hypnosis will be discussed later, Simon's response is revealing. Ironically, he is most skeptical of the very procedure that demonstrates, in classical Jungian terms, the existence of his own unconscious. When Simon is allowed to question Grace, who is apparently hypnotized, he suddenly blurts out, "'[a]sk her ... whether she ever had relations with James McDermott.'" He is instantly mortified by his own words, musing that "[h]e hasn't been intending to pose this question; certainly not at first, and never so directly. But isn't it -- he sees it now -- the one thing he most wants to know?" (399). Clearly, the unconscious has intruded and its intrusion carries hidden truth.

As Kamala Gopalan observes, "Atwood ... mocks the objectivity and truth claims of science or pseudosciences. Dr. Jordan, driven by his curiosity to explore the interiors of Grace Marks' psyche, unleashes the demons in his own. The line between sanity and insanity is a thin one" (77). In this view, Dr. Simon Jordan is positioned no more favourably than the hypnotist, Dr. Jerome DuPont (alias Jeremiah the peddlar), whom Simon so clearly disparages and dismisses as fraudulent. While the reader is tempted to snigger at Simon's predicament, by extension, s/he is similarly implicated; even with the vast amount of psychological progress since the nineteenth-century, the unconscious retains a degree of mystery. In Jungian terms, "[i]ndefinitely large areas of the mind still remain in darkness" (*Symbols* 73), for "[o]ur psyche ... remains an insoluble puzzle and an incomprehensible wonder, an object of abiding perplexity" (*Undiscovered* 25). Interestingly, Rosemary Sullivan notes that from her earliest work, Atwood has possessed a similar interest in the psyche, seeking "an understanding of why humans behave the way they do: why the self is a mystery even to itself; why we crouch on the edge of the psyche unwilling to enter the depths below" (*Red* 160). Sullivan's description of *Alias Grace* suggests that Atwood seems to answer her own early queries, for "Simon Jordan stands at the edge of the psyche he thinks he can master and, when he sees his own dark uncontrollable impulses, runs in terror" (*Red* 225). Simon demonstrates the reason for human reluctance to engage with the psyche in Jungian terms as a fear of what might be discovered (*Undiscovered* 28).

Jung's view of the unconscious holds significant potential for a study of *Alias Grace* in its willingness to engage with the unknown realm of the psyche. Moreover, Jung's views correspond to Atwood's portrayal of all individuals -- characters and reader alike -- as confronted with the unknown in the psyche. Karen Stein's general observation of Atwood's work is particularly relevant to this novel; Stein notes that "[a]s Atwood continually reminds us, stories are always ambiguous and subject to interpretation" (4). This ambiguity and the need for interpretation are redoubled in *Alias Grace*, where the

reader is confronted with multiple versions of Grace's story and her limited understanding of her own unconscious. Atwood's inclusion of the unknown challenges the characters' and reader's dismissal of what is conventionally considered "irrational" and suggestively implicates even the fictional (and fictitious) "experts" as unable to decode or to contain their own unconscious. This autonomy of the unconscious is particularly revealing in the figure of Simon, the figure who posits himself as Grace's analyst and ironically succeeds in revealing his own ignorance. By destabilizing the psychological voice of authority, Atwood's novel questions notions -- even the "expert" opinions -- of madness and posits the need for assessment at the reader's door. Moreover, as Coral Ann Howells notes, "her [Atwood's] recognition that texts are created by their readers as much as by their writer ... displaces the concepts of writerly authority and absolute meaning in favour of a more open and pluralistic approach to the availability of fiction" (*Private* 53-54). That is, Atwood also removes herself as an author(ity) figure, leaving the reader no recourse outside of her/himself. Earl G. Ingersoll argues that *Alias Grace* undermines "reading strategies of the sophisticated reader" including "that the text is an expression of Atwood's omniscient mind, which can enter at will the consciousness of a Grace in the first-person or a Dr. Jordan in the third-person narrative point of view" (389). Conversely, by removing absolute authority, Atwood strategically empowers the reader. Critics often remark on Atwood's structuring of the novel to implicate the reader; Reingard Nischik even observes that this strategy is evident in Atwood's first novel, where in this early use of gaps, "we see Atwood striving towards a text format which she brought to perfection in her later works" ("Flagpoles" 9). This removal of explanatory passages is enhanced in *Alias Grace* by the inclusion of contradictory fragments, all of which the reader must decipher and interpret.

In *Alias Grace*, Atwood convincingly counters Grace's view of her own experience and psyche with the views held by the authorities and emphasizes the connection of the latter to the larger community. Three men represent the side of the

medical experts: Doctors Workman, Bannerling, and Jordan. Both Dr. Joseph Workman and Dr. Samuel Bannerling express their views in letters of response sent to Dr. Simon Jordan. As Medical Superintendent of Toronto's Provincial Lunatic Asylum, Joseph Workman is in a position to offer suggestions on the day-to-day operations of such an institution. One letter details the grisly lack of sanitation along with practical advice on how to counter and prevent the physical consequences of such conditions. There is sound logic in many of Workman's conclusions; for example, he acknowledges the difficulties of political practices which force the mentally unstable to inhabit the same facilities as criminals (48-49) and acknowledges that the mind and body are inextricably connected. He notes that "it is of no use to attempt to minister to a mind diseased, whilst the body is afflicted by infections. This side of things is too often neglected" (47). In particular, Workman's description of Grace is telling, for he does not refute her condition upon admission to the asylum but speaks in a qualified manner of her mental stability; Workman writes, "[a]s to the degree of insanity by which she was primarily affected, I am unable to speak. It was my impression that for a considerable time past she had been sufficiently sane to warrant her removal from the Asylum" (48). Workman's own terms indicate that insanity is a variable term, but more importantly, so is sanity; he refers to Grace as "sufficiently sane."

Based on these views, it may seem unsurprising that Workman conveys a compassionate tone in his strong recommendation of "gentle treatment" for Grace (48), yet the undertone of his view is unmistakably medical. As outlined in my introductory chapter, the perception of psychological conditions as medical diseases had serious implications that continue to reverberate in the present. *Alias Grace* highlights this historical shift in the social perception of madness; as Atwood observes, in this era, "madness... was increasingly coming to be seen as an illness" ("Ophelia"). Workman views madness as a physical, internal weakness of the brain and strongly advocates his belief that external factors can not "induce insanity in a truly sound mind -- I think," he

writes to Simon, "there is always a predisposing cause which renders the individual liable to the malady, when exposed to any disturbing agency, whether mental or physical" (48). Perhaps the attribution of biological frailty fosters Workman's compassion, as it most certainly guides his practices. Denise Russell notes that medical or biological psychiatry, the contemporary version of Workman's views, posits a sharp "distinction between madness, mental illness or disorder on the one side, and sanity or normality on the other"; moreover, it follows "a guiding assumption that the causes of mental illness or disorder are biological and that the treatments should be in that realm" (1). Interestingly, despite Workman's apparent awareness of the variable interpretations of mental in/stability, the premise of his view is one of clear division and of madness as the Other, as his comments regarding "a truly sound mind" suggest.

Further, while Workman's benign bedside manner is not representative of the profession, neither is it as straightforward as it appears. In her article "Beyond Grace: Criminal Lunatic Women," Kathleen Kendall offers some insightful historical facts about Toronto's Provincial Lunatic Asylum and the Kingston Penitentiary. Among these, she notes that "Grace Marks was one of the first among a small number of nineteenth-century Canadian prisoners to be labelled 'criminal lunatics'" (110). The significance of this fact is tied to Workman's disapproval of lodging criminals and the mentally unstable in the same facility. Clearly, Grace straddles this neat division; Workman views this as problematic. As Kendall notes, "[n]ot only did Workman believe that criminals were not amenable to moral treatment because of their evil natures, he was unable to segregate them due to a lack of space. This destroyed his system of classification, order, and control, which underpinned the therapeutic philosophy" (113). Kendall further observes that J. E. Moran's research demonstrates the coping strategy which was adopted: "[t]o rid himself of the criminal lunatics, Workman simply reported that their sanity had returned and shipped them back to the penitentiary" (113). Since Workman's release of inmates was often false and merely pragmatic, his qualified designation of Grace as "sufficiently

sane" is called into question by the reader and becomes suspiciously vague. Interestingly, in her afterword to the novel Atwood points out two relevant facts: "[d]etails of prison and asylum life are drawn from available records. Most of the words in Dr. Workman's letter are his own" (465).

Notably, Atwood fosters the reader's hesitancy by carefully balancing her representation of the medical community as one rife with conflict. Juxtaposed to Dr. Workman is Dr. Samuel Bannerling, a physician who treated Grace during her stay at the Asylum and to whom Workman refers Simon Jordan. Bannerling's letter makes no attempt to downplay their disparity of opinion, but abruptly announces, "Dr. Workman and I have not always seen eye to eye. In my estimation -- and I was at the Asylum for more years than he has yet been there -- his policies of leniency have led him to undertake a fool's errand" (70). No tones of compassion resound here. Conversely, Bannerling is of the opinion that Grace is a manipulative fraud. He warns Simon that she is a dangerous criminal, claiming that "[s]he is as devoid of morals as she is of scruples, and will use any unwitting tool that comes to hand" (71). Bannerling firmly insists that "she was not in fact insane.... To speak plainly, her madness was a fraud and an imposture, adopted by her in order that she might indulge herself and be indulged, the strict regimen of the Penitentiary ... not having been to her liking" (71). Ironically, Bannerling's view of Grace's sanity is far more defined than Workman's; although both doctors posit an opposition between sanity and madness, Bannerling sees no degrees of mental stability. Since he is convinced that Grace is sane, she must be imitating madness, for he views people as irredeemably mad or sane.

This stark segregation is based on Bannerling's strong opinion that "[t]he taint of insanity is in the blood" (70). Notably, Atwood includes the possibility of such heredity on Grace's part. Her father is portrayed as an abusive alcoholic whose violent actions suggest mental instability. Prior to their immigration, Grace's family is poverty-stricken in Ireland. At the birth of his twelfth child, her father speaks of killing or, at least, in fine

Swiftian fashion, of eating his own child; Grace recounts that "he said it made him hungry just to look at it, it would look very nice on a platter with roast potatoes all round and an apple in its mouth. And then he said why were we all staring at him" (110). Before this birth, Grace herself admits to having considered killing her five younger siblings to spare them from poverty and attributes this evil thought to "the Devil, no doubt. Or more likely... my father, for at that age I was still trying to please him" (108). After Grace's mother dies on the voyage, Grace's father is somewhat subdued but soon gains a reputation for being unstable as a worker. In his alcoholic stupour, he acts without reason, violently beating Grace in unpredictable rages, as he had done to his wife; Grace fears these outbursts: "[i]t was the never knowing when he would go off his head like that and start rampaging about, and threaten to kill this or that person, including his own children, for no reason that anybody could see at all, apart from the drink" (129). Perhaps unsurprisingly, such behaviour actually provokes Grace to consider killing her own father and decides she must leave the house, going into service at Mrs. Alderman Parkinson's to save herself from the temptation of indulging her own anger (129). It is suggestive that Grace's first fainting fits occur during her father's beatings, and that her father's reaction to these horrific scenes is to claim a sort of amnesia; Grace recounts that "after these rages he would wake up in the morning and say he couldn't remember a thing about it, and he hadn't been himself, and he didn't know what got into him" (129). Eerily, Atwood's inclusion of these details suggests that Grace's own mental state could have been affected by the external physical "disturbing agency" (as Workman defines insanity) or, equally, by Bannerling's belief in the inevitable "taint in the blood." Conversely, Grace's reliance on amnesia as an alibi may also be a wily imitation of her father's behaviour.

More specifically, Bannerling views madness as an inevitable, inherited condition and chillingly argues that "[m]ost who suffer from the more severe nervous and cerebral disorders cannot be cured, but merely controlled" (70). Although he seems to indicate

there are exceptions, in practical terms, Bannerling treats all the inmates as equally barred from a return to sanity, scoffing at any apparent success Workman claims to have achieved; Bannerling notes that "these supposed cures will no doubt in time prove to have been superficial and temporary" (70). Consequently, in his view, only the established, harsh methods of treatment -- "physical restraint and correction, a restricted diet, and cupping and bleeding to reduce excessive animal spirits" -- have had any efficacy, and these only as a means of control rather than cure (70). As Bannerling's own admission of his reliance on the supposedly proven methods of the past suggests, he is strongly influenced by the eighteenth-century perception of madness -- a view which Foucault summarizes as the belief that "[u]nchained animality could be mastered only by *discipline* and *brutalizing*" (75). Moreover, the specifics of Bannerling's methods bear out Atwood's claim that Victorian asylums offered anything but asylum; as she provocatively remarks,

> [t]he Victorians cleaned up the straw and the chains of the old Bedlam-like institutions of the eighteenth century, but they didn't always clean up the practices. Patients were drugged, starved, drained of vast quantities of blood, beaten up, swung from ropes, immersed in cold water and whirled around in the air upside-down, all in the belief that it would improve their mental states. Ask yourself whether this is likely to have been true. ("Ophelia")

In the midst of the extremes represented by Doctors Workman and Bannerling, the reader identifies her/himself with Dr. Simon Jordan in his attempts to clarify -- or perhaps, to prove -- his own more moderate perspective.

Simon Jordan, a medical man early in his career and interested in mental disorders, fosters a sense of identification for the reader not only because the narrative traces his line of inquiry but also because his method moves beyond the purely theoretical. Whereas Workman and Bannerling both have contact with the mentally unstable, only Workman shows any indication of regarding the patients as individual human beings and in seeking to find treatment for them. Bannerling, on the other hand, retains what Foucault identifies as the common perception of the late eighteenth and early

nineteenth century, a period in which "[m]adness became pure spectacle" (69) and so took on the role of the Other. Foucault observes that madness was equated with a loss of humanity and so was perceived as entirely segregated from sane civilization: "[m]adness had become a thing to look at: no longer a monster inside oneself, but an animal with strange mechanisms, a bestiality from which man had long since been suppressed" (70). Ironically, this starkly divided view of the mad as animalistic aligns Bannerling with the schizoid individual who similarly perceives her/himself as dissociated from others as well as in mind-body. Laing argues that "depersonalizing the person who is the 'object' of our study ... yields false 'knowledge.'" Further, he contends that "[d]epersonalization in a theory that is intended to be a theory of persons is as false as schizoid depersonalization of others and is no less ultimately an intentional act" (*Divided* 23). In this view, Bannerling is, in fact, more closely aligned to the "animalistic" schizoid than other characters in the novel.[2]

Simon, on the other hand, disagrees with Bannerling's theory of heredity (133) and intentionally personalizes Grace's case. Grace herself notes the difference between the two medical men, observing that "whatever I said [in the courtroom] would be twisted around, even if it was the plain truth in the first place. And it was the same with Dr. Bannerling at the Asylum. But now I feel as if everything I say is right. As long as I say something, anything at all, Dr. Jordan smiles and writes it down, and tells me I am doing well" (68-69). Thus, through these two medical experts, Atwood represents two starkly different modes of perception. Laing describes the significance of these modes: "man can be seen as person or thing. Now, even the same thing, seen from different points of view, gives rise to two entirely different descriptions, and the descriptions give rise to two entirely different theories, and the theories result in two entirely different sets of action"

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[2] Notably, Atwood suggests in the novel that Bannerling acted in an animalistic manner by sexually abusing the inmates, including Grace Marks. Grace herself recounts Bannerling's violations (32, 34) and Reverend Verringer notes Bannerling's association with Warden Smith, a man convicted of inflicting such brutalities (78-79).

(*Divided* 18-19). Laing adds that "[o]ne acts towards an organism differently from the way one acts towards a person. The science of persons is the study of human beings that begins from a relationship with the other as a person and proceeds to an account of the other still as a person" (*Divided* 20). Clearly, such differences will be critical determinants in the assumptions, means, and results of any analyst's view of one's psychological condition. In short, Laing observes that "[m]an as seen as an organism or man as seen as a person discloses different aspects of the human reality to the investigator" (*Divided* 20). Jung similarly focuses on the analyst's need to view the analysand as a human being rather than a scientific category, and, more specifically, to view that human being as an individual (see "The Plight of the Individual in Modern Society," *Undiscovered* 3-11).

Simon Jordan easily distances himself from Bannerling's dismissive views and so is positioned to see things hidden from Bannerling. In fact, Simon is considered one of the "modern" forward-thinking medical men as opposed to Bannerling's dated perceptions and methods. Simon's presence in Kingston is based on this reputation; he was recommended to Reverend Verringer by a distinguished Swiss physician, Dr. Binswanger. Verringer tells Simon that they are seeking "'an authority on this side of the Atlantic,'" and that Binswanger "'said you are well up on cerebral diseases and nervous affliction, and that in matters concerning amnesia you are on your way to becoming a leading expert. He claims you are one of the up-and-coming men'" (78). In spite of this expertise, Simon admits that "'[i]t [amnesia] is a baffling area'" (78), and thus he travels to Kingston in an attempt to clarify the specifics of his views. His interest in Grace Marks derives from a similar impulse; Simon wishes to test the theoretical on a real subject and this translation from theory to practice enables the reader to associate her/himself with Simon's experimental psychotherapy sessions.

Although Simon is undoubtedly attempting to establish a greater reputation for himself, his tentative line of thought still parallels the reader's uncertainty. The day after

meeting Grace, Simon ruminates on the curious nature of his own thought processes, speculating that

> [p]erhaps a maniac is simply one for whom these associative tricks of the brain cross the line that separates the literal from the merely fanciful, as may happen under the influence of fevers, and of somnambulistic trances, and of certain drugs. But what is the mechanism? For there must be one. Is the clue to be found in the nerves, or in the brain itself? To produce insanity, what must first be damaged, and how? (60)

Simon suggests that there may be more similarity between sanity and madness than commonly held, and seems uncertain of the actual distinctions. Perhaps more tellingly, Simon unwittingly reveals that his own psyche remains mysterious to him, the "authority." However, Simon's uncertainty is deceptive. Although Atwood has created a character who seems distanced from Workman and Bannerling and aligned with the reader, Simon is also unmistakably positioned as one of the "experts" or medical men.

In these musings over the "mechanism" of mania, Simon wrestles with the main medical views of insanity as a disease of the nerves or the brain, and the process of his own mental word association wherein the "*Middle term* [is] *essential*" (60) forms a striking parallel to Jung's early word association experiments. Although Jung eventually abandoned their use, word association experiments were an important avenue in his early psychotherapy sessions. In an interview, Jung offers an explanation for his reliance on this method: "the [word] association experiment has given me access to their [his patients'] unconscious. I learned about the things they did not tell me, and I got a deep insight into things of which they were not aware" (Evans, *Jung* 119-20). In fact, through these experiments, Jung discovered "areas of emotional blocks" for which he coined the term "complex," a major concept in contemporary psychology; consequently, he strongly recommends such projective tests as training tools, referring to them as "the best means to make them [psychologists early in their careers] see how the unconscious works" (Evans, *Jung* 120). Later in his career, Jung abandoned the word association experiments in favour of dream analysis as a more revealing method of discovering the individual's

unconscious (*CW* 7:21; *Abstracts* 71). However, it seems clear that Jung's interest in the word association complemented and, to some extent, fostered his belief in the extent and autonomy of the unconscious.

Atwood's depiction of Simon resembles that of Workman and Bannerling in the sense that she is careful to place him historically. Perhaps this awareness informs Ingersoll's assessment of the novel; he argues for a "grounding of Simon as a forerunner of Freud" (389). Conversely, I would contend that this assumption is too limiting, for Simon is certainly described as a forerunner to contemporary psychology, but not strictly Freudian. Particularly in relation to the associative tests, to label Simon's interest as pre-Freudian is misleading. While it is undeniable that Jung was closely associated with Freud and that Jung's use of the word association methods coincided with his partnership with Freud, nonetheless, the attribution of these experiments to Freud is a common misconception. As Jung notes, "just when I began my career ... I applied the experimental association methods of [Wilhelm] Wundt ... and I studied the results.... [T]he interesting thing is why people could *not* react to certain stimulus words" (Evans, *Jung* 42).[3] Jung further explains in this same interview that his recognition of this absence -- during his independent research -- led to an understanding of Freud's concept of repression and a deep interest in the unconscious (Evans, *Jung* 42-43). Ironically, while Jung's results with word association began his correspondence with Freud, ultimately Jung's broadening of the unconscious -- which resulted from these same experiments -- also led to the dissolution of his partnership with Freud (Evans, *Jung* 43). Thus, Simon's action of taking the apple and other vegetable "prompts" into his sessions with Grace aligns him with such psychological authorities as Wundt, Freud, and Jung -- both in the retrospective view of the contemporary reader and also by contextualizing him as a medical expert like

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[3] Wilhelm Wundt (1832-1920) is a precursor of Freud and Jung, a German psychologist and philosopher, founder of experimental (or scientific) psychology. He is credited with important progress, including offering the first academic course in psychology (1862), establishing the first laboratory for experimental psychology (1879), and founding the first psychological journal, *Philosophische Studien* (1881) ("Wundt").

Workman and Bannerling. Moreover, Simon's use of such projective tests signals his interest in the unconscious.

Although Atwood seems to credit these early psychological experiments, her novel simultaneously challenges them. Atwood's portrayal of Grace shrewdly undercuts both the efficacy and the premise of these experiments by recognizing Simon's analytic motivation. In response to his first object prompt, the apple, Grace suggestively muses, "[h]e's playing a guessing game, like Dr. Bannerling at the Asylum. There is always a right answer, which is right because it is the one they want, and you can tell by their faces whether you have guessed what it is" (40). Following similar dead-ends with root vegetables, Simon takes stock of his method: "[a]ccording to his theories, the right object ought to evoke a chain of disturbing associations in her [Grace]; although so far she's treated his offerings simply at their face value, and all he's got out of her has been a series of cookery methods" (90). Simon does not credit Grace with recognition of his method or with the possibility of intentional avoidance even though she tells him, "'I can say anything I like; or if I don't wish to, I needn't say anything at all'" (90). Through Grace's astute recognition, then, the reader is positioned ambiguously, with her/his affinity for Simon fading as he steps into the role of medical expert. Simultaneously, Grace's reactions become understandably defensive; from the first, she refuses to cooperate in this guessing game and purposely resorts to an evasive maneuver instead: "I look at him stupidly. I have a good stupid look which I have practised" (38). Grace will not engage in the middle-term exchange for the simple reason that she perceives Simon as a doctor and as a threat, admitting to herself that "I do not trust him at all" (40). Likewise, the reader's implicit trust in Simon has begun to recede as s/he begins to perceive Simon as Grace's antagonist.

Simon certainly views Grace as a medical challenge, and confesses in correspondence to his friend, Dr. Edward Murchie, that he expects that "the gentle Grace, having been hardened in the fire now for some fifteen years, will be a very hard nut to

crack" (54). Nevertheless, Simon also observes that his aim is to win Grace's trust since this is a necessary prerequisite for his method of discovery and that he recognizes that, with just cause based on her experiences, Grace will be reluctant to trust him (54). Indeed, Jung argues that if a psychologist is to move beyond scientific knowledge or classification to understanding the individual, this must occur in the context of a relationship rather than an objective means of treatment; to have any possibility of success in understanding, the analyst must see "the unique human being ... as the supreme and only real object of investigation" (*Undiscovered* 7). In this view, Simon's impulse to win Grace's trust is laudable and, in fact, has become the contemporary basis for psychotherapy. By extension, Atwood positions Simon as concurrently seeking to gain the reader's trust; thereby she implicitly suggests that the reader may mirror Grace's hesitation in granting it. As Klaus Peter Müller notes, "Atwood invites her readers to resist authoritarian power and to participate actively in constructing her texts" (254). Atwood destabilizes categories of authority within and without the text -- including characters in positions of authority and herself as the author figure. Her portrayal of Simon challenges assumptions held by the characters and by the reader, thereby emphasizing the reader's active role in "constructing her texts."

As noted in my introductory chapter, the assumption that madness is a readily identifiable condition is challenged by psychology itself; this questioning is indicated by the historical variations in constructions of mental health, or conversely, of what constitutes "madness." A similar multiplicity and indeterminacy characterized nineteenth-century views of mental health. As Atwood notes in her afterword to *Alias Grace*, the proliferation of theories is partly what inspired her writing:

> The rapid generation of new theories of mental illness was a characteristic of the mid-nineteenth century, as was the creation of clinics and asylums, both public and private. There was intense curiosity and excitement about phenomena such as memory and amnesia, somnambulism, 'hysteria,' trance states, 'nervous diseases,' and the import of dreams, among scientists and

> writers alike.... I have attempted to ground Dr. Simon Jordan's speculations in contemporary ideas that would have been available to him. (466)

The consequent proliferation of cases and asylums that Atwood identifies here is echoed by Dr. Workman in the novel. As he explains to Simon: "[e]nterprises such as yours [a proposed private institution] are unfortunately much required at present, both in our own country and in yours, as, due to the increased anxieties of modern life and the consequent stresses upon the nerves, the rate of construction can scarcely keep pace with the numbers of applicants" (49). This is the social context which fosters Simon's psychological interest; he purports to be an expert and is well-versed in contemporary psychological theories and practices. During his speech to the Kingston social circle, Simon issues "a plea for the reform of mental asylums, ... [makes] some remarks about the intellectual turmoil in this field of study, and ... [enumerates] the contending schools of thought," including "the many new discoveries" (299). Interestingly, Simon notes that his own interests lie in one of these controversial new areas of study, that is, in "the investigation of dreams as a key to diagnosis, and their relation to amnesia" (300). In addition to his breadth of knowledge, to the reader Simon appears "rational" rather than radical -- forward-thinking but dismissive of spiritualism and neurohypnotism -- and so seemingly trustworthy.

However, this appearance may be misleading, for Simon is also representative of an over-confidence in reason and medical theories, believing the unconscious psyche is knowable. In particular, Simon is convinced that Grace "knows" the truth about the murders and that he can "root it out" from her unconscious. As their sessions progress towards the hours of the murders, Simon becomes hyper-conscious of his role as interpreter: "[a]nything she [Grace] says now may be a clue; any gesture; any twitch. She knows; she knows. She may not know that she knows, but buried deep within her, the knowledge is there" (291). Although Simon believes in the unconscious, he is unaware of its depth, autonomy, and resistance to being fully known. The contemporary reader

cannot fault Simon for a lack of knowledge that has yet to be discovered without being anachronistic. However, the reader's awareness of these characteristics of the unconscious may trick her/him into a position of false superiority which Atwood strategically debunks. The historical placement of the novel, then, enables Atwood to portray fictionally the beginnings of the modern psychological era as well as to suggest motives, means, risks, foibles, and, not least of all, the unpredictability and internal controversy of the profession.

Within this questioning, the doctors' differing opinions also point to variable social expectations. These are exemplified in *Alias Grace* by polite, privileged members of society, including the Governor's socialite wife, her cliché-mouthing circle of acquaintances, and Mrs. Constance Jordan, Simon's mother. In her attempts to dissuade Simon from his interest in "Lunatics," Mrs. Jordan voices concerns over the economic feasibility of his proposed private institution and the potential risk to his future family -- that family she diligently attempts to coerce her son to acquire. In her correspondence to Simon, she remarks that

> [n]o one in the Family has ever concerned himself with Lunatics before.... In addition, I cannot believe a private Asylum could possibly be made to pay, as the relatives of Lunatics are notoriously neglectful once the afflicted person has been put away, and wish to hear or see nothing more of them.... [S]urely the daily consorting with the insane would be far from conducive to a tranquil existence. You must think too of your future wife and children, who ought not to be placed in such close proximity to a pack of dangerous madmen. (50)

Mrs. Jordan's moralistic pronouncement voices the opinion of the high-minded but short-sighted: "[i]t is commendable to wish to relieve human suffering, but surely the insane, like idiots and cripples, owe their state to Almighty Providence, and one should not attempt to reverse decisions which are certainly just, although inscrutable to us" (50). Perhaps most tellingly, Mrs. Jordan berates Simon for the fruitlessness of what she perceives to be his idealism: "[o]f course, you have always been an idealist, and filled with optimistic dreams; but reality must at some time obtrude, and you are now turned

thirty" (51). She suggests a more pragmatic approach of investing in sewing machines as a business venture: "I am certain that a Sewing Machine would relieve as much human suffering as a hundred Lunatic Asylums, and possibly a good deal more" (51). If somewhat melodramatically, Mrs. Jordan's views draw attention to some of the difficulties of Simon's proposed project. Perhaps more revealing, however, is the fact that Mrs. Jordan seems to exemplify the neglectful relatives of the "Lunatics," for her moral arguments actually dismiss the mentally unstable as inhuman. Atwood's inclusion of Mrs. Jordan adds complexity to the portrayal of social views and Simon's navigation among them. Within this controversial atmosphere of popular and medical opinions, general commonalities seem to be a relative lack of compassion for individuals considered mentally unstable and a fear-induced eagerness to foster the sense of distance from "normal," "sane" society -- particularly from oneself.

The nature of this distancing is perhaps best shown in the figure of the Governor's wife. She exhibits the conflicting features of intense fascination with madness and bravado of contact, but a basic fear of madness. During the daytime, the Governor's wife allows Grace out of the Penitentiary and into their home as a servant, a situation which the Governor's wife flaunts among her social circle as evidence of her open-minded, tolerant, and modern views; she is duly admired as possessing iron-clad nerves (24). Grace is aware that "although an object of fear" for the Governor's wife, Grace herself "[is] also one of the accomplishments" (22). The Governor's wife has a scrapbook which Grace describes as "quite different ... [with] all the famous criminals in it -- the ones that have been hanged, or else brought here to be penitent.... [She] cuts these crimes out of the newspapers and pastes them in; she will even write away for old newspapers with crimes that were done before her time. It is her collection" (26). Coomi S. Vevaina argues that this scrapbook is an example of how Atwood intentionally portrays the socially-respectable figures with "abnormalities." Vevaina observes that "[b]y portraying all the characters as multiple, Atwood seriously disturbs our concept of normalcy.... Unlike these

normal, respectable people, Grace knows that the line separating the abnormal from the normal is in fact illusory and that the two repeatedly shade into each other" ("Quilting" 69-70). While such blurring of sanity and madness does not form part of the Governor's wife's thinking on an overt level -- as exhibited by her careful segregation of Grace to the Penitentiary during the nights -- her lust for violent crimes suggests otherwise.

Similarly, despite the overt show of bravado, the Governor's wife reveals the depth of her fear during Grace's encounter with a doctor who arrives to measure her head.[4] As the doctor reaches into his black satchel and withdraws the callipers, Grace momentarily perceives him as "the very same black-coated doctor with his bagful of shining knives" who performed the abortion that killed Mary Whitney and she begins to scream (29). Although Grace is "brought round by a glass of cold water dashed in the face" and silenced by the Penitentiary Matron's slap, her attempt to explain the mistaken collapse of identity as "a fear of doctors... of being cut open by them" is abruptly dismissed (30). Grace is accused of playing "tricks" to get attention and is thrown into solitary confinement for this breach of norms (30-31). While the Governor's wife allows Grace back in the house after an interval, when Simon comes to conduct his interviews, there are marked changes. Grace observes that "I do not have the run of the house as before. The Governor's wife is still frightened of me; she's afraid I will have another fit.... [Y]ou would think she never heard anyone scream before" (64). These assumptions coincide with the Governor's wife's consistent misinterpretation of Grace's actions as evidence of her insanity. She confides in her friends that "although she [Grace] appears to be perfectly recovered you never know when they may be carried away again, sometimes she talks to herself and sings out loud in a most peculiar manner" (24). As the reader learns, Grace does indeed vocalize when alone, but this is hardly a result of madness. In solitary confinement, Grace says, "I sing a song, just to hear a voice and keep myself

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[4] Atwood notes elsewhere that in this era, "[p]hrenology, or the measurement of bumps on the skull to determine character, was taken seriously as a science... and there was a growing notion that the physical side of a person might have something to do with his or her psychic side" ("Ophelia").

company" (33); she also tells Simon that "I enjoy singing.... A good hymn tune or ballad is uplifting to the spirits" (359). Interestingly, Nancy Montgomery similarly condemns Grace, who overhears Nancy telling their employer, Thomas Kinnear, that "there was something about me that made her quite uneasy, and she wondered whether I was quite right, as she'd several times heard me talking out loud to myself." By contrast, Kinnear laughingly dismisses this notion of madness, saying "that was nothing -- he often talked to himself; as he was the best conversationalist he knew" (278).

Jane Ussher's observation on the erroneous reactions inspired by the assumption of madness proves illuminating here. Ussher notes that "everyone performs actions that correspond with our definition of mad behaviour... [but] once the person is labelled as mad, everything they say or do will be interpreted within this context, as their behaviour is selectively interpreted by the outsider to provide confirmation of the diagnosis" (*Women's* 136). The Governor's wife's misinterpretation of Grace's behaviour functions most obviously in this fashion. However, it also bears remembering that Grace was transferred from the Penitentiary to the Asylum because of just such behaviour. The Matron fosters the Governor's wife assumption that Grace's uncontrolled screaming is a form of madness. The Matron describes it as a fit of hysterics, affirming that "we have had a great deal of experience with that kind of a fit, this one used to be prone to them but we never indulged her, we worked to correct it and we thought she had given it up, it might be her old trouble coming back" (30). She further assures the Governor's wife that Grace was "a raving lunatic" (30). The Kingston Penitentiary medical records indicate that the Matron was repeating the prison surgeon's diagnosis of Grace exhibiting manifestations of insanity; he records a significant change in Grace's behaviour: "she all at once became noisy ... and excitable. For several days displaying the highest state of exaltation by singing, laughing and rapid talking, which would be followed for a shorter period of gloom and despair. She has daily illusions imagining she sees strange figures invading her" (Kingston Penitentiary 290 qtd. in Kendall 110). This radical change to

erratic behaviour is interpreted as insanity and Grace is sent to the Asylum. To complicate the reader's interpretation further, Grace herself admits that she still does not like being alone because it fosters hallucinations -- both visual (33) and auditory (358); as she tells Simon, "you often imagine things, when you are alone so much" (358). Thus Atwood includes "evidence" of Grace's "mad" behaviour and varying interpretations of it; through this ambiguity, she leaves the reader to sift through both the evidence and the interpretations in an attempt to discern an elusive "truth" or, at the very least, to form her/his own opinion of the complexity of the matter.

Not surprisingly, these varying opinions also have an effect on Grace, but the result itself is paradoxically revealing, considering its form. In general, such social conditions silence the mad figure and, in fact, silence plays an important role in social constructions of madness; Atwood's portrayal of Grace is no exception. Consequently, madness is not an effective form of protest but a loss of agency, as the reader discovers through Grace's experience. Based on her interaction with doctors and matrons, those in power, Grace is shrewd enough to discern that silence is her only feasible option within the asylum. As she tells Simon, "[a]t last I stopped talking altogether, except very civilly when spoken to, Yes Ma'am, No Ma'am, Yes and No Sir" (32). According to Grace, this tactic results in a transferral from the Asylum back to the Penitentiary; she even gives a comical and deadly-accurate portrayal of the controversial conditions of this decision, which occurred "after they had all met together in their black coats, Ahem, aha, in my opinion, and My respected colleague, Sir I beg to differ. Of course they could not admit for an instant that they had been mistaken when they first put me in" (32). Even with the possibility of erroneous diagnosis set aside, these comments emphasize the lack of agreement among the medical experts, a divergence in perspective that can only be amplified between these men and their patients.

Among this divergence of perspectives, Atwood's presentation of madness in *Alias Grace* challenges the notion of clearly defined states of sanity and madness. She

suggests that a significant amount of overlap exists between the two -- an overlap that society fears to admit and so seeks to deny. As noted in my introductory chapter, Foucault emphasizes that the absence of a language of common understanding between the rational and the irrational is a major obstacle in any attempt to consider madness. In fact, he argues that acceptance of the medical model has created an artificial distinction between sanity and madness (Foucault x). As a result of the "broken dialogue" which Foucault identifies, silence assumes an increasingly significant role, becoming the factor linking the two states of being: "[h]ere madness and non-madness, reason and non-reason are inextricably involved: ... existing for each other, in relation to each other, in the exchange which separates them" (Foucault x). In this view, the gap created by an absence of language becomes highly significant not only to challenge the neat separation of these mental states but also as the paradoxical site of communication through silence -- a communication that is necessarily limited and can easily be misread through projection or misguided assumptions. Atwood emphatically challenges dichotomous thinking through her extensive use of gaps to convey meaning as a main structural device in *Alias Grace*, among other works.[5]

Alias Grace speaks to the reader largely through the suggestiveness created by silences as well as through the fluid language of the novel. Atwood's use of ambiguities -- through omissions (silences) and through contradictory phrases or conflicting interpretations by characters -- effectively implicates the reader in making character judgments. Through these judgments, the reader implicitly constructs the social norms by which to measure deviation in the context of the novel. As Howells observes, "Atwood's fiction draws attention not only to the ways in which stories may be told but also the function of language itself: the slipperiness of words and double operation of language as symbolic representation and as agent for changing our modes of perception" (*Margaret*

[5] For a more detailed, specifically Foucauldian analysis of *Alias Grace*, see Linda Morra's "Articulating Madness," which draws notable parallels between Simon Jordan's deteriorating hold on reason and discourse -- manifested in his actions and language -- and his increasing inability to "cure" Grace.

8). This view of change affected in the reader's perception complements Iser's theory that the engaged reader will first establish normative limits in the novel and then transfer this gaze to her/his own surroundings with a fresh, more "objective" perspective of norms, recognizing them as constructs and evaluating their efficacy (*Act* 74-79). Atwood most directly implicates the reader in this normative construction through the psychotherapy sessions through which Simon attempts to evaluate Grace's mental condition. He asks her leading questions, such as "[y]ou aren't mad, really, are you Grace?" To which she replies, "[n]o Sir I am not" (41). Similarly, he asks, "'[y]ou don't care about my good opinion of you, Grace?'" Grace shoots him "a quick, sharp look" before replying, "'I have already been judged, Sir. Whatever you may think of me, it's all the same'" (90). However, when Simon pushes Grace to tell him whether she has been judged rightly, she claims it is irrelevant since "'[p]eople want a guilty person. If there has been a crime, they want to know who did it. They don't like not knowing'" (90-91). Similarly, Grace simply feigns not to understand when he asks "'[d]o you not feel you have been treated unjustly?'" (91). Through this exchange, Grace's silence leaves other questions hanging in the air for the reader: who determines what is just treatment or, more generally still, what is justice? The reader is confronted with the question of normative limits and their enforcement; s/he is left wondering what the basis is for such determinations.

The manner in which Atwood characterizes Dr. Simon Jordan's attempts to connect with Grace mirrors Foucault's assessment of psychoanalysis' early attempts to use dialogue to release madness from its position of the silent Other (250). As previously noted, this goal was only partly realized: instead of dialogue, this twentieth-century approach succeeded in establishing a monologue with reason speaking at the irrational (Foucault 251). Although Simon's exchange with Grace does not appear to be what Foucault terms "language without response" (251), Grace's responses are measured, wary, and intentionally truncated. She gives the illusion of engaging in dialogue, but remains purposely disengaged. Atwood makes certain that the reader is aware of Grace's

intentional withholding of information from Simon. For example, Grace describes one of the days preceding the murders and includes her own trip to the privy, where she "emptied the slop pail, and so forth" (216). Simon asks for clarification which causes Grace, both amused and exasperated, to mock him in her thoughts. She thinks through a comical and somewhat crude elaboration of her euphemistic phrase, but never speaks it. Instead, Grace simply repeats the phrase, reasoning that "[j]ust because he [Simon] pesters me to know everything is no reason for me to tell him" (216). Atwood's inclusion of both the spoken and the unspoken exchange situates the reader in wary recognition of the silenced responses in what Simon intends to be a frank and open dialogue. Indeed, he makes this intention immediately clear to Grace; upon meeting Grace, Simon says, "[i]f you will try to talk, ... I will try to listen" (41). His suggestion of the tentative nature of their exchange is more telling than Simon likely realizes. It is only much later that Simon is to recognize that "[w]hat he wants is certainty, one way or the other; and that is precisely what she's withholding from him" (322). Simon, as the medical man and representative of "sane" society remains shut out by the socially-constructed division of sanity and madness; he cannot reach Grace through methods that rely solely on reason, for reason continues to be answered by silence; the irrational remains outside of language.

Atwood's deft portrayal of Simon reveals his tenuous position as simultaneously aware of medical advances but hindered by their restriction to the rational realm. Jung recognizes the analyst's need to straddle these two realms; he argues that the psychologist must possess scientific knowledge but must individualize the process of analysis, if any degree of understanding is to be expected (*Undiscovered* 5-8). Similarly, Simon is aware of the need to gain a relationship with Grace and, more generally, expresses his awareness of the many unknowns which characterize the psyche. It is telling that Simon's recognition of this vast unknown is triggered by his initial studies at Guy's Hospital in London. While studying to be a surgeon, Simon becomes fascinated instead by the psyche; he wonders "[w]hat mysteries remain to be revealed in the nervous system, that

network of threads ... all leading to the brain, that shadowy central den where the human bones lie scattered and the monsters lurk.... The angels also, he reminds himself. Also the angels" (187). Interestingly, Simon has to bolster his own courage, for the depths of the psyche are not only mysterious but frightening; the lurking monsters, arguably, are manifestations of so-called madness, the extreme unknown which is existent in every psyche.

In comparison to Simon's awareness of the unconscious and enumeration of the nineteenth-century variable theories of mental instability (299-300), it is alarming to note that the situation for psychological patients and the difficulties facing analysts have not substantially changed. That is, the increased knowledge of contemporary medicine and psychology has not remedied or even simplified the situation; arguably, it has succeeded in complicating matters. Consequently, the nineteenth-century situation represented in *Alias Grace* is equally relevant for the twenty-first-century reader. To date, all attempts either to classify or to clearly delineate the symptoms of madness or mental illness have remained controversial, variable, or even contradictory -- ultimately, madness remains a vaguely defined socially-constructed designation of normative aberration. As previously indicated, the extent of this tendentious classification is outlined by Russell, Ussher, and Chesler, among others. The genesis of this modern condition with its vague categorizations, (mis)diagnoses, and lack of communication with those labelled "mad" is evident in Atwood's historically accurate portrayal of the nineteenth-century asylum. Grace describes the wide range of colourful inmates -- alcoholics, abused women, homeless women who feigned madness in winter, cholera survivors left without any family, child murderers, and religious fanatics -- and casually remarks that among these, "a good portion of the women in the Asylum were no madder than the Queen of England" (31-2). Grace identifies the authority figures as the problem, noting that those who were in a position to assess the women made no attempt to understand them. Grace speaks from her own experience: "I told them I wasn't mad, ... but they wouldn't listen. They

wouldn't know mad when they saw it in any case" (31). The mad figure is put away and silenced by the rational but ignorant society that constructs a variable image of madness as a means of maintaining social comfort. Ironically, Mrs. Jordan's words bear some truth: the neglect of so-called Lunatics accurately describes more than just their relatives.

The role of perception is critical to Atwood's portrayal of madness as a social construct. As I have already suggested, class distinctions sharply influence the determinations of madness. Privileged society not only decides what constitutes madness, but is itself excused from behaviours it would condemn in others. Atwood's novel elucidates this disparity through the inclusion of spiritualism as a dabbling pastime of the Kingston ladies' society. As the ever-proper Governor's wife introduces Simon to Mrs. Quennell, "the celebrated Spiritualist," his reaction is less than enthusiastic; he remains the medical man: skeptical, bemused. In an off-handed but revealing comment, Simon observes that "[s]piritualism is the craze of the middle classes, the women especially.... If these people were not so well-to-do, their behaviour would get them committed" (82-3). While Simon takes this state of affairs as a matter of course, the reader is pointedly reminded of the power of money and social position to protect and to decree. Later, Simon acknowledges to himself that despite his cultivated reason and medical savvy he, too, is but a hair's breadth from madness. His own uncontrollable "manifestations of the imagination" force him to consider that "[t]he difference between a civilized man and a barbarous fiend -- a madman, say -- lies, perhaps, merely in a thin veneer of willed self-restraint" (142). In this apparently broadminded expression, Simon gestures towards an important recognition of the false division between sanity and madness but, more acutely, displays his continued ignorance. Contrary to what Simon suggests, the factor connecting the "madman" and the "civilized man" cannot be subdued through "willed self-restraint" unless "madness" is recognized and acknowledged as part of the self. This barbaric or evil side of the self is the shadow which forms part of the unconscious psyche, that part of the self which is autonomous, uncontrollable, and largely unknowable.

Although Simon absolutely considers himself as "civilized," his dreams pointedly argue against his ability to wilfully control the unconscious psyche. In fact, Simon himself observes that dreams and fantasies come to him unbidden: "[h]e is both sane and normal, and he has developed the rational faculties of his mind to a high degree; and yet he cannot always control such pictures" (142). Nevertheless, an unwillingness to acknowledge his own fiendish or savage tendencies underlines Simon's wilful blindness. He dreams and fantasizes of sexual brutalities and bondage with Mrs. Rachel Humphrey, his mistress and landlady, puzzling over them. Although Simon does not deny the existence of such intrusions, it is significant that he refuses to accept these as elements of himself. Tellingly, Simon describes the man representing himself in the dreams as "a hulking figure that bears no resemblance at all to himself; although ... the quilted dressing-gown looks identical" (142). In an intriguing collapse of waking and dreaming, Simon becomes sexually involved with Rachel in what he imagines is a dream but awakes to find himself acting out (352). He is annoyed by this undefined state of consciousness, arguing that "his own dreams turned against him" (363). Interestingly, Simon instantly recognizes Rachel's story of somnambulism as a cover-up, noting that "for a refined woman of her class he supposes it's a way of saving face" (364). While Simon is quick to identify and dismiss Rachel's avoidance tactics, he remains oblivious to his own.

Simon's recognition of the unconscious is divided. He is aware of its existence in himself and so assumes it exists in others (142); however, he views it differently in others than in himself. More specifically, Simon is ready to credit the unconscious as having greater control and more unsavoury aspects in others than in himself: a civilized, rational, educated man. Interestingly, Simon does record his own dreams but in a distracted fashion (140). Although he intermittently puzzles over the various unbidden intrusions of his unconscious in the form of dreams and fantasies, he does not make a concerted analysis of his own dreams. Similarly, Simon reflects on the various theories of the

unconscious -- including the possibility that dreams are "a manifestation of the animal life that continues below consciousness, out of sight, beyond reach of the will" -- but does not apply these to himself (140-41). During his tumultuous nightly scenes with Rachel, Simon is animalistic, acquiring a literal bloodlust, wanting "to make an incision in her -- just a small one -- so he can taste her blood, which in the shadowy darkness of the bedroom seems to him like a normal wish to have" (365-66). In this extreme representation, Simon resembles a Laingian or Jungian divided self, describing himself as "driven by what feels like uncontrollable desire; but apart from that -- apart from himself, at these times ... -- another part of himself stands with folded arms, fully clothed, merely curious, merely observing. How far, exactly will he go? How far in" (366).

Simon also speculates on the theories of a vast unconscious where "[l]ost memories lie down there like sunken treasure, to be retrieved piecemeal, if at all; and amnesia itself may be in effect a sort of dreaming in reverse; a drowning of recollection" (141). Nevertheless, Simon continually returns to the comforting notion of a conscious control over all of the elements of the mind -- including the unconscious. Suggestively, Simon must keep reminding himself that "there is surely an element of will at work" even in amnesia or repression (362). This need for reassurance suggests that the converse -- the notion of the psyche as autonomous, uncontrollable, unknowable -- would be unbearably frightening. Jung, of course, indicates that such "panic fear" is precisely the factor which limits exploration of the unconscious psyche (*Undiscovered* 27-28). Based on his partial awareness of the unconscious, Simon is certain that Grace is consciously "concealing something from him." He compares the mind to a house, where unwanted or painful thoughts and memories "are thrust out of sight, and consigned to attic or cellar" (362). The associations Simon draws are highly suggestive to the reader, for both the attic and the basement figuratively represent the unconscious; the attic in particular, in reminiscence of Bertha Mason Rochester, connotes the sequestering of madness.

Indeed, the reader is aware that Grace is hiding things from Simon. Her adoption of silence in the asylum seems to have been modified and muted into conscious selective revelation. At times, Grace chooses to withhold her dreams -- those manifestations of the unconscious which were later to form the basis of psychotherapy. On one occasion, although the reader is privy to Grace's recollection of a dream, she deliberately refrains from telling Simon; instead, she feigns forgetfulness, saying only that "[i]t was something confusing." Atwood provocatively includes Grace's rationale for that decision; she muses, "I have little enough of my own, no belongings, no possessions, no privacy to speak of, and I need to keep something for myself; and in any case, what use would he have for my dreams, after all?" (101).[6] Stephanie Lovelady also notes Grace's intentional refusal to share this dream with Simon; she describes how Atwood's structuring of the novel enables this double talk: "[t]his trick, the withholding that initially looks like compliance, is possible because in Grace's narration, there are no quotation marks, so it is often unclear whether text is spoken or thought until a tag clause appears at the end. Grace guards her privacy through silence, and by playing the part expected of her" (42).[7] In this view, Atwood's "trick" includes the reader as well as Simon, for the reader depends on these same textual clues. Arguably, s/he is more dependent on these clues than Simon is, since the reader is privy to both Grace's silent and verbalized memories but can fully rely on neither.

Alice Palumbo argues that "[t]he examination of macro power relations in *Bodily Harm* and *The Handmaid's Tale* shifts in *Cat's Eye, The Robber Bride*, and *Alias Grace* into an analysis of power in women's relationships, and the conflict between the conscious and unconscious, and memory and the present" ("On the Border" 81-82). This assessment can only be considered accurate on the most overt level and is somewhat

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[6] In this respect, Grace's rationale bears a striking resemblance to Offred's careful guarding of her memories and her thoughts in *The Handmaid's Tale*.

[7] Lovelady's article, "I Am Telling This to No One But You," is a notable study of narrative strategy in *Alias Grace*.

misleading. The latter two claims are certainly not limited to the three novels mentioned but, more significantly, I would argue that *Alias Grace* is not limited to the microcosmic. In this novel, Atwood presents microcosmic and macrocosmic power struggles -- both of which are most deeply explored through the male-female, analyst-analysand, gentleman-servant relationship of Simon and Grace. Unlike Simon, Grace has the benefit of neither position nor gender and so she is well aware of the power of social expectations. As seen in Grace's choice of silence in the asylum, selective revelations to Simon, and her contemplation of wearing the slop bucket on her head, Atwood presents her character as fully aware of social conditioning and her own limited options. The accuracy of this portrayal catches van Herk's attention; she notes that "Atwood's touch is deft, slicing so thinly that the oblivious reader will hardly be aware that s/he is being offered a sharp lesson in the daily difficulties of women's lives, especially women without the advantages of husbands or money." Moreover, van Herk praises Atwood's attention to detail, claiming that "[m]ore than any other Canadian writer, Atwood manages to work with social details, employing the daily aspects of history in a way that is superlatively informative" (112). Part of this portrayal is the distribution of power on the social or macrocosmic level.

While Grace is certainly aware of social restrictions, it is important to recognize that these conditions do not drive her mad, as one line of feminist critique might argue. Marilyn Yalom's perspective is helpful here; she writes,

> [u]nlike some feminist scholars, I do not hold the view that women are driven mad primarily by patriarchal society, although the psychic results generated by sexism (as well as by racism and classism) can contribute significantly to mental distress. All women (like all blacks) suffer some form of discrimination, but not all women (nor all blacks) suffer psychotic episodes.... Madness ... derives from sources that are complexly bio-psycho-social and pertain to both women and to men. (6-7)

Following from these views, it is also notable that Atwood's representation of Grace does not posit madness as a perceived method of escape. Conversely, this novel presents

madness in the form Caminero-Santangelo observes in general terms; she remarks that "madness is clearly depicted as the last gasp of the powerless ... [as] the dead end" (94). This negative view of madness is suggested prior to Grace's own experience in the Asylum. Grace witnesses the results of an unsuccessful suicide attempt by Effie, one of the other servants at Mrs. Alderman Parkinson's. As Grace recounts, Effie arrives at "the dead end of madness": "she attempted to hang herself by her apron strings; but they broke, and she was found on the floor half-choked and out of her mind, and had to be put away" (148). Notably, in the murder trial, Grace's life was not spared due to a plea of insanity, but as a result of her age and gender; her period in the asylum did not occur until seven or eight years into the life sentence at the Penitentiary. On one hand, Grace seems to inhabit the role of the madwoman, perhaps in its most profound form, in her loss of agency and relegation to silence. On the other hand, Grace inverts these silences to her advantage in her "dialogue" with Simon, thereby retaining a measure of agency through the silences of her own choosing.

Similarly, Grace manages to resist conformity in an ironic fashion by refuting the social expectations of mad behaviour. Although tempted to enact the role of the raving lunatic by donning the slop bucket as a sort of helmet, Grace makes a conscious decision to adhere to normal, acceptable behaviour patterns while simultaneously recognizing that the social expectations for her are not to be "sane" or to act "normally." The madwoman is expected to act the part that society has envisioned for her, a role perpetuated by the Matrons at the asylum, about whom Grace remarks, "they would provoke us, especially right before the visitors were to come. They wanted to show how dangerous we were, but also how well they could control us" (32). Grace's strategic control of her behaviour suggests that she is in control of her reason. Caminero-Santangelo argues that "madness consists not of subversion but rather of surrender to the representations of others; madness constitutes the inability to construct a counternarrative of any sort" (132). In these terms, Grace is clearly not mad. Conversely, Atwood manages to invert the

madwoman's silence. Although Grace is silent, this silence is duplicitous. She is silenced by others in the asylum, but outside of that environment, she chooses silence. These silences are meaningful and construct a counternarrative, if a limited one. Significantly, the counternarrative Grace transmits through silences or gaps requires the process of ideation in Simon and the reader in order to be fully constructed. In this manner, *Alias Grace* relies on reader involvement, an engagement which Atwood's structuring of the novel makes necessary but the extent of which is determined by the reader.

In her awareness of social expectations, Grace typifies Atwood's protagonists. Nathalie Cooke asserts that "[a]ll of Atwood's female characters are acutely aware of social expectations. They are concerned about them. Unable to ignore them" (324). Yet, as Cooke further observes, that is not to say that they always choose to conform: "[n]ot all of these women comply, though, and it is through their refusal to play along that we come to learn about them and, in some ways, to judge them" (324). These comments helpfully draw attention to Atwood's implication of the reader as judge. Moreover, Cooke suggests that the characters retain a degree of autonomy by refusing to allow their behaviour to be dictated by society. While Atwood's protagonists have agency, strictly speaking, the madwoman does not. Therefore, Atwood's representation of Grace straddles this line of division; as the madwoman figure, Grace manages to retain some degree of agency. However, in another view, Grace more fully inhabits the role of madwoman, for she is subsumed in drastic, inexplicable, and uncontrollable ways by the unconscious -- with serious, even deadly, results. This psychic imbalance is represented by Grace's dreams, sleepwalking, and fainting, these previously mentioned manifestations of autonomous intrusions of the unconscious. Moreover, as will be discussed, this imbalance takes a more extreme form of possible possession or co-inhabitation of Grace's body by the spirit of Mary Whitney.

At times it is merely Grace's physical presence that clashes with stereotypical social expectations, thereby challenging social norms and divisions. Simon's initial

encounter with Grace is most telling. When Simon enters the jail cell, he has fully prepared himself with mental images, presumably (and ironically) to fortify his nerves for an encounter with a prototypical madwoman: "quite possibly insane" and likely violent. Yet these initial impressions are dashed the instant he sees her. Instead, Simon perceives Grace as an entirely romanticized pre-Raphaelite figure; she is "the cornered woman," including "the long wisps of auburn hair escaping from what appeared at first glance to be a chaplet of white flowers -- and especially the eyes, enormous in the pale face and dilated with fear, or with mute pleading -- all was as it should be" (59). However, as soon as Grace herself steps forward, this image also falls away: "[i]nstead there was a different woman -- straighter, taller, more self-possessed.... There was even less escaped hair than he'd thought: most of it was tucked up under a white cap" (59). Like shattered spell, in an instant, the impossible flowers become an ordinary cap and the figure transforms into her everyday appearance. The startling eyes remain "unusually large, ... but were far from insane. Instead they were frankly assessing him" (60). While he subsequently chides himself for giving into "melodrama, and an overheated brain," the encounter exposes Simon's fantasies for what they are: "Imagination and fancy" (60). Even the medical expert falls prey to the stereotypical images of madness and when these expectations are challenged by reality, Simon must adjust his behaviour accordingly -- not, however, without giving himself away. Privy to his expectations and disappointments, from this very first encounter, the reader becomes wary of accepting Simon's assumptions, despite his socially-sanctioned position. In this fashion, Atwood challenges the reader to determine her/his own view of what constitutes madness.

Atwood strategically implicates the reader in forms that complement Grace's use of silences and the ambiguity of such gaps. In particular, the novel is constructed to require the reader's determination of the boundaries of sanity and its subsequent application in assessments of the characters. Significantly, while this need for the reader's judgment is

directed most obviously at Grace, it extends to other characters. One of the means which Atwood employs to discourage the reader's unquestioned acceptance of social assumptions is to juxtapose Grace's assessments of mental stability with those made by Simon. In addition to comparing the views of madness held by the community with those held by the experts, Atwood intensifies this presentation by giving voice to the two extremes: the medical man and the madwoman. Therefore, the reader must determine what constitutes the "reality" of the text -- a situation which is obscured rather than illuminated by language. As Vevaina remarks, "[i]n her ninth novel *Alias Grace*, Atwood deftly uses this imperfect tool [that is, language] at her disposal to lay bare the multiple selves of her characters and present their reality as essentially surreal, absurd, inchoate, dynamic and most importantly, ambiguous" ("Quilting" 65-66).

Perhaps Grace's most unsettling assessment of mental instability involves James McDermott, the servant with whom she is accused of having collaborated in the murders. In recounting the incident to Simon, Grace repeatedly states her certainty that McDermott "was a madman" (330) and explains how this conviction influenced her own actions and responses preceding and following the murders. She claims to have made careful concessions because "it is dangerous to contradict mad people" (334). The possibility of McDermott's madness increases the complexity of Grace's own situation, for if her instincts were correct, then her conciliatory strategic actions can hardly be attributed to her own mental instability. On the contrary, her fear seems entirely reasonable, and her ability to keep her wits about her, entirely commendable; in order to get off the property Grace explains, "I told him [McDermott] to pull himself together, and be a man. For the last thing I wanted was to be stuck there in that house with him, especially if he'd gone completely out of his mind" (333). McDermott's madness, whether temporary at the time of the murders or more deep-seated, is never ascertained, yet the reader is inclined to believe Grace's assessment since surely a murderer must also -- at least momentarily -- be devoid of his senses: a madman.

Nonetheless, McDermott's insanity does not automatically exonerate Grace since the reader has yet to determine the degrees of her awareness and of her complicity in the crimes -- assessments which hinge on the reader's assessment of Grace's mental state. The periods of unconsciousness Grace claims to have undergone and her amnesia surrounding the critical moments of the murders complicate matters, but do not necessarily mean that she is mad. In outlining some of the characteristics of repressed thoughts, Jung indicates that such repression can occur either consciously or unconsciously; that is, it can be intentional or uncontrolled. Moreover, this repression can be so complete that it resembles amnesia; Jung remarks that "neurotics seem to have the capacity for forgetting significant experiences or thought so thoroughly that one might easily believe that they had never existed" (*CW* 4.1, 91-93). However, Jung is also careful to note that such behaviour does not mean an individual is "neurotic," for "[f]orgetting is a normal process... [and] unavoidable" because of the limits of conscious capacity (*Symbols* 78). Repressed contents are distinguished from other forgotten contents by "their disagreeable and incompatible nature," but these also "can rise up spontaneously at any time, often after many years of apparently total oblivion, or they can be fetched back by hypnosis" (Jung, *Symbols* 79). Nevertheless, Jung is emphatic that such duality and unknowable contents comprise the very nature of the human psyche, arguing that many people "overestimate the role of will-power" and wrongly assume that the mind is entirely under conscious control. Thus Jung cautions that, regarding the psyche,

> one should learn to discriminate carefully between *intentional and unintentional contents*. The former are derived from the ego-personality, while the latter arise from a source which is not identical with the ego, that is, from a subliminal part of the ego, from its 'other side,' which is in a way another subject. The existence of this other subject is by no means a pathological symptom, but a normal fact that can be observed at any time anywhere. (*Symbols* 82)

Significantly, then, the "loss" of psychic contents is no more abnormal than the resurgence of unintentional aspects in the form of the shadow, dreams, or fantasies.

At one point in the narrative, Simon admits in a letter to his close friend, Dr. Edward Murchie, that he is baffled by Grace's apparent normality. Simon laments that "[i]t would be helpful to me, if she [Grace] were indeed mad, or at least a little madder than she appears to be; but thus far she has manifested a composure that a duchess might envy" (132). Simon's words reveal part of the narrative's intrigue: the reader, along with Simon in his capacity as expert, must determine whether Grace is mad at all and how much of her condition she is actually revealing. Considering Atwood's use of ambiguity and the fragmented textual structure, this determination is no mean feat. As van Herk observes, Grace's rendition of events is significant for its revelation of "a silent double-text, an intricate awareness of what she should not and cannot say." Moreover, she adds that "Grace's amnesia reiterates that events are inflected by more than memory, itself a construction, a fiction, a quilt" (van Herk 111). It would appear that, like Simon, the reader is at a loss to determine Grace's mental state, and the efforts of Reverend Verringer and others to petition for Grace's release gain some plausibility. Unlike the Bannerling-type experts, at least these individuals seem to perceive the person behind the stigma. However, this rationalization is too simplistic, and Atwood's construction of the text strategically prevents such complete identification with any one character -- including Simon. Not only are readers granted access to Grace's thoughts, but even in what is said, van Herk contends that the reader is able to hear more than Simon does, the man who despite his training "is prone to deafness, [and] has not learnt to read lips or to listen to subtleties" (111). Thus the reader distrusts Simon's assessments to some extent, his professional expertise notwithstanding.

Moreover, Atwood seems to rely on the reader's position outside the novel resulting in a clearer perception, for s/he is both part of social normative constructions and historically removed from them. As previously discussed, Iser remarks on the value of such historical distance and its effect on the reader's process of ideation and means of engagement -- both with the novel and, subsequently, with her/his own society (*Act* 74).

Intriguingly, Ingersoll asserts the possibility that this apparent reliance on the reader's astute perception may, in itself, be a form of Atwoodian trickery; he notes that in its fragmented nature, "[t]he narrative leaves an impression of a variety of 'coding,'" and so the reader "may look for hints of hidden messages in what might be discounted by ... Dr. Jordan" (388). However, Ingersoll cautions that "[a]t the same time, the narrative may be teasing its readers ... : Atwood may be offering an encoded text for which the 'code' has been irrecoverably lost" (389). In other words, the concept of uncovering the "truth" of Grace's mental condition positions the reader alongside rather than above Simon, for s/he is engaged in an equally bewildering and perhaps unsolvable task of interpretation.

Atwood further complicates matters by including Grace's suspicions that Simon himself is mad, while she is sane. In a comical inversion of their initial meeting in the cell, where Simon is so quickly disillusioned by Grace, Grace fleetingly views Simon's request for her to identify the apple as an indication of mental instability. Grace recognizes that such instability could be attributed to her or, somewhat shockingly, to him; she muses, "[h]e must think I am simple; or else it's a trick of some sort; or else he is mad and that is why they locked the door -- they've locked me into this room with a madman." Though the idea is provocative, she reconsiders, "[b]ut men who are dressed in clothes like his cannot be mad" (40). Ironically, Simon's persistence in bringing the root vegetables for his word association experiments signals to Grace that perhaps he is not "normal." The goal of such associative experiments, according to Jung, is "to establish a basis of comparison between normal and mentally disturbed subjects" (*CW* 2:1). Simon attempts to awaken Grace's unconscious associations, but Grace undermines the attempts. Dismissively musing about what he could possibly hope to discuss via a potato, she notes, "[s]ometimes I think that Dr. Jordan is a little off in the head." Somewhat comically, she appears to humour him, conceding that "I would rather talk with him about potatoes, if that is what he fancies, than not talk to him at all" (97). Rather than stabilizing the limits of sanity, then, Simon's psychological expertise and methodology serve the opposite

purpose; in Grace's view they seem irrational.[8] Since the social construction of madness equates it with irrationality, what surprise if Grace does so?

By presenting Simon and Grace as two extreme sources of mental assessment, Atwood situates the reader to determine behavioural norms and the points of deviation, irrationality, or madness. Yet, ultimately, as Cooke maintains, Atwood's focus is on the inscrutability of the attempt to make this determination: "the act of judging a person is fraught with difficulty, uncertainty; in fact, it is practically impossible. The novel refuses to, cannot, disclose whether Grace is guilty or innocent of this brutal crime. Instead, it suggests that she cannot be so reduced" (326). That is to say, Atwood's novel insists on both the complexity of human behaviour and social construction as well as the complicity of the reader in making these determinations of normality. In a recent assessment of her fiction, Ljungberg indicates that Atwood is "constantly probing where to draw the boundary between inner and outer realities." This, she argues, "create[s] several possibilities of interpretation: frequently the reader has to choose between reading the text as a realistic narrative about a person either suffering from mental illness or abnormal imagination, or as a narrative about a 'real' intrusion of irrational and supernatural powers into everyday life" (Ljungberg 147). It is significant that the reader decides what extent of the irrational is a "normal" part of reality, for this indicates that the social construction of madness portrayed in the novel may not coincide with the reader's own determination. In a Jungian view, the intrusion of the irrational is not only "real" but is a normal occurrence that modern society attempts to suppress both on the individual level

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[8] Laing describes a similar inversion of the analyst's behaviour seeming irrational when viewed objectively. Using the psychiatrist's own words, Laing outlines Emil Kraepelin's methods of clinically examining a servant girl, then makes this observation: "Here are a man and a young girl. If we see the situation purely in terms of Kraepelin's point of view, it all immediately falls into place. He is sane, she is insane; he is rational, she is irrational. This entails looking at the patient's actions out of the context of the situation as she experienced it. But if we take Kraepelin's actions... -- he tries to stop her movements, stands in front of her with arms outspread, tries to force a piece of bread out of her hand, sticks a needle in her forehead, and so on -- out of context of the situation as experienced and defined by him, how extraordinary *they* are!" (*Politics of Experience* 107) While Simon Jordan's actions, of course, are not as extreme or threatening, they also reveal the potential for the analyst's actions to be interpreted as irrational or odd.

and on a social level -- the latter, through the decrees of so-called experts such as Dr. Simon Jordan.

Jung pronounces ignorance of the irrational and unconscious elements of the psyche as the primary inhibiting factor to self-awareness in modern culture, a view reflected in Atwood's characterization of the psychologist-patient relationship in *Alias Grace*. This relationship not only depicts Grace's probing and selected revelation of her psyche but, equally significantly, demonstrates how the psychological investigation process challenges Simon's assumptions. The psychotherapy sessions which Simon arranges to unveil Grace's hidden or repressed memories expose him to the irrational and the unconscious, a realm whose value he acknowledges but with which he is poorly equipped to deal, despite -- or perhaps more pointedly, due to -- his profession. Simon is convinced that by reaching Grace's unconscious he can restore the blanks in her memory regarding the day the murders of her employer and his housekeeper-mistress occurred. That he even holds this aim demonstrates that Simon both recognizes and values the unconscious part of the psyche for the information it contains. "My object," he confesses in a personal letter to Edward, "is to wake the part of her mind that lies dormant -- to probe down below the threshold of her consciousness, and to discover the memories that must perforce lie buried there. I approach her mind as if it is a locked box, to which I must find the right key; but so far, I must admit, I have not got very far with it" (132).

Despite his awareness, Simon is unable fully to appreciate the unconscious, for he perceives it in what may be described as a quasi-Freudian manner: the unconscious is a repository of repressed memories that needs only to be decoded with "the right key." Moreover, Simon sees this decoding as entirely possible -- via an analyst, such as himself -- and thus the unconscious contents is deemed knowable.[9] In Jungian terms, such

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[9] A useful summary of Freud's theory of the unconscious is found in "The structure of the unconscious: The distinction between the personal and the impersonal unconscious," an Appendix of Jung's *Collected Works* 7:22. In relation to Simon Jordan's views, perhaps the most salient feature of the Freudian theory is the belief that "by means of analysis, the repressions would be lifted, rendering conscious the contents of the unconscious; as a result, Freud believed, the unconscious would wither and disappear" (*CW* 7:22, *Abstracts*

limiting of the psychic contents and autonomy is directly the result of fear. In fact, Jung asserts that such fear caused Freud to refrain from further exploration of the unconscious and to delineate his views so tightly; Jung remarks that fear of the vastness of the unconscious "troubled the originator of psychoanalysis himself [Freud], who confessed to me that it was necessary to make a dogma of his sexual theory because this was the sole bulwark of reason against a possible 'eruption of the black flood of occultism'" (*Undiscovered* 28). In this sense, I would agree with Ingersoll's earlier assertion that Simon is a pre-Freudian figure; however, this designation is not entirely complimentary. Simon also treats the unconscious, or the irrational, as a part of the Other but not of the self; he believes himself to be entirely rational and "normal." Consequently, Simon is the modern forward-thinking man which he desires, admires, and perceives himself to be, and in Jungian terms, that is precisely where he goes awry.

Jung and Laing concur that "normality" is actually a state of deep internal division and alienation that the individual must redress if s/he is to attain self-realization or self-knowledge. While the trio of doctors in Atwood's text -- Workman, Bannerling, Jordan -- all recognize the mysterious functioning of the brain, their concern, to varying degrees, remains on treatment and control. Simon comes closest to seeking discovery by examining the unconscious but, as his avid pursuit to recover Grace's memory indicates, Simon is unable to accept that aspects of the psyche remain beyond reason and cannot be known. He desires to have everything remain in the domain of reason and so implicitly rejects the irrational. Consequently, Simon limits his ability to come to any real self-knowledge and, simultaneously, to understand Grace's condition.

In other words, Simon is unwilling to accept that the irrational -- that which society labels "madness" -- exists within each individual, including the "expert." This unwillingness hinders him since such a recognition is particularly significant for the

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71). By contrast, Jung maintains that the unconscious cannot be entirely known or emptied and made to "disappear."

analytic process. Jung cautions that the analyst's mind is necessarily prejudiced and that s/he cannot view her/himself to be superior since no one is capable of "embracing the whole of the psyche" (*Symbols* 97). Although Simon jokingly tells his friend, Edward, that "I might run mad myself, out of sheer boredom" (133), he jealously guards the distance created by social constructions of normality and sanity. For example, he entertains sexual fantasies not only about Rachel Humphrey, but more tellingly, about Grace and becoming involved with her. These persist until Simon reminds himself of the social consequences: "[m]adness, of course; a perverse fantasy, to marry a suspected murderess." Yet, as he concedes, it is the possibility of her having flouted socially acceptable limits of behaviour that he finds so attractive: "*Murderess, murderess*, he [Simon] whispers to himself. It has an allure, a scent almost. Hothouse gardenias. Lurid, but also furtive" (389). As Atwood notes, "Grace Marks was a celebrated figure in her own time partly because of the hint of transgression and aberration and sex and plain craziness that hung around her" ("Ophelia"). Not surprisingly, then, Simon is drawn to her, the madwoman, the murderess, the elusive and enigmatic female figure.

Simon's attraction can be viewed as a male fascination with what is popularly termed the *femme fatale.* Such an explanation is based on another Jungian concept: the anima (Evans, *Jung* 73). On the basis of Vevaina's assessment that Grace functions as a Jungian shadow figure for Simon, she asserts that this encounter will inevitably move Simon towards self-realization, and affirms that "we [the readers] have no doubt that he will benefit by it" ("Quilting" 71). Even if Grace is interpreted as a shadow figure, I would argue that the opposite is true: ironically, Simon cannot benefit from any such contact because, by the conclusion of the novel, he is in no mental capacity to choose to engage with the projection. As described in the preceding chapter, such engagement with the shadow is absolutely necessary before any resolution can be expected. In Simon's case, however, he is subsumed by the unconscious; the degree of this imbalance is represented in his delusional collapse of the ironically named figures of Grace and

Faith.[10] As Mrs. Jordan's selected fiancée, Faith Cartwright attends to Simon after his war injuries of severe memory loss caused by flying shrapnel, which result in periods of delirium. During these ministrations, Simon "persists in believing that she [Faith] is called Grace" (431). This confusion may be the result of Simon's infatuation with Grace and his expressed desire to marry her, imagining her as "domesticated" and "normalized." Ironically, Simon's impossible desire foreshadows Grace's fate, for she takes on just such a role -- though not with Simon. In more general terms, Staëls notes that the positive result of self-realization is not a foregone conclusion with any of Atwood's protagonists since "the protagonist all too often tends to shy away from unconscious forces that rupture her stable position" (*Margaret* 220). This assessment is true of Simon as well; in fact, in Jungian terms, such shrinking from manifestations of the unconscious is the typical human reaction.

More substantively, I would disagree with Vevaina's characterization of Grace exclusively as a shadow figure. Although Grace's designation as murderess and madwoman situates her in the general sense as a shadow for various characters who represent society -- including the Governor's wife and daughter -- and for the reader, within the narrative Atwood positions Grace more prominently as Simon's projected anima figure. Her primary function in relation to Simon's psyche is not as a manifestation of the evil or dark impulses therein, for he does not identify Grace in this fashion. Rather, she manifests another aspect of his unconscious; that is, the contrasexual part of his psyche. Notably, Jung remarks that the "archetypes that most affect the self, [are] namely the shadow, the anima and the animus" (*CW* 9.2:17; *Abstracts* 114). Therefore, an

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[10] Interestingly, Grace herself muses on the meaning of names, including her own and Simon's. Grace speculates that she may have been named after the hymn "Amazing Grace"; however, the only basis for her conclusion is her own hope that this association is true and will describe her future (379). Regarding Simon, she notes that "[t]here is Simon Peter the Apostle, of course, who was made a fisher of men by our Lord. But there is also Simple Simon. Met a pie man, going to the fair.... [H]e thought he could take things without paying for them; and so does Dr. Jordan" (379). Although Grace minimizes the Biblical allusion, it is an apt characterization. By refusing to write the letter of professional assessment to endorse Grace's mental stability, he denies his responsibility and betrays both Reverend Verringer and Grace herself. Simon also denies his own unconscious.

examination of *Alias Grace* as a representation of the anima complements my preceding studies of the shadow in *The Robber Bride* and the animus in *Lady Oracle*. More significantly, however, it is my contention that viewing Grace as the anima most clearly and accurately demonstrates how Atwood's text explores the unconscious element of the psyche through the relationship of Grace and Simon.[11]

The anima is the female personification of a man's unconscious and can manifest itself in several ways. Jung describes the anima as having "partial autonomy" and observes that the ego-conscious struggles against the anima: "[m]an represses his feminine qualities in order to develop his persona; hence, the relation between the anima and the persona is compensatory. Since complete identification with the persona leads to neurosis, the compensatory function of the anima is salutary" (*CW* 7:18; *Abstracts* 70). That is, Jung argues that the anima must be recognized since it is part of the unconscious psyche which is required to balance the outward conscious persona. Incidentally, the persona is described as a "protective cover or mask" with "two purposes: first, to make a specific impression on other people; second, to conceal the individual's inner self from their prying eyes" (Jacobi 350). More specifically, in a Jungian view, "the anima is a personification of all feminine psychological tendencies in a man's psyche"; notably, these include "receptiveness to the irrational, capacity for personal love, feeling for nature, and -- last but not least -- his relation to the unconscious" (von Franz, "Process" 186).[12] In Atwood's characterization, Simon has no lasting female relationships, is resistant, or at least indifferent, to the idea of marriage (324), and admits his ignorance regarding nature (61). However, each of these attitudes changes as a direct result of his encounter with Grace, which suggests her function as an anima figure.

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[11] Incidentally, Atwood's familiarity with this Jungian construction of the psyche -- recently affirmed in an interview (Staëls, *Margaret* 208) and by a biographer (Sullivan, *Red* 96-97, 232) -- increases the plausibility of reading Grace as an anima figure.

[12] It may bear repeating that Jung's categorical designation of feminine and masculine traits is undoubtedly essentialist and sexist; however, this rigidity is tempered by his belief that the psyche is bisexual. In Jung's construction, both genders possess both sets of characteristics although the contrasexual elements are not consciously recognized; creating such awareness is part of the role of the anima/animus.

Similarly, the anima, this manifestation of the male unconscious, often appears in the form of fantasy or dreams, particularly "the form of erotic fantasy" (von Franz, "Process" 191). While Simon's mind almost indiscriminately indulges in such fantasy, in relation to Grace he experiences autonomous intrusions of such dreams in a powerful form: "[h]e struggles; he is being closely embraced; he can scarcely breathe. The sensation is painful and almost unbearably erotic, and he wakes with a jolt" (195). Such wandering eroticism can also be localized as a physical manifestation of the anima; M.-L. von Franz notes that "these aspects of the anima can be projected so that they appear to the man to be the qualities of some particular woman" ("Process" 191). The latter of these functions is the Jungian explanation for the phenomenon of what is commonly termed "love at first sight": a man perceives a woman as irresistible because she is a version of himself which his own unconscious recognizes. While this may help to explain Simon's attraction to Grace, their initial meeting in the cell is hardly a rapturous moment; however, it does raise a tantalizing possibility that the romanticized version of the madwoman Simon envisions is an indication that such unruly and fantastical tendencies exist and even originate from within himself.

The Jungian formulation of the role of the anima posits a direct relation to the man's knowledge of his own unconscious. Jung's associates clarify this role; M.-L. von Franz notes that "the anima takes on the role of guide or mediator, to the world within and to the Self" ("Process" 193), and Jolande Jacobi similarly observes that "it is the role of the anima to lead a man into his unconscious, and thus to force him to deeper recollection and increased consciousness" (369). If Grace is perceived as the anima, that is, as a manifestation of Simon's unconscious, then her psychological function is to direct his attention to the unknown aspect of his own psyche. In this view, it is not at all surprising that Simon finds himself fantasizing and thinking "irrational" thoughts, for he is being exposed to the unconscious and uncontrollable part of his mind. Nevertheless, Simon struggles against these intrusions and resists the guidance that Grace, as his anima,

could offer. Ironically, he fixates on Grace's unconscious while refusing to explore his own. Thus, unlike Jung, Simon expects his patient to go where he fears to tread. Jung insisted on undertaking exploration of his own psyche, recognizing that without "his own direct experience," he could not be of assistance in the process of analysis for another. Fully aware of the psychic danger of such an endeavour, Jung remarks that he "felt not only violent resistance to this, but a distinct fear.... [However, a] cogent motive for my making the attempt was the conviction that I could not expect of my patients something I did not dare to do myself" (*Essential* 80). The lack of this direct experience seems to hinder Simon's ability to guide Grace's investigation of her unconscious.

As a result of his resistance to facing his own unconscious, Simon fails to gain self-realization, or in Jungian terms, to engage in the process of individuation; this process requires conscious surrender to the unconscious (von Franz, "Process" 165). If anything, Simon consciously resists this power, as his suppression of attraction to Grace -- as his anima -- and his dismissal of his own dreams clearly demonstrates. By ignoring or suppressing his unconscious, Simon remains in a state of limited consciousness, or "normality." Perhaps the most convincing Jungian presentation of Simon's psychic struggles involves a scene in which he reminisces about his undergraduate days at Harvard. Simon recalls his exposure to Bellini's opera, *Sonnambula*, which traces the nearly fatal unconscious actions of the village girl, Amina. He recalls his Latin teacher labelling it "a parable of the soul ...[since] *Amina* was a crude anagram for *anima*." Significantly, Simon continues to be puzzled by this characterization; he wonders, "why ...was the soul depicted as unconscious? And, even more intriguing: while Amina slept, who was doing the walking?" (321). Notably, Jung observes that the anima, "the feminine part of a man's soul," is "semi-conscious" and has "partial autonomy" (*CW* 7:18; *Abstracts* 70). Moreover, since the anima has a compensatory function as a mediator between the ego, or conscious self, and the unconscious part of the psyche, it is most significant when reason fails. As von Franz observes, "[w]henever a man's logical mind

is incapable of discerning facts that are hidden in his unconscious, the anima helps him to dig them out" ("Process" 193). This revelatory function of the anima, as only partly autonomous, hinges on the male consciously choosing to engage in the process of self-discovery. In this sense, other aspects of the unconscious, such as the shadow, can be active when the anima is quiescent.

As the anima, Grace has the potential to mediate between the conscious and unconscious, enabling Simon to explore his own psyche, but Simon erroneously perceives Grace herself as the knowable. Referring to the outcome of the opera -- wherein Amina's resurgence of somnambulism proves that her actions are unconscious and so is vindicated from false accusations -- Simon admits to himself that "he wants to be convinced [by Grace that she is innocent]. He wants her to be Amina. He wants her to be vindicated" (322). As a medical man, he derides himself for being so "drastic," "so extreme and histrionic," insisting on the need for objectivity. In all these protective measures, Simon excises his ability to engage in the analysis of Grace's unconscious. Excepting Reverend Verringer and his circle, in the view of general society, Grace is mad; this complicates matters for Simon. Although he seems to recognize her as a balancing figure, Simon also fears Grace's social designation and reminds himself that instead of being innocent, or at least unconscious of her actions, "she could of course be insane" (322). José Barchilon argues that in Foucauldian terms, "[m]adness is really a manifestation of the 'soul,' a variable concept which ... came to be known, after Freud, as the unconscious part of the human mind" (viii). In these terms, what Simon actually fears is the extreme manifestation of the unconscious and his own soul: madness.

Grace is an embodiment of and a link to the unconscious not only for Simon but also for the reader; she is Simon's anima and the reader's projected shadow, a manifestation of madness. Consequently, as noted earlier, Atwood's characterization of Grace is largely based on ambiguity. Iser emphasizes the "mutually restrictive and magnifying interaction

between the explicit and the implicit, between revelation and concealment" which characterizes communication in literature; he notes that "[w]hat is concealed spurs the reader into action, but this action is also controlled by what is revealed; the explicit in its turn is transformed when the implicit has been brought to light. Whenever the reader bridges the gaps, communication begins. The gaps function as a kind of pivot on which the whole text-reader relationship revolves" ("Interaction" 111). That said, the gaps seem to contain a more powerful potential but can only be activated by the reader's direct involvement in the construction of the fiction. Atwood's use of ambiguity in *Alias Grace* serves two major functions: it preserves the fluidity of the boundary demarking the known from the unknown, and it necessarily implicates the reader as part of the society the novel represents. Critics of Atwood's body of fiction focus on the indeterminacy of the written word which relies on the reader's variable reconstruction (Bignell 22-23) and her postmodern reliance on the reader as co-creator (Hutcheon, *Canadian* 156); similarly, critical studies of *Alias Grace* often cite Atwood's postmodern use of the "patchwork" structure which requires the reader to reassemble the "blocks" of text into a narrative (see, for example, Vevaina, "Quilting"; Murray, "Historical"; Ingersoll, "Engendering"; Gopalan).

In *Alias Grace*, Atwood's use of ambiguity forces reader complicity through two distinct "gray areas": first, she uses the gaps in language to create possible and plausible readings of Grace's mental balance or imbalance; second, she introduces the possibility of the supernatural explanations for Grace's apparent amnesia surrounding the murders. Grace contemplates enacting the madwoman role by donning the slop-bucket and leaping out from behind her jail cell door, but remarks that she refrains from such stereotypical actions because "[i]f I did them, they would be sure I had gone mad again." This construction can suggest that society and the experts would be reaffirmed in their own opinions by misinterpreting her actions -- that is, "they would be sure" but they would be wrong. Conversely, Grace's phrasing also represents a frightening possibility of relapse

which she chooses to disguise as long as possible by avoiding any physical manifestation of madness since she is fully aware of the consequences of such revelations. Thus, her comments can be either a denial or an admission of insanity, but are not clearly or exclusively either. Similarly, like Simon, the reader is faced with the possibility that Grace is lying. In her first interview with Simon, Grace conjectures that "[p]erhaps I will tell lies." Simon does not refute this possibility or its likelihood; conversely, he indicates that "[p]erhaps you will tell lies without meaning to, and perhaps you will also tell them deliberately" (41). To his credit, Simon is willing to risk the possibility that Grace is a liar.

By engaging in the act of reading this narrative, mediated by Grace (as befits an anima figure), the reader implicitly agrees to take this risk also. Although the reader is well aware that Grace has "every practical reason to lie" to Simon, Barbara Hill Rigney's accusation -- that "it is the perverse aspect of this book that neither Dr. Jordan, the reader (and maybe not even Grace...), nor Atwood herself ever learns the 'truth' from Grace" ("Alias Atwood" 157-58) -- is decidedly odd. I would argue that Rigney misses the point and by seeking or even expecting the revelation of a single "truth," she is duped as a reader into mimicking Simon's role as interpreter. By contrast, Müller's assessment of *Alias Grace* praises this so-called perversity:

> [t]he novel scrutinizes not so much Grace, as the stories people construct about her and 'the mechanisms at work' ([*AG*] 94) in these constructions.... It becomes obvious that reality is not truth but a construct people believe in. It often implies ... conforming to accepted and well-known roles, as this comforts and satisfies people.... Society wants absolute certainty and its desires fulfilled. (242)

Clearly, Müller does not criticize Atwood for not fulfilling this social desire for comforting constructions but applauds her adept exposure of them. Notably, near the end of his analysis sessions with Grace, Simon admits that his methods have been "a dismal failure" and he, too, "wants certainty, one way or the other" (322). Atwood complicates matters by having Grace herself tell Simon that "[i]t would be a great relief to me, to

know the whole truth at last" (320). Such admissions encourage the reader's inclination for resolution which Atwood intentionally withholds. This action, however, is not malicious but an expression of the depth of Atwood's faith in the reader. As Atwood notes in *Negotiating With the Dead*, "[v]alue judgments on the characters or the outcome need not be made by the writer, at least not in any overt fashion.... But the reader will judge the characters, because the reader will interpret" (110-11). That said, the author is not under any obligation to provide resolution. In fact, in Iser's view, the proliferation of choices is what makes the act of reading pleasurable and engaging. Iser observes that such variability defines the dynamics of reading; by interpreting the gaps in the text, the reader "implicitly acknowledges the inexhaustibility of the text; at the same time it is this very inexhaustibility that forces him [the reader] to make his decision" (*Implied* 280). Ultimately, Atwood's reader is left to determine what is considered "madness" by challenging or upholding those normative boundaries which have condemned Grace to being a madwoman and a murderess.

Atwood's second "gray area" created through ambiguity is her inclusion of supernatural elements specifically related to the unconscious to offer possible explanations of Grace's apparent amnesia regarding the murders. In addition to spiritualism, which is largely dismissed, Atwood introduces the concepts of hypnosis, schizophrenia, and "possession" for the reader's consideration. In relation to each possibility, Atwood continues to emphasize the socially constructed nature of sanity. By eliminating readerly comfort zones, the novel not only forces readers to make and substantiate opinions but also to question the socially constructed boundaries of self and madness. This implication undermines the reader's ability to step back and criticize those judging Grace, for the reader necessarily becomes the one who sits in judgment. Neutrality is not an option. Atwood's ambiguous characterization of Grace probes and moves beyond conventional parameters of the psyche by focusing on the vast unknown expanse of the unconscious. Although Simon rejects Grace as the guide to his

unconscious, the reader maintains the option of accepting the irrational and examining it in both Grace and her/his own psyche; however, the reader is not free of the fear accompanying such contact with the unknown.

The possibility of possession is perhaps the most intriguing and revealing of the supernatural elements included in the novel. While Simon is dismissive of the procedure of hypnosis, his medical skepticism can only be accentuated by his wounded ego. In other words, the hypnosis is undertaken to accelerate the process of obtaining "results" and answers about Grace's condition that have eluded Simon thus far; the need to resort to such measures seems to indicate failure on his part. The reader's faith in the process is also undermined by Atwood's inclusion of discreditable coincidences. Most pointedly, Dr. Jerome DuPont is the chameleon figure of Jeremiah the peddler now retooled as a neurohypnotist. He is no longer making the circuit selling buttons, shirts, and such, but circulates as a part of the sudden spiritualist trend, selling a different commodity: illusions and mystery. Simon, with his ambitions and medical training, is insulted by this intrusion onto what he ironically considers his territory, Grace's psyche. The possibility that Grace is possessed arises during this hypnotic session with Dr. DuPont, held before Simon, Reverend Verringer and his committee. Once Grace is seemingly hypnotized, Simon begins to question her, but soon the conversation is controlled by Grace in her indeterminate state of consciousness.

Grace's hypnotized replies to Simon's questions are maddeningly ambiguous. For example, when he asks whether she helped to kill Nancy Montgomery, the voice which Simon can no longer identify replies "'It was my kerchief that strangled her.... Hands held it.... She had to die. The wages of sin is death. And this time the gentleman died as well, for once. Share and share alike!'" (401). Ambiguity is created by the passive construction of the sentence and by the allusion to "sin" which is Nancy's out-of-wedlock pregnancy; in Grace's earlier words, "Mary Whitney had done the same as her, and had gone to her death" (276) without the gentleman ever being identified. Indeed, some moments later,

the voice claims to be Mary Whitney, accepting blame for urging James McDermott to do the killing and asserting that "Grace doesn't know, she's never known" (402). Instead, the voice claims to have inhabited Grace, and there is a scene after Mary's death, immediately preceding Grace's fit of fainting and amnesia, where Grace claims to hear Mary's voice saying "[*l*]*et me in*" (178). Incidentally, Grace uses the alias Mary Whitney to register at the tavern in Lewiston after the murders; in this sense, Grace does absorb Mary Whitney's identity at least.

Eerily, the voice pleads for Simon not to tell Grace about this co-habitation so that Grace is not returned to the asylum. The reader is well aware that Grace has a strong aversion to being sent back to the asylum and, in fact, securing such a promise is one reason she originally agrees to undergo the sessions with Simon. Now, under hypnosis, the voice indicates that, unlike Grace, she "'liked it there at first'" because of the supposed freedom from silence; however, this freedom was short-lived: "'I could talk out loud there. I could laugh. I could tell what happened. But no one listened to me.... I was not heard'" (403). Thus, the voice seems to take responsibility for the raving behaviour which led to Grace's transferral to the asylum. More revealingly, however, the "madwoman" who has been silenced outside of the asylum is unexpectedly also silenced within. She has lost all agency by not being able to create meaning or engage in discourse. Foucault's notion of the monologue of reason silencing madness is enacted by the authority figures in the asylum and now repeated by Simon. His demand for the hypnotized Grace to "'[s]top playing tricks'" is met with wails of frustration: "'[y]ou're the same, you won't listen to me, you don't believe me, you want it your own way, you won't hear...' It trails off, and there is silence" (403). Tellingly, Simon's demand effectively silences the madwoman.

Nevertheless, since this exchange occurs under hypnosis, neither the characters nor the reader can be certain whether this manifestation is Grace's conscious voice. Notably, Grace responds normally once "awakened" by DuPont; she claims to have no

memory of the proceedings but to have been asleep (403). Thus Atwood suggests that Grace's other absences from consciousness -- fainting, sleepwalking, and amnesia -- may also be directly associated with the presence of Mary Whitney. Laing describes such a situation as a division of the personality which can cause "extreme distress"; he remarks that

> [a] most curious phenomenon of the personality, one which has been observed for centuries, but which has not yet received its full explanation, is that in which the individual seems to be the vehicle of a personality that is not his own. Someone else's personality seems to 'possess' him and to be finding expression through his words and actions, whereas the individual's own personality is temporarily 'lost' or 'gone'. This happens with all degrees of malignancy. (*Divided* 62)

Such an extreme division of personality mirrors the Jungian notion of an individual being subsumed by the unconscious -- that imbalanced state Jung describes as neuroticism. That said, it is my contention that Grace's personality loss can be more closely aligned with the unconscious. Such a connection is suggested, in part, by Grace's undetermined level of consciousness during the hypnotism. In this view, Mary becomes a manifestation of Grace's unconscious and so retains autonomy to act as an intrusive force without Grace's conscious knowledge or "permission." Thus, as the rational medical man, Simon silences Grace's unconscious voice during the hypnosis; however, as discussed earlier, in her conscious discussions with Simon, Grace inverts this power of silence as a suppressive force by selectively choosing her own silences.

Moreover, Mary can be read as Grace's shadow figure, a manifestation of the dark aspect of Grace's unconscious. Vevaina contends that "Atwood feel[s] that we do not have one but many Shadow selves which we project onto people around us.... What makes *Alias Grace* different from her earlier writing is that for the first time the multiple selves are seen to exist *within* the protagonist herself and not as people in external reality." In addition to observing that such a collapse of the shadow is a distinctive feature of this novel, Vevaina remarks that Atwood's other protagonists "fear a fall from 'grace'

with the manifestation of even one of their awkward multiple selves but Grace, who is already at the lowest rung of the social ladder, cannot fall any further" ("Quilting" 66). While interesting, Vevaina's suggestion that Grace's lack of social status makes possible the manifestation of the shadow is also limiting. The Jungian concept of the shadow as a manifestation of the unconscious affects every individual though one may not recognize it as such. Notably, this manifestation on Grace's part is not conscious and able to be controlled as Vevaina seems to suggest, nor does it reach a confrontation with the conscious self. Consequently, Grace cannot deal with the shadow and the potential positive resolution which occurs in *The Robber Bride* is not possible in this novel. That said, I would only partially agree with Stein who argues that Mary "becomes a confidant [*sic*], friend, and alter ego... and on one level she is for Grace what Zenia is for the three protagonists of *The Robber Bride*, a model of irreverent, outrageous behavior" (107). Although Mary does function as such a "model," the interaction between the characters differs on the psychological and physical levels. Whereas Zenia makes life a living hell for Charis, Roz, and Tony -- draining them of energy, resources, and trust -- conversely, Mary adds comfort and previously unknown joy to Grace's life.

Grace projects this aspect of her unconscious onto Mary and internalizes the manifestation of her shadow only after Mary's untimely death. Alice Palumbo observes that Grace and Mary are both projections of shadow figures, noting that "Grace Marks herself is, in a way, 'alias' Grace, since all who see her project their own needs, and narratives, upon her.... Mary is the projection of all of Grace's own feelings of rage and hostility" ("On the Border" 84). During Grace's sessions with Simon, she often alludes to borrowing Mary's crude way of talking and attempting to think of how Mary would respond or react to situations; Grace even attributes her own thoughts to Mary, following her expressions with the phrase, "as Mary Whitney used to say" (332). Perhaps most tellingly, Mary figures prominently in Grace's dreams; just prior to the murders, Grace envisions Mary's soul as a firefly flitting about, trapped by a closed window, and then

disappearing from Grace's view (312-13). Immediately thereafter, Grace tells Simon that she dreams of Nancy "'with her hair fallen over and the blood running down into her eyes.... holding out her hands to me for mercy'" (313). In this chilling dream, Grace is powerless to extend mercy or to help Nancy; she tells Simon, "'[t]hen it was dark suddenly, and a man was standing there with a candle, blocking the stairs that went up, and the cellar walls were all around me, and I knew I would never get out'" (314). Simon is suitably shocked by Grace's admission that this dream preceded the murders. If accepted as fantasies, then Grace's unconscious seems to be warning her through her dreams. In fact, Jung identifies such an "anticipatory or prognostic aspect" as one of the possible compensatory functions of dreams (*Symbols* 117). In this dream, Grace claims to feel detached from the situation and, more tellingly, from herself; she retains this sensation until the next morning, describing herself as "[feeling] light-headed, and detached from myself, as if I was not really present, but only there in body" (315). Thus, Grace is not only a Laingian divided self, observing herself from a distance, but also a Jungian neurotic, suffering from a state of serious psychic imbalance.

These dreams represent a blurring of Grace's conscious and unconscious states, or her inability to distinguish between dreams (fantasy) and reality. Grace reveals to Simon that these "dreams" are recurrent and, more importantly, specifies them as the reason she was put into the asylum. She tells Simon that "[t]hey said they were not dreams at all, Sir. They said I was awake. But I do not wish to say any more about it" (314). Although Grace does not specify who "they" are, presumably her referent includes the legal system and those with the authority to decide her fate, yet in this exchange with Simon, it is Grace who silences further discussion of the matter. Atwood structures the narrative to suggest significant links between Grace's dreams and an unconscious state of somnambulism. The unconscious may continue to act autonomously if the conscious is overcome and inhabited by the shadow figure; this action of the unconscious may also take on physical forms. In other words, Grace's unconscious activity may strongly mirror

Bellini's Amina figure, who physically walks in the face of disaster, narrowly averts death, and through this action unknowingly proves her innocence by demonstrating that her physical action does not necessarily indicate a state of conscious awareness.

Provocatively, however, Grace does not claim to have been incarcerated for these dreams, but rather to have been "put away" into the asylum "[b]ecause of the bad dreams" (314). Since the reader is aware that the reason for Grace's move was her "abnormal" and unruly outward behaviour, Grace's claim is to be called into question. However, the possibility remains that these physical actions parallel Amina's crossing of the bridge: an action separate from that for which she is accused but deriving from the same source. Arguably, then, Atwood's ambiguous presentation suggests a collapse between the conscious and unconscious state wherein Grace's physical actions do not guarantee her consciousness and, conversely, unconsciousness does not guarantee inactivity. Clearly, such possibility of being "possessed" by one's own unconscious psyche is frightening for the reader; s/he may well be tempted to mirror Simon's evasive action.

After Grace's hypnosis during which events spiral out of control, Simon chooses to inhabit the role of the medical man and then to escape. Among this group of "black coats [and] Ahem, aha," opining to which Grace is subjected again, there is a sense of fear and disagreement. Reverend Verringer assesses Grace's condition on past religious principles, noting that "[i]t would have been a clear case of possession ... [and] [a]n exorcism would have been in order" (405). Simon, the modern medical man protests, arguing for a "neurological condition"; Jerome DuPont tries to assist by labelling it "*double consciousness*" but is forced to concede that research has not shown this condition to be reached through hypnosis (405). Finally, Simon terms it, "a case of what is known as *dédoublement* -- the subject, when in a somnambulistic trance, displayed a completely different personality than when awake, the two halves having no knowledge of each other" (406). DuPont eagerly agrees, putting forth the assertion that it may be an

instance of "two distinct personalities" coexisting in one body rather than simply "alternating *states* of consciousness" (406).

In this diagnosis, Stephanie Lovelady notes that the so-called experts have chosen "a psychological condition ... which closely resembles today's multiple personality disorder, a still controversial condition believed to be brought on by trauma that causes the conscious self to fracture" (55). Lovelady further asserts that such a psychological diagnosis may offer Grace "slightly more agency ... than as a victim of possession, since the psyche of the multiple personality splinters in order to shield the original personality from painful knowledge. This splintering is a self-protective move from within, not an invasion from without" (57). Caminero-Santangelo's general discussion of multiple personality challenges such a suggestion of agency. She argues that "the phenomenon of multiple personality does not magnify the potential for agency (through the coexistence of several 'wills') but actually undermines agency -- perhaps most drastically the agency of speech" (118); such loss of agency is Caminero-Santangelo's definition of madness. Incidentally, Lovelady concedes that only an assessment of "outright deception" grants Grace "the highest degree of agency," but is unwilling to isolate Atwood's ambiguous presentation in this single interpretation (57). Less obviously, perhaps, attributing any amount of agency to Grace removes her from the socially-defined role of madwoman. By contrast, in their diagnosis, the experts, psychological and spiritual alike, seek (perhaps unwittingly) to entrench Grace more firmly in the role of madwoman by silencing her. Society -- including what Atwood elsewhere terms "the pro-Grace faction" ("Ophelia") -- seems to agree with this intent to silence Grace by refusing to inform her of what transpired during the hypnosis or of the ensuing diagnosis. Since both Simon and DuPont, alias Jeremiah, depart in short order, Grace sardonically recounts the ensuing situation to Jeremiah in a letter; she notes that "[t]hey will not speak about what was said on that occasion, as they are of the opinion that it might unsettle my reason; which I doubt would be the case" (425-26).

Whether the reader is inclined to accept the spiritual or psychological explanation, both conditions presume that the conscious self is subsumed by the unconscious; that is, s/he must accept the autonomy of the unconscious. Conversely, after proclaiming his medical diagnosis, Simon shirks his responsibility of writing a report in support of Grace's release, and literally flees the scene. Stark terror causes Simon to decidedly and consciously refuse to engage with the unconscious. On the train departing from Kingston, he recognizes his choice and sighs with relief. In this instant, Simon sets aside the exploration of psychological theories and decides to take up the more tangible project of a model Asylum wherein "[t]he main thing must be to keep the patients clean and docile -- drugs will be a help" (413). In this fashion, he is more closely aligned with Bannerling and Workman than ever. Although Simon recognizes that "[a]ll of this will be a compromise" (413), his actions are based on conscious fear. Simon knows that "[h]e has gone to the threshold of the unconscious, and has looked across; or rather he has looked down. He could have fallen. He could have fallen in. He could have drowned" (412). Quite clearly, despite all his psychological studies, development of reason, and medical expertise, Dr. Simon Jordan is simply unprepared for that degree of immersion.

Simon's fear is largely based on his equation of the unconscious with death; that is, he perceives the unconscious as a threat, an uncontrollable force that will inevitably result in the death of the ego-conscious -- the only self that Simon knows. Ironically, this moment of retraction from his interest in the unconscious begins a series of events which lead to Simon's utter dissociation. In a letter to his friend, Edward, Simon tellingly refers to the time in Kingston as "a troubled dream" and confesses, "I can scarcely determine whether I myself was awake or asleep" during the "unsettling turn [of events] at the last" (423). Thus, Simon reveals that the events became a manifestation of his unconscious, yet he stubbornly resists facing them. Instead, he dismisses the situation as "a wild goose chase, or a fruitless pursuit of shadows"; unsurprisingly, Simon's own psychic balance remains disturbed, and his letter is peppered with references to "com[ing] close to

nervous exhaustion," having "brain sick ramblings," "wander[ing] in darkness," inhabiting a "tumultuous and morbid mental state," and being "brain sore and weary" (423-24). These indications of mental instability are borne out in Simon's post-war incapacitated state, wherein he is desperate for Grace and cannot accept Faith. In Laingian terms, Simon, the psychological expert, becomes a schizoid through his denial of the unconscious, which is manifested in these two women:

> If the whole of the individual's being cannot be defended, the individual retracts his lines of defence until he withdraws within a central citadel. He is prepared to write off everything he is, except his 'self'. But the tragic paradox is that the more the self is defended in this way, the more it is destroyed. The apparent eventual destruction and dissolution of the self in schizophrenic conditions is accomplished not by external attacks from the enemy (actual or supposed), from without, but by the devastation caused by the inner defensive manoeuvres themselves. (*Divided* 80-81)

Atwood situates the reader to witness Simon's psychic self-destruction and, consequently, to consider her/his own position.

Simon's view is extreme, and so is the result; however, the reader is not limited to the options which are figured in the characters of Grace and Simon. The madwoman is characterized as one subsumed by the unconscious; conversely, the schizoid, or madman that Simon becomes, is a condition precipitated by complete rejection of the unconscious. Jung suggests that the most fulfilling state of health for the human being is achieved by a synthesis of the conscious and unconscious; nevertheless, he admits that "it transcends our powers of imagination to form a clear picture of what we are as a self, for in this operation the part would have to comprehend the whole ... [and] there will always exist an indeterminate and indeterminable amount of unconscious material which belongs to the totality of the self" (*CW* 7.2.2). Since the modern individual is characterized by an overbalance of the ego-conscious, Simon's outcome serves as an implicit warning. Not surprisingly, Jung emphasizes that one must acknowledge the unconscious for such a balance to be achieved or for the process of individuation to begin (*Essential* 19). The novel holds the potential for such recognition to occur, for Iser argues that in the act of

reading one fills gaps through the process of projection -- and that "a successful relationship between text and reader can only come about through changes in the reader's projections" (*Act* 166-67). In this sense, the reader's engagement with the novel causes varied projections which offer the potential for the reader to engage with her/his own unconscious through the process of ideation that is the act of reading.

For the reader of *Alias Grace*, this process is redoubled as the reader recognizes the act of projection in Simon and Grace while these same figures have the potential to function as manifestations of the reader's own projections. Marilyn Yalom describes this situation for the reader of what she terms "the literature of madness" as an ironic one wherein the reader simulates the role of a therapist. "Like a good therapist," Yalom remarks, "we listen attentively, empathically, respectfully. But unlike the therapist, we make no direct impact on the speaker; it is the author/narrator/patient who influences us, extending our vision of mental illness beyond the limits of personal experience and into a realm of communal knowledge." Following from these views, Grace has the power to influence the reader and to change her/his perception. However, as Yalom points out, "[w]hether this illusion of intimacy with fictional characters can lead to shared wisdom is a question that each reader can answer only for herself" (112). That is, Atwood's novel has the inherent power to shape the reader's thinking about madness, states of consciousness, and her/himself but such power can only be unleashed by the reader's imaginative engagement. If the reader chooses to indulge in this "illusion of intimacy," s/he moves outside of reason into fantasy, madness, and the unknown; in this act, the reader takes on the characteristics of madness. Ultimately, the entire process rests on the reader's exercise of agency: the choice to engage with the novel. This fact alone separates the reader from the mad figure with whom the novel brings her/him into contact. While the reader is positioned outside of the novel, more fundamentally s/he is not precluded from the threat of madness in her/his own experience and reality. That threat derives from

the psyche itself as a site of potential imbalance and vast amounts of the unknown and the unknowable.

The discomfort associated with assuming the label of madness is actively examined in the character of Grace Marks, Atwood's madwoman of *Alias Grace*. In this historical fiction, Atwood's ambiguous and often ironic characterization probes the limits not only of socially-constructed notions of insanity but also of consciousness. By focusing on the unconscious, Atwood posits the psyche of the madwoman as a site of the author-characters-reader dynamic. Grace becomes the mechanism by which Atwood implicitly challenges her characters and her reader to determine the level of self-knowledge each is willing to possess. Society keeps Grace at arm's length, in fearful wonderment. Dr. Simon Jordan approaches, looks, and flees in terror only to undergo psychic dissolution. Perils remain on both sides and the reader alone is left to decide which method is "mad." With limited information and many unknowns, the reader must choose whether to accept the existence of the unconscious and engage with the irrational, or to choose the tenuous safety offered by the socially-constructed net of "normality." Either way, the reader must take responsibility for her/his choice, a choice the unconscious may well contest.

Conclusion:

Facing the Fear of Madness

"So you become the voice of silence."

-- Margaret Atwood (Atwood and Beaulieu 184)

Margaret Atwood has high expectations of authors, readers, and the act that draws them together. She posits the act of writing as an act of faith and hope and, by extension, the reader becomes the only means for such hope to be realized.[1] Her faith is particularly directed at the unrealized potential of humanity -- and through writing, Atwood seeks to awaken that potential in the reader. Her method involves the fictional representation of diverse stages of self-knowledge, including its absence; the latter condition is perhaps most convincingly and starkly figured in *Life Before Man*. The theories of C. G. Jung, R. D. Laing, and Wolfgang Iser illuminate Atwood's various foci: on the alienated condition of the individual, on the resultant necessity to engage in self-realization, and on the reader's potential to manifest such change in "the real world" through her/his act of ideation. While gesturing towards a general lack of self-knowledge, Atwood's novels specifically depict characters and societies wherein ignorance of the unconscious creates psychic imbalance and states of "madness." Notably, in conversation with Victor-Levy Beaulieu, Atwood remarks that the role of a writer is to engage in ideation based on absences of information and then to express that which is implicit; thus, through the act

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[1] Atwood's faith in the acts of writing and reading are well-documented and span her career to date. In addition to her comments in interviews (for example, Mendez-Egle, "Conversation" 173, 177), similar thoughts can be found in the Atwood Papers housed at the University of Toronto. Particular early references to the power of language and writing include a manuscript dating to 1970-71 (Untitled comments) and a striking lecture dating to 1984 wherein Atwood addresses a group of writers at a conference; she asks, "what exactly are we doing here? I think we're here to maintain faith, in various ways.... We're here to tell each other that what we're doing is important, spiritually important, spiritually important for our communities -- ... and that we must at all costs maintain the faith and keep on doing what we're doing. It works, too" ("Trip").

of writing, she notes that "you become the voice of silence" (184). While Atwood utilizes gaps and ambiguities to transfer this same act of interpretation and projection from the writer to the reader, nowhere is the enunciation through discourse more significant than in relation to madness.

Madness is paradoxically both elusive and pervasive. As a "condition" often associated in Western society with women, madness fascinates and baffles physicians, psychologists, sociologists, and feminists alike. The more one tries to define madness, the more it slips outside of language: blurring categories, doubling upon itself, and retreating into the inexpressible. This resistance to containment in discourse is arguably one of the few consistent features of madness and makes approaching madness through literature a daunting and necessarily limited endeavour. Such an attempt requires a paradoxical acceptance that madness can be neither fully contained nor fully expressed through discourse. Generally, contemporary Western society considers any manifestations of the irrational or the unconscious in the individual to signal abnormality. However, since the "normal" condition is a dissociated one, even positive attempts at psychic reintegration are termed "mad" -- fantasy, dreams, and projections are all considered dangerous and to be avoided. Consequently, madness is used as a means of distancing the unknown from the self by treating it as other and thereby attempting to silence the mad figure -- both externally and internally. Since the irrational eludes full expression in language, the individual confronted by it is unable to communicate her/his experience comprehensibly; thus s/he is removed from discourse and, effectively, is silenced -- both by society and by the very limitations of language itself. Therefore, in the act of interpretation which -- Jung, Laing, and Iser all agree -- forms a large part of human interaction, the "mad" experience is necessarily misinterpreted and the "mad" figure is misunderstood. In this apparent impasse, the acts of writing and reading acknowledge the limitations of language while simultaneously seeking to work within and through them. As a result, literature offers an avenue to approach madness through the act of ideation.

The conclusion to a literary-critical study of madness seems the appropriate place to recognize that many individuals -- some of whom I have known personally -- do experience cases of serious, even debilitating, psychological imbalances or disturbances. By no means has it been my intention in this study to trivialize either the difficulties or the reality of such experiences. On the contrary, through this examination of various forms of madness in Atwood's novels, I wish to draw attention to the prevalent and facile use of psychological categorization in contemporary Western society for the purpose of challenging such distancing techniques. Atwood's representations of society, together with her strategies of reader-involvement, position the reader to reconsider designations of normality and degrees of self-knowledge -- first in the fiction and characters, then in "reality" and the self. Through the presentation of normative instability, Atwood's novels reveal the necessarily fluctuating designation of madness as a social construct which is variable but pervasive. Some version of madness exists in each of the novels, suggesting a similar presence in the corresponding external societies; in fiction and reality, "madness" designates what is not known or understood and therefore is feared -- both in the other and in the self. In addition to the resistance to containment in rational discourse, then, the existence of fear is a defining feature of madness as a social designation which seeks to distance the unknown and the unknowable from the primarily ego-conscious self.

The act of reading counters this distancing tendency by granting the reader perspective to observe dissociation and its consequences in both characters and societies. Through the process of ideation, the reader creates this society and interprets the novel's gaps, thereby becoming complicit in establishing normative limits and in passing judgment on individuals and their society. The societies in Atwood's novels are peppered with non-expert psychological diagnoses, character eccentricities, psychological marketing strategies, dreams, fantasies, suicidal tendencies, anxieties, nervous breakdowns, paranoia, sleepwalking, periods of unconsciousness, and clinically diagnosed insanity. The reader must navigate this world and take responsibility for her/his

assumptions, conclusions, and judgments. Within this interpretive experience, Atwood further intensifies the reader's role by including the opinions of psychological "experts" but representing them as necessarily limited hypotheses. Nonetheless, the reader cannot simply dismiss these diagnoses as flawed and invalid since s/he shares the expert's predicament. The psyche remains a vast unknowable expanse -- with an unpredictable and autonomous unconscious -- and any other individual's experience is always exclusive; consequently, any conclusions about the other individual are based on limited information. Although this exclusion is obscured by the reader's deep imaginative engagement with the characters' experiences, the reader is always distanced from the fiction, straddling the world of the novel and her/his own. In contrast to the characters' situation, Iser reminds us that the reader's involvement is always by choice and can be terminated at will. Only when the reader transfers the ideation process to an analysis of her/his surroundings and self is the option of disengagement removed. Paradoxically, then, the reader's focus on a society that is "other" enables a re-visioning of the foundational assumptions which create the world s/he inhabits.

Notably, Atwood insists upon the reader's complicity in the creation of both worlds alike. Through this interaction, the reader vicariously experiences the characters' "normal" alienated condition and their tenuous, often painful, processes of self-realization. Surrounded by psychology in popular culture, Marian McAlpin questions her "normality," whereas Rennie Wilford is confronted with normative instability. Joan Foster unknowingly struggles against "normal" alienation through fantasy and her animus figures; by contrast, this dissociated condition subsumes Elizabeth Schoenhof and Lesje Green, obliterating fantasy. In a reality that verges on frightening fantasy, Charis, Roz, and Tony confront their unconscious projections in the shadow figure of Zenia. Ultimately, the reader is most directly and strategically implicated in interpreting in/sanity through the interaction of Grace Marks and Dr. Simon Jordan. In addition to the puzzling question of Grace's psychic condition, her function as Simon's anima figure inverts the

potential of psychic realization by revealing the psychological authority figure as equally dissociated from his unconscious. Within all of these interactions, the reader is in a privileged position as observer, engaged but also removed; nonetheless, s/he also shares the characters' psychic limitations, interpretive challenges, and fear of losing conscious control. Atwood challenges the reader to recognize the alienated state of "normality" as inherently problematic, yet only the reader can determine whether to engage consciously in the process of individuation. The act of reading provides an opportunity for the reader to increase in self-knowledge by recognizing manifestations of the unconscious, considering the unknown, and, fundamentally, by facing the fear of madness.

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