Psychological Escape of The Protagonists in Margaret Atwood's Novels

The present study focuses mainly on the psychoanalytical study of the characters in the novels of Margaret Atwood. Margaret Atwood is a Prolific Canadian litterateur. Her versatile intelligence can be noted when she tries to attempt every possible conceivable genre of the Literature. Victimization and Survival are the twin themes explored by Atwood in her fiction and poetry. As a Canadian woman writer and a feminist, Atwood deals with usages of victimization and survival of both the Canadian experience and female experience. Atwood sees similarity between the status of Canada and of women. Atwood's vision of the life centers around the psyche, the soul and the consciousness of men. The women as portrayed by Atwood suffer from personal victimization which has its root in colonial patterns of destruction. The women feel inferior to men and suffer psychological tensions. <u>Key Words</u> *: psychoanalysis, victimization, deterioration, disintegration, reintegration.*

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Today psychoanalysis has developed into a heterogeneous interpretive tradition. Sigmund Freud, an Austrian psychoanalyst, who pioneered the technique of psychoanalysis, developed a language that described, a model that explained, and a theory that encompasses human psychology. His theories are directly and indirectly concerned with the nature of unconscious mind.

The psychoanalytic approach to literature not only rests on the theories of Freud; it may be even said to have begun with Freud, who wrote literary criticism as well as psychoanalytical theory. After Freud, many great visionary writers have attempted to write in this form.

The present study focuses mainly on the psychoanalytical study of the characters in the novels of Margaret Atwood. Margaret Atwood is a Prolific Canadian litterateur. Victimization and Survival are the twin themes explored by Atwood in her fiction and poetry. Atwood sees sexual politics as only one of the areas in which power relation are the crucial issues, and secondly, because as a novelist she insists on her aesthetic freedom to write from her sense of the enormous complexity, not only of the relationship between man and woman, but also those other abstract intangibles, art, life, form and content, writer and critique, etc. Her characters might best be characterized as 'experiments' (to adopt her own scientific vocabulary and method of inquiries), always testing the limits of theory and exceeding ideological definitions. Her characters also canvass such a comprehensive range of social issues and form such variety of perspectives that it eludes that simplicity of any single 'feminist' position. Hence her characters have provided a chronicle and critique of the changing fashions with in feminist politics over the past 30 years.

The protagonists of Atwood's novels retreat into their psychological, cocoons in order to escape the maladies of a diseased culture. Their escape also retards rapid deterioration of the fragile and sensitive psyches each seems to possess. The characters show an inability to conform to the multiple expectations of both society and of their family and friends. The protagonists internalizes their conflict and gradually withdraws psychologically, eventually, facing total immersion in to alternative realities . Atwood's targets--the people, ideas, attitudes and institutions she reveals ingloriously--as the catalysts for the protagonists' borrowing in fantasy. All her protagonists hare the feeling of doubt, of isolation, of division, of lack control within her own life, each of the protagonists finds herself moving in new directions as she attempts to make sense of what is too frequently a senseless world. Because Atwood presents a picture of women in contemporary society, one might be too quick to accuse her of lambasting men. But the dissatisfaction of the characters stems from society, inclusively, where both men and women share complicity in both good and bad.

The characters of Atwood share displeasure in their relationships--with men and women, family and friends, of their youths and their adulthoods, They also experience isolation due to society's projections of the ideal upon them-

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-whether it be the view of beauty or the roles of women as helpmates, nurturers or partners. Whether propelled by society's expectations or an individual's expectations, or a combination, the women find themselves on a quest for wholeness, for reintegration of their separate selves, for normality. But therefore to emerge, they must first descend.

The characters struggle with the various labels and roles assigned to them. In their attempts to conform to society's conventions, they experience increased alienation and internal disintegration. Hence their confusion results in a psychological withdrawal as a form of survival. The protagonists find their form of escape in the alternate worlds of their own creations and fantasies. Their psychological retreats take them to the nether worlds of sanity, to the brink of madness.

Atwood's protagonists deal with the various issues confronting the contemporary female, struggling with the traditional views of the past, and the new emerging ones. Encountering biases and restrictions, often due to gender--either overtly or subtly--these women attempt to survive by physically withdrawing, by creating dual worlds, or by plugging into madness. The woman of Atwood's novels retreat; yet, they are survivors. And, in the end, they refuse to be victims.

Margaret Atwood's Novels : The Edible Woman, Surfacing, Lady Oracle and Life before Man are disparate in tone, style and structure, they share common theme: the protagonists embark on a psychological journey in order to secure their own survival within a malevolent society. Perhaps ironically, their psychological escapes lead them to a clarity of vision and insight which enables them to discard their fragmented perceptions of themselves, to refuse victimization. While their retreats from the rational, tangible world can be nothing less than a form of denial, they also offer the protagonists insights often ignored by the some people around them.

The protagonists engage in a journey towards selfhood. They embark from a culture milieu which threatens to engulf them. Although they may be forced to change locales, the real topography they travel is their interiors, their psyches. For the psychological escapes of Margaret Atwood's protagonists, the paths are so muddy and worn, one can just barely make out they were made by human or animals. Atwood's ideas on female characters; they should be allowed their humanness, including their imperfections; they should be able to make decisions, to both survive events and cause them.

Atwood's novels show society sustains victimization by holding power over woman. The protagonists of Atwood's novels are not satisfied with their lives, and as they explore the reasons for their discontentment, come to realize that they are victims of social, economic and political discrimination.

Finding their environment threatening and malevolent the female protagonists in Atwood's novel withdraw psychologically. Their psychological escapes take many forms: fantasies, alternative worlds, delusions, hallucinations and madness. While the behavior of these protagonists is irrational and illogical to the 'sane' world, it allows them to reintegrate their fragmented lives. The protagonists emerge from their psychological cocoons with clarity of vision, recognizing both their multiplicity and their complicity. Thus meeting Atwood on her own terms, one can feel her presence in her characters.

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