The creative non-victim position is a feasible as well as attainable position for the protagonists as individuals. It is the position where they attain their self fulfillment and their identity as individuals. The individuals have the scope of attaining their goals and performing their duties and responsibilities as human beings and as members of the society they represent. They end up with a better awareness of their past and also of their present. If they have to survive as non-victims, it is necessary that they have to devise their own strategies in their capacity as individuals. In this regard, they have to rediscover their hidden, rather, hitherto oppressed potentials and let them flourish. In this sense Atwood’s protagonists, emerge as creative non-victims giving expression to their creativity and ingenuity.

The position focuses on the creative talents of the individuals. Creativity can flourish only in an atmosphere of freedom and fraternity. The paralyzed artists of the second position naturally emerge as revived and regenerated artists vibrant in their talents and creative abilities. All the protagonists studied here undergo this kind of transformation. For them it is not merely a matter of creative expression but their survival is ensured through their creativity.

In this phase the role of a victim is no longer a temptation. The apparent security and the privileges ensured by the victimizers cease to tempt the victim.
The victim in her attainment of self-awareness realizes the rights and claims to selfhood and the freedom it guarantees. The creative aspect fortifies the woman and enables her to control her life. It is the triumphant tool that helps resurrect them. As artists, writers, friends, each one ameliorates her situation and her world, positively metamorphosing reality in the process. In societies tailored to the submission of females, Atwood’s protagonists refuse to be pinned down to the measurements of the perfect woman. Instead, they reconstruct their lives, imprinting their own designs in worlds of patterned fabric (Goldblatt 281-282).

The non-victim position envisaged in this regard is in fact, similar to Barbara Berg’s vision for all women: It is the freedom to decide one’s destiny, the freedom to opt out of sex-determined as well as socially ascribed roles. It involves the freedom to express thoughts and to convert these thoughts into constructive action. It is the right to act according to the dictates of one’s conscience and judgment. This focuses on the evolution of the individual woman, as an autonomous being worthy of personal freedom.

In this context it should be noticed that the kind of non-victim status Atwood envisages in *Survival* is not merely that of individual freedom and growth in a society. As a writer Atwood is also concerned with the oppression undergone by the larger society that the individual represents. The transformation of the society and its liberation from oppression becomes possible only through collective effort. Hence the transformation of the individual is only a primary step
in this direction. The larger power structures of domination and authoritarian oppression that stunt the progress of the society can be overcome only through a proper mechanism of redistributing power and rightly enjoying the responsibilities that go with it.

The rejection of the role of a victim by woman results from a significant attitudinal change involving themselves and the society to which they belong. This rejection often results in the women giving voice to their personal experience of oppression. This marks a significant move away from the victim, condition and towards the goal of self-recovery. Nevertheless it is only a beginning. To stop with self-expression and personal autonomy would amount to stalling the movement of the collective victim to the collective non-victim position.

Atwood, in this context focuses on the interdependence between individual and community and says: “If you want Position Four Canadian literature, change the society” (SW 145). For any creative act that is grounded in a society that is still a victim, the creative non-victim status is applicable only at the individual level. There still remains a considerable distance between the individual non-victim status and the collective non-victim status which is a greater goal.

The protagonists move from position three in their personal growth and development as individuals. As individuals they have already been able to identify the oppressive forces around them and have repudiated their victim status. They
move ahead towards the status of creative non-victims as they undertake the tasks of voicing out their histories of oppression, emerging from the imposed silences. They also give up their notions of helplessness and regardless of their physical infirmities and other constraints actively engage themselves in the battle of life, determining their roles as individuals and as women in society.

In her interview with Gibson, Atwood talks about the different categories of people:

If the only two kinds of people are killers and victims, then although it may be morally preferable to be a victim, it is obviously preferable from the point of view of survival to be a killer. However either alternative seems pretty hopeless; you know, you can define yourself as innocent and get killed, or you can define yourself as a killer and kill others. I think there has to be a third thing again; the ideal would be somebody who would neither be a killer or a victim, who could achieve some kind of harmony with the world, which is a productive or creative harmony, rather than a destructive relationship towards the world. (Gibson 27)

The protagonists of The Edible Woman, Surfacing, Lady Oracle, Cat’s Eye, Bodily Harm all end up with this kind of a possibility towards the closure of their narratives. They attempt to integrate themselves as whole human beings with life
around them and thereby achieve harmony between themselves and the society at large.

*The Edible Woman*

Marian’s flight from Peter’s party may initially seem to be a mere escapade. It however serves a crucial purpose in that she is forced to resort to some action in order to register her protest at being reduced to a consumable commodity. The medium she chooses for it is also significant as it is the womanly art of baking. Her rejection by Duncan also contributes to this act. Marian is forced to cast aside her victim role. It becomes inevitable for Marian to rediscover her self so as to survive. Marian at this instance resorts to the art of baking as a means of enjoying her creative powers. She bakes a cake and moulds it in the form of a bride. When Peter comes to her seeking an apology she offers the cake as a substitute for herself. Peter is embarrassed at this gesture and leaves her without touching the cake.

While decorating the cake Marian projects her own miseries as a victim into it. The selflessness and self-effacement she experienced in the presence of Peter are also reflected in the vacant expression of the cake woman: “Her creation gazed up at her, its face doll-like and vacant except for the small silver glitter of intelligence in each green eye” (270). It reflects the passivity and the vacant sensation that pervaded Marian’s being in the presence of Peter all along. The cake
reflects a way of seeing herself or perceiving as in a mirror and it expresses a truth she had never perceived before, that Marian had so long “conceived of herself as a kind of doll” (Rigney 34).

Compared to other women in the novel this is the only creative act possible for Marian. Though educated and holding a BA Degree Marian had ignored her creative skills reducing herself to ‘a manipulator of words’ at Seymour Surveys. She also rejects the possibilities of being creative and nurturing life like her friends Clara and Ainsley. However she is brought to the awareness of her victim status, made to reject it and to resume her creative abilities as a non-victim. Goldblatt is of the view that the “womanly art of baking provides Marian with a way to free herself” (281). Baking and molding the cake and offering it to her victimizers - both Peter and Duncan - and also consuming it herself, Marian finally sheds her inertia and fear and acts, thereby wielding power in her hands. More than the shape the cake takes it is Marian’s capability to act that becomes significant. Marian has recovered from her earlier notion of powerlessness and relies on her creative instinct that manifests in baking.

The cake marks the symbolic purification Marian has attained by her refusal to eat. Moreover it shows the necessary power of self-assertion that she has regained following the flight from the party. As a passive victim Marian used to comply with Peter’s commands suppressing her inner voice and personal opinions. Now she starts expressing her views and acts according to her individual will.
Salat rightly says: “the final act of baking a cake in the shape of a woman to offer Peter as a woman-substitute symbolizes her having attained the necessary self-knowledge. Henceforth, it implies, she will not be Peter’s - or any man’s, for that matter - consumable commodity” (66).

Once Marian sheds her fear and inertia she is able to transgress the victim role. Marian emerges determined to mould a new life for herself: she cleans up the apartment, the sink and even the refrigerator that she was earlier scared to open. More remarkable is the fact that she resumes eating. Symbolic of Marian’s emergence from silence and regaining her power of articulation the narrative resumes in the first person. Thus Marian survives not through marriage but by breaking away from it. She reclaims her selfhood by walking out of a relationship that proved to be oppressive and annihilating for her as a woman.

Marian’s break from marriage however is not a rejection of the institution of marriage. Rather it is a breaking away from a relationship that threatened to be oppressive and self-effacing. As an educated and sensible woman Marian looks for a relationship based on mutual acceptance as individuals, built on love and sharing of responsibilities. She finds it unable to cater to the chauvinistic ideas of Peter and hence breaks up with Mm.
The protagonist of *Surfacing* is forced to recant her notions of powerlessness and hence like Marian she also reclaims her power. The proclamation of the victim refusing to be a victim “is a sign that she is prepared to be a creator rather than being created to meet the needs of others” (Walker 84). The power and self-knowledge that she is forced into brings her to an awareness of her complicity in her victimization. She realizes that she is guilty of having caused the abortion of her earlier child and is prepared to make amends for it. She conceives a child from loe and assumes responsibility as she realizes that “if I die it dies, if I starve it starves with me. It might be the first one, the first true human; it must be born, allowed” (*Surfacing* 230).

Even though she is uncertain of the promises Joe holds as he comes back searching for her, she dares to take up the challenge, be it “captivity in any of its forms” or “a new freedom” (*Surfacing* 230). She sheds her fear for humans whom she had for long considered synonymous with Americans who are labeled killers according to her concept of power. Once she recognizes the power in her she is determined not to reduce herself to a killer, but to be a nurturer of life. Here lies creative spirit. She realizes that death is the inevitable end of human life and hence she has to treat life “with understanding, responsibility, respect” (Fullbrook 183).
The revival of the creativity also marks the revival of the artist in her. Once back in the city, she has the prospect of reclaiming her artistic skills and also of pursuing a satisfying career as an artist. Her disillusionment with her earlier career and the compromises she had to make in her profession together had rendered her a paralyzed artist.

With her reclamation of the power over her self and having ridden herself of the haunting sense of guilt, the protagonist returns to the society. Joe is no more an enemy or American ally but a mediator who has come to take her back and to make possible the reintegration with the society. Only the integrated self can merge with the larger society and help her survive as an individual. In the words of Davidson, the narrator has made possible “a shifting of her selfhood from its stance on the margins of male society to a state of being in which her own feminine personality is central and patriarchy has itself moved to her margins. She thus transforms herself from victim to hero, turning patriarchal space inside out so that it can no longer limit her being” (1981: 156).

Also she reestablishes her links with language as she realizes that it is essential to survive in the human world. Earlier she believed that even language betrayed her in a landscape that continually alienated her. It had failed to serve its purpose of communication and of connecting individuals. In fact it stands as a barrier between herself and Joe in their relationship. However, by reclaiming
language, initially to communicate with Joe, when he is back to fetch her, the prospect of her reintegration becomes assured.

**Lady Oracle**

Joan’s emergence as a creative non-victim is evident in the narrative framework of the novel. The narrative comprises of her struggle for survival, enduring the victimization from her early childhood to her youth and extending into marriage and her career.

Joan decides to accept the past and to make a palpable new beginning by committing herself to act, rather than enact the varied role prescribed by the various men in her life. Joan’s decision to return to Toronto to save her friends who are falsely implicated in ‘murdering’ her is the one responsible decision she has ever taken. Also her final act of telling her story is the most crucial event in her whole life. So far she had been telling the story of countless heroines awaiting their partners in marriage. But when she lays before her readers the story of her life in the form of an oral narrative intended for the reporter Joan transforms herself from a passive object to an active subject. In constructing the oral narrative of her life, Joan refuses to be ascribed any further feminine attributes and thereby refuses further victimization. This marks her emergence as a non-victim, a creative one also.
As Davidson has remarked, Joan has begun to confront her present in her life and she is to do the same in her art also (1978). As a prelude to this and to alter her perspective of life she decides to give up writing Gothic romances and to try her hand in science fiction. Though it is accepted that the latter “is paradoxically built on the same structural principle as romance” (Davidson, 1981), she does not however abandon her creative faculty as a writer. In fact writing has been the key to her survival, and thereby her creative ventures have always assisted her in escaping victimization.

From escape as her strategy Joan progresses to have confrontation as her strategy. As she waits for the intruder and when the knock does come on her door “she chooses the future, now knowing and accepting that it will contain her past and her present as well” (Davidson, 1981: 172). Though she is well aware of the consequences of her action, and of the possibilities of another escape, Joan dares to confront her future. She trusts her self and also her power. Joan is capable of making choices rather than evading it as she contemplates the choices before her. She dares to open the door for the stranger instead of fleeing as she had done earlier.

Later in narrating her story Joan engages in the process of bringing herself to real life, not the fantasy ridden life that she has been drifting through. Thereby she is determined to assume responsibility for her fake suicide and to get her friends out of jail. As she walks to the hospital everyday to visit the reporter she
has hurt and unravels her story to him it is evident that “she has chosen to accept her responsibilities, preeminently the responsibility of her own life” and refuses “to be inundated by guilt and fear” as in her past (Davidson, 1981: 173). Prabhakar says that with her flight and the narration

Joan Foster is released from the stifling cocoon of privacy, freed from the cruel canons dictated by the patriarchal culture and metamorphosed into a creative writer. This “metamorphosis” of Joan opens up the possibility of artistic creation by women writers. (62)

**Bodily Harm**

Rennie’s emergence as a non-victim is obvious but the creative manifestation remains ambiguous considering the ending of the novel. Rennie visualizes her release from the prison and plans for her future following the release. Rennie shows promises of emerging as a creative writer, not merely a reporter as she had been earlier. From focusing on the surfaces she plans to penetrate into the depths, the truth behind her news stories.

Rennie undergoes a transformation in the prison. It seems somewhat epiphanic. She tries to bring Lora back to life by holding her hand and calling her by her name. She acknowledges Lora’s prostitution than her cold impermeable self and by licking away the blood encrusted on Lora’s face attempts to restore her life. This is in contrast to her usual looking. She accepts Lora’s humanity and
through Lora and her sacrifice rediscovers her own humanity. As Rennie strains and pants trying to push Lora back to life, it is almost like a birth that is in progress. The actual birth that takes place here is Rennie’s. Rennie fully assumes her own humanity through the recognition of the humanity of others. All along her life she had tried to ignore this humanity of others and had attempted to detach herself from others. 

Once she is out of prison she decides to write, to report the truth: “she will pick her time: then she will report”.

Rennie seems more open to life and more seeing towards the end.

She doesn't have much time left for anything. But neither does anyone else. She's paying attention, that’s all.' Rennie 'will never be rescued' and yet 'has already been rescued'; although she 'is not exempt,' she is 'lucky, suddenly, finally, she's overflowing with luck. (BH 13)

Following the release, she decides to return to Toronto and to write of the occurrences in the island, defying all the power structures, thereby becoming the voice of those who remain oppressed (Vevaina 184).

Seeing the blood-covered face of Lora, Rennie’s initial reaction is as follows: “For a moment she feels nauseated and tries to tell herself that she has “no connection with this, there’s nothing she can do, it’s the face of a stranger” (BH 298). But she soon realizes that there is no such thing as a faceless stranger.
No longer repulsed at the sight of Lora’s hand, she holds her left hand with both of her own and pulls hard hoping to bring her back to life. She thinks “if she can only try hard enough, something will move and live again, something will get born” (BH 299).

The commitment that Rennie finds in herself, and the intense desire to restore Lora back to life are signs of her transformation from passivity to the acceptance of responsibility. Rennie realizes that “negative innocence ... is the most appalling characteristic of evil when it appears in the actual world” (Vevaina 191).

Rennie’s transformation however does not end with this. If she has to ensure her own non-victim status and of other women like Lora it is inevitable for her to report. She understands that she has to communicate this experience of victimization verbally with those around them and live her life as fully as possible with all the emotional risks that it involves. By visualizing her release from the prison and reporting the incidents to the world “she imagines herself actively changing her own future and, hopefully also that of others” (Vevaina 192).

*The Handmaid’s Tale*

Offred emerges a non victim as she flees from the victimization of Gilead with the help of the underground activists. Her oral reconstruction of her life and the victimized past in Gilead makes her a creative non-victim. By attempting a
narration she engages in recreating her own history as her story. This oral narration at first to herself and then into the tapes serves several purposes. It validates her own existence, gives her a sense of control over her life and wills into existence a listener. Narrating a story thus becomes an active strategy of acquiring a female space for oneself and others in a patriarchal universe. Offred emerges a non-victim as she upholds her autonomy of thought in her narrative and power over the listeners for whom she narrates. Also her flight from the Commander’s house appears to have provided her liberation from the oppressive circumstances of her life, confirming her status as a creative non-victim.

Offred’s oral reconstruction of the narrative simultaneously in her head and to the listeners marks her emergence as a non-victim. She is able to reclaim her past torments and oppression and also to narrate them to her listeners of the future generations. Recording it in the cassettes for the future generations also ensures the responsibility and commitment she has assumed for the women of the future.

According to Offred the reconstruction of one’s own life as a story gives a sense of control over the events in the story and hence a sense of control over one’s life: “I would like to believe this is a story I’m telling. 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” (HT 49).
The responsibility and involvement as evinced by Offred through her recordings testify to her non-victim status. Unlike her past when she took things for granted and practiced non-involvement as her policy, she dares to rebel against the victimization in Gilead. Moreover she risks her life by resorting to flight in a state where she is under constant surveillance by the regime. The uncertainty that confronts her as she steps into the van that has come to take her away is clear from her words: “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” (HT 378).

Offred’s story recorded in the cassette tapes is intended to convey her history of oppression and victimization to the future generations of women who are likely to commit the same mistakes like her. Though her ultimate fate remains a mystery, it is worth noticing that she has emerged a non-victim with the autonomy over her story and power over the future listeners. Though uncertain about her audience at the time of her narration she has the creativity to imagine them into being, to anticipate their existence, to remain optimistic in spite of the oppressive life in Gilead. Her concern for the women of the future and their survival are the forces behind her narrative encoded in the cassette tapes.

According to Rigney, Offred emerges a non-victim, with the recognition that “political confrontation is not merely a choice but a human responsibility. Her responsibility ... is to report, to chronicle her time, to warn another world” (120).
Having survived the circumstances where communication was forbidden, Offred following her flight assumes a future audience and records her struggle. “The very act of writing, of recording, is for Atwood as well as for her heroines, the final and irrevocable commitment to one’s society and to one’s own humanity” (Rigney 121).

_Cat’s Eye_

Elaine Risley emerges a creative non-victim both as a woman and as an artist. As an artist she has attained the peak of her creativity. She has matured enough to have a retrospective as an artist. Also in her personal life, she has attained the maturity where she has been able to lay to rest the haunting memories of her oppressive past. The retrospective of her paintings facilitates her survival. Though she had refused to be a victim and she was being shaped into a creative non-victim, it is through the late visit to Toronto that she achieves the status of a creative non-victim.

Elaine achieves her creative non-victim status “without sacrificing her [one’s] integrity either as a woman or as an artist” (Jump 121). The final Elaine, the Elaine who reconstructs her memories in the novel, “is a woman whose personal coherence is generated not by the changing social patterns she has imitated with greater or lesser success, and with greater or lesser resistance, but
through the images, the metaphors and the speculative themes that run through her life” (Fullbrook 191).

The cat’s eye vision of an artist that Elaine has achieved over the years enables her to look back through time and to re-member her paintings. She sees them now as she tries to see time, looking down through a shape “like a series of liquid transparencies, one laid on top of another” (CE 3). True retrospective vision alters her vision of the past. As Ingersoll says: “Atwood shows us in Elaine Risley, a painter/writer who may seem in a conventional sense to be exploring the truth of her past but who in a truer sense is creating, or writing, a past as she chooses now to see it, rather than as it might have once existed”(1991:19). She returns to Toronto for Retrospective exhibition of her paintings at Subversions, the art gallery of Ontario run by a bunch of women. Elaine’s retrospective is writing her experience into art. In short, Elaine seems to make a final, statement on man-woman relationships through her paintings presented as a chronicle at the Art Gallery.

With the cat’s eye vision she is able to transform the agonizing experiences of the past, particularly the failed relationship with Ion. She admits that both of them are “survivors of each other. We have been shark to one another, but also lifeboat” (CE 17)
Barat considers her return to Toronto an important stage in her journey towards selfhood, as it was for Joan Foster; it enables her to evaluate herself as a person and an artist, and to lay the ghosts of the past that would otherwise have continued to haunt her (178). Her first journey to Vancouver, following the separation from Ion, is no longer merely an escape, as it might have seemed to her earlier; set in the right perspective, it appears as her route to serenity and equanimity.

In her artistic career Elaine reaches a stage where gender bias does not matter for her. She has outgrown it. Earlier even her unconventional parents did not see any future for her in art as a profession. Her own struggle towards achievement of identity as a woman and as an artist is obviously harder, more painful, because she is a painter. When she tries to conform, to the accepted artistic attire of her fellow students, it worries her mother and her mother’s friends that she is “letting herself go”: “Letting yourself go is an alarming notion; it is said of older women who become frowzy and fat, and of things that are sold cheap. But letting go is the first step towards selfhood, as she realizes” (Barat 180).

In Vancouver her life stabilizes, she establishes herself, and having, “exhausted the notion that the answer to a man is another man” finds someone uncomplicated and easily pleased and remarried... Elaine thus survives, as artist, as woman, as individual, though she may not have ended her quest
completely. Indeed this is the mark of her survival that her quest continues, though she may have left her misery behind her: her quest and her zest for living life. (Barat 184)

Fullbrook sums up Elaine’s development and transformation as a woman and as an artist in the context of her painting of the Virgin Mary. She says:

Elaine’s painting of the Virgin Mary is at once a salute to and a definition of an ideal of womanliness that is both religious in the sense that it marks an act of faith in the existence of the qualities the Virgin represents, and utterly secular in that it is an artist’s encapsulation of the most positive, formative elements in the composition of herself. (178)

The Robber Bride

As a historian and as the central consciousness of the novel Tony emerges as an autonomous individual. She enjoys the liberty as well as the creativity of the historian that makes the narrative of her past a unique one. The novel emerges as the history of the three female friends who have survived the ravages of their common friend Zenia. Having withstood her attack into their personal lives separately, they gain strength to obliterate her memories through united effort. They find strength in their union as well as in their collective consciousness called Tony.
Having acquired the power to confront Zenia and immunized herself to her deception Tony emerges as a non-victim. When Zenia reappears from the dead Tony shows the courage to confront her first without informing her friends. Also Tony is the one who comforts the angst-ridden Roz when Zenia subjects her to abuse. She also takes Charis under her wings when she is deserted by her husband.

Tony is a creator as a historian, “a storytelling academic who reconstructs the past from the facts available to her, and who represents the wide perspective of European history as a map on a sand-tray in her basement where she continually reshuffles the pieces in her effort to make sense of the riddles of human behavior in battles which she has never seen” (1996: 139). Tony has the power over Zenia, following her death, as she is reduced to dust. It is for Tony to shape her into history in the light of her skills as a historian. “At the moment she is formless, a broken mosaic; the fragments of her are in Tony’s hands, because she is dead, and all of the dead are in the hands of the living” (RB 461). So it is up to Tony to mould her history, regardless of the fact that she lacked a proper story even during her life. Mere memories of Zenia are so overwhelming that Tony has to constantly remind herself of the present, that she is in her study at the cellar recollecting and reliving the battle she waged with Zenia.

The significance of Tony’s creative venture is that Zenia is not merely an outsider, an evil woman who has done a rampage in her life as well as that of her friends. Once Tony is forced into the realization that Zenia represented the hidden
self of each one of them, it is imperative for her to adjust and to accommodate Zenia as an aspect of her own being. “She is their dark double, appealing directly to their unspoken fears and desires, just as she reflects fantasies of femininity from which women suffer as well as men” (2003: 30). Zenia’s presence is inevitable for the three women to survive and Tony takes up the responsibility of reconstructing her history from her ashes. This venture thereby turns out to be a “form of negotiating with the dead, as the protagonists confront ghostly selves who may turn out to not to be dead at all” (2003: 31). Hence just as they had confronted Zenia at the Toxique after her burial Zenia’s presence pervades their entire lives even after her ashes are scattered in the Mediterranean.

It is necessary for Tony to do justice to Zenia by reconstructing her history. Zenia had in fact rescued the women from their disintegrated selves and their homes and had restored to them the notion of a stable home and family. From the fragmented selves, they inherited from their oppressive childhood and youth,

They all try to create a sense of home, to achieve a sense of stability and safety. However they are forced to renegotiate such feelings as Zenia bursts into their lives and shatters them, showing how precarious and provisional that security was. They are forced to face chaos and instability both inside and outside, and are pushed into “perennial borders” shifted into disorder. (Rao 104)
As Tony waits for Zenia in the lobby of the Arnold Garden Hotel, prepared for a confrontation, she realizes the transformation she is undergoing. “She has the sensation that she’s growing hair, little prickles of it pushing out through the skin of her legs like the quills of a porcupine, hanks of it shoving through in tufts around her ears. It’s Zenia doing this, the effort of tracking Zenia: it’s fusing her neurons, rearranging the molecules in her brain. A hairy white devil is what she’s becoming, a fanged monster. It’s a necessary transformation perhaps, because fire must be fought with fire. But every weapon is two-edged, so there will be a price to pay: Tony won’t get out of this unaltered” (RB 403). As she walks out of her room and out of the hotel Tony is transformed, the confrontation has been inevitable for her emergence from powerlessness and victimization. Zenia has exposed her vulnerability as well as that of her friends and Tony is confronted with the illusory peace and calm of her personal life.

By articulating the ordeals of their self-discovery and identity and the battles of their personal lives on behalf of the trio of women Tony is not merely a historian, but a skilful craftsman, a sculptor who has shaped out an urn from the scattered bits of history. The ashes held in the urn are their own fragmented selves as well as that of Zenia.
Grace emerges as a non-victim as a result of the pardon granted to her by the government. However, the impact of it on Grace becomes clear when considered in the light of the twenty eight years she spent in the prison and in the asylum. Endurance and ingenuity alone help her emerge as a creative non victim, after a period of enforced torture.

Grace’s creativity is also manifested as the narrator as well as a maker of splendid quilt patches. Like Tony, Grace also recreates history in the form of the narrative mostly unraveled as the sessions with Doctor Iordan. As a prisoner and later out of prison Grace articulates her victimization and emerges a non-victim.

While in prison, Grace is able to endure her victimization through resistance. The process of quilting she seems to engage in gives her time and space to evolve her strategies and also to give expression to her suppressed desires in art form. Though in prison she is always an oppressed victim, at the regular spells in the governor’s parlor and the sessions with the doctor, Grace has the freedom to talk and to engage in creative ventures.

Grace’s success lies in emerging with an interesting narrative that grips the attention of the readers while she still manages to keep the truth behind the murder a mystery. She reclaims her body that has been incarcerated for twenty eight, years. She also reclaims her voice and her skills. She assumes autonomy over her past,
the victimization of the past. She engages in quilting not for her masters, but for herself so that she has the freedom to improvise. Improvisation she does even in her narrative as she adapts parts of her past to lure the doctor. Unlike in the presence of other doctors earlier, Grace manages to sit through the sessions with Doctor Jordan owing to the process of quilting that goes parallel to the narrative process.

In spite of her history of madness and attacks of hysteria Grace restrains herself and transforms her memories into a coherent, acceptable narrative. She is under scrutiny by a representative of dominant society while narrating parts of her life story. While Iordan wants her to affirm the formal story available, Grace seeks to formulate an acceptable version of the story. It is the manifestation of her desire to get recognition as a subject with a story and a voice of her own. Well aware of her earlier incidences of hysteria in the presence of the doctors, Grace composes herself in the presence of Doctor Jordan. Simultaneous to this she also composes her narrative, revealing and concealing at will as Simon says: “[S]he’s told him only what she’s chosen to tell” (AG 322). At times Grace censors certain thoughts in relation to Simon, whereas the reader becomes her privileged listener. When Simon asks her, “What did you dream last night?” she answers, after having narrated the dream, “I can’t remember what I dreamt last night. It was something confusing” (AG 100-01). In order to please her analyst, Grace attempts to provide
Simon with a deceptive chronological account, with a clear and linear plot, as though she were capable of faithfully, that is, literally, reproducing historical facts.

Following her release Grace withdraws into the calm of family life as she gets married to Jamie Walsh her acquaintance at Kinnear’s. Though Walsh had testified against her in the court at the time of her trial, Grace is able to forgive him and to put up with his repentance as she joins him in marriage. When Walsh proposes to her she does not want him to marry her “out of mere duty and guiltiness, and he denied that such were his motives, and claimed that he’d always had very warm feelings towards me, and that I’d scarcely changed at all from the way I was as a young woman” (AG 452).

Grace continues making quilts even at her home in Ithaca and it is accompanied by narration not of the past but of her present. Grace undertakes making a quilt for herself as she had dreamt of while in prison. It is called the Tree of Paradise an improvisation on the usual pattern. Her quilt will have only a large tree on a white background with three triangles. The three triangles in her Tree makes all the difference as she says:

One will be white, from the petticoat I still have that was Mary Whitney’s; one will be faded yellowish from the prison nightdress I begged as a keepsake when I left there. And the third will be a pale cotton, a pink and white floral, cut from the dress of Nancy’s that she had on the first day I
was at Mr. Kinnear’s, and that I wore on the ferry to Lewiston, when I was running away.

I will embroider around each one of them with red feather-stitching, to blend them in as a part of the pattern.

And so we will all be together (AG 460).

Like Tony, Grace’s present and her survival as a creative non-victim do not mark an escape from the past, but a harmonious existence integrating the past and the present. The painful memories though exorcised are still necessary to enable their survival in the present as non-victims. Hence Grace has to sew in the pieces of the old clothes on her new quilt. Likewise is her narration that coincides with the sewing. It also reveals her creativity in another aspect, with the ability to tell stories and to shape her own history.

*The Blind Assassin*

Like the other protagonists of Atwood, Iris survives her victimization through the acts of defiance and subtle rebellion. She emerges a creative non-victim towards the end of the novel. Though denied the privileges as a wife and mother Iris fights the lone battle of her life in her own possible ways. Her only motive is the will to survive that forces her to fight the battle of life and to confront the dominant powers of Richard and Winifred. More than Richard it is Winifred, another female who makes life difficult for Iris.
Iris emerges from the role of a passive victim by writing and thereby reconstructing her past. The narrative of her past becomes a narrative of her resistance to evade the victimization and to articulate her experience of incarceration and surveillance in a society where the victimizers are mostly women. The result of this form of victimization by women who assume power over other women is that the victimized protagonists find themselves “reduced to a space that defines itself by not being there at all and alienated from the very bodies by which they have been trapped” (Davies 62).

Iris survives and also records the tale of her survival for the sake of her granddaughter Sabrina. Hence the novel *The Blind Assassin* becomes a survival narrative as a tale told by the surviving matriarch to her grandchild and thereby to the readers.

Iris’s anticipation of the presence of the readers is the motive for her writing. Though deprived of her rights over her daughter and grandchild Iris enjoys the power over her narrative and manipulates it in such a way that the reader is deceived into believing it as the novel written by Laura before her untimely death. As a narrator Iris wields her power over the readers. If Laura is locked up in her victimhood symbolized by her white dress at death, Iris breaks the lock and emerges out daring to confront her victimizers. Iris tells about Laura’s dress that it was “less like something she’d chosen to put on than like something she’d been locked up in” (BA 1).
Iris’s narrative also concludes with her death, but Iris does not end up a victim for ever. With her meeting with Alex Thomas in the streets of Toronto, Iris realizes that her victim hood is not her fate and that there is a way out of it. The rendezvous with the revolutionary figure instills courage in Iris and she resorts to subversive relationship with him.

From the position of a victim who has been physically as well as mentally abused in marriage, Iris emerges as a survivor powerful to transcend her victimization. She reclaims and establishes her autonomy over her body by detailing her past abuse and thereby connecting the text with the body. The narrative is the ultimate measure resorted to by Iris to make herself heard and to emerge from a life time of “enforced or self-imposed silence” (Davies 63).

Iris’s story of victimization and survival is not merely a personal history. It is the history of a nation as well as of a business empire. The novel has as its backdrop the political developments in Canada in the light of the first world war. Also the fortunes of the Chase family are determined by the war. Degeneration sets into the industry as well as the family with the outbreak of the war. She is the silent witness to the progress and evolution that Toronto undergoes during the years after the war. Simultaneously she is the silent witness as well as victim of the disintegration of a business empire. Iris has been the sacrificial victim, as she was married off to Richard by her father in an attempt to salvage the already shattered button business. Throughout her married life Iris is reduced to silence by
the domineering presence of Richard and his sister Winifred. However after the death of both, Ms reclaims not only her voice and thereby her personal history. She wields the autonomy over her own past and thereby is able to transcend her victimization.

Unlike the narratives of Atwood’s other protagonists, Iris’s memoir emerges as a narrative written in blood as she just manages to complete it before her death. The very act of writing is a means of resistance for Iris as she is racing against her age and the physical infirmities associated with it. It seems to be a “race between her body and her text” and time seems to be “running out for both . . . As Iris’s body gradually decomposes, it simultaneously composes her text, and her narrative can thus be seen in terms of a writing down of the body before it ceases to be” (Davies 68). Having survived her victimized past as well as her victimizers Iris is able to reclaim her past late in her old age. Thereby Iris establishes her status as a creative non-victim.

As creators all the protagonists move towards the creative non-victim position from their various victim positions. Except for Elaine Risley and Grace Marks none can be said to have clearly reached the position of a creative non-victim. But each protagonist, viewed as individuals become actively engaged with their lives, awaits hopefully their integration with the society as women aware of their roles in the society. Their engagements in various capabilities in position
Survival Strategies

The protagonists are no more victims but survivors. They celebrate their survival through the narratives they construct. The process of narration gains significance in two ways. It marks the voice they have regained in the course of their evolution from enforced silence to willful self-expression. They undertake the task of narration on their own. It is also the essential strategy they resort to in order to mark their emergence as survivors. Through the process of narration they evaluate the transformation they have undergone and trace their movement through the various victim positions. It celebrates the triumph of their lives. They also undertake the task of narration out of their newly assumed responsibility for their fellow human beings and to ensure their survival so that collectively they could lead their society to the non-victim position. “As they tell their stories, the protagonists reclaim their silenced voices to question and unsettle both social and fictional conventions” (Stein 85).

All the protagonists considered in this study are artists of one sort or the other. For them their art is the medium through which they look back into the time past. For the protagonists their pasts with its struggles to survive are not to be forgotten and discarded as they emerge as survivors. That is why Iris continues
with her memoir even at eighty two well aware that she on the brink of death with a failing heart. For the protagonists of Atwood “historical time is not a solidified crystal” (Vevaina 96) but as she says in *Cat’s Eye* it is

something you could see, like a series of liquid transparencies, one laid on top of another. You don’t look back along time but down through it, like water. Sometimes this comes to the surface, sometimes that, sometimes nothing. Nothing goes away. (CE 3)

Hence it involves the surfacing of memories and the narratives are composed of the memories of each protagonist as they surface. The penetrating visions they are endowed with enable them to look down into time and to keep the past from vanishing. The presence of their past is imperative for their survival in position four as creative non-victims. They are no more oppressive memories that obstruct their lives but the fertile grounds that nourish their development as creative non-victims.

Marian resumes her life as a normal woman as she resumes eating and she has overcome her fears. Peter is no more a threat for her, nor is Duncan a refuge. Her illusory faith in men as her saviors has been shattered and she realizes the responsibility she has over her life. She resumes her lost voice as well as her power to make decisions. Marian’s creativity is given expression in the art of baking cake and molding it in the figure of a bride. Liberated from the fear of
disintegration that had haunted her, she has attained the courage to confront not only Peter but also her landlady. Marian has taken the control of her life into her hands and strives to be “a whole human being” (Gibson 26).

The protagonist of *Surfacing* recognizes the power latent in her as a woman, and as an individual and determines to survive with dignity in society resuming her sane self. As she decides to go back to the city with her lover Joe she is out to face the reality she had earlier evaded by fleeing to the island. Having turned away from “the catchword consolations of patriarchy, security, marriage, property etc.” she has “arrived at the vision of an alternative organising of life through mother-child bonding” (Lai 53). Moreover she has also re-established her links with language and hence undertakes the narration of her journey to the island that forms the frame of the novel. This again marks the revived creativity of the paralyzed artist.

Joan Foster of *Lady Oracle* is another artist-protagonist who had told the stories of several other women through her Gothic fiction. She finally resorts to tell her own story in the form of a narrative meant for the ears of the reporter who has tracked her down to Terremoto. The significance of the narrative is that Joan is finally able to view her life as a whole. As a self-realized woman she has the courage to compose herself and to confront her own self that she had constantly kept submerged under the disguise of the Gothic romances. The power to articulate her own tale is the most crucial achievement in the life of Joan.
Rennie of *Bodily Harm* also undertakes a narrative of her prison experiences in the island as well as the events that led to her journey. She is again able to look back at life and offer a retrospective. Rennie who had always preferred to see life in pieces and had sought to reduce the events pertaining to life in general to readable articles is brought to view her life as a whole in her narrative. The most significant transformation that has come over Rennie is her ability to connect herself with others, especially Lora, the beaten up woman who shares her cell. The dominant metaphor of the lost hands gains significance at this instance as she extends her hands to touch Lora’s mutilated body and tries hard to bring her back to life.

The protagonist of *The Handmaid’s Tale* is survived by her tale. The tale gains significance as the link between the readers and Offred, the handmaid. Offred undertakes the narration of her excruciatingly painful life as a handmaid keeping in mind the society of the future especially its women who are prone to take things for granted and are likely to ignore the recurring instances of exploitation and oppression around them. She exposes her life with all its failures and loopholes so that the coming generations would have a better life.

The commitment she takes up at the risk of her life is highlights the significance of her survival. Instead of withdrawing into a secure life by being silent during her life in exile, she resorts to warn the future generations. This testifies to the sense of responsibility that she has attained. Offred’s survival
becomes “heroically rebellious” as she resorts to the extremely subversive strategy of narration (Stein 85).

Elaine Risley establishes herself as a painter and proves to be successful enough to have a retrospective. Risley’s narration of her past manifests in the form of her paintings. In the view of the retrospective the paintings that are to be exhibited have as their subjects the oppressors of her past. By making them the subject of her paintings and letting them out in colors Elaine gives expression to her feeling of torment and oppression that haunts her. The return flight to Toronto also throws light on the changed perspective of Elaine as a survivor. She could appreciate the camaraderie of the elderly women who are her fellow passengers in the plane en route home to Vancouver.

Tony is the central voice of the novel *The Robber Bride*. As a military historian she says “All history is written backwards” and as a demonstration of this she undertakes the construction of history through her narrative. The narrative that goes back into her childhood also alternates between the past and the present. The novel develops through Tony’s perspective. Tony wonders about the significance of the stories if “the stories of history really teach anything at all and if anybody really cares about them. “Maybe it’s just a hobby. . . Or else it’s an act of defiance: . . .” (Stein 102). Though she is not the only character who articulates her story in the novel, her narrative frames the entire novel, encompassing the narratives of her friends Roz and Charis.
Narration of her past is the essential strategy for Grace Marks also. Most of the critics of Atwood would agree with Stein that “Grace is the quintessential Atwoodian Scheherazade. Imprisoned for her life, she has temporary diversion and amelioration of her situation when Dr. Simon Jordan asks to interview her” (109). But what distinguishes Grace’s strategy is that she carries on the narration even after she is into the settled life in Ithaca, as the wife of Jamie Walsh. In this narrative also Grace talks about the quilts she is making for herself. This part of her narrative is not meant for the ears of Jordan but for the readers. It is also intended to convey the kinds of harmony she is out to achieve by integrating the memories of her prison life with those memories about Mary Whitney and Nancy Montgomery.

Like the other protagonists Iris also takes up responsibility not only for her actions and her life but also for her granddaughter Sabrina who was taken away from her at the age of four. Iris does not sacrifice herself as does her sister Laura but survives as a woman and as the narrator. The ability to maintain her enigma is the key to her survival. Vevaina considers Iris the most extreme example of narrators “who cannot escape the compulsion to narrativize” (96). In spite of her weak heart and the ageing body Iris could not resist the urge to narrate her story. It is in a way an attempt to beat the body as well as her life. The mysteries she had maintained in order to ensure her survival could be told and thereby be revealed by none other than Iris herself. Only through this narrative the readers realize that Iris
never gave up herself to passivity. The heroic resistance with which she countered
the oppression and threats on annihilation from Richard and Winifred is exposed
through the narrative of her subversive life.

The protagonists seen in this chapter illustrate the evolution they have
attained in the course of their lives. Transcending the experience of victimization
that has been a feature of their lives they emerge as survivors. As individuals they
prove themselves capable of reforming their lives and rescuing themselves from
eternal suffering. This emergence is also marked by the unique potential these
protagonists possess as women. They return and remain rooted in their society and
attempt to carve out their own space in their varying roles as women in family,
workplace and society.