Chapter III

3. The Parts of the Patriarchal Machinery and the Matriarchal Deputies: An Examination of Feminist Ideology

This chapter focuses on the various types of agents of gender constraints in the novels of Atwood. In other words, it examines the upholders of the patriarchal values. They are always depicted as harmful, depressing and unappealing characters in Atwood’s novels. Though most of them seem powerful and successful, a careful character analysis reveals that there is an emptiness in their lives. There is a great deal of social pressure on them to conform. They are tormented by the same system which they believe in. These characters never emerge victorious and they are always ruined by their faithfulness to the gender dichotomy. Interestingly, both men and women play equally important roles in sustaining the oppressive patriarchal values, a feature that gives Atwood’s fiction genuineness and gender neutrality. The purpose of this chapter is to have a clear understanding of the might of the patriarchal system, how it is kept alive and how it oppresses even those people who adhere to it. Besides, it helps one to clearly see Atwood’s negative attitude towards the traditional gender stereotypes maintained in the patriarchal society. The present chapter, which examines the patriarchal power, will serve as a background against which the greatness of the people who transcend gender constraints to achieve selfhood can be understood.

The adjective ‘masculine’ is used to satirize men’s desire to be ‘typical’ males. Such men are the primary agents of the patriarchal oppression. They are obsessed with the traditional notions of masculinity and believe that they must suppress women in order to remain powerful. Their life is characterized by pretentious behavior and
manipulative nature. Peter, Marian’s fiancé in *The Edible Woman*, is unmistakably a symbol of archetypal male principles. Even the apartment in which he lives is given a high symbolic value. It is still under construction and Peter lives there “at only a third of the price they’ll charge when the building is finished. He was able to make this deal through a connection he acquired during a piece of contract manipulating” (64). This is indicative of his pragmatism and manipulative nature, the qualities that conventionally characterize a person who performs a typical male role. The unfinished apartment is often used by the builders as a model for buyers. Similarly, Peter also tries to be a ‘model’ man who is progressive, successful and socially acceptable. Through his relentless compliance with the standards of materialistic society, “he promotes consumerism and is a loyal custodian of capitalist way of existence [...]” (Pourgharib, 2008: 103).

There is a great deal of self-imposed pressure on Peter to conform to the demands of the patriarchy. In the beginning of the novel, he seems to believe that he needs to have tough male friends with whom he can drink and hunt with. He is fond of photography and hunting, both symbols of ‘capture’, and keeps a set of weapons which include two rifles, a pistol and many knives. He hates marriage and believes it will domesticate him. He agonizes over the fact that his friends get married one after another and abandon the ‘macho alliance.’ When his friend Trigger gets married, he condemns the bride, “accusing her of being predatory and malicious and of sucking poor Trigger into the domestic void” (74). Nevertheless, Peter soon starts to believe that he has a social obligation to get married, and proposes to Marian. He ‘logically’ justifies his decision to get sucked “into the domestic void” by saying
A man’s got to settle down sometime, and I am twenty-six........A fellow can’t keep running around indefinitely. It’ll be a lot better in the long run for my practice too, the clients like to know you’ve got a wife; people get suspicious of a single man after a certain age, they start thinking you’re a queer or something... (106)

Two important things are testified here. Firstly, the building blocks of Peter’s entire personality are social convictions. Peter’s character does not seem to have any fixed and individual identity. He just mirrors the false and inconsistent ideals of the society. Secondly, Peter is extremely self-centered. He only itemizes his reasons for marrying Marian without any consideration for her feelings. In other words, his proposal is based on what he considers to be his social and professional needs and not on any genuine love for Marian.

Throughout the novel, Peter clearly exemplifies the constricting nature of the society which thrives on gender differences. When Marian gives him frozen peas to eat, he is dissatisfied with it and asks her peevishly, “Why can’t you ever cook anything?” (73). This is obviously an overbearing way of reminding Marian of her traditional duties. He generally dislikes it when Marian goes out alone and feels she always needs to be protected by him. He always opens doors for her. “Peter is scrupulous about things like that” (80). His camera is symbolically a restrictive device with which he imposes limitations on Marian.

Now ....could you stand a little less stiffly? Relax. And don’t hunch your shoulders together like that, come on, stick out your chest, and don’t look so worried darling, look natural, come on, smile. (291)
Moreover, Peter’s passion for hunting is also used as a domineering strategy which scares Marian into thinking that she is defenseless. While describing to Len how he and his macho friends killed a rabbit, he says, “So I let her off and Wham. One shot, right through the heart[…]” (80). This cold-blooded account of the killing makes Marian run away from the place. In addition to the overtly dominant behavior, Peter also seems to use certain devious strategies to control Marian psychologically. Peter explains why he likes to marry her by saying

*I can always depend on you. Most women are pretty scatter brained but you’re such a sensible girl. You may not have known this but I’ve always thought that’s the first thing to look for when it comes to choosing a wife.* (106)

To Marian’s surprise, he says to her that her commonsense and independence make her admirable and different from other women. He, therefore, skillfully forces Marian to believe that admirable women, who have commonsense, leave all decisions to their men. They do not demand anything from them and do not rob the men of their independence. So, Marian has always been undemanding and non-aggressive. Also, by contrasting ‘sensible’ Marian with other ‘scatter brained’ women, he shrewdly tries to disassociate Marian from womankind. Pourgharib (2008) says “The best method of ensuring Marian’s loyalty is by rupturing her affinities with other women. Invisibility to the presence of differences is what makes a power relation feasible and durable” (96). In this way, Peter can easily deprive “her of her primary identity as a woman. Individuals who are devoid of their basic identity are the most vulnerable and unassertive” (97).
Along these lines, Peter fits Marian into a conventional image of a woman who is submissive and continues to use her for his own benefit and delight. In the sexual relationship, Peter is always indifferent to Marian’s feelings, because “Marian is only a body to Peter, who is a typical symbol of consumerism” (Indira, B., 1999: 168). During their first attempt to have sex, Peter disappoints Marian because he switches the attention to clearing the floor of pieces of the glass bottle that gets broken in the process. He refuses to listen to her plea to ignore the glass pieces. On another occasion, he drives her to make love in the bathtub presumably in an attempt “to assert his youthfulness and spontaneity” (68). Though it is very inconvenient to her, he enjoys it without any sense of guilt. However, the sophisticated way in which he exploits Marian, which perfectly matches up with the furtiveness of the male-dominated society, is so indirect that Marian is puzzled as to what he actually wants from her. In fact, it is the elusiveness of Peter’s motives that drives Marian crazy. Pourgharib (2008) rightly says:

Marian’s accumulating resentment is not caused so much by Peter’s domination over her as it is caused by his maneuvers to squeeze Marian into a model identity based on his own propensities and prejudices as to how a woman should be (97)

Joe, Clara’s husband in The Edible Woman, is a tacit but loyal upholder of patriarchal values. His repressive function in the narrative is camouflaged by the affectionate and helpful way in which he takes care of his wife and children. He is seen cooking, serving and changing children’s diapers. By using the role of Joe, a caring husband and a benevolent man who does all domiciliary chores which are traditionally done
only by women, Atwood seems to illustrate an important point that the patriarchal
dominion over women is not always achieved by aggressive men whose approach is
overtly brutal and uncaring. It is also frequently done by some ‘chivalrous’ men whose
approach is very furtive and therefore more treacherous.

Clara’s inept and bleak condition exemplifies the insidious way in which the male love
and care lead to the erosion of the female independence and capabilities. Joe has
always had “a protective attitude towards Clara” (37) and after the marriage, he
pampers her because he, a conventional male, thinks she serves the interests of the
society as an ‘earth-mother.’ Clara, in turn, thinks her childbearing and motherhood
entitle her to be slothful. She is completely dependent on her husband for doing the
domestic chores. Interestingly, from the perspective of traditional Indian family
values, this situation looks marvelous with Joe as an unusually devoted husband and
Clara a ‘blessed’ wife. However, in a feminist context and from a psychological
perspective, this can be interpreted as patriarchy’s ongoing attempt to craftily wear
down women’s sense of independence and their basic capabilities. So that they can be
robbed of their ability to develop a sense of their own selves.

However, Joe, unlike a typical male oppressor, has a sympathetic understanding of
how marriage wears down a woman’s identity. At Marian’s engagement party, when
Joe tells Marian about the problems of a married woman, he says:

… when she gets married, her core gets invaded…her core...The center
of her personality, the thing she’s built up, her image of herself....Her
feminine role and her core are really in opposition. Her feminine role
demands passivity from her ... (296).
According to him, a woman lets her personality to get taken over by the domestic responsibilities. This awareness, however, does not make Joe play any constructive role in the narrative. He is not disposed to do anything to ameliorate the situation because he thinks women can never be saved from this deprivation. In his opinion, it is useless to caution women against losing their identity to social conventions. He says, “Of course it doesn’t help to realize all that ... It happens, whether you realize it or not.... (297). This pessimism gives Joe’s character a distinct negative flavor. He looks even more debased when he says that women should be denied university education as it can make them more conscious of the loss of their identity. It is therefore quite clear that Joe epitomizes patriarchal repression.

Leonard Slank, Marian’s friend in *The Edible Woman*, seems to illustrate the shakiness and feebleness of masculinity. Introduced as a “self consciously lecherous skirt chaser” (103) in the narrative, Leonard initially gives the impression that he is a typical male oppressor in the plot of the novel, but the hilarious and uncomplicated way in which Ainsley entices him, shows that he is the casualty in the battle between the sexes. The way in which Ainsley, using her ‘scheming’ nature, feigns youthfulness and naivety while pursuing Leonard Slank, a womanizer, who has a strong desire for young and inexperienced girls, is a clear indication that maleness is also equally fragile and is prone to be manipulated by femaleness. It has to be noted here that Atwood skillfully inverts the conventional seduction scheme and it is Len, the man, who screams at the end, “You seduced me!”(195).

For Leonard, love is just a game to be won and young girls are just the rewards to relish. He enjoys his transitory relationships with girls without any emotional
attachment with them. He does not want to bear any responsibility for what happens to them afterwards. His personality is described in the novel as a mixture of cynicism and idealism. The idealist in him is attracted to the purity of untouched girls. After his goal is achieved, the cynic in him is repelled by the griminess of tainted girls. Figuratively, Leonard is an animal which enjoys and discards its prey.

Atwood seems to use the deviousness of Ainsley as a sort of retribution for Leonard’s sexual malignancy. By using the sexual battle between Leonard and Ainsley, Atwood also seems to warn that men can also be easily trivialized by women if men continue to take women’s submissiveness for granted. That Len is reduced to an object is clear as he is identified by Ainsley as “a potential candidate” (78) and used “as an inexpensive substitute for artificial insemination with a devastating lack of concern for his individuality” (148). The inanimate nature of Len’s role in the narrative is clearly evident in the pronominal reference used in the conversation between Ainsley and Marian:

Ainsley: It has to be tonight.

Marian: What does?

Ainsley: It, Leonard. You know.

Marian: Oh. That. (143)

Atwood comically exposes the gullibility of this seemingly clever enchanter by making him lament the damage (that he thinks) he has caused her:

She’s such a little girl, Marian, I mean most women you’d feel what the hell, they probably deserved it, rotten bitches anyway, not that anything like that has ever happened to me before. But she’s so young. (191)
Leonard, as it finally becomes very clear, is not disposed to perform a typical male role. He says he can never be a husband and a father. He shows the fragility and the inadequacy of his masculinity when he expresses his horror of being responsible for someone’s pregnancy and indignantly rejects Ainsley’s plea to marry her. He recoils from Ainsley “fertility worship” and shouts “all you clawed scaly bloody predatory whoring fucking bitches can go straight to hell” (268-269). In short, Len rejects an archetypal male position, and, in the polarized patriarchal social system, becomes a victim of oppression.

In *Surfacing*, David is an unmistakable exemplification of male authority. When his wife, Anna, brings him a beer, he pats her on the bottom and says, “That’s what I like, service” (32). In the beginning, one gets the impression that he is hilarious and frisky, but later one can slowly start seeing the viciousness that all his pranks spring from. He, using his wit which is often mortifying, emotionally restrains his wife from being a dignified person. Anna says, “He’s got this little set of rules. If I break one of them I get punished, except he keeps changing them, so I’m never sure. He’s crazy, there’s something missing in him, you know what I mean? He likes to make me cry because he can’t do it himself” (123). Interestingly, David, like the narrator, is emotionally deadened, but the reason for his numbness, unlike that of the narrator, is his absolute consonance with inconsiderate patriarchal values.

As an upholder of male chauvinism, David has a duplicitous nature, a key characteristic of a manipulator. On one occasion, he tells Anna, “None of that Women’s Lib or you’ll be out on the street. I won’t have one in the house…” (112). However, on another occasion, he tells the narrator, “..I’m all for the equality of
women; she (Anna) doesn’t happen to be equal and that’s not my fault, is it?” (139). Similarly, he is a vociferous critic of Americanism (a word which, according to the narrator, refers to a sort of socio-cultural imperialism). However, he behaves like an embodiment of Americanism. He loves baseball and often imitates the American cartoon character Woody Woodpecker. The most striking contradiction in David’s character is that he teaches ‘communication,’ though his relationship with his wife Anna is marked by a startling lack of communication. In fact, his communication with people, which generally consists of mortifying comments and imitations, is so hollow that no one can understand what he really feels.

In one of the most distressing scenes of the novel, David, with a “menacing gentleness” (136), tells Anna to strip off for the movie he makes. When Anna feels humiliated by his demand and refuses to cooperate, David, being completely insensitive to Anna’s feelings, says that she is only pretending to be reluctant and that she is in reality an exhibitionist. As time passes, he runs out of patience and shouts,” Now take it off like a good girl or I’ll have to take it off for you.” (136). He finally succeeds in filming Anna in the nude. This merciless act of David epitomizes the patriarchy’s callous disregard for the feelings of women (or the powerless in general) and its aspiration to oppress.

Like Peter Woodlander of The Edible Woman, David uses the camera as an instrument to ‘capture’ and dominate. The documentary that David makes with the help of Joe, according to Poovaya (1981: 212), has a clear undertone of male domination and subjugation of women:
Among the objects photographed for David’s documentary film ‘Random Samples’ are stinking fish innards from the fish they had caught, the strangled heron they had found on a remote island, the log they had felled, and most important of all, pictures of David’s wife Anna, brutally humiliated into posing in the nude by her husband. The choice of subjects hardly needs a comment. Atwood has tacitly included women among the felled, brutalized objects of nature-tree, fish and bird. (1981: 212)

His brazen opportunism and vindictiveness come to light when he tries to induce the narrator to have sex with him on realizing that Anna and Joe are having an affair. His imperious approach that belittles the narrator’s feeling is typical of male chauvinism. He makes this attempt not out of any love for the narrator but only to take vengeance on his wife Anna. The narrator is appalled at David’s stony, unconcerned conduct:

*Geometrical sex, he needed me for an abstract principle; it would be enough for him if our genitals could be detached like two kitchen appliances and copulate in mid-air, that would complete his equation.* (153)

When the narrator refuses to give in to his demand, he yells at her furiously: “You…tight-ass bitch” (153). This insolent behavior towards the narrator, coupled with the vulgar language he uses to describe Anna (“a pair of boobs”), give the narrator enough reasons to think that David is an unsympathetic oppressor.
Arthur in *Lady Oracle* personifies the double standard and insincerity that characterize the patriarchal system. Atwood uses this pseudo-reformist to indicate that men, despite the differences in their outward behavior, are innately domineering and manipulative. By creating Arthur’s character, Atwood scorns the hypocrisy of men who claim to rebel against conventions. Arthur, “*A melancholy fighter for almost-lost causes, idealistic and doomed*”(165), easily captures Joan’s heart. When he tells Joan that he is looking for a “*woman whose mind he could respect*” (33-34), Joan feels he is very different from people like Paul, who feel women are inferior to men. However, in the end, the contrary is proved true: Arthur is just as repressive as Paul.

Arthur, who ‘champions’ the cause of the oppressed, is, in fact, very snobbish. He always looks down on others. “*He never talked things out with them. He would simply decide, by some dark, complicated process of evaluation that these people were unworthy. Not that they’d done something unworthy, but that unworthiness was innate in them* (237). At home, he expects servile obedience from Joan. Her failures make him extremely happy as it makes him feel that she is weak and he is in control. Obviously, her sudden success as an author upsets him. The feminist theme of Joan’s book makes him feel humiliated. Consequently, he turns more apathetic towards Joan and all her efforts to please him are in vain. As a conventional male force in the novel, Arthur offers significant resistance to Joan’s development and because of his attitude, even her victories, instead of making her feel happy, cause her uneasiness.

In spite of his negative function in the novel, Arthur plays an important role in helping Joan to come to terms with her flaws and duplicities. In the beginning, Arthur’s seeming idealism and the organized nature make her acutely conscious of her
inadequacies. However, when his fickle behavior and falseness come to light later, she feels very comfortable with her own duplicitous nature.

*Once I’d thought of Arthur as single-minded, single-hearted, single-bodied; I, by contrast, was a sorry assemblage of lies and alibis, each complete in itself but rendering the other worthless. But I soon discovered there were as many of Arthur as there were of me. The difference was that I was simultaneous, whereas Arthur was in sequence*” (236)

Hengen (1993) describes Arthur as *pathologically narcissistic*, and this keeps Joan so fearful that she suppresses her several identities, whereas Arthur passes through his own series of identities – among them pamphleteer in a British Ban the Bomb movement, US civil rights activist, writer for a Canadian nationalist tabloid – all of which fail to supply him with an acceptable sense of self (67). The lack of an adequate sense of self makes him apathetic and unwilling to develop a close relationship with Joan for whom the marital life becomes increasingly disappointing.

With a desperate need to conform to the stereotypical image of masculine behavior and with the permissive nature of Rennie, Jake is a sadistic male figure in *Bodily Harm*. He is, aptly, a packaging designer by profession and Rennie later understands that she is one of the things he is packaging, in spite of her prudence. He tries to transmute Rennie into an erotic figure. Jake destroys her plants and makes changes in her apartment, especially the bedroom. He ‘decorates’ the bedroom with sensual posters. One of them shows a "*brown-skinned woman wound up in a piece of material*"
that held her arms to her sides but left her breasts and thighs and buttocks exposed” (105) and another one displays “a woman lying feet first on the sofa and her head up at the other end of the sofa, was tiny, featureless and rounded like a doorknob. In the foreground there was a bull” (105-06). He decides what Rennie should wear and how she has to behave. Interestingly, Rennie is very compliant with Jake’s wishes and he represses her without any qualms. Overall, their relationship illustrates the conventional power relations between male and female; Jake is domineering and Rennie is submissive.

Jake does not believe in ‘love’; he believes only in ‘sexual desire.’ Love making, for him, is a vulgar game, which is meant to hurt women as much as possible. “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 (207). His sadism and rape fantasies manifest themselves in his strange ideas like” pretend I just came through the window. Pretend you’re being raped” (104). Undoubtedly, Jake personifies male domination and cruelty in the novel.

Besides his sadism in the sexual relationship with his wife, he has a contemptuous attitude towards women in general. He says, “What is a woman...A head with a cunt attached or a cunt with a head attached? Depends which end you start at. (235). Similarly, when Rennie wants his opinion on her mind, he says, “I’m not a mind man. I’m more interested in your body, if you want the truth” (104). His unbalanced interest in Rennie’s body and his repressive nature makes Rennie feel like a mere sex object. In other words, “in Jake’s hands and under his gaze, Rennie is turned from a “being-
for-itself” into a “being-for-others,” from a subject to an object” (Drichel, 2008:28). Jake shows a total disregard for Rennie’s likes and dislikes and uses her as an object to fulfill his carnal desires. Since Jake lacks devotion and is interested only in bodily pleasures, Rennie’s mastectomy upsets him very much. He sees the scar on her breast as “the kiss of death on her” (201).

Jake, a man who skillfully shapes Rennie into an object according to his sexual fantasies, does not give her any opportunity to develop a sense of self. This ‘packager’, in spite of his ‘masculine’ behavior, is emotionally very insecure. Instead of sympathizing with his wife, who has undergone a mastectomy, he is repelled by her scar. However, fortunately for Rennie, “Jake receives little emphasis in the narrative, leaving Rennie to recover and define herself alone in relation to the men and women she meets amid the violent political upheaval on St. Antoine” (Hengen, 1993:90).

The commander in *The Handmaid’s Tale* represents the most powerful class which is the pivot of the Gileadean totalitarian regime. As a high-status male individual, he epitomizes the patriarchal supremacy in the novel. He ‘owns’ the people in his house as if they are mere commodities. Offred clearly feels the power that he has on all the people: “Household: that is what we are. The Commander is the head of the household. The house is what he holds. To have and to hold, till death do us part” (91).He is one of those who considers that pre-Gileadean culture is totally immoral and maintains that the male-controlled Gileadean way of life is fully in conformity with natural and religious rules. The commander says that the pre-Gileadean years which were characterized by love, passion and desire “were just an anomaly, historically speaking.....just a fluke. All we’ve done is to return things to Nature’s
norm”(232). The Commander’s ceremonial speech during prayvaganzas reveals that the religion is skillfully used to subjugate women: “Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection..........But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence”(233).

However, Atwood’s characters are so true-to-life that they defy classification. One cannot easily come to a conclusion that the Commander is a merciless male oppressor. In his personal life, he feels very lonely and dejected as he himself is coerced by the rigid social system of Gilead, of which he is a founding father. He seems to long for the company of a female partner who is sensible and intelligent. He secretly makes Offred come to his room and makes her his Scrabble partner. He also gives her books, magazines and hand lotions, things that women are banned from using in the Republic of Gilead. His personal life, in which he often talks and behaves like a naïve boy, contrasts sharply with his public life as a custodian of traditional patriarchal values. Offred thinks that the Commander is a prisoner in the callous and stern social order that he has created. Though Offred does not feel any affection for him, she, in the beginning of their unlawful relationship, certainly feels pity for him.

However, it slowly becomes clear that the Commander develops the illegal relationship with Offred for his own selfish needs with a total disregard for Offred’s safety. He ignores the fact that this relationship puts Offred’s life at great risk. Offred comes to know that her predecessor had to commit suicide when the Commander’s illegal relationship with her came to light. The Commander’s self-pity and egocentrism are typical of gender chauvinism and it is certain that he is a male oppressor whose approach is tacit. He likes to have Offred dress up in an erotic outfit
and take her to Jazebel’s, a secret Gileadean brothel where the powerful men go to have extra-marital sex. The way the commander justifies extra-marital sex by the Gileadean elite is a clear indication of the brazen hypocrisy upon which the Biblical Gileadean society has been built: “But everyone’s human, after all…. You can’t cheat Nature….Nature demands variety, for men…It’s part of the procreational strategy. It’s Nature’s plan” (248-49). When he proudly says, “we have quite a collection” (249) referring to the women at Jezebel’s, he looks as if he is a ruthless monster. Offred comes to know from the Commander that many women who were successful professionals in the pre-Gileadean era have now been reduced to lowly sluts. The Commander describes the past of some prostitutes with a hint of smugness and sarcasm: “That one there, the one in green, she’s a sociologist. Or was. That one was a lawyer, that one was in business, an executive position…. (249). That Atwood intends the Commander to be a loathsome character is beyond question.

There are women who accept the feminine roles prescribed by the patriarchal system. However, in their anxious attempt to gain some ‘feminine’ power in the male-dominated society, they become the custodians of the traditional feminine values that the patriarchy expects all women to internalize. As the upholders of the patriarchal notions of femininity, they gain power over other women who need to be groomed to be socially acceptable. In Atwood’s novels, they are sometimes even more oppressive and influential than dominant men. However, it can be noted that they themselves are scared of the male-dominated society and they tyrannize fellow women only to forget their own victimization at the hands of men.
Joan’s mother in *Lady Oracle*, Fran, is a domineering character. She always tries to mould her daughter into a person who has all the qualities that satisfy the expectations of the patriarchal society. By forbidding Joan from living freely with her limitations, she makes Joan feel totally inadequate as a person. She names her daughter after Joan Crawford, a gorgeous film star, and this clearly shows what kind of a person she wants her daughter to grow into. Later, this makes Joan feel that her mother never wanted her to have her own identity.

When her overweight daughter refuses to follow her suggestions and try sincerely to become slim and attractive, she feels her daughter has brought shame on her. Consequently, she turns very hostile towards her daughter. She often humiliates her daughter to vent her anger and frustration. For instance, in the dancing school, when Joan has a good chance of dancing as a butterfly, she makes her play the role of a mothball, which Joan finds very disgraceful. In fact, it is this childhood incident that is the most important reason for Joan’s perpetual sense of insecurity and desire for acceptance. Fran does this to Joan in order to make her feel that she is unfit to do anything that needs elegance and beauty.

Fran’s preoccupation with her daughter’s appearance shows how strongly she has been victimized by the overbearing standards set by the patriarchy. She not only tries to transform her daughter, but also tries to transform herself by regularly putting on facial cosmetics. In *Lady Oracle*, she seems to epitomize the destiny of women who have no choice but to play the traditional roles imposed on them. Frustrated by the monotony of her married life, she yells at her irresponsible husband: “You don’t know what it was like, all alone with her to bring up while you were over there enjoying
you...It's not as though I wanted to have her. It's not as though I wanted to marry you...I had to make the best of a bad job” (82). Her disposition towards adhering to socio-cultural norms in spite of her craving to be free makes her look very duplicitous to her daughter who thinks she is a “triple headedmonster.”

In *Lady Oracle*, Fran comes across as an insecure and unhappy woman. She cares primarily about “what kind of impression she makes” and never grows to accept her life (Hengen, 1993). Her desperate yearning to look beautiful and remain socially acceptable makes her feel weary as she grows older. She tries to reestablish herself in the society by making her daughter attractive, an attempt which fails and makes her feel inept. She is also frustrated by her husband who is irresponsible and cold. Overwhelmed by the wretchedness of the domestic life, she finally commits suicide. Even after her death, her memory haunts her daughter reminding her of her “inadequacies” and the shameful past. Atwood uses this character to exemplify the weakness of women and how easily they succumb to patriarchal forces. Nevertheless, one should remember that Fran’s melancholic power of determination and honor later exerts a major positive influence on her daughter’s quest for selfhood.

The Aunts in *The Handmaid’s Tale* are strict mature women who guard Handmaids with “electric cattle prods hung on thongs from their leather-belts” (14). Though they are man-haters, who think that “men are sex machines” (153), they have embraced patriarchal values and are used by Gilead to impose these ideas on other women. Though they are the most significant upholders of male domination in the novel, they are given only limited power by the male ruling class of Gilead. It has to be noted that the Aunts “could not be trusted with guns” (14). With the power given to them, these
merciless women hold sway over the Handmaids. This matriarchal control system within an unrestrictedly powerful patriarchal organization may seem enigmatic but is based on a simple colonial logic: “control of the indigenous by members of their own group” (320). In other words, “the best and the most cost-effective way to control women for reproductive and other purposes was through women themselves” (320).

Only very few women serve as Aunts out of a genuine belief in the conventional patriarchal values. Most of them do this job either because they love the power it entails or because they want to avoid being shipped to toxic colonies. By oppressing women who are more defenseless than them, the Aunts try to forget the fact that they are also being victimized in Gilead. Apparently, all Aunts remain devoted to the governing principles of Gilead. They are expected to be (and many of them are) excellent manipulators and motivators. At the re-education centre, the Aunts persuade the Handmaids into believing the Gileadean values. They skillfully manipulate Biblical passages to justify the repressive regime of the Republic of Gilead. The Aunts are bent on convincing the Handmaids that the pre-Gileadean life was very dangerous for women. For example, Offred talks about a porno film from seventies or eighties, shown to them by Aunt Lydia to terrorize them into detesting the life in pre-Gileadean era. The film shows women being viciously assaulted and sexually abused in an incredibly horrendous way. While the Handmaids are speechless with fear, Aunt Lydia says, “You see what things used to be like? That was what they thought of women then” (128). However, Moira thinks that the porno film is not real and it has been prepared in an exaggerated manner with models to terrify the Handmaids. Aunt
Lydia always feels that the Handmaids are coddled in Gilead and that the Handmaids should remain grateful for it.

_There is more than one kind of freedom, said Aunt Lydia. Freedom to and freedom from. In the days of anarchy, it was freedom to. Now you are being given freedom from. Don’t underrate it._" (24)

As people are responsible for the inculcation of patriarchal standards, regulation of the repressive system and the punishment for noncompliance, the Aunts, with their symbolic cattle prods, are an unquestionable representation of male oppression.

Cordelia is one of the prominent characters in _Cat’s Eye_ and she exerts a great power on Elaine to make her believe that she is deficient in everything that is important in life. Cordelia’s oppressive nature is indelibly imprinted on Elaine’s psyche and the best way to analyse Cordelia’s character is to analyse her effects on Elaine’s psyche. Elaine’s painting “*Half a Face*” reveals the insolent and hostile gaze of Cordelia. It also shows that Cordelia has an interminable power over Elaine’s identity. "_Cordelia is afraid of me, in this picture. I am afraid of Cordelia. I'm not afraid of seeing Cordelia. I'm afraid of being Cordelia. Because in some way we changed places, and I've forgotten when_" (267). Cordelia’s systematic repressive strategies make her an indisputable representative of patriarchal values in the novel. She never misses a chance to make Elaine feel inadequate as a girl. For example, after a short conversation that Elaine has with her father, Cordelia says, “_How could you be so impolite? You didn’t even answer him. You know what this means, don’t you? I’m afraid you’ll have to be punished. What do you have to say for yourself?_” (138). She,
along with Grace and Carol, always watches Elaine pointing out her mistakes and deficiencies: ‘Stand up straight! People are looking!....... Don’t hunch over ...... Don’t move your arms like that” (141).

Cordelia always behaves like a know-all and tells her friends about plays, sexual matters, deadly nightshade and the dissolved dead people in the ravine under the wooden bridge. The might of Cordelia’s influence manifests itself in Elaine’s meek submission. Elaine says, “she [Cordelia] creates a circle of two and takes me in”(83). Cordelia successfully makes Elaine accept the belief that she is nothing: “Nothing, I would say. It was a word I came to connect with myself as if I was nothing”(47). Elaine is also made to believe that Cordelia’s help is necessary for becoming a socially acceptable person: “I am not normal, I am not like other girls. Cordelia tells me so, but she will help me”(140). Elaine's memories of Cordelia are filled with episodes that illustrate her dependency on Cordelia in defining herself. However, Cordelia’s only aim is to make Elaine feel alienated from her surroundings and to even annihilate her. The malice that Cordelia bears towards Elaine becomes evident when she digs a hole and together with Grace and Carol dresses Elaine up as Mary, Queen of Scots and abandons her in the hole.

Cordelia has “power over”(134) Elaine even after their separation from each other. Cordelia’s phantom torments Elaine throughout her adulthood. “Lacking her dark double trapped in an earlier period of time, Elaine remains unfixed, incomplete” (Howells, 2005:113). Elaine’s brother, Stephen, clearly understands Cordelia’s power over Elaine and says, “Cordelia has a tendency to exist” (287). Her voice always pursues Elaine and torments her. Later, after Elaine goes and sees Cordelia in a private
mental hospital, she ruminates over Cordelia’s influence: “That was the last time I talked to her. Although it wasn’t the last time she talked to me” (427). The most favorite childhood story for Cordelia and Elaine is the one which describes two sisters, one extremely beautiful and the other scarred over half of her face. Miraculously, the scarred sister becomes the other as the other gazes into a mirror. Throughout her adult life, Elaine fears this will happen to her. Through this fear, Cordelia rules Elaine’s mind. However, as Hengen (1993) observes, Cordelia’s power also has some positive effects on Elaine because it “lies in the wonderfully imaginative quality of Cordelia’s childhood plots, a quality that helps to shape Elaine’s own imagination and contributes to Elaine’s decision to pursue a career as an artist rather than a biologist” (108). In spite of its good impact, Cordelia’s power is very distressing for Elaine and when Elaine comes back to Toronto for her retrospective, the city itself becomes linked with Cordelia. In the chapter entitled “Bridge” Elaine is found to be fighting with Cordelia’s spirit: “You’re dead, Cordelia. No I’m not. Yes you are. You’re dead. Lie down” (489). Cordelia’s phantom is the patriarchal standards engraved on Elaine’s mind and Cordelia is what Elaine has to get rid of in order to attain selfhood.

Cordelia’s oppressive nature, as Elaine later understands, stems from her unhealthy family environment. Her mother is a weak woman who is an unsuccessful actress in her youth. She names her daughter after Shakespeare’s heroines. This shows that the sisters are forced to live up to certain unrealistic expectations. “Cordelia says they’re [her own name and those of her sisters] out of Shakespeare. She seems proud of this, as though it’s something we should all recognize” (85). Her mother is an irresponsible person who leaves the household work to a cleaning lady and cleverly escapes the
clutches of family life. Cordelia’s father ignores her and is very ruthless towards her. In fact, he is the main reason for the kind of person Cordelia is. His total indifference towards Cordelia and his cruelty make Cordelia feel that she is insignificant and a wrong person. She is very scared of her father and feels very insecure. After many years she tells Elaine, “I wanted some place that was all mine, where nobody could bug me. When I was little, I used to sit on a chair in the front hall and I used to think that if I kept very still and out of the way and didn’t say anything, I would be safe... I used to get into trouble a lot, with Daddy when he would lose his temper. You never know when he was going to do it”(252). Her fear for her father makes her dig holes and hide in them. She does it to avoid the powerlessness and the pain of victimization. Elaine, after she knows about Cordelia’s family background, understands why Cordelia tortures her.

Cordelia’s childhood home is replete with symbols that represent patriarchal domination and the socially acceptable norms of femininity. Her weak mother, her powerful father, the cleaning lady who is simply called “the woman” (84) and her narcissistic sisters are some of them. Cordelia grows up with a sense of alienation because she thinks she is not as beautiful and gifted as her sisters. Her father’s indifference adds fuel to the fire. Cordelia, as a result, becomes a malicious person who is hungry for power and control. It is interesting to note that even Grace and Carol are oppressed by their own fathers. According to Hite (1995), “Elaine is a surrogate victim, representative of the category “girl” and thus a stand-in for the other girls, who use her as a scapegoat in order to displace their own suffering as members of a patriarchy, here literalized in the authority of their own fathers”(137). Atwood
clearly shows that home is the birthplace of patriarchal domination by making Cordelia victimize Elaine by using her own father’s expressions of contempt.

Besides portraying Cordelia as a forceful girl, Atwood does not forget to show that her character is very hollow and futile, thereby indicating the inner fragility and the meaninglessness of the patriarchal system. Cordelia has no sense of her inner self. She behaves like a grownup and there is a lack of originality and ease in the way she deals with other children. It is as though she tries to match up to some norms. The way she talks to the boys in the school is flashy and pretentious, and Elaine describes it vividly:

*Her attempts at conversation with them [boys] are a performance, an imitation. Her laugh, when she’s with them, is refined and low, like a woman’s laugh on the radio, except when she forgets herself. Then it’s too loud. She’s mimicking something, something in her head, some role or image that only she can see.* (288)