"If Margaret Atwood had never used the word "Survival" we would read her engagements with the geographies of Canada and community and self in quite different ways. She has the uncanny vision of a prospector. She look at the Canadian Shield that we have all looked at - and the guesses the site of the vein of ore that no one guessed before".

Robert Kroetsch

Art is moral issue for Margaret Atwood, and it is the responsibility of the writer to assist the people and the world. Both self and the world are independent of each other. Her idea of art and literature conform to the concept of literature as the art for life safe. Only through confrontation of illusion and reality truth can be arrived at the resolution of the conflict leads to gaining control over our lives by journeying back to the past. The process involves constant struggle in the form of personal quest for self sanity and wholeness of personality.

In all Atwood's novels, the protagonists are women, and always women are young but old enough for their experience of the modern world to have driven them into some kind of life crises. External circumstances or inner compulsions break the easy accommodations; they seem to have made with their world. They are released, by mental breakdown or by political accident, to the darker forces within themselves.
or in the world outside, to the later of which they respond in ambivalent ways. Out of such responses they emerges a symbolic pattern of recreation.

The Indian has figured in Canadian writing in all the eras but, as Leslie Monkman says, “White writers offers relatively few insights into the red man's world and the Indian becomes a means, instead, for the exploration of their own concerns and culture.”¹ The modern intellectuals are deeply concerned with the lethal predicament and serious dilemma. These ideas find expression and reflection in all forms of literature—fiction, drama, poetry and story. The Indian fiction writing in English have experienced the uncertainty of survival. There are a large number of Indian writers—Shashi Deshpande, Arun Joshi, Anita Desai, Chaman Nahal, R. K. Narayan and many others— who have expressed this stoic conflict of man’s experiences in their works.

Anita Desai, in her novels, expresses her serious concern about survival alienation. Cry: The Peacock, Voices in the City, Where shall We Go This Summer?, Fire on the Mountains, Clear Light of Day, Bye-Bye Black Bird, The Village by the Sea and In Custody, highlight the innermost feelings of man’s multi-dimensional alienation-social, cosmic and self.

*Cry, the Peacock* is the tragedy of a father’s child. The novel shows the feelings of *despair, loneliness, helplessness* and *despondency* of the heroine, Maya. The heroine finds herself utterly out of place and time in the company of her matter-of-fact husband Gautam. He cannot understand her self-effacing drives. Maya is emotionally starved. She alienates herself from her reticent husband.

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In *Voices in the City*, the major characters of the novel suffer from the *feeling of alienation*. *Nirode, Monisha* and *Amla* are three important characters of the novel that are alienated from society as well as from their mother who is in love with *Major Chadha*. In *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* the heroine gets alienated from her husband and leaves him when she is enceinte for the fifth time, in a mood of intense unease to seek peace in an island *Manori of Bombay* where her father had once reigned as the local Patriarch. She starts for Manori, leaving behind her husband and his established business. She abhors the hectic activities of *business life* that her husband admires, adores and remains absorbed in.

In *Fire on the Mountain*, there are three characters Nanda Kaul, her great grand-daughter Rakha and Nanda’s old friend Ila Das. These three, although physically near to one another, live in their separate loneliness making but feeble and vain attempts at establishing bridgeheads of understanding. Both Nanda and Rakha hug their privacy and as for Nanda and Ila, *lacking total sincerity*, every move for understanding is for them only a new exercise in frustration. The central chapters describe Rakha’s *self-finding* through the exploration of the hillside and Nanda’s and Ila’s viperous sense of alienation is depicted by the authoress. In *Clear Light of the Day*, Tara, who is married to a successful diplomat and is the mother of two charming daughters, is nevertheless, gnawed by a corrosive sense of failure, since she has been of little help to her problem-ridden parental home. *Bye-Bye Black Bird* is intimately related to Desai’s own experiences. She admits that of all her novels it is most rooted in experience and the least literary or derivation. It deals Indian immigrants in London. This novel highlights the problems of the coloured in U.K. often complicated by *inter-racial marriages*. Indians live there mutely.
and invisibly and feel trapped. They are alienated from society they live in England.

The feeling of unwantedness, not belonging is beautifully spotlighted through *Dev*-the chief character of the novel. His predicament in the alien country, *isolation* and *prejudices, humiliation* and the weight of living in a cheerless atmosphere- all these things find expression in the form of alienation. *The Village by the Sea* is a novel about a girl *Lila* who is living in an indifferent monotonous world. She dislikes her father who smells of wine all the time. Her brother Hari, too, does not escape the wrath of all pervasive alienation. *Hari’s father* is waspish and truculent in forcing Hari to entertain the thought that one day he will die of snakebite. This attitude shows Hari’s complete indifference to his father. He gets alienated from him. *In Custody*, the protagonist *Deven* is caught in an impasse. The harsh realities of life produce in him intense feelings of frustration and resentment. He is an alienated being.

*Arun Joshi*, in his novels, dwells upon the themes of alienation. *The Foreigner, The Strange Case of Billy Biswas, The Apprentice* and *The Last Labyrinth* highlight the feelings of man’s multi-dimensional alienation. *The Foreigner* explores the problems of detachment and *involvement, indifference and commitment* going it alone and communion. The protagonist of the novel is alienated from society. He is a rootless drifter and remains a foreigner everywhere - whether it is *London, Boston* or *New Delhi*. *Sindri Oberoi*, the hero of the novel, could not belong to any country in particular. He is extremely vexed by the sense of loneliness. He finds himself absolutely unable to get along with the western society and alienates from it. In *The Apprentice, Ratan Rathod* makes a brief daily escape from one world to another, both co-existing in modern Delhi. *Ratan* is a civil servant in his late forties with a wife and a
daughter. He aspires to procuring material prosperity, and he makes deals even in choosing his wife. He is also exposed to corrupting influences. He has sunk neck deep in the garbage. As a result, he is estranged from humanity. His alienation is complete. He is torn between the contradictory forces of surrender and revolt. The inner conflict, an important ingredient of alienation, leads to the divided self-a rift in his personality. He is the quintessence of self-remorse. He spends some time on the steps a temple. The apprenticeship in shoe shining is a beginning and leads to the cleaning of the layers of dirt covering his soul. Ratan strives hard to find out the purpose of life. The self-realization rolls in the end. The novel ends on a note of affirmation. Billy, the protagonist in The Strange Case of Billy Biswas realizes the shallowness of civilization. He remonstrates against the mechanized and dehumanized people. In the run, he retreats from civilization and loses himself among the Adivasis. He lives with an Adivasi girl Bilasia. He is reverenced as a God by the Tribal. But life looks quite futile to him. In this way, he drifts away from the main stream of life and suffers from the ineluctable predicament of alienation.

Som Bhansker, the chief character in The Last Labyrinth, is the symbol of quest-the quest for self. Som Bhasker, married to Geeta and the father of two children, meets enigmatic Anuradha who lives in Benaras with the decadent Aftab and wants to possess the woman and buy the man’s business. He partly succeeds in both but catastrophically fails in the end, then begins his journey of loneliness. Som Bhaskar, in search of life, goes through several labyrinths of human existence. In The Last Labyrinth, the hero is an outsider and makes desperate attempts to silence the insidious bug within and reach a rapport with the world. The protagonist suffers from the diseases ‘discontent and discontent’.
R.K. Narayan too could not escape the dilemma of alienation. In his novel Bachelor of Arts, The hero (not a mere student in B.A. class but a full-fledged B.A., who after hectic preparations has already stormed the gates of success in the examination) carries his frustration to the point of renouncing the world and becoming a wandering sadhu. The Guide is the quintessence of divided self. Raju is alienated from his parents and later he gets alienated from Rosie after realizing and considering her the sole cause of his landing in jail. Macro gets alienated from Rosie due to his over-busy schedules in the caves and seeks pleasure in the company of another girl.

Mulk Raj Anand’s Untouchable and Coolie spotlight many facts of alienation. In Untouchable and Coolie, Bakha, the Jamadar, and Munoo, the waif, protagonists feel alienated from the society in which they are forced to live and suffer and their cups of frustration and misery are full to the brim. Bakha thinks that it is Satanic to think that anybody born in the Harijan family is polluted and can pollute others. He abhors picture of a society; a picture that is an indictment of the evils of a decadent and perverted orthodoxy. The giant of evil enters into the big castle through the labyrinthine channels of caste. In Coolie, the evil is more widespread and appears as greed, selfishness and in humanity in their hundred different forms. The root of Munoo’s alienation from society is poverty as Munoo wails in melancholy that there must be only two kinds of people in the world: the rich and the poor. In Two Leaves and a Bud, the atmosphere is of suspicion and strife, the racial intolerance and antagonism, the reign of prejudice and unreason. The characters are alienated from surroundings and the society at large.

Mrinalini Sarabhai, the great Indian dancer, could not escape predicament of alienation. In This love Is True, she galvanizes the
difficulties that have to be faced by a girl of good family who desires to make dancing her career. The endemic prejudice against the profession (the profession of harlots) is reinforced by opposition from the husband and his family. Parvati, the heroine, finally decides to follow her inner voice, which means her alienation from her lover Chetan and his possessive mother and alienation from the joys and fulfillment of a happy marriage.

The theme of survival is dominant in the writers of the west as well. Almost every one of them delineates and suffers from the feelings of man’s impotent helplessness in this chaotic world. Life loses all its meaning in the present chaos. The ceremony of innocence is dead. Shakespeare presents it almost in all his plays. The characters in his dramas are close to reality and they pass through unending sufferings of this modern world. Life appears to them a tale told by an idiot full of sound and fury signifying nothing.

W.B. Yeats laments painfully that the best lack of all conviction and the worst are full of passionate intensity. The world is rotten and for a man like Yeats that it is no country for an old man. Here the old man is a tattered coat upon a stick.

T.S. Eliot adroitly delineates the living death of the modern wasteland in The Waste Land. His poem gives examples of spiritual and emotional sterility of the modern man. Man has estranged from himself from God and high morals. The poet expresses the utter anarchy, sterility and erosion of values in the modern world. Life is like a dead Balley leading us nowhere. The hollows men in The Hollow Men are representatives of the denizens of the modern wasteland. They, devoid of all religious faith, are spiritually empty. They die with a whimper of defeat. The ever growing feeling of weariness and futility of living-all
these things force T.S. Eliot gives a detailed expression to the feeling of survival and hollowness in *The Waste Land* and *The Hollow Men*.

The world gives man no freedom to live a life of his own choosing. One has to suppress his feeling and live in an atmosphere completely indifferent to his temperament and liking. The experience of life goes a long way to mould a writer. *Hardy*, in his early years, saw a woman being dragged away by two persons to the scaffold. The boy ran away from the hill in terror but the incident had never been effaced from his mind. It lingered in his memory only to find expression in his novel *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*.

In the existential view, man’s worth is determined, which can only be achieved through a painful process. The weak man acquiesces; the man with an existential sense of himself struggles and suffers. *Maurice Friedman* writes:

“*Personality is suffering. The struggle to achieve personality and its consolidation are a painful process. The self-realization of personality presupposes resistance; it demands a conflict with the enslaving power of the world, a refusal to conform to the world. Refusal of personality acquiescence in dissolution in the surrounding world can lessen the suffering, and man easily goes that way. Pain in the human world is the birth of personality, its fight for its own nature*.”

*Atwood* demonstrates the crucial ability of sense-making through story telling and thus testifies to the very power on which it pins its fragile hope for *humankind’s survival*. Margaret Atwood uses the survival as a device to *highlight and intensify the suffering*, which is caused by innumerable factors. *Margaret Atwood*’s all leading characters are *victims*

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of quest of survival but their quest of survival make them able to face the challenges of their life. In her world of fiction quest of survival is agony for the males as well as females. In Atwood’s novels, intensity of quest of survival increases and decreases with the rise and fall of moral persona of the character.

In a world of shifting values, when novelists do not find a readymade substructure of unquestioned religious, ethical, philosophical or even political varieties to shape their works, but are, on the contrary, faced with unanswered questions, perhaps the Canadian writers, in their ancient role as introspective intellectual can give us “a truthful image of the moral anxiety haunting members of their generation”.

The Atwoodian heroines are all employed, economically independent and live by themselves. Peripherally, they appear liberated and advanced. But, as Atwood shows the fallacy through her novels. Where major decision is concerned it is only man who takes them. A woman is still not capable of making her own choice. Anger and displeasure against this sexual political involve Atwood's women in an emotional crisis leading to craziness. They isolate themselves so as to appreciate and place their individuality on a pedestal. In this process they tend to reveal certain flows in themselves and they seem 'misfits' and 'crazy' in the eyes of others. Their madness is of a varied kind. The normal woman in Canada is known by her subservience and compliance, and any deviation from this automatically renders her abnormal. This kind of abnormality and insanity in women is traced undoubtedly to the result of quest of identity.

When a creative writer is a also a literary critic, it is perhaps inevitable that the reader tries to relate the writer's critical generations to

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3 David L. Stevenson, “Fiction's unusual Face”; Nation 627 (November I, 1958) P. 309
her/his creative writing. In the case Margaret Atwood, as Linda Hutchson points out that Atwood's ‘survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature’ has served as the context in which critics have subsequently discuss his / her work. Women's existence under patriarchy has excluded them from power. This exclusion has often been productive, forced the women to establish their own identity, so that they can take the power.

Quest of survival explored by Atwood in her works as a Canadian writer, deals with issue of victimization and survival as condition of both the Canadian experience and female experience. Atwood's novels probe themes related to the survival such as the enforced alienation of women under patriarchal attempt to annihilate the selfhood of women, the gradual carving out of female space of women, through various strategies and women's quest for identity, self definition and autonomy. Structurally, Atwood is an innovator who experiments with various narrative forms.

Victim position in survival, she did it as an aid to the study of Canadian literature, where she found a superabundance of victims, as she herself has said that the positions are the same whether you are a victim, a victimized minority group or a victimized individual. In the position of victimization the fact of being a victim is acknowledge, the responsibility for it is transferred to something vast, nebulous and unchangeable like Biology or womanhood. Either the victim does this by herself or she accepts such an explanation and definition of herself as given by others. She excuses herself from any responsibility to take efforts to change her position.

Atwood seems similarity between the status of Canada and Woman that she has always seen Canadian nationalism and concern for women's right as part of a larger, non-exclusive picture. Power structures have been built into the Canadian national consciousness and the female
psyche and Atwood makes it her mission to *explore and expose these*. Most of Atwood's novels grapples with the *politics of gender*. Politics *means having to do with power; who got it, who wants it*, how it appears in a word who's allowed to do what to whom, who gets what from whom, who gets away with it and how.

*The Edible Woman*, Atwood's first novel in 1963, she wrote when she was twenty-three. The novel, which she handwrote at night in her room in Toronto rooming house and typed during the day at her job with a market research company was set near a swamp. *The Edible Woman* arises the *question of survival* and *quest of identity*, the author explores the position of *victim women in a patriarchal capitistic, consumer society*. The protagonist Marian McAlpine her friends, colleagues and acquaintances illustrate, various attitudes towards their own status as women. Marin's spinster colleagues, *Lucy, Emmie* and *Millie*, nicknamed as *'the office virgins'* being unaware of being victims in patriarchal society. They unquestioningly accept society's definition of woman as a role - occupant to fulfill the function of a wife. Their sole aim in life seems to be getting a husband. All of them are artificial blondes, since blonde hair is one of the regulation charms of women, as required by their society, Lucy dressed elegantly and systematically visited all the expensive restaurants in town during lunch break, in the hope of catching a prospective husband. When Marian announces her engagement to *Peter* at Lunch, their expression changed from expectation to dismay. When they are invited to Peter's last bachelor party they come eagerly, "They were so excited. They were each expecting a version of Peter, to walk miraculously through the door, drop to knee and propose."

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4 Atwood Margaret. The Edible Woman (Toronto: McClelland, 1985; Boston: Houghton, 1986), P. 258
Lucy even tries to attract Peter, fluttering her silver eyelids and paying him lavish compliments, "you are even handsomer than you sound on phone". Later when Marian disappears from the party, Lucy accompanies Peter during his search for Marian displaying concern and sympathy and Peter is properly impressed.

The landlady of Marian's apartment is other lady who drifting through life in a state of unawareness, blindly accepting and enforcing society's cliched expectation from women. She is self appointed champion of bourgeois morality and strongly disapproves of a rebel. Clara, Marian's former classmate, a natural blonde, had been "everyone" ideal of translucent perfume advertisement feminity" (TEW, P. 37), during her high school days. She had fallen in love with Joe Bates in her second year in college and had been swept into matrimony and motherhood in a state of unawareness. She had greeted her first pregnancy with astonishment, the second with dismay and with the third "she had subsided into a grim but inert fatalism" (TEW, P.38). Repeated pregnancies bring her to this position. One way of responding to this position is with passivity, another is with anger. Her resentment at her position comes out when she call them leeches branches, "all covered with suckers like an octopus" (P.32). Marriage and multiple motherhood seem to have reduced her to a state of exhaustion and inertia, almost to a vegetable. She lay back in her chair and closed her eyes, "looking like a strange vegetable growth" (TEW, P.32). In the views of Clara's husband, Joe Bates, a women who has been to the University:

"gets the idea she has a mind, her professor pay attention to what she has to say, they treat her like a thinking human being; when she get married her core gets invaded. Her feminine role and her core are really

5 Ibid; p.263
in opposition, her feminine role demands passivity from her . . . so she allow her core to get taken over by the husband. And when the kids come, she wakes up one morning and discovers she doesn't have anything left inside, she is hollow, she doesn't know who she is anymore, her core has been destroyed”.  

Joe too contributes to Clara's position as a victim. He recommends unawareness as the only strategy of survival. Perhaps Clara achieves this by the end of novel, for she seems better adjusted and capable of coping with life. Her membership in a burial society takes on a symbolic meaning, perhaps indicating that she is buried alive in her victim condition. Marian's apartment mate Ainsley Tewkes rejects the marriage but she wants to give birth to a child, to fulfill her "deep feminity" (TEW, P. 12) as she puts it but she believes that the thing that ruined families these days is the husbands and decided to dispense with one. All she wants is a man with a decent heredity, who would father her child and then leave her "and not make a fuss about marrying her" (TEW, P. 44) Ainsley strategy is thus to turn the tables on man and use and exploit him to fulfill her own need to become a mother. In her relationship with Len Slank the traditional male-female role assumptions as victor victim and hunter hunted are reversed. Putting on a school girlish innocence, Ainsley makes Len believe that he is the hunter stalking the prey, while the truth is different later when Len hears how he had been used by Ainsley he is fitted with shock and anger and rails at all women as "Clawed, scally predators" (TEW P 238). Her response is "I guess that, I will simply have to get another one, that's all (TEW, P. 239). For her a husband is just a replaceable spare part, whose function is to provide a father image to her child.

6 Ibid; P. 261
Marian's panic reveals here subconscious acceptance of the wifely role as the ultimate destiny of the women, outwardly she readily adjust to Peter's moods, "of course I had to adjust to his moods, but that's true of any man" (TEW, P. 66) and conforms to his expectations from her, there are traces of an independent, individual self within her. After love making Peter always asks, "how was it for you" and Marian replies "marvelous", though she thinks to herself, "One of these days, I should say 'rotten', just to see what he would do" (TEW, P. 66). This independence of spirit is short lived. She weeps, becomes hysterical, hides under the bed and runs away along the road, chased by Peter in hunter victim sequence. Rapidly Peter assumes a proprietarial air over her: "her sounded as though he's just brought a shiny care, I gave him a tender chrome plated smile." (TEW, P. 96)

She is still capable of irony but Peter imposes on her his image of the perfect woman, as when he tells her that he chooses her because she was sensible, a quality he wanted in his wife. "I did not feel very sensible. I lowered my eyes modestly" (TEW. P. 97) says Marian. Her loss of autonomy comes as a shock event to her. Marian's total loss of identity is indicated subtly. After the engagement, Marian allows Peter to order the food when they go out for dinner and Peter could make up their minds right away. It is as if they have a corporate mind, whose decision making power rests with Peter. She is unable to understand that her body's rejection of food is caused by her subconscious rejection of the victim wife role of being consumed and assimilated by Peter.

Meanwhile, Peter continues to reshape. He suggests that she should get a new dress and a new haired and appear "not quite so mousy" (TEW, P. 231). The red sequined dress, the elaborate hair do and layers of makeup meet with his approval, though finds them oppressive. She
experiences herself as a vegetable. In the bath tub, "all at once she was afraid that she was dissolving, coming apart layer by layer like a piece of cardboard in a gutter puddle" (TEW, P 242). Under the heavy makeup "She was afraid even to blink, for fear that this applied face would crack and flak with the strain"(TEW, P. 246). When she runs away Peter's party and escapes being hunted down by the photographer or hunter with his camera/flashgun and Marian rejects of the victim role. When Peter comes, in lieu of an explanation, she offers the cake to him with the words,

"You have been trying to destroy me, haven't it you? You've been trying to assimilate me. But I've made you a substitute, something you'll like much better. This is what you really wanted all along, is not it"  

At last, Marian break off her engagement and she begins to eat, she ends with no lover, no roommate, but with a remarkably healthy appetite. Marian lives a double life earlier,

"One sexual role after another is presented to her but she seems unable to accept any of them, I mean she's really blocked. She rejects maternity when the baby she's been nursing turns into a big, nor does she respond positively to the dominating female role of the queen and her castration cries of of with his head. . . "

Marian's body suddenly metamorphoses and this transformation show her mental state. "Marian gazed down at the small silvery image reflected in the bowl of the spoon; herself upside down with a huge torso narrowing to a pinhead at the handle end. She titled the spoon and her forehead swelled, then receded"  

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7 Ibid; P. 301
8 Ibid; P. 199
9 Ibid; P. 150
Lady Oracle is about the growth of a girl, Joan Foster, to maturity. It is subscribes to the tradition Bildungsroman. Joan Foster the female protagonist in Lady Oracle is big, fat, weighing 245 pounds at the age of 19. At the school she is asked to do teddy bear dance, not to butterfly dance. Her mother advice her to buy clothes that would make her less conspicuous the dark dresses with tiny polka dots and vertical stripes favored by designers. Joan Foster doesn't want to hide her body, she deliberately buys peculiar, offensive violently colored, and some of them she gets only in maternity shops. She says that she was not going to let herself be diminished, neutralized, by a navy - blue polka dot sack. Her mother always quarrels with her and the quarrel is on the territory of her body. The Italian or Turk cook in Bite - A - Bit restaurant where Joan works for a while proposes to marry her. He says that he is serious. He wants to meet with her father, and he shows her his bank account. He says "I will give you babies; lot of babies, I see you like the babies - you are a good girl." The guy here instead of opening his heart like a romantic hero open his bank account book to Joan Foster. She quizzically reflects upon the commercial and native proposal and says "sometimes I thought it would be pleasant to have married him, it would be as good as having pet, for with his black eyes and his soft moustache he would be like a friendly animal". John says "what a shame, how destructive to me were the attitudes of society, forcing me into a mold of femininity that I could never fit. How much better for me if I'd been accept myself, too." By means of a complicated series of parodric plays Atwood challenges the customary positions of women as mother, wives and mistresses and tries to liberate them from their usual association in a discourse inscribing hierarchy and possession.

10 Atwood Margaret. Lady Oracle : Toronto; ECW Press, 1993, P. 66
11 Ibid; P. 99
12 Ibid; P. 103
In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the child bearing function of woman is isolated, blown out proportion and shown to be at the root of the *victimisation of women*. While the Aunts who are accomplice of the system, deny their victim position, most of the women in *Gilead* accept it as something inevitable. They, however, devise various strategies to make it tolerable. There are a few like *Moira Ofglen* and *Offered* who rebel against the role of the victim but they are punished for this action. The victimization of the women character is conveyed through imagery and the very structure of the novel is fragmented like the women. At one point Offered says, "I'm sorry there's so much pain in this story. I'm sorry it's in fragments, like a body caught in crossfire or pulled a part by force." It's almost as if the structure is an objective correlative of the theme.

In *Gilead*, where women are defined as mere functions to serve man as the wife, decorative in function, and dressed in blue, the daughter, silent and submissive, dressed in white, the *Martha, middle aged housekeeper*, in green and *Handmaid* in red personifying the child bearing function, all concept their victim position as something is inevitable, dictated by Biology and decreed by history, at time when Caucasian birthrates had declined steeply. However they evolve various strategies of survival under victimization one of them is the bonding among women. Many wives in Gilead resort to gardening as a device to achieve a degree of inner autonomy."*Many of them to order and maintain and care for.*" (THM, P. 22). *Gilead* aims at destroying the Handmaid as an individual and strips her personal name and assigns a patronymic to her which merely indicates the male to whom she is assigned - as of fered, of glen and of warren. The name is composed of the preposition 'of' indicating, possession and the name of her

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'commander'. Since *Gilead* tries to annihilate them as persons, the Handmaids assiduously affirm one another's being for others. During the shopping trips, they show their recognition of each other "I see several women I recognize, exchange with them the infinitesimal nods with which we show each other we are known at least to someone, we still exist". Another survival strategy of the Handmaids is to keep alive the oral tradition among them. This is seen in the manner in which *Moira's* story is pieced together from what other have said, a story passed from women to women, by word of mouth.

"Part of it I can fill in myself, part of it I heard from Alma, who heard it from Dolores, who heard it from Jannie. Jannie heard from Aunt Lydia"

While most of the Handmaids accept their victim position, *Moira* and *Ofglen* are rebels who repudiate the victim role. *Moira* openly defies authority and is punished by being "beaten on her feet with steel cables" (THT, P. 102) until the feet are reduced to pulp. Later she also attempts a bold escape through physical flight. She is caught and finally as signed to Jezebels, where other recalcitrant like her are housed and used as a prostitutes by the commanders. Almost all the women at Jezebel's reject the role of the victim, though they tolerate being used as prostitutes, preferring that to being dumped in the colonies.

*Ofglen*, unlike *Moira*, keeps her rebellion secret. Her strategies are subversion and sabotage. While the other handmaids seek secret bonding with other bonding with other victims to derive consolation and comfort from the fact that other also in some plight, ofglen reaches out to others in the hope of winning proselytes for the underground resistance group with

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14 Ibid; P. 295
15 Ibid; P. 139
code name "may day: when finally her identity as a rebel is discovered, "she hangs herself rather than be taken away in the ominous van that came for her" (THT P. 296) Her suicide may be seen either as a retrogression of rejection of both the role of the victim and the fact of victimization.

The sketch of offered's mother, as revealed in offered's reminiscences of pre-Gilead days, is a vivid vignette of a woman who rejects the victim roles and chooses exactly what she wants out her life. Her attitude to man, a revealed in her statement "a man is just a woman's strategy for making other women"(THT, P.130) is rather similar to Ainsley's in The Edible Woman. She regards man as a tool to serve her own purpose and woman as exploiter and victim.

Offered is similar to other Handmaids in accepting the victim position as something inevitable. She adopts the aunt's definition of her own self image. Offered perceives herself only as a walking womb i.e. only in the child bearing context and regards herself as a failure when that function is not fulfilled. "I have failed once again to fulfill the expectation of others, which have become my own"(THT P. 83), she says in anguished disappointment when she fails to conceive. When the commander summons her to a secret meeting, against the rules, she feels that she cannot refuse him. "There is no doubt about who holds the real power" (THT P. 146). "Offered assertion of her autonomy of thought is seen often at night in the privacy of her room, the night is mine, my own time, to do with as I will . . . But the night is may time out. Where should I go?"16 She goes in imagination to the past through flashbacks. She often recalls her life with her husband and daughter, her relationship with her mother and her friendship with Moira, perhaps to convince herself of the objective

16 Ibid; P. 147
relation of the former state of affairs before *Gilead*. Offred oral narration at first to herself and then into takes serves several purposes. It validates her own existences, gives her a sense of control over her life. "*I am telling you this story. I will your existence. I tell, therefore you are.*" (THT) P. 279. Handmaids are not allowed to look the world, but they are constantly watched. Offred is allowed no mirror in her room at the commander's house, because she could kill herself with a piece of it, but she can see her red-robed figure reflected and distorted in the mirror of the stairs. Offred draws the reader into the dangerous enterprise of her narrative.

"A story is like a letter. Dear you, I will say Just you, without a name. Attaching a name attaches you to the world of fact, which is riskier, more hazardous; who knows what the chances are out there of survival, yours? I will say you, you like an old love song."\(^{17}\)

Her novel, *Bodily Harm*, deals with the theme of escaping entrapment to *find one's identity*, takes a much *darker turn*. The narrator is literally imprisoned by *corrupt, abusive political systems* run by men who are abetted by women. This novel bears witness to the brutal injustices of modern global politics; the life demands cultivate a political and moral conscience. *Rennie Wilford*’s story traces the growth of such a conscience. A freelance journalist who writes trendy trash on lifestyle for paper and magazines, *Rennie* thinks of herself as an expert on surfaces who never writes about serious issue. *Rennie* travel to the United Islands of *St. Agtha in the Caribbean to escape reality*, get some sun, and write a travel piece. The Island immediately seems meaning, with mysterious figures hidden behind mirrored sunglasses. Soon Rennie is drawn into the convoluted *post-colonial politics of the country*, implicating herself

\(^{17}\) Ibid; P. 53
by unknowingly transporting a machinegun for the local communist party and by having a brief affair with Paul, a big time drug dealer and gunrunner for the party. Dr. Minnaw, an honest leftist reformist running for president, continually urges Rennie to report "what you see" on the island to newspaper in Canada. It is her duty, he insists, to witness what is happening before her eyes when Rennie explains that her subject is only "lifestyle. . . what people wear, what they eat", Minnow beams, "that is all I wish" (BH, P13), alluding to the conspicuous poverty of the island. Minnow is shot in the back during a premature leftist rebellion fomented by the local CIA agent solely for the purpose of ensuring that the right wing Ellis, a corrupt papa doc figure, will win election. Rennie is thrown into a cell in a fortress prison alongwith.

Lora, the white mistress of the dubbed communist candidate Prince, known as The Prince of peace, after suffering wretched deprivations in the dungeon and witnessing the savage beating of Lora, Rennie is perhaps rescued by a Canadian diplomat and perhaps lives to tell her story, the reader cannot be certain because the ending is narrated in future tense. Whether or not Rennie escapes, she tells her story in the novel as one she is deeply changed by her experiences. She has become three dimensional, a person who pays attention, “she will pick her time; then she will report” (BH, P.301). The novel being with first person narration but quickly switches to third, suggesting objective and it is narrated in very short scenes, like a journalistic piece.

Rennie’s heightened political awareness as witness and victim of oppression causes her to make connections among all sorts of bodily harm, pornographic violation of women, Jakes’ sadistic love talk, the torture she witnesses on St. Antoine, the humiliations she undergo in

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18Atwood Margaret. Bodily Harm: London; Macmillan, 1994, P. 133
prison, and the abusive life story told by Lora. Even Rennie’s mutilation by cancer surgery is a benevolent form of bodily harm linking her with all who suffer loss. When Rennie grapes the hand of the bloodily beaten Lora, trying to will her back to consciousness, Rennie has leaned the lesson that no one escaped bodily harm and that “there’s no such thing as a faceless stranger” (BH, P.299). Although Rennie remains as solitary, she has opened to the necessity of human connectedness. Having come to full understanding that no woman is an island, Rennie leaves behind a lifestyle and gain a life.

Like Before Man is the story of a love triangle, but in an anaesthetized, plastic world the characters cannot seem to transcend cliches of feeling. Novel follows the streams of consciousness of three characters associated with the Royal Ontario museum. A work of grim psychological realism, Like Before Man traces the last stage of disintegration of the marriage of Nate and Elizabeth Schoenhaf and Nat’s joyless affair with the young paleontologist Lesje. Elizabeth, the most complex of the three characters probably deserves a novel of her own, since the subplot of the intergenerational struggle between Elizabeth and her hated Aunty Muriel is the most dynamic material in the novel.

Surfacing, opens on a note of decay where the unnamed narrator is separated from her parents and husband, and journey into the Canadian wilderness of her childhood with three companies, Joe her lover and David and his wife Anna. The novel reflects the condition of the Canadian society bringing to light the problems peculiar to a multicultural society like Canada. The narrator coming on the appearance of Joe says that from the side he is like the buffalo on the U.S. niche shaggy and blunt shouted, with small clenched eyes and the defiant but insane look of a species once dominant, now threatened with extinction. Ironic
implication which shows the narrators hatred for the Americans and her inability to identify whether Joe is an American or an Canadian. Her defiant but insane look is typical of an American drunk with power and domination who is now threatened with extinction. It also highlight the culture predicament in Canada, where one culture tries to dominate the other of root out the other. Atwood propounds that Canadians themselves feel threatened and nearby extinct as a nation, and suffer also from like denying expression as individual the culture threatens the animal within them and that their identification with animal is expression of deep seated culture fear.

The protagonist sees her own victimisation as symbolized by the crucified heron, she listens while Peter describes a hunting incident to Len, man to man, “So I let her off and wham. One shot, right through the heart. . . I picked it up and trigger said, “you know how to gut them, you just slit her down the belly and giver her a good hard shape and all the guts’ll ballout; so I whipped out my knife, good knife, German steel, and slit the belly and took her by the hind legs and gave her hell of a crack, like a ship you see, and the next thing you know there was blood and gust all over the place.”

Peters account of his hunting expedition, Marrian begins to widraw, even physically to the point that she hides beneath a bed in Len’s apartment while the conversation continues above her, “I was thinking of the room as up there. I myself was underground; I had dug myself a private burrow.” (S. P. 77).

From the beginning of the novel Atwood provides indications that her narrator cannot be trusted that she has somehow last touch with the reality of her own like, “I have to be more careful about my memories,

she says, “I have to be sure they are my own... I run quickly over my version of it, my life, checking it like an alibi” (S. P. 845). One of lies that the protagonist tells the reader, her friends and her lover, and even herself is that she is divorced and the mother of a young child who lives with the former husband. She was never married art teacher. She begins to remember, she lost her innocence, was not merely victim but an actual participant in the game of cruelty. At one points, she recalls, she and her brother collaborated in a kind of murder. “... We killed other people besides Hitler, before my brother went to school and learned about him and the games became war games. Earlier we would play we were animals, our parents were the humans, the enemies who might shoot us or catch us, would hide from them. But sometimes the animals had power too”.

In order to be reborn, to heal her divided psyche, she receives a ‘legacy’ from her parents; she has received the gift of knowledge from her father, but her mother’s gift, yet to be discovered, will be beyond logic. She is mysteriously guided, she believes, to one of her own childhood drawings, a picture of a women with a round moon stomach, the baby was sitting up inside gazing out, just as the protagonist has earlier envisioned herself as conscious before her birth, able to see the world through her mother’s transparent womb. She interprets the picture as an instruction to become alive, she must reassured that part of herself which she has killed, the miraculous double women giving birth to herself as will to new life. The protagonist takes her lover to the shore of the lake and carefully arranges their positions.

“I lie down, keeping the moon on my left hand and the absent sun on my right. He kneels... He trembles and them I can feel my lost child

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20 Ibid; p.154
surfacing within me, forgiving me, rising from the lake where it has been
prisoned for so long, its eyes and teeth phosphorescent, the two halves
clap, interlocking like fingers, it buds, it sends out founds. . . It will be
covered with shining fur. I will never teach it any words”²¹

Protagonist’s perception of her world has changed and above all
she is no longer seeing herself as Victim, but as humans and responsible.

“This above all, to refuse to be a victim unless I can do that I can
do nothing. I have to recent, give the old belief that I am powerless and
because of it nothing I can do will ever hurt anyone. A lie which was
always more disastrous than the truth would have been.”²²

Atwood has remarked in an interview that Surfacing is “a ghost
story,. . . the Henry James kind, in which the ghost that one sees is in fact
a fragment of one’s own self which has split off, and that to me is that
most interesting and that is obviously the tradition I am working in”²³.
Women are reduced to the position of victims, though their own
complicity in the process is also acknowledge. Woman may either sink
into unawareness and thus deny the fact of being Victim, or accept it
passively or repudiate the Victim role and try to reverse the victor-Victim
roles or come out of the gender struggle situation by becoming creative
non-victims.

In Cat’s Eye, Elaine Risley, the artist-narrator becomes a willing
accomplice in he own victimization, and her passivity- a quality
important, paradoxically, to the artist, who must first suffer in order to
craft is also part of her acceptance of patriarchal attitudes to gender roles.

²¹ Ibid; p. 190-191
²² Ibid; p.p.223-235
Participation in a feminist group does not give her the kind of support she needs.

The first half of *Cat’s Eye* builds suspenseful to that moment when *Elaine* turns her back on Cordelia. The second of the novel covers *Elaine’s* like up to the present, a life that she herself views as the aftermath of her ordeal with *Cordelia*. Recognition of the *Cordelia* within, a voice which urges both cruelties and self-doubts, takes *Elaine* a very long time; she is still wrestling with that dark angel at the end of the novel. Her bitter experience with *Cordelia* prepares the adult *Elaine*, however, to extricate herself from an absurdly constraining and pseudo romantic affair with her art teacher *Joseb* and gives her strength to weak away from her unsuitable and exhausting first marriage, to the irresponsible artist *Jon*, although not until after a theatrical suicide attempt with an knife, with the internal voice of *Cordella* urging her on. The only relationship in her adult like which is not tainted by the victor victim struggle of wills is her peaceful second marriage to *Ben*. Significantly, *Ben*, who is by far the most attractive male in any of *Atwood* is novels, runs a travel business, is off in *Mexico*, and never appears in the novel.

*Atwood* displays a profound preoccupation with eating in her writing; she has even edited a cook book. In her novels eating is employed as a metaphor for power and is used an extremely subtle means of examining the relationship between women and men. The powerful are characterized by their eating and the powerless by non-eating. Eating is not the only, or the most predominate metaphor for power; indeed, images of consumption see so ordinary as to be significant. Nevertheless, they reappear persistently throughout the novels and, examined in totality, assume a potent significance. There is analysis of the politics of
eating in all the novels provides a new way of reading Atwood and a new understanding of women’s relationship to food. All Atwood’s heroines initially appear as victims, and they demonstrate their powerlessness through their relationship with food.

In *The Edible Women*, Marian’s wedding approached and she subconsciously feels herself being absorbed by Peter, she stops eating. As she loses her identity and autonomy, so she loses her ability to eat. Her non eating is a physical expression of her powerlessness and, at the same time, a protest against that powerless. Significantly, Peter’s power is demonstrated by his ability to directly control what Marian eats. He chooses her order in the restaurant and this is the moment from which Marian can no longer tolerate food.

*In Surfacing* the narrator's sense of victimization by the father of her aborted child is symbolized by the way she imagines he controlled what she ate during her pregnancy. Anna’s appetite is also controlled and repressed. She is stereotypical women who possesses all the traditionally feminine characteristics imposed by the process of socialization. The narrator faces similar choices. Her rejection of, and return to, society is reflected by what she eats, when she rejects culture and retreats into the wilderness to become a ‘natural’ women, she gives up eating processed food. Such food is contaminated in the same way that society is contaminated by patriarchal ideology. Both are unnatural constructed, man-made, and both threaten to poison her. Instead, the narrator eats only the raw food, she realizes she cannot live without physical sustenance just as she cannot live outside society. She must engage with life. Her return to the cabin to eat the food, there signals her first step toward a tentative reintegration into society.
Food and control lay at the heat of a *Lady Oracle*. The first part of the novel focuses on the power struggle between Joan and her mother, and this struggle center of food. Joan’s mother attempt to deny her daughter any sense of autonomy and tries to control her life and identity. She makes her diet and tries to assert her authority physically by reducing her daughter in size. Joan challenges her mother and takes control of her own life through eating. She retaliates against enforced diets by eating more and more. Eating empowers Joan, and she eventually vanquishes her mother. Although Joan decides to lose weight when Aunt Lou dies leaving her two thousand dollars on the condition that she do so, she capitulates only because the money will enable her to leave home. Money is a more powerful substitute for food. However, one slim, John remains powerless, because she remains trapped in a victim mentality. Nevertheless, the moments when Joan does attempt to exert control over her life are always accompanied by acts of eating. Just as she empowers herself through food in relation to her mother, her attempt to take control of her life in Italy is accompanied by an act of eating.

*Rennie*, in *Bodily Harm*, is another of Atwood’s powerless heroines. *Rennie* is controlled by her boyfriend, Jake, who tries to change her to fit his ideal. He moves into her apartment, decorates it hangs pictures of naked women over the bed, makes *Rennie* wear erotic cloths. He physically exerts his authority through sadomasochistic sex. Jake’s power is reflected by food. He controls what they eat just as he controls everything else in the relationship.

*In Life Before Man*, the relationship between eating and power is demonstrated by the three principal character. Elizabeth is obsessed with being in control. She is confident of her own identity, independent and autonomous. Her power is symbolized by her hearty eating. However,
power based upon the subjection of other is precarious and dangerous. Chris’ suicide has already indicated the unbalanced and unwholesome nature of a relationship a not based on parity and mutuality. Elizabeth demonstrates that tyranny over others is eventually turned in upon oneself when there is nobody left to dominate and destroyed. She eventually loses control of the relationship proves elusive and transient. She eventually loses control of the relationship between Nate and Lesje, which she has been attempting to manipulate to her own end, and her marriage break down completely. Nate moves in with Lesje and he and Elizabeth’s powerlessness is marked by the absence of food. Nate’s subordinate position in his relationship with Elizabeth is epitomized by the fact that he does all the cooking. He feels an impulse to nourish Elizabeth’s lover, Chris. When Chris begs Nate to persuade Elizabeth to get a divorce and move in with him, Nate wants to give Chris something, some food. However, while Nate is powerless in relation to Elizabeth, he likes to dominate his girlfriends. When he asks Lesje to lunch, she orders the cheapest thing on the menu, a grilled cheese sandwich and a glass of milk. She listens, eating in small bites, concealing her teeth. Where Lesje feels self-conscious eating, Nate voraciously devours his sandwich. Lesje is powerless in her relationship with both William and Nate. This is conveyed by the fact that she eats very little and frequently refuses food. She often misses lunch or just has a cup of coffee, and when she does eat she only has sandwiches or bran muffins. Whenever food is offer, she herself doesn’t feel like eating. This is epitomized in the dinner because she suspects she is having an affair with Nate. She dominates the evening and deliberately tries to intimidate Lesje, which is so uncomfortable the she is unable to eat anything.
In The Handmaid Tale Gilead is a society in which women are denied any form of power. One of the main ways of system of oppression is enforced is through food. The handmaids have no choice about what they eat and are permitted to consume only that which the authorities consider will enhance their health and fertility, caffeine, alcohol and cigarettes are forbidden and sugar is rationed. Their meals are brought to them in their rooms and they eat alone. By controlling what they eat, the Gilead regime gains direct control over the handmaid bodies. The connection between food and control is exemplified at the Red centre, where women are prepared for their role as handmaids. They are indoctrinated with ideological justification of the government’s aims and methods as they take their meals eating are accompanied by biblical exegesis. In addition, Offered, suspects the food is drugged.

"Give me children, Or else I die. Am I in God’s stead, why bath with held from thee the fruit of the womb? Be hold my maid Billab. She shall bear upon my knees, that I may also have children by her. An soon and and so forth.We had it read to us very breakfast, as we sat in the high school cafeteria, eating porridge with cream and brown sugar .......... . For lunch it was the Beatitudes, Blessed be this, blessed be that. They played it from it from a disc, the voice was a man’s”

Like Rennie in prison, Offered associated food with freedom. One of her memories of the pre-Gilead period is of being able to eat what she liked. Her reluctance to eat the food she suggests that she subconsciously realizes she is being controlled by what she eats. Her physical rejection of the food symbolizes her mental and emotional rejection of the tyrannical regime she lives under.

24 Ibid; p.226.
Like the other novels, *Cat’s Eye* is centered on a power struggle. Here, however, *Atwood* focuses on the relationship between girls. *Cordelia* is *Elaine’s best friend*. She is also her tormentor. With her accomplices, *Grace* and *Cordelia* tortures *Elaine* into believing she is nothing and sets her on a cruel program of reform. *Elaine’s* powerlessness and her struggle to overcome the psychological hold her tormentors have on her is traced by her relationship to food. The relationship between eating and power is epitomized by *Elaine’s* father whenever he appears in the novel he is eating voraciously and, as he eats he speaks with authority on the the subjects of science, philosophy, ecology and culture. *Elaine* internalizes the association between eating and power that she sees operating the world around her. She dreads going to school, where she cannot escape *Cordelia*, and in the mornings is unable to eat her breakfast. She identifies with her father’s associated.

*Mr. Banerji*, because as a foreigner, he too feels alien and isolated like *Elain’s*, his powerlessness is reflected by his non-eating and the way he bites his hands. At the Christmas dinner he suffers his food around his plate and leaves most of it, *Elaine* relates this sense of powerlessness specifically to food. Leaving the house for school *Elaine* ignores her friend and walk on alone. They follow her along the street insulting and criticizing her,

“*I can hear the hatred, but also the need. They need me for this, and I no longer need them. There’s something hard in me, crystalline, a kernel of glass. I cross the street and continue along, eating my licorice*”

Henceforth, the balance of power begins to change between *Elaine* and *Cordelia*. The scene in which *Elaine* threatens to eat *Cordelia*

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contributes to this. Playing in a graveyard at dusk, Elaine teases her friend that she is a vampire and will suck her blood out. While Cordelia maintains a façade of disbelief, she is unnerved by the possibility this may be true. For all Atwoodian heroines the search for selfhood and identify is symbolized by search for something satisfying to eat. Marian eats, she eats poorly. She lives on snack food, frozen meals, and T.V. dinner. Marian hungry throughout The Edible Women but cannot find anything to satiate her. Whatever she eats makes her sick. In the narrators’ search for physical sustenance in the natural world becomes symbolic of her lack of spiritual sustenance in the social world. At the end of Joan has nothing to eat except some biscuits which are hard as plaster and tasted of shelf and some cooked pasta, drying out already, and a yellowing punch of parsley. She has failed to escape her old life and her old self, and the absence of proper, nourishing food indicates that, at the end of the novel, Joan is still trapped in the role of victim. In Rennie seems to spend the entire move searching for something decent to eat.

All the heroines interpret the world in terms of food and negotiate their way through life using food. For women, eating and non-eating articulate that which is ideologically unspeakable. Food functions as a muted form of self expression but, more than that, it also becomes a medium of experience. Eating expresses the ineffable. By writing about women and food, Atwood exposes one of the most subtle and subconscious ways in which power operates. Atwood offers no alternative to the repressive social system she exposes, by highlighting the devastating effects of such a system, she brings into focus the need and means to transcend it.

Her protagonists are not very heroic heroines in the beginning of their adventures and sometimes not even at the conclusion. They are not
really reliable narrators; they may lie to the reader as they sometimes lie to themselves, or in some instances, they are even a bit mad. They are often fragmented, isolated, seeing poorly, and translating badly. All are, in varying degrees, failed artists like those metaphorically paralysed and amputated authors whom Atwood describes in cut off from tradition, bereft of audience and of social or political relevance. All of Atwood writer and artist protagonists share a curious ambivalence towards their craft. They often use their fictions for the evasion of reality rather than for combination, they create illusion rather than transform reality. Much like Atwood’s mirror images, so central to all her novels and poems, art can function, as it does for these heroines, as a way to lose the self in a vision of the self, to establish a conflict between the ‘I’ of the self and ‘she’ of one’s fiction, to become object rather than subject, to create polarities where none should exist. Atwood’s innocent and at least symbolically virginal heroine, she implies, must like Canada as a whole, refute the illusion of their own innocence, recognise their complicity in the destructive cycle of power and victimisation, and thus comfort their own reality.

Victimization, according to Atwood, is the subject of a great deal of mythology, Canadian and otherwise. The victimised heroines of fairy tales are also frequently a source of identification for Atwood’s protagonists, and they inevitable prove to be destructive models. Atwood describes the traditional heroine of Canadian fiction as a Rapunzal or a lady of shallot, an image of the women artist imprisoned in a tower of mythology which is her own construction. Reading Margaret Atwood, one comes inevitably to conclude that she love to live in totality, want to save the civilization and existence from destruction. Her writing values human life. Quest of survival provides the core material to her
imagination novel and novel. For Margaret Atwood, man lives in the world of interpersonal relationships, in which she is capable of defining and achieving a satisfactory existence. She approaches human problems with compassion and remains hopeful for the betterment of man and the world in which human being is destined to live.

Atwood’s method, how to approach is new. She thinks and then works on the subjects. Atwood believe in realism, the hard reality of life. Her love for past living in future makes her novels interesting. She judges fairly her characters and their consequences are true to the realities. She tries to cover the terrible gab between man and women. Her interest in sexuality separates her from others. Her novels are creative woks and can serve as guideline to those who lost values and moral in their lives. She believes that women will have to come forward to change their social and national situations even if the final situation worked out in the novel of Margaret Atwood.