MYTH AND BELIEF IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S DOMESTIC FICTION

by

Jerrine Emma Lee
B.A., University of Victoria, 1981

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department of English

ACCEPTED
LTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
DEAN
1990-04-25

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

Dr. Nelson Smith, Supervisor (Department of English)

Dr. Stephen Scobie, Department Member (Dept. of English)

Dr. David Godfrey, Outside Member (Dept. of Creative
Writing)

Dr. Sheilah Allen, External Examiner (Communications &
Social Foundations Dept., Education)

© JERRINE EMMA LEE, 1990

University of Victoria

All rights reserved. Thesis may not be reproduced in
whole or in part, by mimeograph or other means, without
the permission of the author.

of Canada du Canada

Canadian Theses Service Service des thèses canadiennes

Ottawa, Canada
K1A 0N4

The author has granted an irrevocable non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of his/her thesis by any means and in any form or format, making this thesis available to interested persons.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in his/her thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without his/her permission.

L'auteur a accordé une licence irrévocable et non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de sa thèse de quelque manière et sous quelque forme que ce soit pour mettre des exemplaires de cette thèse à la disposition des personnes intéressées.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège sa thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

ISBN 0-315-62391-8

Canada

Supervisor: Dr. Nelson Smith

ABSTRACT

Society's assumptions about domestic life rely heavily on traditional beliefs that imply "there's no place like home" and that "a woman's place is in the home." Until recently, the presumption has been that home is a safe, nourishing and happy place, and that all women, because of their biological capacity to bear children, are by nature, good mothers and housekeepers. So much of Margaret Atwood's fiction is set in the home where the mirror she holds up to society reflects a domestic life that challenges these popular misconceptions. Atwood's fiction reveals that home can be a dangerous place, that it frequently fails to provide physical or psychological nourishment, and that "happily ever after" endings are not assured. It also demonstrates that all women are not "natural" mothers and housekeepers.

This study examines Atwood's use of classical mythology, fairy tale, and realism to challenge traditional ideas about home as a place and about woman's place in society. Close readings of The Edible Woman, Lady Oracle and Life Before Man as well as selected stories from two collections, Dancing Girls and Bluebeard's Egg show how Atwood uses revisionary mythopoeisis and realistic details to create both settings and characters which undercut the concepts of these two domestic, and largely patriarchal, assumptions. Atwood's evocation of positive female archetypes, her re-vision of classical myth, and her identification of woman's reality show there is power in myth for women and redemption in truth-telling from a woman's point of view. This process which can liberate women has as its ultimate goal the renewal of society.

Chapter I addresses the ambiguity of myth by providing definitions applicable to Atwood's fiction and discusses the need for revisionary mythopoeisis. Chapter II examines Atwood's response to the popular notion that suggests home is a safe, nourishing and happy place. Chapter III discusses Atwood's challenge to the idea which suggests a woman's place is in the home. Chapter

IV explores Atwood's use of classical myth and realism in the modern heroine's quest for rebirth in Life Before Man.

Examiners:

Dr. N.C. Smith, Supervisor (Department of English)

Dr. S.A.C. Scobie, Departmental Member (Dept. of English)

Dr. W.D. Godfrey, Outside Member (Dept. of Creative Writing)

Dr. S.M Allen, External Examiner (Dept. of Communication and Social Foundations, Education)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract..ii

Table of Contents...............................v

Acknowledgments.................................vi

Chapter I: Rewriting the Myth 1

Chapter II: No Place Like Home.................14

Chapter III: A Woman's Place...................47

Chapter IV: Her Own Place......................78

Notes...113

Bibliography 115

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Nelson Smith for his interest and support. My thanks also goes to Dr. Stephen Scobie and Dr. David Godfrey for reading and commenting on my paper. My husband, daughters and friends have been encouraging and patient.

CHAPTER I

Rewriting the Myth

Myth, says M.H. Abrams in *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, "is one story in a mythology--a system of hereditary stories which were once believed to be true by a particular cultural group," and which served to explain "why the world is as it is and things happen as they do" (111). "Mythos" in classical Greek signified any story or plot whether true or false (Abrams 111). The concept of myth as a story also occurs in the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition: "a purely fictitious narrative usually involving supernatural persons, actions, or events, and embodying some popular idea concerning natural or historical phenomena" (177). *The Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought* calls myth a "sacred" narrative from which legends and fairy tales are not always clearly distinguishable (407).

Definitions of myth by Mircea Eliade and particularly Northrop Frye, one of Margaret Atwood's teachers at Victoria College, are perhaps the most relevant to this study of Atwood's fiction. Eliade, in *Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries*, defines a myth as a "true history" of what came to pass at the beginning of "Time," one which provides "the pattern for human behaviour"

(23). In <u>Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology</u>, Frye also says myths are believed to have really happened or to have some special significance in explaining certain features of life (31). He says that "mythology merges insensibly into, and with, literature" (33), and that myth presents the fiction writer with a "ready-made framework" which allows him to devote "all his energies to elaborating its design" (31). Most mythologists agree that the object of myth is to explain the world, including nature and its phenomena, and all circumstances of human life, including dreams. Similarly, the object of the fairy tale, according to Bruno Bettelheim in <u>The Uses of Enchantment</u>, is to provide an understanding of the meaning of one's existence (3).

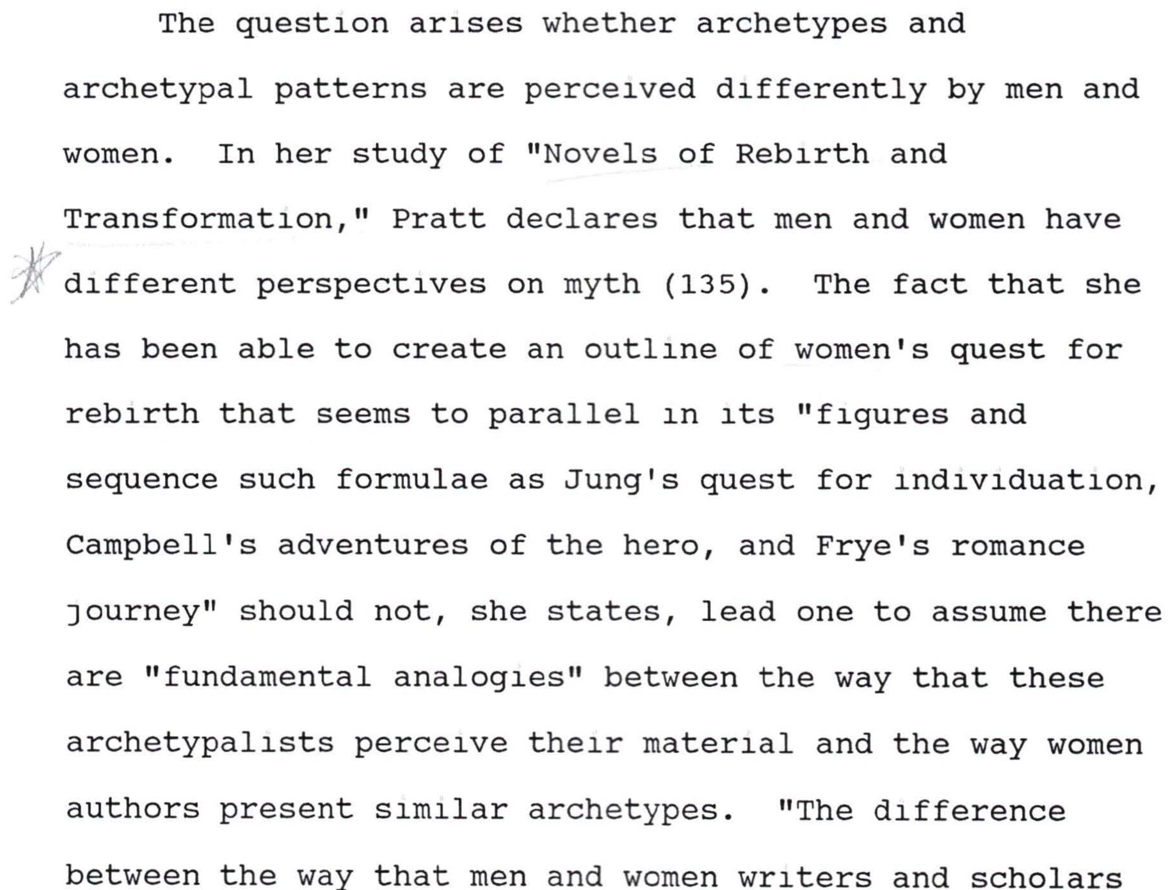
Clearly, too, modern versions of classical myth are operative in today's world. As Eliade suggests, "modern man is subjected to the influence of a potent if diffuse mythology that offers him a number of patterns for imitation" (33). Real and imaginary heroes, he states, play an important part in the formation of adolescents: "The characters in tales of adventure, heroes of war, screen favorites" are all part of a continually enriched mythology which is added to and altered by the "exemplary figures thrown up by changes of fashion" (33). Batman

and Superman, for example, are heroes of popular culture who, in their superhuman ability to win against overwhelming odds, resemble the heroes of Greek mythology. The relevance of myth to modern life and literature is expressed dramatically by Joseph Campbell when he says "the latest incarnation of Oedipus, the continued romance of Beauty and the Beast, stand this afternoon on the corner of Forty-second Street and Fifth Avenue, waiting for the traffic light to change" (4).

Myths embracing both public and private life play an undeniable, if not always obvious part in the everyday experience of the women and men who inhabit Atwood's technological and consumer society. These myths include traditional stories which were believed to be true, including those from Classical Greece and Rome and from the Bible. This definition may be expanded to include other traditional stories including fairy tales and legends, as well as modern versions of these narratives. Myth critics, says Abrams, view the genres and individual plot patterns of almost all literature as recurrences of certain archetypes--original patterns out of which later forms develop.

In her study of Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fiction, Annis Pratt suggests that positive female archetypes can empower women's personalities to grow and

develop. She provides the following useful definitions which distinguish betweeen archetype and stereotype: "From the Greek, <u>archi</u> is a beginning or first instance, and <u>typos</u>, a stamp, denotes the primordial form, the original, of a series of variations." Stereotype is a printing term designating the original plate from which subsequent imprints are made and "connoting an excessively rigid set of generalizations" (135). Pratt suggests that archetypes can subvert long-standing gender stereotypes.



The question arises whether archetypes and archetypal patterns are perceived differently by men and women. In her study of "Novels of Rebirth and Transformation," Pratt declares that men and women have different perspectives on myth (135). The fact that she has been able to create an outline of women's quest for rebirth that seems to parallel in its "figures and sequence such formulae as Jung's quest for individuation, Campbell's adventures of the hero, and Frye's romance journey" should not, she states, lead one to assume there are "fundamental analogies" between the way that these archetypalists perceive their material and the way women authors present similar archetypes. "The difference between the way that men and women writers and scholars

perceive archetypes derives. . . .from their different experiences in society" (138).[1]

In an interview in The American Poetry Review, Atwood offers her own definition of myth and then talks about the strong female archetypes in fairy tales:

> Myths mean story, and traditional myths mean traditional stories that have been repeated frequently. The term doesn't pertain to Greek myths alone. Grimm's Fairy tales are just as much myth or story as anything else, but some get repeated so often in the society that they become definitive, i.e., myths, of that society. Certainly Biblical ones have been very important in our society. We all know what the Bible's attitude toward women is. (Hammond 28)

The unexpurgated Grimm's Fairy Tales, she says, contains a number of tales in which the central characters are women who win by using their own intelligence. Those people who feel fairy tales are bad for women, Atwood comments, are only right "if the only ones they're referring to are those tarted-up French versions of 'Cinderella' and 'Bluebeard' in which the female protagonist gets rescued by her brothers. But in many of them, women rather than men have the magic powers" (Hammond 28).

Atwood stresses that the message given to women in our culture is the one proposed by Robert Graves, that is, "man does, woman simply is. Man is the poet, woman is the Muse, the White Goddess herself" (SW 224).

Furthermore, Graves, she says, would view the evoking of a male muse by a woman poet as "new-woman perversity; but then, he labours under the same difficulty as does Freud when he tries to discuss female psychology and Jung when he deals with the animus archetype: he's a man" (SW 68). Since classical Greek myth, like Biblical myth, is the product of a patriarchal society, women writers in their efforts to represent the female experience feel the need for revision.

Atwood uses classical mythology in whatever way suits her art as poet and fiction writer. At times she allows it to resonate intact and full-blown through a poem. However, the myth of the hero, for example, is usually undercut with satire, as in the poem "They eat out" in Power Politics. In this book of poems about sexual politics, the woman speaker participates in the myth to create a Superman in his "blue tights and a red cape." Her participation in the myth as handmaiden helps to assure her male partner's hero status, even his elevation to immortality. However, the speaker undermines the classical myth of the hero and the notion of apotheosis by continuing to eat her Chinese food and saying: "I liked you better the way you were,/but you were always ambitious" (5).

Frequently, too, Atwood will rewrite a myth from a woman's perspective. In discussing the need for revisionary mythopoesis, Rachel Blau Du Plessis in Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers says that with myth, the woman writer faces material that is indifferent or actively hostile to historical considerations of gender:

> To face myth as a woman writer is, putting things at their most extreme, to stand at the impact point of a strong system of interpretation masked as representation, and to rehearse one's own colonization or "iconization" through the materials one's culture considers powerful and primary. (106)

This act of "re-vision" is, as Adrienne Rich has said, like "entering an old text from a new critical direction." In order to know themselves women need to know the assumptions in which they are drenched. "We need to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it: not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us" (quoted in Du Plessis 107).

By treating the writing of the past differently, as Atwood so frequently does in her use of classical myths, she challenges the traditional role of woman as handmaiden to the hero, and she draws on strong female archetypes as a source of inspiration and power for women, as, for instance, when she evokes the positive

classical female figures like Demeter, goddess of the ripe grain, and her daughter Persephone, deity of tender budding shoots. Most often, her use of the Demeter/Persephone myth deliberately focusses on what Atwood sees as the need for mothers to help daughters uncover their own sources of inner strength--the resident goodness in their bodies, the acknowledgment of their own erotic and creative desires, and the validity of their own projects apart from men and from the constrictions of the dominant culture. As Kathyrn Rabuzzi states in <u>Motherself: A Mythic Analysis of Motherhood</u>, Persephone is an ideal supernatural helper for women trying to understand themselves. Persephone's story, she suggests, "strongly violates patriarchal standards. She is one of very few female figures admitted into the canon of patriarchal literature for whom marriage and husband signify the underworld" (100). Significantly, Persephone returns to her mother and the organic world of creation for part of the year. Rabuzzi concludes:

> In contrast to all the thousands of women who end up supposedly living "happily ever after" with the hero who "rescues" them, Persephone earns the right to divide her time between the two realms of life and death....Persephone, indeed, seems to possess the secret of balancing life between the two antithetical realms of patriarchal and gynocentric space. (101)

Atwood also draws on "goddess" myths, such as those fertility, green, and moon goddesses associated with prepatriarchal times, to demonstrate the inherent power of the female principle. Two examples from Surfacing use positive female myths associated with nature. The unnamed protagonist in the novel makes what Carol Christ calls a "spiritual quest" in which woman is aligned with nature. The vision of her mother as the mythological "Mistress of the Animals" is a key to the heroine's recovery--her ability to feel and to trust others (49). Secondly, in tune with nature and her sexual power, the heroine becomes, like the Virgin Mother Goddess of the Moon, a female in control over her own body, her own creative force, and she conceives a child, her male partner being almost incidental (47).

Atwood's revisionary techniques also make classical myth live in a way which reflects woman's life experience. In Power Politics, Atwood enters the text from a vantage point other than that of the questing hero when she revises classical mythology by telling the Odysseus myth from Penelope's point-of-view. The sequence begins with the woman waiting in the past: "At first I was given centuries/to wait in caves," but it then moves through time, through all wars--Vietnam, for example--as Penelope recalls, "not so/long ago, you

failed,/and came back in a wheelchair" (28). Thus, classical myth is made more meaningful to women.

Fairy tales as myth also recur in various forms, from allusions to Grimm's "Cinderella" in Atwood's use of the terms "true bride" and "false bride" in Lady Oracle to the more extensive use of the Bluebeard myth embedded in several stories including the title story of Bluebeard's Egg. A modern incarnation of Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale "The Red Shoes" in the form of a movie about a ballet dancer occurs in Lady Oracle as an extended metaphor for the repression of the female artist whose irrepressible creativity forces her to dance regardless of the consequences.

In the Gerstein Lecture delivered at York University in 1976, Atwood talked about the problem of creating fictional female characters who challenge the accepted male versions of women wherein even classic mythological figures become stereotypes. Among the many examples Atwood provides are Old Crones (the witches in Macbeth as evil personified) or the White Goddess, woman as muse, inspiring but ultimately destroying. Atwood rejects these as well as other stereotypes presented, not only through the Western literary tradition but by film, radio, television and newspapers, indeed the entire culture. Instead, she wants to create a woman character

who "makes decisions, performs actions, causes as well as endures events, and has perhaps even some ambition, some creative power" (SW 219-223). In creating a female character, Atwood wants to show her "having the emotions all human beings have--hate, envy, spite, lust, anger and fear, as well as love, compassion, tolerance and joy" (SW 227). Similarly, Atwood wants to take the cloaks off the mythological Superman figure so that male characters can be seen in terms of their humanity as well (SW 427).

But creating characters who overturn beliefs about domestic life is only one method of bringing the forces of reality onto the pages of her fiction. Another revisionist technique is Atwood's use of housekeeping as a metaphor, not only to challenge these misconceptions but to fuel her persistent attacks on technology and consumerism. In a review of Margaret Drabble's <u>The Radiant Way</u>, Atwood notes that Drabble was attracted to write a biography of British novelist Arnold Bennett because "he had been able to make art out of the slag and industrial desolation" of central England. Atwood says Drabble is one of the first writers to take women's domestic life, "the diapers, the dishes, the rashes, that were, for the literati of the time, the equivalent of slag heaps and industrial dumps--and treat it as material suitable for fiction" (<u>Ms. Magazine</u> 62,65). Likewise,

Atwood herself creates literature out of the "slag heaps" of domestic life, combined with myth, creating what Robert Kroetsch in *Labyrinths of Voice*, calls a "dance between myth and reality" (122).

Since much of Atwood's fiction is set in the home, it is here that she uses myth to challenge popular beliefs about domestic life by creating characters who are not gender stereotypes of "homemaker" or "housekeeper." As Canadian sociologists Meg Luxton and Harriet Rosenberg state in their book, *Through the Kitchen Window: The Politics of Home and Family*, feminists are drawing on evidence from history, anthropology and biology to argue that there is nothing "natural" in the exclusive allocation of women to domestic labour (10). Likewise, it could be suggested, there is evidence in literature by women which questions popular beliefs about woman's place in society. This study concerns Atwood's challenge to two of the most powerful beliefs about home life: the one that says that "there's no place like home," that home is a safe, nourishing and happy place; and the other that declares "a woman's place is in the home," upholding the notion of the division of labour by gender, and postulating that a woman's biological capacity to bear children makes her a natural mother and homemaker.

Close readings of The Edible Woman, Lady Oracle and Life Before Man, as well as selected stories from two collections, Dancing Girls and Bluebeard's Egg, show how Atwood creates settings and characters which challenge these misconceptions by using the realistic details of domestic living on the one hand, and frequently, but not always, by evoking mythical stories on the other. Chapter II examines home as place: Atwood's treatment of the belief that says "there's no place like home." Deriving largely from the industrialization of the nineteenth century, this popular notion says that the public world and the domestic world are separate: one is a world of industry, commerce, science, and politics still largely controlled by men; the other, the world of home and family, is safe, or to borrow Luxton and Rosenberg's phrase, "a haven in a heartless world." Chapter III, "A Woman's Place", explores Atwood's use of the metaphor of housekeeping to challenge the belief that says a woman's place is in the home, an attitude which assumes that a woman's biological capacity to bear children makes her the best caregiver, and also naturally inclines her to cook, clean and manage the house. Chapter IV, "Her Own Place", discusses Atwood's use of classical myth in the modern heroine's quest for rebirth in Life Before Man.

CHAPTER II

No Place Like Home

The common belief that "there's no place like home" implies the pre-eminence of home as place, specifically as THE place which promises safety and comfort, physical and emotional nourishment, and happiness.[1] Home provides the individual with a sense of belonging. People say "We feel at home" or that another place has "all the comforts of home" suggesting something very special--something beyond simple comfort. Home as a place of safety, comfort, and refuge is inextricably linked with memories of the first home--mother's womb, the perfect environment. For most people, says Kathryn Rabuzzi in The Sacred and the Feminine: Toward a Theology of Housework, home implies salvation in the sense of safety--"safety from the elements, from animals, from dangerous people and from fearful encounters of any kind" (67-68). Traditionally, it is the woman, the housewife, who presides over this place of comfort.

The sacred image of home probably dates back to the cave woman, but more influential on the Western literary tradition is the classical myth of the Greek goddess Hestia, or Vestia as she was known in Rome, whose responsibility it was literally to keep the home fires burning. Medieval theories about women were largely

influenced by the Church and the good woman's role as mother, inspired by worship of the Virgin Mary, was considered sacred. The household prior to the industrial revolution, as Catherine Hall mentions in her history of the housewife in The Politics of Housework, was the centre of both domestic and mercantile activity. The farm was a factory employing men, women and children. A housewife in fourteenth-century England tended to mean "the co-ordinator and organiser of an establishment and of a centre of production" (Malos 48). However, after the industrial revolution, the "sacred" image was revived and embellished by the nineteenth-century upper- and middle-class idealists who saw home as a sanctuary which provided salvation for men who worked in the profane world of the industrial revolution. John Ruskin, in Sesame and Lilies, describes home as a place of peace, "a sacred place, a vestal temple, a temple of the hearth watched over by Household Gods" (137).

Another Victorian notion saw the woman who administered the comforts of home as the Angel in the House, her nurturing qualities the antitheses of the competitive qualities of the man in the world of industry and business. Thus, home became a place where family members expected to receive both physical and emotional nourishment; male members of the household would find

renewed strength in its "vestal" temple. This notion of home as a refuge from the world of work outside is still essential to the modern concept of domestic life. According to Rabuzzi, existential analytic theory suggests "the worlds in which we all stand are not single, but multiple"; there is Umwelt which is the natural world, Mitwelt, the world of community, and Eigenwelt, the world of relationship to oneself. "To centre yourself in the sense that home allows is specifically to centre yourself within the Eigenwelt; to be at home with yourself," she says (65).

Finally, home is the place of the fairy-tale ending where man and wife live "happily ever after" sharing love, sexual fulfillment and happiness. In the idealized Victorian view, marriage ought to attain a state of perfection since, as Tennyson said, marriages are "made in heaven."[2] This vision of domestic life perhaps inspires the romance behind the idea of modern marriage which Atwood's fiction challenges.

Atwood's portrayal of twentieth-century home life disputes the concept that suggests "there's no place like home." Her fiction exposes home as a place that does not necessarily provide safety, nourishment or happiness. The safety of the home is undermined by threats of bodily harm and psychological dismemberment. The true

Labyrinth with its devouring Minotaur, the Bluebeard fairy tale with its murderous husband, and the myth of Echo and Narcissus and its uncommunicative lovers challenge the idea of safety and domestic happiness. Her Gorgon Medusa appears not as a reflection in the shield of Perseus but as a paralyzing representation of the "bad" mother in a face-to-face encounter with a female "hero." When Atwood does use the powerful example of female affirmation that resides in the myth of Demeter and Persephone, it contrasts with the many raging and powerless mothers and daughters who inhabit the domestic world of her fiction. Similarly, Atwood evokes mythological Goddesses from prepatriarchal times whose close connection to the natural world offer redemption. The Crone figure, Hecate--the old woman aspect of the Triple Goddess--is depicted not as a personification of evil but as a wise woman with magical powers.

This revisionary mythopoesis is accompanied by a rendering of realistic details. In his discussions of literature and language in Labyrinths of Voice, Kroetsch says "it is a mistake to liberate myth from reality...I want the dance of myth and reality to go on, the two dancing together" (122). Atwood choreographs a complex dance of classical myth and reality in her challenge to popular beliefs about home. For example, her "slag

heaps" of domesticity--the dirty soap curds in the bath, the bacon fat in the kitchen, the eggs slotted in their place in the refrigerator--are part of realistic domestic settings that make a statement about the characters and convey Atwood's vision of home life in North American society. Familiar images of everyday life, such as food, take on symbolic meaning. Food and eating (or not eating), for example, are important metaphors in Atwood's fiction; sometimes food is a metaphor for sex, at others it is a metaphor for protest. In her introduction to The CanLit Foodbook, Atwood talks about the significance food holds in literature:

> For a person whose religion is lived at a profound level, any food may be sacramental. For a starving person, much is edible that would otherwise not be. For an anorexic, on the other hand, all food may be taboo. Eating is our earliest metaphor, preceding our consciousness of gender difference, race, nationality and language. We eat before we talk. (2)

Authors, she says, use foods to reveal character, "slimy as well as delectable, or provide metaphors or jumping-off points into the ineffable or the inferno" (2).

Atwood responds to the "home, sweet home" idea by first declaring that not all homes are safe. Threats to the safety of the home are a recurring motif in her fiction. They can come from within: Elizabeth, the

protagonist of Life Before Man, has alcoholic parents who neglect her and her young sister; the home in Lady Oracle becomes a psychological battleground for mother and daughter. Or they can come from outside the home, as in the opening pages of Bodily Harm, when Rennie's apartment is broken into, and a rope left on her bed foreshadows the "bodily harm" repeated in the novel; in the title story of Dancing Girls a young woman has her throat cut when she leaves her bathroom window unlocked (214). And, in "War in the Bathroom" (Dancing Girls), a paranoid old woman fights madness and loneliness with the small, daily rituals of domesticity; her alienation from society manifests itself in a small "war" over domestic space when she has to share the bathroom in a rooming-house. She succeeds in "winning" the "war" by tyrannizing an old man by taking over his usual time in the bathroom.

This last example may serve as an illustration of Atwood's approach, for in Western society, there is the popular notion that the bathroom affords warmth, privacy and renewal; the bath itself, a cleansing and purifying ritual, is presumed to offer deliverance from the cares of the world, a kind of return to the womb, a safe place in the "home, sweet home." Atwood's vision shows this not to be the case; her use of the realistic "enclosing"

settings of domestic life, rooms such as the bathroom, reveal home as an unsafe place.

The bathroom is depicted as the centre of the mythical Labyrinth when Marian MacAlpin, the heroine of The Edible Woman, visits her boyfriend's apartment. Atwood describes her young protagonist's visit to Peter's residence as a journey into the Otherworld. In classical myth and literature, the Labyrinth is connected with the hero's journey to the Underworld where he learns about his future, as does Aeneas who, in Book Six of The Aeneid visits the Sybil who guards the entrance to Hades near which is a representation of the Cretan Labyrinth.[3] Marian's journey to Peter's apartment is one of several "descents" to the Underworld made by the heroine during the course of the novel.[4]

While the Labyrinth is almost always connected with a cave, Atwood rewrites the myth to have Marian climb up the stairs of a modern but unfinished apartment building--the opposite (in theory) to a cave dwelling. Yet Marian has to "thread" her way through "piles of concrete blocks," and inside the building she has the sensation of being inside the belly of a monster with its "beetle-hard internal shell," a "rough grey underskin of subflooring," and raw wires that "dangled like loose nerves" (52-53).

Peter, like the Minotaur, is the building's (Labyrinth's) only tenant, while Marian is the sacrificial maiden.

Marian's encounter with Peter in the bathroom denies the concept of safety in home and marriage, as the description of their love-making in the bathtub illustrates. It is uncomfortably "hard and ridgey"; she thinks he might have got the idea from one of the murder mysteries he reads. She imagines the cover of the book which shows a naked woman with a "thin covering of water" and "the cold purity of the bathtub surrounding her body"--the bathtub as "coffin" (56). Atwood undercuts the ominous imagery of this scene with humour and with Marian's dispassionate first person narration, however, as when she assumes her punishing sexual encounters with Peter are his "revolt against the stale doom of stockings in the sink and bacon fat congealed in pans evoked for him by his friends' marriages" (56). The carnivorous nature of the Minotaur is satirized.

> He was twining his fingers in the hair at the nape of my neck. "I bet you'd look great in a kimono," he whispered. He bit my shoulder, and I recognized this as a signal for irresponsible gaiety: Peter doesn't usually bite.
>
> I bit his shoulder in return, then, making sure the shower lever was still up, I reached out my right foot--I have agile feet--and turned on the COLD tap

While the potential male violence perceived by Marian appears mostly as a figment of her overactive imagination, it does so with good reason, given Peter's penchant for painful love-making, and for weapons ("two rifles, a pistol, and several wicked-looking knives" hang on the walls of his bedroom along with his cameras [544]). Marian's perception of Peter as a physical threat is a metaphoric representation of the killing of her identity.

In a later bathroom scene, Marian again feels this erosion of self--a sense of being used and tossed aside. Bathing in preparation for the party Peter planned to celebrate their engagement, she looks down at the "hard-water particles of dirt and soap, and the body....somehow no longer quite her own. All at once she was afraid that she was dissolving, coming apart layer by layer like a piece of cardboard in a gutter puddle" (227-28). The feeling of physical dissolution or disembodiment conveyed in these bathroom scenes echoes the theme of symbolic "cannibalism" suggested by the book's title which will be discussed later.

The threat of "bodily harm" is even more explicit in Atwood's use of the Bluebeard myth, a cruel fairy tale that features dismembered wives, and lacks the usual romantic fairy-tale "happily ever after" ending. It

tells the story of a brutal wizard who kills his brides, storing their dismembered bodies in a secret and forbidden room in his castle. In "Spring Song of the Frogs" (Bluebeard's Egg), the male protagonist's figurative dismemberment of women parallels the literal dismemberment in the Bluebeard tale. Phrases such as "the flesh of thighs and rumps" (148) and "the girl's arms, bone-skinny and white" (148) and "to see her veins and intestines, like a guppy's" (150) contribute to the brutalizing aspects of the story as does his assessment of today's Playboy centrefolds--"solid gristle"--which he compares unfavourably with the women who used to pose for earlier men's magazines. He recalls "the way the garters would sink into the flesh of thighs and rump. Now there's no flesh, the thighs have shrivelled up, they're all muscle and bone" (148). Will, like Bluebeard, sees women as "meat" and as sex objects.

To further illustrate the body insecurity women feel in relationships with men, Atwood uses as a metaphor the serious psychological illness of anorexia nervosa in her reworking of the Bluebeard material. "Spring Song of the Frogs" features three women who suffer from anorexia which, according to Susie Orbach, an expert on women's eating disorders, represents "both the rebellion and the accommodation that women come to make in the context of a

social role lived within circumscribed boundaries" (Hunger 15). Anorexia is an attempt by women to gain control over their own bodies and their own lives--a struggle represented in Atwood's story by the man urging the women to eat and their refusal. Orbach says in each instance of anorexia "one can observe the most brutal internal struggle directed at suppression of needs that originate inside the woman" (9). Atwood draws a grim parallel between the brutal internal struggle of the anorectic and the brutal dismemberment, both literal and figurative, of women by men.[5]

The Bluebeard in this story is a divorced, lonely and confused man; the story is structured around three different "eating" occasions with three different women who refuse to eat. The protagonist says he seeks "a woman who would not look at herself in the glass of the picture behind him. A woman who would like what he cooks" (158). But the first woman, with whom he is having lunch in a restaurant, is preoccupied with her reflection, and like Narcissus for whom, Ovid tells us, "no thought of food" could make him forsake his reflection in the pool (quoted in Morford and Lenardon 71), she refuses to eat. Her inability to share his enjoyment of bread (the staff of life) tells Will they could not share other sensual pleasures in the land of

"Happily Ever After." Nor is Will able to coax his niece, hospitalized with anorexia nervosa, to eat.

His attempt to rekindle a romance by preparing a "candlelight and wine" dinner for a former girlfriend at his country home fails to bring him close to the woman. He "fools with the steaks, rubbing them with garlic, massaging them with pepper and a pinch or two of dried mustard" (156). But the woman does not share his appetite for she too is anorectic, and more silent than he remembers; she is almost "spindly," and feels "frail, diminished," elegant "but less accessible" (156). The meal is a dismal failure, the candles are gnawed by mice, the food is rejected by the woman, she leaves half her steak on the plate and "throws up" the rest in the bathroom. Using food as a metaphor, the story draws attention to what the author observes as the difference in male and female perspectives on love and marriage.

The notion of male and female attitudes towards food depicted in "Spring Song of the Frogs" echoes Marian's experience over "candlelight and wine" with her fiance in <u>The Edible Woman</u> where the male preference for meat arouses fear in the protagonist. Marian is uncomfortable and unhappy with a filet mignon dinner which Peter has chosen: "she suddenly saw it as a hunk of muscle. Blood red. Part of a real cow that once moved and ate and was

killed" (154). Peter by contrast "operates on the steak. .carving it into neat cubes" (153). During the meal, Marian's thoughts dwell on male violence, hunters in the Moose Beer ads whose hands are bloodless, and the sniper who shoots nine people, "the finger guiding but never touching, he himself watching the explosion from a distance; the explosion of flesh and blood" (153). Atwood's division of food along gender lines is (carefully) explained in the prose piece "Simmering" in Murder in the Dark where meats are "more masculine kinds of foods...anything that had obviously been killed and had visibly bled" (31). Women are associated with "glazed parsnips and the prune whip, anything that flowered or fruited or was soft and gooey in the middle" (31). Atwood's association of men with meat and blood links them to violence and killing. "But just because all rapists are men it doesn't follow that all men are rapists, you tell yourself," says the speaker of "Liking Men" (Murder 54). Distrust and fear hinder her good intentions as she ventures: "It's time to like men again...He's a carnivore, you're a vegetarian. That's what you have to get over" (Murder 53).

The male "cannibalism" theme, implied in the title of The Edible Woman, also disputes the "happily ever after" myth. Marian MacAlpin's temporary anorexia occurs

when she tries to mold herself into a stereotypical bride for Peter's consumption, she feels "like a slab of flesh, an object" as the hairdresser treats her head "like a cake; something to be iced and ornamented" for Peter's party (217). Marian's fear of being devoured causes her to literally flee from Peter on more than one occasion, and her subconscious attempt to make herself physically invisible by starving her body is yet another kind of flight from the devouring Minotaur. The "symbolic cannibalism," says Atwood in her 1981 introduction to the book, was inspired by "wedding cakes with sugar brides and grooms" (SW 369).

Atwood's vision of marriage as a sacrificial ceremony with the woman as the victim is revealed as Marian makes up her mind that she will not be sacrificed to the Minotaur after all. Instead, she plans to try the bridegroom's willingness to accept a substitute sacrifice by devising "a test, simple and direct as litmus-paper" (279): she bakes him an "edible woman." Atwood's description of Marian's cake-baking is crammed with realistic detail, but at the same time, the tone conveys the idea of a ceremony prior to sacrifice. The ingredients for the cake must be fresh, the bowls new. She "began to crack and separate the eggs, hardly thinking, concentrating all her attention on the

movements of her hands," and then, "Her image was taking shape. Eggs. Flour. Lemons for the flavour...She wanted everything new, she didn't want to use anything that was already in the house" (280). When Peter fails to accept the cake as a substitute sacrifice (He "hadn't devoured it after all.") Marian herself becomes a consumer once more (285). The popular mythology surrounding weddings and fairy-tale endings is thus shaped by Atwood into a pessimistic statement about marriage.

Atwood's view of the institution of marriage holds that a life of "happily ever after" is not possible if women suffer from body insecurity, if men continue to "cannibalize" them, and if couples fail to communicate their feelings to one another. Marian bakes the cake because she finds words insufficient to communicate with Peter. "What she needed was something that avoided words, she didn't want to get tangled up in a discussion. Some way she could know what was real" (279). However, once armed with the cake shaped like a woman, she is finally able to speak directly to Peter about how she feels. "You've been trying to destroy me, haven't you," and "You've been trying to assimilate me. But I've made you a substitute" (284). When Peter fails to understand how Marian feels and makes a hasty retreat, the romance is over. This failure of couples to communicate,

depicted in Atwood's first novel, has continued to be a concern. Fourteen years after the publication of The Edible Woman, Atwood sees men and women still struggling to reach one another without much success as "Spring Song of the Frogs" illustrates with its male protagonist's attempts to promote meaningful dialogue with women.

All Will's attempts to communicate with the women in the story are unsuccessful. The story begins with the sentence: "Women's lips are paler again" (147). Emphasizing the lack of communication, the protagonist notes that women are "becoming more silent: it goes with their new pale lips. They're turning back to secrecy, concealment. It's as if they're afraid of something" (158). In addition to drawing on the Bluebeard material and its dismemberment motif, Atwood's story retells the classical myth of Echo and Narcissus to illustrate the failure of men and women to have meaningful dialogue. Atwood's story, like Ovid's, clearly illustrates the failure of lovers to communicate. In the classical tale, the beautiful young Narcissus, captivated by his own reflection, spurns the love of the nymph Echo who "burned with passion" for him. She could not approach Narcissus with "tender appeals" because she was unable to speak first and could only give back words she heard. For his part, Narcissus is so consumed by passion for himself

that he would not have heard the most eloquent of pleas. Atwood's women are unable to speak through their pale silent lips, instead they speak through their bodies, rejecting the image of sexual object and consumable bride by a subconscious denial of sexuality symbolized by their thin, girl-like bodies.

Will feels "betrayed" because he seeks intimacy and love while his girlfriend (Bluebeard's third bride) is preoccupied and unsympathetic. Worse still, her attitude expresses a universal sense of despair. "What makes you think you're that much worse at [relationships] than anyone else?" she asks (158). This despondency is mirrored in nature where the voices of the spring frogs are "thin and ill" conveying no hope of renewal (159).

In the title story from Bluebeard's Egg, however, there is at least a veiled hope for the institution of marriage as Sally begins to see that she cannot go on forever being a nourishing Angel of the House. Less certain is whether or not Sally recognizes that she, not Bluebeard, is in control of her life

The modern land of "happily ever after" and "home, sweet home" in "Bluebeard's Egg" is a spacious and richly-furnished home on a ravine lot in Toronto. Bluebeard is heart specialist Ed, who lives with his third wife Sally, the protagonist. Their home is a place

where Sally "performs," sometimes "playing the dull wife of a fascinating heart man" (122), sometimes impressing guests with her gourmet cooking, entertaining them by trivializing her part-time job or her night-school studies in narrative fiction. Not only does Atwood embed the original "Bluebeard" tale ("much earlier than Perrault's sentimental rewriting...where the girl has to be rescued by her brothers" [BBE 137]) in her story, but she explains the task she has set for herself in rewriting the myth, stated as an assignment Sally has in her course on "Forms of Narrative Fiction".

Sally's task, and Atwood's, involves a "transposition" of the Bluebeard tale "set in the present" and "cast in the realistic mode"; a story to be limited to the point of view of "anyone or anything" in the tale (137). In the original fairy tale, the wizard Bluebeard puts three captive brides in turn to a fidelity test. He entrusts the woman with an egg and with the keys to every room in his castle. She is told that in his absence she is to guard the egg, and that she may enter all but one forbidden room. The first two brides enter the forbidden room, discover dismembered female bodies, and drop the egg into a basin of blood. The telltale egg gives them away, and like their predecessors they are killed and dismembered. The third bride,

however, leaves the egg outside the room, pieces together the bodies of her two sisters, who are magically restored to life, and the wizard loses his power. Atwood's reworking of the Bluebeard tale first focuses on Sally's fascination with the "forbidden room."

The "forbidden room" is the medical office where Ed has a new machine (to examine hearts) with which he is completely enthralled. The room symbolizes the man's life outside the home which Ed does not feel inclined to share with Sally. Sally insists, despite Ed's reluctance, on a visit to the office and having Ed try the machine on her. There, she sees her own heart, in motion, in black and white on the screen, a "large grey object, like a giant fig, paler in the middle, a dark line running down the centre. .two wings fluttered in it like an uncertain moth's." Her heart "was beating over there all by itself, detached from her, exposed and under his control" (128). This experience Sally finds "sexual in a way she didn't quite understand" (128). Sally's imagination has imbued Ed's medical practice with a mystique, and her visit to the "forbidden room" makes her believe Ed controls her heart, giving him power which in reality he does not possess.

Sally is characterized as a possessive and jealous wife which fits Bettleheim's psychological interpretation

of the myth. Bettelheim says the original "Bluebeard" gives body to two, not necessarily related, emotions--jealous love and sexual feelings that "can be terribly fascinating and tempting, but also very dangerous" (301-302). Atwood's protagonist glamourizes a dull, self-sufficent and remote husband whom she imagines might be captivated by his women patients. Yet, he is shown to take his work seriously and respect professionalism, and there is no real evidence to suggest Ed is a philanderer. Sally's marriage is threatened from within by her own jealousy and doubt.

The most intriguing aspect of the story for Sally, and for the reader, and the one alluded to in Atwood's title, is not the forbidden room but the egg--"the innocent and passive cause of so much misfortune" (140). The women in the classical Bluebeard story are all so preoccupied with the "hidden room" that they ignore the "golden pink egg" pulsating with life which will inevitably "hatch" (146). Just as the forbidden room is a symbol for the man's life outside the home, so the egg is a symbol for the woman's creative force which in Atwood's story is demanding recognition. Frank Davey sees the egg as the egg of "deferential existence" (147). To express it more positively, it represents the woman's

own work, in Sally's case--fiction writing--a job apart from the domestic.

In "Bluebeard's Egg", as in other stories, Atwood thus confronts the issue of the woman who denies her own creative ability in order to centre her life around a man and home. In this story, the author evokes "The Angel in the House" described and exposed so vividly by Virginia Woolf. Derived from a popular Victorian long poem by Coventry Patmore, the phantom angel who haunted Woolf is described in "Professions for Women" as that self-sacrificing, pure, charming and sympathetic woman who comes between the writer and her work or any woman and her work outside of the domestic. To write, Woolf had to kill the Angel, and it wasn't easy: "It is far harder to kill a phantom than a reality" (Woolf 279). Sally has been grappling with her own phantom but the "angel is getting tired of being an angel," its wings are "frayed," it is "withered" and "frantic" yet so far she has been unwilling to kill it (134). As a metaphor for woman's creativity, the egg which Sally visualizes at the end of the story, represents not just the baby she wants, but a "form of narrative fiction" she could write if she dared get rid of the phantom "angel." Atwood suggests this egg is bound to hatch. She also seems to be saying that it is not necessary for women to play the "angel," to defer

her own interests in order to make marriage work, but that it is essential to communicate. Atwood rejects the "literary stereotype" of the "angel in the house" by saying both men and women are "human, with all the individuality and variety that term implies" (SW 228). Furthermore, Sally, not Bluebeard, has the power to change her own life.

Just as Sally must recognize her own source of power symbolized by the egg, mothers and daughters must acknowledge the nurturing aspects of the "home, sweet home" that reside in the Demeter/Persephone bond. Yet, Atwood's reflection of society shows a domestic world in which women fail to offer daughters the physical and emotional nourishment implied by the popular ideas surrounding mother and home. In Lady Oracle, for example, she creates a "triple-headed" Monster Mother with "murderous red" fingernails (64-65), and in Life Before Man an equally threatening mother figure is portrayed in Auntie Muriel. Surely the characterization of this Medusa Mother is an attempt to locate for women the threat of potentially paralyzing entanglements in mother-daughter relations that can and do exist within the nuclear family. However, as Karen Elias-Button says in her essay "The Muse as Medusa" in The Lost Tradition: Mothers and Daughters in Literature, facing the Terrible

Mother involves "not destruction of the 'mother' but rather a confrontation with and incorporation of those matriarchal powers which are both ancient and our own" (Davidson and Broner 202).

In her portrayal of domestic relationships, Atwood does not deny the dark side of the mother, something other women writers also express. In her study of the terrible mothers in contemporary women's poetry, Elias-Button quotes from a poem by May Sarton expressing the rage the heroine of Lady Oracle eventually recognizes in her mother, a mother who is "enclosed" in her suburban living room--the "plastic-shrouded tomb from which there was no exit" (LO 180):

> I turn your face around! It is my face.
> That frozen rage is what I must explore--
> Oh secret, self-enclosed, and ravaged place!
> This is the gift I thank Medusa for. (Davidson and Broner 204)

The daughter obviously sees herself reflected in the mother's image and what she sees is distressing--a representation of the unreal self. As Atwood's heroine watches her mother's reflection in the triple mirror of her vanity table where she "puts on her face," the process is perceived by the child as a painful one physically, and emotionally, hot brown glue between the eyebrows, pink mud which hardens and cracks on the face. "Putting on her face" leaves the mother both sad and

cross, "as if she saw behind or within the mirror some fleeting image she was unable to capture and duplicate" (63), that elusive image of her real self. Instead, three heads "rose up from her toweled shoulders on three separate necks" and Joan recognizes that "my mother was a monster" (64). Joan is unable to flee from the petrifying Medusa Mother who hangs like an "iron locket" (65), "a rotting albatross" (215) around her neck.

The inability of the Monster Mother to make home a place of emotional as well as physical nourishment in Lady Oracle again brings Atwood's concerns about the relevance of food and body insecurity for women into focus. Food is an obvious metaphor for protest in Lady Oracle. In protest against her mother's plans for her to be thin and successful like the movie star Joan Crawford for whom she was named, Joan feeds herself on peanut butter sandwiches and gothic romances. As she eats her way through orange layer cakes, and makes away with extra chicken, cranberry salads and Duchess potatoes, "the war between my mother and myself was on in earnest; the disputed territory was my body" (67).

The aggressive and ambitious mother, repressed by strict, religious parents, unsuccessful and unhappily married, saw her fat daughter as the "embodiment of her own failure and depression" (65). Eventually, this war

between mother and daughter causes Joan to leave home after being stabbed in the arm by her mother. Thus, Atwood demonstrates how dangerous home can be for a daughter when the mother's bitterness and resentment result in madness. The stabbing, while only a superficial physical wound, cuts to the heart of the mother-daughter bond symbolizing the daughter's rejection. In *Lady Oracle*, Atwood not only challenges the notion of home as a safe and nourishing place but she presents it as a training ground for girls and women in a consumer culture that actively encourages body insecurity.

Atwood's exploration of domestic life exposes the role that home and mother play in inculcating this insecurity which leads to eating disorders women suffer as they attempt to live up to the expectations of their society In her study of compulsive eating, *Fat is a Feminist Issue*, Orbach says *Lady Oracle* provides one example in popular culture of the symbolic value that food and fat hold between mothers and daughters. She states that it is mother who passes along to daughter the message that she must make her way in the world with her "beauty," her body. As Joan Foster expresses it: "Our

relationship was professionalized early. She was to be the manager, the creator, the agent; I was to be the product" (64).

Significantly, while Joan uses food to protest against her mother's ambitions for her, it is also through food that she gains at least a partial understanding of her mother. When the mother dies violently, the now slim Joan returns home from England and stages a final ritual protest as a perverse acknowledgment of her loss and her guilt. "That night I went to the refrigerator, <u>her</u> refrigerator, and gorged myself on the contents." As she eats, Joan expects her mother to materialize "she liked to catch me in the act--but despite this ritual, which had often before produced her, she failed to appear" (178).

This episode, which causes her to be ill during the night, precipitates an epiphany the next day in which Joan begins to understand the futility of her mother's domestic life. Unlike the heroine of <u>Surfacing</u>, who is redeemed and empowered through the vision of her mother, Joan merely gains insight into the rage the Monster Mother felt over her own self-hatred and powerlessness. "She used to say that nobody appreciated her," says Joan of her mother, and she acknowledges that nobody did, even though she had done the right thing, according to

society's concept of the mother's nourishing role: "she devoted her life to us...made her family her career as she had been told to do, and look at us: a sulky fat slob of a daughter and a husband who wouldn't talk to her... My mother would say that my father didn't love her, and I believed my mother" (179). For the first time in her life, Joan began to feel it was unfair that everyone had liked Aunt Lou but no one liked her mother (181). That many mothers fail to nourish daughters is Atwood's challenge to the popular conception of home as a place of nourishment.

Reaching back to the archetypal myth of the "mother" is seen by Atwood as a source of support, strength and recovery for women--an important nourishing aspect of the home. Too few of Atwood's mothers draw on the power of the Demeter/Persephone myth. Demeter's efforts to retrieve her daughter are a relentless challenge to the male-dominated power structure. The "Homeric Hymn to Demeter" tells how pain seized her heart when her daughter Persephone was abducted by Hades; she tore her clothing and rushed in hot pursuit roaming the earth in search of the girl. She refused a summons from Zeus, rejecting all appeals to relieve the famine she had set upon the land. "She maintained that she would never set

foot on fragrant Olympus nor allow fruit to sprout from the earth until she saw with her own eyes her lovely daughter" (quoted in Morford & Lenardon 206).

In the modern world of Life Before Man, however, there is no outraged Mother with the power to undo rape and restore life to the natural world when Lesje Green (whose last name associates her with Persephone) is raped by her live-in lover William in their apartment home. The comfort and consolation Lesje seeks when she "goes home to mother" is not available because she cannot "talk to her mother, confide in her" (178). The older woman neither opens herself to the reality of the present nor receives the wisdom of the past. Instead, in an effort to cultivate "serenity," she has "drawn herself together in a sphere," become "impenetrable, compact, plump," desiring only that Lesje appear happy because Lesje's happiness is her mother's "justification" (179).

> But her mother, encased as she is, would never be able to mourn with Lesje. She'd merely wait until Lesje had stopped crying and wiped her eyes on the dishtowel, and then she would point out all the things Lesje has pointed out to herself already: No real harm done. You're better out of it. It was the only way. Everything turns out for the best. (179)

Cliches are cold comfort. Lesje's mother is blind to her daughter's real pain--the memory of the "pure hate" inflicted upon her by someone she trusted (179). Just as

the mother denies her ethnic heritage by attempting to become "English," symbolized in her efforts to cook roast beef and Yorkshire pudding, she also denies the heritage of the Great Mother.

Through myth, Atwood seems to suggest, women can locate the power vested in the nourishing mother even though biological mothers disappoint them. The self-imposed "enclosure" of Lesje's mother contrasts markedly with the worldly-wise and demonstrative Demeter archetype. But, when her mother is unable to help Lesje, the young woman believes salvation lies with her grandmothers because old women possess special powers. Lesje looks to the memory of these matriarchs who would have consoled her, "wept, keened and wailed"; they would have "put their arms around her and rocked her" (179) thereby affirming the mythic strength of mother-daughter love. In her study of The Crone, Barbara Walker says the aged mothers of prehistoric tribes possessed "wise blood" and "old women were described as the wisest of mortals" (49).[6]

Atwood evokes the mythological Crone whose powers not only comfort but liberate women, permitting them to make unilateral decisions about their own lives. As Carol Matthews has shown in "Transforming Hags: Old Women in Canadian Fiction", Atwood affirms the power of

grandmothers on yet another occasion in the novel, when Lesje evokes their memory as she contemplates becoming pregnant (16). The wisdom and power of old women is associated with special powers connected with the forces of creation and destruction (Walker, Crone 50-1). The Greeks called her Hecate, the Crone form of the Triple Goddess; she represents the old moon aspect of the Moon Goddess. Lesje seeks to be "endorsed" and "sanctified" to receive the "mother's blessing" her own mother is unable to bestow (249). The Crone, an archetype feared and suppressed by patriarchal culture, is a source of power to women trying to make their way in the world. Walker states: "The Old Woman, who acknowledges no master, may be our best guide in this long, dark, labyrinthine spiritual journey" (Walker, Crone 14).

A comparison of mothers in two of Atwood's novels demonstrates how the mother-daughter bond can be a source of power and affirmation. In both Surfacing and Lady Oracle the protagonists go "home", both see visions of a dead mother, both find a token of the mother's legacy in the form of scrapbooks and photograph albums. Both recover by means of the body. The unnamed heroine of Surfacing fasts while the protagonist of Lady Oracle feasts. The contrast between the two visions, however, is both startling and revealing in terms of its

presentation of the mother. The woman's rebirth in _Surfacing_ is achieved with the help of the Demeter/Mother archetype envisioned as she feeds the birds:

> Then I see her. She is standing in front of the cabin, her hand stretched out, she is wearing her grey leather jacket; her hair is long, down to her shoulders, in the style of thirty years ago, before I was born; she is turned half away from me. I can see only the side of her face. She doesn't move, she is feeding them: one perches on her wrist, another on her shoulder. (182)

As Susan Griffin in her study, _Woman and Nature_, mentions, "the birds bring messages from the dead, and the dead bring messages from the universe" (180). The protagonist of _Surfacing_, who had lost her ability to feel after having an abortion she did not want, is put in touch with the powers of the natural world through the vision of her mother; she regains the resident goodness in her body and her ability to feel and to trust others.

Joan's vision of her mother comes before she returns home to Canada from England, it occurs not in nature but in the parlour of Arthur's flat. Joan has just decided she can give her life "significance" by devoting herself to Arthur and his causes. She is about to sew bathroom curtains when the vision of her mother appears.

> She was standing, very upright, on the clay-colored rug, dressed in her navy-blue suit with the white collar; her white gloves, hat and

> shoes were immaculate, and she was clutching her purse under her arm. Her face was made up, she'd drawn a bigger mouth around her mouth with lipstick, but the shape of her own mouth showed through. Then I saw that she was crying, soundlessly, horribly; mascara was running from her eyelids in black tears. (173)

The unnatural, constricted and stricken mother in Joan's vision offers neither a sense of hope nor a positive reflection for the daughter. Joan's ephiphany, while it allows her to recognize the rage behind the face of the Medusa, does not necessarily lend her power. Instead, it leaves her partially paralyzed--able to take flight from the fearful Medusa head, yet unable to drop the duplicity of her own mirror image and reveal and release her true self. Lady Oracle depicts a home that is neither safe nor nourishing, but the protagonist's vision in Surfacing portrays a mother whose independence, openness and belonging in nature affirms the Demeter/Persephone bond and its power to renew.[7]

The worldly wisdom of the goddess Demeter with her capacity for love and sorrow, and her determination to use her power to challenge the male god stands in contrast to the retiring Hestia, virgin goddess of the hearth whose name, which means "hearth," confines her to the place called home. It is Hestia who is evoked in Chapter III in the discussion of Atwood's response to the society's conceptions of woman's place in the home.

CHAPTER III

A Woman's Place

In their pursuit of selfhood the heroines of Margaret Atwood's fiction invariably engage the widely-held belief that suggests "a woman's place is in the home." Because women have the capacity to bear children, the presumption is, all women ought to be mothers, and all must therefore be "natural" housekeepers and caregivers. Atwood's persistent attack on this misconception questions the role of the traditional housewife and mother.

The presumption that woman's natural place is in the home, like the notion that home is a "sacred" place, may have roots in the classical Greek myth of Hestia. The virgin goddess Hestia, the first born of Cronus and Rhea, was the deity of the hearth and guardian of the sacred fire both at home and in the community of ancient Greece. In Rome, her counterpart Vesta was honoured in a temple in the Forum where the fire was tended by six Vestal Virgins. Despite her obvious importance, this precursor of the modern housekeeper was, unlike Demeter, generally ignored by the other gods. So conscientious was she that when the other gods went to a feast, she alone stayed home, and was eventually squeezed out of the Olympian

canon of twelve. Dionysus took her place in the Greek pantheon (Morford & Lenardon 54-55, 402). Not a great deal is known about the goddess, because, being "just a housewife," she wasn't considered very interesting. Even today, the attitude of the goddess towards her domestic responsibilities is one that continues to be reflected in the lives of many traditional homemakers. Kathryn Rabuzzi in The Sacred and the Feminine: Toward a Theology of Housework comments that Hestia's devotion to duty and lack of participation in the power structure parallels the housewife's situation: "How aptly her role reflects that of traditional women, who, like her, represent the comfort of home for others, without seeming to achieve full personhood in their own right" (95).

Rabuzzi says setting and character are so closely intertwined for the housewife as to blur the normally accepted distinction between them. Even the word "housewife" connects place and person. Furthermore, Christian mythology concerning the Virgin Mother has sometimes seen woman herself represented as a house. Woman's ability to provide within her body the first home and food for the child has led to the close association of woman with the home as well to some misconceptions about the "natural" mother. Gilbert and Gubar cite examples from medieval times when statues of the Madonna were made to open up

and reveal the holy family hidden in the Virgin's inner space. The female womb, they continue, has been viewed as "a mythic paradise imaged over and over again in sacred caves, secret shrines, consecrated huts" (Madwoman 88). The close association of the woman with home and her "place" in it thereby took on a sacred aspect in Christian worship just as it had in the religion of classical Greece. The foundations for the concept of "a woman's place" being confined to home were thus laid. But it took the romantics with their view of upper and middle-class women to pick up on these classical and Christian mythologies which so closely associate woman with home, and her duties as "sacred."

The Victorian "angel of the house" made home a refuge from the grim realities of the industrial world, and "wherever a true wife comes, this home is always round her," commented Ruskin (quoted in Millett 140). The hypocrisy of the idealized Victorian lady is that she depended on the exploitation of lower-class women (many of them wives and mothers themselves) as factory workers, needlewomen, agricultural workers and domestic servants (Malos 67). Housework, a necessary adjunct to "civilized" society, historically, had produced life's necessities. With industrialization, this work moved from home to factory and many jobs were lost to

technology. This, says Adrienne Rich, was a significant factor in the institutionalizing of motherhood. Women were to remain at home where their influence on future generations was a "sacred" trust and, furthermore, where women could assume the burden of male salvation from the profane world (Rich 44-45).

Charlotte Bronte voices the frustration felt by women who occupied the "haven" in the "heartless world" of the industrial revolution. In her novel Shirley, Caroline and Shirley are not only concerned about the victims of the industrial society, but yearn for meaningful lives outside the home (229).

In this century, according to Erhenreich and English, to fill the "domestic void" experts both male and female introduced the science of child raising and the science of housework and thus a new version of this popular myth--the "good housekeeping" myth--was born. Home economists became a part of the corporate team putting their professional honour behind the "Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval." As a result, "a woman's place" had a new popular mythology in which the role of wife and mother was defined by the advertising industry; domestic competence could only be realized by taking the advice of experts and buying the approved soap and the

recommended stove. Nevertheless, in more recent times, women have taken work outside the home while retaining the role of housekeeper and caregiver.

A house is still more closely associated with the woman than with the man, and the notion of home as woman's place lingers in spite of the second phase of the sexual revolution. Alice Munro's short story "The Office", for example, portrays a writer who is also a housewife who wants an office outside the home because, as she says, while a house is all right for a man to work in, it is not the same for a woman. "She is not someone who walks into the house to make use of it, and will walk out again. She is the house; there is no separation possible" (Lucas 264). This reality of women's lives is articulated in Atwood's challenge to ideas in Western culture that declare woman's place is in the home.

This challenge begins with a mythic quest by the heroine of <u>The Edible Woman</u> in which Atwood portrays the lack of "place" for women in the modern world. Marian determines that her options are limited, that society has failed to provide "recognized and dignified opportunities for any other occupation but 'housewife'" (SW 256). In subsequent works, especially "Betty" and <u>Lady Oracle</u>, Atwood challenges the notion that all women are "natural"

housekeepers and mothers happy to take their place in the home. She parodies a variation of the natural housewife--the Superwoman: she shows the helplessness of "natural mothers" and the competence of women who are not biological mothers. And, finally, she takes up the other side of the questing motif by examining the consciousness of the woman who waits. Home is the place to which Odysseus returns, but it is also the place where Penelope waits. Hestia, so different from the globe-trotting Demeter, is chained to the hearth, separated from community. Atwood's images of confinement in bodies, houses and social roles prescribed by the patriarchy offer her most serious challenge to the popular myth of woman's place in the home.

In The Edible Woman, published in 1969, Atwood's representation of "woman's place" in society shows how restricted it is. As the author comments in the introduction to the 1981 edition, her heroine's choices are limited: "a career going nowhere, or marriage as an exit from it." Furthermore, Atwood notes, "it would be a mistake to assume that everything has changed" (SW 370).

Marian undertakes a comic, at times almost passive, quest. Like Odysseus and Aeneas, she descends to the Underworld to learn her future. Wearing the "high heels expected by the office" she moves cautiously from her

apartment down the stairs past a collection of threatening domestic artifacts, reminders that a woman's place is in the home. She avoids "catching" herself on the "many-pronged spinning-wheel," a symbol of Penelope's confinement (4-5). In the "downstairs hall" the exit/entrance is guarded by--"the lady down below"--the landlady, a representation of the housewife, who was wearing "a pair of spotless gardening gloves and carrying a trowel. I wondered who she'd been burying in the garden" (5). The hot, polluted atmosphere of urban Toronto is a foul and stifling Underworld. The dingy brick building with small windows in which Marian works is a "furnace" (16); she feels oppressed, even locked into the job: "I waded among the ladies' desks to my own corner and had scarcely settled in behind the typewriter before the backs of my legs were stuck to the black leatherette of the chairs" (10). The air-conditioning, consisting of a fan that stirred the air around "like a spoon in soup," had failed again and the women in the office like Tantalus could only yearn hopelessly as the blades of the fan dangled "unmoving" (10). Marian works on the second floor where all the employees, except the office boy, are female--"the gooey layer in the middle"--while on the floor above are "the executives and the psychologists--referred to as the men upstairs, since

they are all men"; below is the machine room. There are no possibilities for advancement. she can't become "one of the men upstairs" (13).

The only alternative is marriage, but as a visit to her married friend's suburban home demonstrates it is equally unappealling. Marian and her room-mate Ainsley visit Clara, entering the house through the patch of uncut front lawn, stepping past a nearly-decapitated doll and a teddy bear with the stuffing coming out on the front steps. She "negotiated the stairs of the back porch, which were overgrown with empty bottles of all kinds" to reach the hot backyard where the pregnant Clara sat helplessly in her chair holding a baby while her husband Joe performs all of the domestic chores. The couple's main preoccupation is changing diapers and searching the backyard for their toddler's excrement. "If we didn't clean it up this place would be one big manure field" (28). A dinner of "wizened meat balls and noodles from a noodle mix" and a canned rice pudding is served by Joe (29). This phase of the quest offers one version of the housewife and mother role which challenges the "sacred" notion of woman's place

The protagonist's options are limited but she rationalizes her prospects for a "happily ever after" marriage. At first, Marian sees her prospective "place"

as Peter's wife in practical, Hestian terms, "so much of it is a matter of elementary mechanical detail, such as furniture and meals and keeping things in order" (100). But before long, although she does not articulate her reservations, Marian begins to see marriage to Peter not only in terms of good organization and reasonable arrangements, but of adjustments (100). The adjustments are to be made by Marian who must turn herself into Peter's "puff pastry" bride, an edible woman. Atwood raises serious questions about woman's place in marriage as Marian's fears of self erosion in this cannibalistic union manifest themselves.

Another young protagonist watching a much more traditional marriage than the one depicted in The Edible Woman observes that a housewife's devotion to duty guarantees neither her place nor her safety in the home. She also sees that the Hestian homemaker "chained to the hearth," to use Rabuzzi's term, is powerless (Sacred 95). In the story "Betty" (Bluebeard's Egg), Atwood deconstructs the Bluebeard myth, first, by naming the story not for Bluebeard but for his wife; then by having her narrator recognize that to survive, a wife needs to be clever not accommodating, and finally, by using the violent aspects of the tale to illustrate how women are

victimized in domestic life. In addition, Atwood argues that Bluebeard can only retain power over the woman if she is "confined" to his castle.

The narrator of the story learns by observing Betty's "place" in the home and the marriages of the other women around her, that Bluebeard's wife needs to be clever rather than nice if she is not to be hurt. Betty is nice but not clever, and like Hestia, appears to have no interest in life outside the domestic world; as Atwood's most devoted housekeeper, she is uncompromisingly committed to her duties and deferential to her husband Fred. Unlike Sally in "Bluebeard's Egg", who also defers to her husband, Betty lacks self-awareness and is without interests of her own. The centre of her life is Fred, a philandering and insensitive man who nevertheless charms the young narrator and her older sister.

The narrator-observer sees that Betty's devotion to cooking, and her catering to Fred's "picky" appetite does not stop him from deserting her, or prevent her nervous breakdown. She also sees that Betty's "deforming niceness" marked her "like the aftermath of some crippling disease" (113). After Betty dies young of a brain tumor, the narrator "came to see that if I did not want to be Betty, I would have to be someone else" (113).

Betty's example absolves the narrator from making the demanded choices between marriage to a Bluebeard and pursuing her own interests. "People stopped calling me a nice girl and started calling me a clever one, and after a while I enjoyed this" (113). However, as already discussed, Atwood says that even being clever like Marian MacAlpin does not guarantee the woman an equal "place" in marriage.

Atwood also uses the Bluebeard myth to engage the reality of domestic violence. Bluebeard is one of the most gruesome of fairy tales, appearing in the Stith Thompson Motif-Index of Folk Literature under the label of "unnatural cruelty" (Vol. 3, 301-302). The Bluebeard material in "Betty" is present in the stories of three victimized wives of whom Betty is one. (These are paralleled by three potential brides in the young girls--the narrator, her sister and the sister's friend.) The other two wives in the story suffer physical violence at the hands of their husbands; one is a neighbour of the protagonist who is battered, the other--Fred's brother's wife--is murdered. Not wanting to be one of Bluebeard's dismembered brides, the narrator decides she must be clever not accommodating. This notion is also expressed by Joan Foster, heroine of Lady Oracle, who, in a bout of

self-recrimination, admits: "I would be one of the two stupid sisters who open the forbidden door and are shocked by the murdered wives" (152).

Atwood maintains that if Bluebeard is to retain his power over the woman, her "enclosure" in the home is essential. This physical confinement stands as a metaphor for the physical and social restrictions imposed on women in society. Betty married Fred just after the Second World War when women were expected to cease active participation in the economy and take their "place" in the home, and well before the revival of the feminist movement in the 1960's and 1970's. Defined and confined by her domesticity, she is symbolically tied to the house by her apron strings, the apron she always wears which she made of left-over material from her kitchen curtains. Betty's confinement is stressed by the author: she does not have a garden because it would be "too uncontained for her" (101). Like the goddess Hestia, the housewife who restricts herself to a "place" in the home to the exclusion of community is rendered powerless. That Atwood finds this kind of woman an enigma is obvious at the story's close. The narrator declares: "The Freds of this world make themselves explicit by what they do and choose. It is the Bettys who are mysterious" (BE 114).

The popular belief, accepted by Betty and rejected by the narrator, that says a woman's place is in the home leads, in fact, to a twentieth-century attitude of domestic ideals which devalues the contribution made by the housewife. Women who had formerly supplied all the goods needed by their families began to doubt themselves: "Market researchers had discovered that the purchase-oriented shopper is socially isolated, technologically uninformed, and insecure about her own domestic competence" (Erhenreich and English 180-181).

As a market researcher at Seymour Surveys, Marian MacAlpin learns how housewives are exploited: they are viewed as a cheap source of labour when required, and as a pool of customers for consumer goods. Marian comments:

> As market research is a sort of cottage industry, like a hand-knit sock company, these (interviewers) are all housewives working in their spare time and paid by the piece. They don't make much but they like to get out of the house. Those who answer the questions don't get paid at all: I often wonder why they do it. Perhaps it's the come-on blurb in which they're told they can help improve the products they use right in their own homes, something like a scientist. (12)

While Atwood's heroine recognizes that housewives are victimized by a system designed to keep women in their "place," she initially believes this sexual politics does not affect a clever and educated woman like herself.

As Atwood's characters challenge to varying degrees the "good housekeeping" notion, domestic competence becomes a preoccupation, a metaphor. The narrator of "Betty" recognizes the fallacy in the suggestion of her Home Economics teacher that "the way to a man's heart is through his stomach." She knows this to be untrue because her own mother is "a slapdash cook" who gives her best dinners when she has a woman in to help (110) and her father's "highest compliment to my mother was that she was no fool" (108). Atwood accumulates her "slag heaps" of domestic details--the dirty dishes and the dustballs--as testimony to the fallacy of the assumption that women are naturally good housekeepers. Marian, at the beginning of The Edible Woman, for example, observes in her friends Ainsley and Clara a failure to meet the "good housekeeping" standards. Marian considers her room-mate Ainsley's bedroom a fire hazard, but admittedly there is a kind of "creative" messiness with its floor covered by "a treacherous muskeg of used clothes with ashtrays scattered here and there on it like stepping-stones" (8). And Clara, her college room-mate, had been messy in a passive way, becoming hopelessly entangled in her room so that Marian would have to dig her out of the "junk pile she had allowed to accumulate around her" (31). Early in the novel, Marian is smug about her own

responsible attitude towards domesticity: the apartment, shared by the two women, if not "exactly clean" never gathers more than a "fine plum-bloom" of dust (9).

Ultimately though, Marian's neglectful housekeeping becomes a metaphor for protest. According to society's view of women, if she is not a good housekeeper she is a bad wife. Atwood uses realistic images of domestic life to manifest Marian's subconscious protest against the concept of woman's place in the home. In the refrigerator, the shelves are crowded with suspicious-looking packages, some of which were "definitely beginning to smell." The sink is full of unwashed dishes: "stacks of plates, glasses half-filled with organic-looking water, bowls with vestiges of things that had ceased to be recognizable," a saucepan, its inner surfaces "spotted with bluish mould" (225). This rejection of the role of housekeeper is accompanied by Marian's anorexia--yet another form of protest against the role of prospective bride. Marian's subconscious attempts to redefine herself and carve out a new role are unfruitful; at the end of the novel she has managed only to reject a traditional, therefore unequal marriage.

The popular good housekeeping assumption is challenged by Atwood as the housekeeping abilities of her heroines are frequently put to the test and found

wanting. In Lady Oracle, her satiric novel about male and female relationships in our society (to use Joan Foster's description of her own book), Atwood portrays a heroine who wants to redefine the "place" of woman in the home but finds she can only go so far without putting her marriage at risk. She discovers, for example, that being a bad cook in no way hinders her marriage although being a successful writer would. Atwood humorously upsets the assumption that all wives must be good cooks when Joan's culinary disasters merely reinforce Arthur's pessimistic view of the world: "roast chicken which bled when cut," and bread that refused to rise "lying like quicksand in the bowl" and "flaccid pancakes with centers of uncooked ooze" (211). Atwood turns around the notion of cooking as artistic performance. "It took me a while to realize that Arthur enjoyed my defeats," reflects Joan; "My failure was a performance and Arthur was the audience" (211).

The "good housekeeping" notion presumes the traditional full-time devotion of the woman to the house but as more and more women began to work outside the home yet another version of this popular belief had to be invented--the Superwoman syndrome. "What is a home? A home is a myth," says British writer Shirley Conran in her introduction to the Canadian edition of Superwoman:

Everything You Need to Know About Running a Home in Canada Today, a best-selling, how-to book explaining in detail how to cope with the realities of housekeeping. By calling home a "myth," Conran intends to deromanticize it, declaring that it represents "one long cleaning job, which nobody notices unless you don't do it" (1). Her solution, like Marian's, is "organization." The "superwoman syndrome" postulates that the woman if she just gets organized can be a competent housekeeper, a "super" wife and mother, an enthusiastic sexual partner, while at the same time earning money at a fulfilling job in the market economy. The story, "Loulou; or, The Domestic Life of the Language" in Bluebeard's Egg, is both a parody of Superwoman and, as the title suggests, a discussion of the nature of art and language.

Atwood deflates the idea of the Superwoman by drawing on ancient and modern mythological figures to inspire her characterization of Loulou, and then treating the subject satirically. Her heroine is a twice-married modern Superwoman and, at the same time, an ancient Earth Mother--the great nurturer to five middle-aged male poets who behave like children. Loulou seems a self-made woman, domestic, independent, assertive, creative and sensuous; she is a competent and creative housekeeper, a businesswoman who supports herself and the poets on

income derived from making pots, particularily domestic cooking pots such as casseroles. She is figuratively cut up (playing many roles) rather than physically dismembered like Bluebeard's wives. Much of her time and energy is devoted to the care and feeding of the poets, stuffing them with baked chicken and hermit cookies, and nursing them through both sexual and artistic impotence.

Loulou is not, as we might have been led to expect by her name, a dance-hall girl but rather a mythical nurturing figure who "mothers" men. Far from being "flighty" or even light on her feet, Loulou is rooted in the earth, wedging her own clay, throwing large pots. The primordial creative force evoked by Atwood in the story is that of pottery-making which, as Adrienne Rich has observed was a "deeply reverenced art" invented by women, regarded as a sacred process and taboo to men (96). Her art of pottery making represents a symbolic tie to the "mother" role. The Greek word for the sacred bowls used to catch the blood of sacrificial victims was amnion which also meant the container of blood in the womb (Walker, Dictionary 122). Not surprisingly, the male poets in the story claim that pottery is not an art form, "it's only a craft" (54). Woman is muse, not poet, not artist. Loulou, however, feels that she is a

creative person both in her pottery studio and in the kitchen where she revels at the yeasty smell of her bread "the smell of her own creation" (54).

One source of tension in the story revolves around Loulou's fleeting self doubts, the questioning of her role as housewife but more especially as "mother" to the poets. "She's always there, she makes them feel safe. But lately she's been wondering: who is there to make her feel safe?" (56). In an examination of Denise Levertov's "Hypocrite Women", Rachel Blau DuPlessis says these women repress feelings of self doubt to preserve a generous, unruffled surface while they "mother man in his doubt," encouraging "the nuances and moods necessary for his self-expression." She says: "They act unthinkingly a nurturing role in their relations with men" (Gilbert and Gubar, Sisters 282).

In Lady Oracle, this "mother" is imaged as the nurturing Moon Goddess in Atwood's satiric challenge to woman's place as "natural" wife and mother. Unlike Loulou, Joan Foster is no Superwoman nor is she a natural homemaker. But, like Loulou, she "mothers" her husband in his doubts. Joan fantasizes and play acts, learning to stifle or hide her own needs and be "calm and receptive" (90); she consistently protects Arthur's ego, pretending, for example, to be a wig saleslady rather

than a writer. The result is a conflict between the demands of her role as housewife and the claims of the self, a reality of women's lives that results in a split consciousness. Joan is a "patient and forebearing, warm, a sympathetic" wife as well as the clandestine writer of costume gothics (215). She notes:

> The really important thing was not the books themselves, which continued to be much the same. It was the fact that I was two people at once, with two sets of identification papers, two bank accounts, two different groups of people who believed I existed. (214)

Du Plessis says women writers express this redefining of the "self" in a double consciousness; one is traditional, corresponding to Woolf's Angel in the House; the other is "critical, trying to evaluate--and change--what the traditional consciousness would unquestionably accept" (Gilbert and Gubar, Sisters 287). This redefinition is concerned with the woman's own view of herself, or of women generally, or in society's views about women.

Joan, for example, believes she would jeopardize her "place" in the home if she does not defer to her husband Arthur. This lack of freedom to be one's self is expressed in images of confinement. Joan is haunted by this "self," her "shadowy twin" who is "myself in silvery negative" while at home she watched "locked in the actual flesh, the uninteresting dust and never-emptied ashtrays

of daily life" (247). With Arthur, Joan was merely "playing house" while she played out her fantasies not only in the text of her books but with her lover the Royal Porcupine (218). To Arthur, she was just "a kind of nourishing blob" (213). The mothering of men by wives is commented on by Joseph Campbell in The Hero With a Thousand Faces. He says that for adults in the United States today "the goal is not to grow old, but to remain young; not to mature away from Mother, but to cleave to her" and while "husbands are worshiping at their boyhood shrines" their wives search for love (11-12).

To express how Joan feels, Atwood makes satiric use of the classical archetype of the Moon Goddess to undercut the popular myth of woman as nurturer. As M. Esther Harding describes her, this Moon Goddess is the "Many Breasted Mother of All," creator of all life on earth, represented in statues of Greek goddesses Diana or Artemis, or the Babylonian goddess Ishtar, and the Egyptian goddess Isis--female figures whose numerous breasts signify their nurturing qualities (109-110). Joan "mothers" Arthur; she alleviates the depression inherent in his amateur Marxist activities by taking him to movies or for Harvey's Hamburgers; she listens to his complaints, and types his papers until she realizes nurturing has limits. Finally, she sees the statue of

Diana of Ephesus in Tivoli, and notes that "several of the breasts were out of order." Once she would have seen the goddess as an image of herself, "but not anymore. My ability to give was limited, I was not inexhaustible. I was not serene, not really. I wanted things for myself" (255). Thus, Atwood articulates in a light-hearted way a classic motif of women's fiction--the dilemma presented by the conflict between playing the role of nurturing wife, and being free to respond to her own intellectual and creative needs. While Atwood represents Joan as having doubts about her "place" in the home, at the same time she portrays Arthur (the king) as a dismal failure as the questing Knight Errant who moves from one cause to another without making any noticable difference to the world.

If all women are not equal when it comes to displaying natural ability in housekeeping, neither are they all natural mothers. In a review of Adrienne Rich's <u>Of Woman Born</u>, Atwood says the misconception of natural motherhood is most injurious to women:

> Rich is writing about pernicious myths. One of the most pernicious, of course, is that mothering is an instinct, that it simply wells up in all "real" women who give birth to children (and according to the same myth, a woman who does not give birth to children is not a "real" woman; she is a

> cipher). Once a biological mother, you will automatically become a Madonna, a virtuous model of self-sacrifice and devotion. (SW 254)

Atwood's attack on the notion that woman's biological capacity to bear children makes her a natural homemaker is vividly portrayed in her characterization of the "barefoot and pregnant" Clara in The Edible Woman. "Never believe what they tell you about maternal instinct," says Clara (27).

The author's satiric evocation of the fertility goddess myth involves the creation of a caricature in Clara, who is aligned with nature, her biological function exaggerated. When Marian and Ainsley visit Clara and Joe at home, Marian observes that Clara's incompetence is passive: "She simply stood helpless while the tide of dirt rose around her, unable to stop it or evade it. The babies were like that too; her own body seemed somehow beyond her" (31). She sits in the garden bulging like a "boa-constrictor that has swallowed a watermelon"; she lays back in her chair looking like "a strange vegetable growth, a bulbous tuber," her head like a "tiny pale-yellow flower" and limbs like "four thin white roots" (25). The image Atwood evokes here echoes the fertility goddess in Power Politics, "in cave rubble, the drowned/stomach bulbed with fertility,/face a tiny bead,a/lump, queen of the termites" (4). Clara sees her

children as "barnacles encrusting a ship" or "limpets clinging to a rock" (31). This portrayal of the "natural" mother casts doubt upon the idea that a woman's place is in the home.

Are women either mindlessly devoted to housekeeping or hopelessly miscast as housewives? The misconceptions implied by Atwood's satiric attack on the Superwoman myth are evident enough--being Superwoman and Supermom is impossible. Ironically, Marian MacAlpin, who views herself as a superior housekeeper compared to her friends, does not become a wife. And men like Nate in Life Before Man and Joe in The Edible Woman take their place in the home by doing more than their share of the housekeeping chores and are in danger of being victimized themselves. Atwood's feminist ideology is not interested in subjecting men to a secondary place.[1] But there are other kinds of women--individuals not defined by the stereotypes surrounding woman's traditional role in the patriarchy. Aunt Lou in Lady Oracle is one example.

Aunt Lou is not a biological mother. She is a surrogate mother figure, clearly not a housewife, who teaches and challenges Joan, ultimately opening the door to freedom from her repressive maternal home. Bettelheim would say that as in fairy tales, Atwood is presenting the two different manifestations of the mother--the

loving and threatening--as two separate entities (67). But as Adrienne Rich explains, daughters for centuries "have been strengthened and energized by nonbiological mothers" or as Mary Daly calls them "spirit sisters" (Rich 252). All biological mothers are not nourishing, as Joan's mother demonstrates, yet women who have not given birth to children can be.

Aunt Lou is no Hestia by the hearth, nor would she win any "good housekeeping" awards. Without being untidy to the point of chaos, Aunt Lou's disordered apartment told Joan "you could do what you liked." Frequently dusty and always cluttered with "newspapers on the floor, odd shoes or stockings under the chairs, dishes in the sink" (80), the apartment was lived-in, contrasting sharply with the tomb-like, static, "plastic-shrouded" living room tended by Joan's mother. Aunt Lou, is not "bitter and frustrated" without a husband as Joan's mother suggests. After a good try, she gave up on marriage to a husband who was a compulsive gambler. But Aunt Lou admits that she was never a natural housekeeper; she had never shopped for food in her life until she married.

> The first week I was married I ordered a pound of everything: one pound of flour, one pound of salt, one pound of pepper, one pound of sugar. I thought that was

> what you were supposed to do. The pepper lasted years. (81-81)

Aunt Lou is an independent woman: she uses her maiden name, and has a public relations job for a sanitary supply company. Significantly, she is a sort of "mother" to many young women, her claim to fame being that she is the author of a booklet for pubescent girls called "You're Growing Up". She answers letters from women asking about their bodies and their sexuality. Aunt Lou does not suffer from the body insecurity that haunts so many of Atwood's women and indeed so many women in society. She is tall and heavy, "built like an Eaton's catalogue ad for the mature figure" but she piled her "graying yellowish" hair on top of her head and wore extravagant hats (78). When her boyfriend Robert visits, Aunt Lou is "ornamented from head to toe" and smells of "South Sea odours" and Robert watches her "as if she were a gorgeous sunset" (103). As Joan's mother observes about Aunt Lou: "I know she's good-hearted but she doesn't care what kind of an impression she makes" (84). Atwood tells us that Aunt Lou is her own woman; unconfined by marriage, a house, or a maternal body, she is not a stereotype but an individual.

More typical of Atwood's fiction and poetry is the tale of the woman who _is_ confined, the woman who is

stuck, the woman who is anxious, bored, beset by stasis, and the woman who waits. Stasis is fundamental to Atwood's concept of reality; confinement or passivity frequently alternating with flight in the context of a gothic plot as it does in Lady Oracle and in The Edible Woman. In the realistic novel Life Before Man, stasis is related to the book's larger time theme.

Stories of the housewife are stories of time experience. Like their mythic literary precursor Penelope some of these women manufacture something to keep them busy or, like the passive fairy-tale archetype Sleeping Beauty, they suffer an over-powering stasis. Images of time passing, of stasis and of inaction and of being immobilized or locked in to life pervade Atwood's writing.

Rabuzzi says because men quest and women wait, questing is storied, waiting is not. This discussion of "woman's place" concludes with an examination of Atwood's articulation of the consciousness of the woman who waits. Home is the place to which Odysseus returns, but it is also the place where Penelope waits. Hestia, unlike Demeter, is confined to the fireside.

Atwood personifies stasis in her "waiting" women as in the short story "Under Glass" from Dancing Girls which magnifies a young woman's pathetic reluctance to give up

a self-destructive relationship with an apathetic lover. She feels trapped in the relationship: "get me out and I promise I'll never never again. Next time it will be just from the neck down, I'll leave his motivations alone" (74). The woman waits in a hotel room for her lover, "I'm a place not a person." Woman and home are synonomous, and confinement is expressed: "He speaks of this room where we have never been before and will never be again as home, I suppose because I'm in it." And "I can't get out, he has the key, where would I go, it's a foreign city" (73). The narrator creates the "illusion of action" by "turning the taps off and on, taking drinks of water and sleeping pills" (73-74). And "the mechanisms of the room continue their clicking and gurgling, indifferent." The controlling image in the story is a static one: plants that have taught themselves to look like stone. The story's narrator identifies with these plants: "I think of them; they grow silently, hiding in dry soil, minor events, little zeros" (78). Her own insignificance as one who waits would be easier to bear if she were like the stone plants requiring little nurturing.

Sometimes, these waiting women hope, as Joan Foster does, to be rescued. "I was caged on my balcony waiting to change...I was waiting for something to happen, the

next turn of events" (LO 312), she says, and wondering if Arthur received her postcard, thinks, "he might just tear it up, ignore my pleas for rescue" (112). Atwood's heroines, in spite of their rejection of the stereotypical roles for women, still seem unable to prevent themselves from believing in the fairy-tale princes who rescue the metaphorically dead Sleeping Beauty or Snow White. Joan, whose life follows the spiralling structure of the novel, alternating between being "locked" in the flesh, in an apartment, or in her life, and fleeing some situation or another, is caught up in her own gothic plot. Even at the end of Lady Oracle, the heroine appears to be hooked on another plot, hoping for another rescuer (possibly the reporter to whom she has told her story). "He's a nice man; he doesn't have a very interesting nose, but I have to admit that there is something about a man in a bandage" (345). Joan still wants to believe in heroes who rescue damsels in distress, a notion Atwood satirically explodes when her heroine hits the man on the head with a Cinzano bottle.

Many of Atwood's heroines experience stasis as entrapment, being "locked" or "stuck" in their lives. Joan is "locked" in her flesh but escapes the confinement of daily domestic life with her lover the Royal Porcupine who "had opened a time-space door to the fifth

dimenesion, cleverly disguised as a freight elevator, and one of my selves plunged recklessly through" (LO 247). In The Edible Woman, although Marian spends much time fleeing from Peter, she begins to feel confined even before marriage. Not only is she "stuck" to her chair in the office, "stuck" against the wall at the Christmas party and "stuck" beneath the bed in Len's apartment but she is stuck in organized time, moving towards the inevitability of a pension at Seymour Surveys or becoming Peter's bride. Being stuck physically is but a metaphor for her restricted place in society and the psychological confinement of woman's place in the home if she were to marry Peter.

Stasis is frequently conveyed in Atwood's work by domestic sounds and by the protagonist feeling "locked" in to a place, a situation, or a frame of mind. Organized time stands still or moves imperceptively forward marked by the sounds of the house as in Power Politics where "little motors click/and whir/I turn on all the/taps and switches" (19). In Life Before Man, Elizabeth is "staked" to her chair in the kitchen "the stove, pot on it, fryingpan unwashed" or with the sounds of the house "ticking around her once more, the furnace hums, warm air sighs through the registers" (188).

"House-wife" and "house-keeper" are female gender words that label "woman's place" but do not describe it. Atwood does describe woman's place, first, by accumulating detailed domestic imagery; secondly, by articulating the consciousness of women who feel confined in body, house or society. The affirmation of woman's reality through myth liberates women by showing them how little freedom or power Hestia has, while, by contrast, the power of Demeter which connects her to community is a source of redemption for mother and daughter.

Life Before Man, Atwood's most realistic novel about marriage and domestic life, presents an even stronger challenge to beliefs about home and woman's place in it. And, perhaps more than any of the other novels, Life Before Man draws on mythical archetypes to tell a modern story about domestic relationships. In this book, a pragmatic heroine Elizabeth, daughter, wife and mother, is reborn through the power of myth. This is the subject of Chapter IV.

Chapter IV

Her Own Place

Life Before Man, is a realistic novel about the nature of home which, like Atwood's other fiction, challenges popular perceptions about domestic life. Perhaps more than any of the other novels and stories discussed in this study, Life Before Man depicts woman's struggle to break out of stereotypical roles and free herself of the confinements of body, house and society. In addition, the novel offers a magnified view of how individuals behave towards one another in domestic relationships and, as Atwood says, the ways in which people behave towards one another tells us who we are as individuals and as a society (SW 346).

Life Before Man is about domestic relationships and arrangements and the uncertainties facing both sexes as home life in the twentieth century undergoes change. Once again, Atwood uses a combination of realism and revisionary mythopoesis to challenge some of the most widely-held beliefs about domestic life but also to affirm home and family as a positive force in society. An examination of setting, character, and narrative shows how effectively Atwood can integrate myth and reality. First, her use of mythic time and space in combination with realistic settings moves the action of the novel

from its enclosed venue to a larger, more universal stage; the setting emphasizes the motifs of time and motherhood, as well as developing character. Second, Atwood uses mythical archetypes to develop characters who are not stereotypes, as the men and women who inhabit the novel challenge domestic roles prescribed by tradition. Finally, the author uses narrative strategies to challenge domestic beliefs and these serve as a means of liberating women.

Atwood's realistic settings are expanded by her manipulation of time and her use of cosmic imagery. The realistic plot hinges on the love triangle that structures the novel and revolves around an anticipated change in domestic living arrangements. The chapters are divided among the three main characters, the protagonist Elizabeth narrating twenty-three, her husband Nate and the "other woman" Lesje having eighteen each. Each chapter is dated, the setting is deliberately narrow, even claustrophic, a few square miles around the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto. Time present, past or historical, prehistory and mythic time provide the novel with a universal context. The action takes place in profane or historical time and space, yet through the power of language the characters live their lives in the context of mythic time and cosmic space.

The use of the Remembrance Day motif marks historical time, a time of war and of heroes, but it also signifies time remembered by the characters in the novel; the use of prehistory associated with the museum pushes time even further back into a "gynocentric" period of human culture, that is, "life before man" or female mythic time (Rich 93). The characters seem lost somewhere between past and present, groping their way through a world where traditional roles are changing. Elizabeth begins by saying: "I don't know how I should live" (3), Nate declares that he doesn't know what "love" means between them anymore (6), and Lesje admits: "There were always things she didn't know" (13). While stasis prevails or the characters in their uncertainty move tentatively towards solving life's immediate problems, they are at least peripherally aware of their own insignificance in the universe while "the stars in their envelopes of bright gases burn on" (142).

The epigram from The Icicle at the beginning of the book dramatically ties the present to the recent past ("How can I be dead if I breathe in every quiver of your hand?") and directs the reader to Atwood's manipulation of time in the novel. Each of the three main characters speak from their own point-of-view not only about their lives in the present but about a past that is part of

them: Elizabeth, who recites "If you break faith with us who die" from "Flanders Fields" (49) is haunted by her dead mother and sister, and her dead lover; Nate is haunted by his "hero" father who died in the war; and Lesje, haunted by her dead grandmothers, also fantasizes about a dead existence in prehistory. Thus, the recent past, historical past, and prehistory are evoked by the book's characters. In addition, Atwood explores one further dimension of time, the Great Time of classical myth and of prepatriarchal myth.

Just as Atwood's manipulation of time expands the setting, so does her use of celestial imagery as it moves the action into the universal context of cosmic space. The book's main characters are all associated with the cosmos. Nate sees Lesje "shining like a cresent moon" (115). Nate's mother is associated with stars, a "dauntless astronomer" charting new atrocities in the world with paper stars pasted on the Amnesty International map in her kitchen. Her use of "innocent grade school stars" to mark each new reported case of torture or mass murder causes Nate to observe "the world is now a haze of stars, constellation upon constellation" (34). Nate feels a sense of universal loneliness as he contemplates divorce and feels alienated not only from his wife and daughters but from his mother. "Motherless,

childless, he sits at the kitchen table, the solitary wanderer, under the cold red stars" (265).

Similarly, as Elizabeth feels the marriage slip away from her, and Nate is now absent more often from the house, she becomes conscious of a cold, celestial loneliness. "When he is there, his presence is like light from a star that moved on thousands of light-years before: a phantom" (88). As she "kills time" in the Planetarium, Elizabeth sees the show called "Cosmic Disasters", the implication being that the drama unfolding in her life is a universal experience. She examines the titles of the books in the lobby--"<u>The Stars Belong to Everyone</u>. <u>The Universe</u>. <u>Black Holes</u>. She's never felt much friendliness towards the stars" (65). Inside the Planetarium's darkened theatre, as the stars begin to shine, the voice says that the ancients believed people could becomes stars or constellations when they died, which was "a poetic thought but of course not true" (65). Elizabeth's denial of the poetic thought, along with the star imagery, signifies a cold, uncaring universe. This alienation is reinforced by Atwood's evocation of the dead in her use of Halloween in the first part of the novel. Elizabeth comments: "All Souls. Not just friendly souls but all souls. They are

souls, come back, crying at the door, hungry, mourning their lost lives" (45).

Calling up dead souls and evoking the recent past establishes the melancholy mood of the novel. Its realistic setting is made up of two "lost worlds": one is the world of prehistory remembered and reconstructed in the Royal Ontario Museum, the other, the world of twentieth-century domesticity in urban Toronto. The museum houses a boneyard of past (and now extinct) life on earth; the domestic settings house men and women in their "natural" habitat, piecing together lives of uncertain purpose and desire. While the tone of the novel is ultimately humane, the juxtaposition of these two settings with their broken bones and broken relationships initially conveys a sense of alienation and despair. Paleontologist Lesje, in her "bleaker moments," feels she is not sure if she really cares if the human race survives. "The dinosaurs didn't survive and it wasn't the end of the world. . .the human race has it coming. Nature will think up something else. Or not, as the case may be" (19). However, the Royal Ontario Museum is for the most part a place where Lesje feels "at home." This setting is used to characterize both Lesje and Elizabeth.

To Elizabeth the museum represents a job she needs for economic reasons, but it is also described as a mythological labyrinthine Underworld where she meets her lover Chris. In a retelling of the Demeter/Persephone myth, Elizabeth's sombre, perhaps sado-masochistic association with her lover brings her to the Underworld (the room where he works) with its smell of formaldehyde and mice; the two of them are locked in the room, "his eyes with their flat hot surfaces, a glint like nailheads. Copperheads. Pennies on the eyes" (16). This description associates Chris with Hades, as does his job as taxidermist. The melding of the Demeter/Persephone roles takes place as Elizabeth descends to the Underworld as the lost daughter, a throwback to her own neglectful and abusive experience as daughter, but is reborn as a "good" mother to her daughters. She always leaves Chris to go home to her daughters. "I have to go now...She doesn't want to say [for] the <u>children</u> because it will make him angry. But she doesn't want them to wake up and not know where she is" (17). While this Underworld visit demonstrates the darker side of Elizabeth's character, she returns to her "place" in the home, not for her husband but for her daughters.

Unlike Elizabeth, Lesje does not belong in the home but feels most at home in the museum, a place that denotes her aspirations and her sense of self. To Lesje the museum represents "the only membership she values" (283), offering her a "nationality" and a sense of belonging, something denied her by the quarrel between her Jewish and Ukrainian grandmothers and by her mother's unwillingness to affirm her own identity. She was introduced to the museum by her Jewish grandmother. On Saturdays they attended the museum instead of the synagogue; it looked a little like a church or shrine "as if you were supposed to kneel. It was quiet and smelled mysterious, and was full of sacred objects: quartz, amethyst, basalt" (83). For Lesje, it is the museum not the home which becomes a sacred place and more. On a visit to the museum as a child, she had seen an Indian woman, wearing a white lab coat over top of her sari, appear through the door marked "staff only" accompanied by two young girls who were obviously her daughters. "Lesje stared after them, entranced. This, then, was her own nationality" (84). As a paleontologist in the museum, she now wears a white lab coat and has keys to the doors marked "staff only."

Even when she decides to become pregnant, the attraction of the museum and her work there does not

diminish, although she herself appreciates the paradox. "A pregnant paleontologist is surely a contradiction in terms. Her business is the naming of bones, not the creation of flesh." To her, the museum is a "palace built in the pursuit of truth," a place where she is a guardian of "whole chunks of time" that lie "golden and frozen" (283-284). The museum then, while not a home is a house, the house of bones, the house of time used by the author to develop the character of Lesje and the theme of woman's "place." In this place, Lesje is unconfined, she has control of time--a time that existed in life before man.

The museum setting with its gynocentric force from prehistory also contributes to the theme of motherhood. The title Life Before Man, besides the obvious connotations connected with the Royal Ontario Museum setting and its prehistory collection, suggests a mythological time before the patriarchy when the feminine principle was in force. Atwood, it might be said, "mothers" this novel, evoking female power by means of a cast of mothers, past and present: the memory of two matriarchal figures--Lesje's grandmothers, the mothers of the three main characters, and Elizabeth's relationship with her daughters as well as her painful memory of her own dead mother, and a surrogate mother, Auntie Muriel.

Atwood's use of the mother and daughter archetype--that of Demeter/Persephone--illustrates the potential for empowerment as the protagonist charts her own destiny through both chronological and mythic time.

This "golden" (female mythic) time existed in the early evolution of the human race when the female principle was the force that kept groups together in mutual co-operation. As Barbara Walker states in The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets, "the bond was maternal because no paternal relationships were perceived" (680), and she notes that archeological evidence indicates the earliest religious works of art were figures of the solitary, mythological figure of the Great Mother Goddess.

Atwood's use of domestic settings is as important as the museum in developing character. Elizabeth's house with its crumbling porch and its crumbling marriage is a relatively safe, nourishing, and not altogether unhappy place. This run-down house is "home, sweet home" to Elizabeth, Nate and their two daughters, and to the small family who help pay the mortgage by renting the top storey. Both Elizabeth and Nate work and, although their "open" marriage is disintegrating, and like their home, in need of repair, domestic life smacks of many traditional homey associations. The house fills with the

smell of scorched pumpkin as the children prepare for Halloween, Sunday brunches are a family ritual; Nate provides Elizabeth with comforting cups of tea (even when she is upset over her lover's suicide), and both parents do all they can to nurture the children. The unwavering sense of shared responsibility of parents portrayed in Nate and Elizabeth is clearly one of the novel's most important messages.

Atwood's microscopic view of the marriage of Elizabeth and Nate does not portray a traditional marriage or a "happily ever after" ending. Nate is the weaker partner in the marriage as signified by his association with the cellar of the house, and he appears to have no clear vision of how he might improve his status (except possibly through another woman). In the cellar, this lawyer-turned-carpenter makes wooden toys and feels like "some huge insect, white and semi-sighted, groping its way by a touch that is also smell" (180). The couple's domestic life involves a kind of role reversal with Elizabeth going out to work while Nate works at home. Although portrayed as a weaker character than Elizabeth, Nate is also depicted as a kind and gentle husband and father. He is losing claim to his share of the home; the kitchen is neutral territory because duties are shared, the living room belongs to

Elizabeth as does the bedroom, Nate being relegated to the extra bed in the spare room. His subterranean existence is consistent with the claustrophobic atmosphere of the novel, and signifies the repression he feels by Elizabeth and the other women in his life--his mother and her moral smugness, the demands of an old lover, and a new and younger lover Lesje. He is putty "helplessly molded by the relentless demands and flinty disapprovals of the women he can't help being involved with" (33).

The novel suggests that the reasons people have for establishing domestic relationships are more complex than they appear. For example, both Nate and Elizabeth believe they married for love, but the reader discovers that Nate married Elizabeth seeking both a mother and a wife; he had been attracted to her because she gave the impression of "knowing exactly what she was doing" and because he idealized her as "a Madonna in a shrine, shedding a quiet light" (41). In other words, the traditional notion of the "sacred" wife and mother. He wanted protection, Elizabeth was the "Earthmother" but when she stopped rocking him, when she refused to mother him he found Martha (144) in whose hands he thought he would be equally "safe" (24). Elizabeth married Nate to escape; he meant "safety" and "relief" from an abusive

family. She recognized him as a good man and knew she would be out of danger (242). But marriage does not dissolve the past and Elizabeth is not yet out of danger. Despite their infidelities, both husband and wife consider their marriage "civilized," in that they behave like "reasonable adults" (93). These are the realities of their safe, comfortable and reasonably nourishing home.

The characters Atwood creates in this novel, as the above discussion indicates, challenge popular perceptions about domestic relationships. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in the first volume of No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century say that modern feminist writers often create strong female figures who are not obliterated by the weaker male characters they create (428). Such is the case with Atwood's Elizabeth. In The Edible Woman, the young protagonist examines life's options for women and finds them wanting. In Life Before Man, published ten years later, the protagonist has already made choices; she is middle-aged, reflecting the Mesozoic (Meso, middle, zoos, life) era of the dinosaurs whose skeletal remains are housed in the Royal Ontario Museum (267). Elizabeth, in her late thirties, is a wife and mother, older and more experienced than Marian in The Edible Woman, more domineering than Sally

in "Bluebeard's Egg" and, unlike the fanciful Joan Foster of Lady Oracle, she is a hard-nosed realist.

While Elizabeth is both domineering and manipulative, she is in many ways an admirable character who, although hardly a Hestian figure, is a good housekeeper and mother. Her most positive quality is her strength of character. Having few illusions, she is able to clearly see woman's "place" in the world. She is tough; she treats her lover "the way men treat women. A lot of men, a lot of women" (145). Admittedly, not very commendable behaviour, but Elizabeth is also strong enough and intelligent enough not to perpetuate the abuse inflicted on her as a child by passing it along to her children. She refuses to accept the blame for her lover's suicide, but while she cannot forget him she is not "crying," but "angry" (3). By the same token, she recognizes that she was "too busy saving herself" to save her sister Caroline from madness and probable suicide. Elizabeth is a survivor, something she admits when playing a parlour game called "Lifeboat" by declaring: "I have a very strong survival instinct" (139). Atwood believes people must, where possible, be responsible for their own lives. The message Elizabeth posts in the kitchen says it all: "Clean up your own mess," a working

mother's way of coping with the mundane daily chores, but really a metaphor for life.

The messiness in Elizabeth's life has been serious stuff--neglect, abuse, her search for oblivion in seedy sexual encounters, and the temptation of suicide. Unlike Joan Foster and unlike Lesje, Elizabeth engages reality head on. She is not duped by the fantasy of the women's magazines in the doctor's office, full-color, "brighter than life, about health and motherhood and washing your hair in mayonnaise." Reality is black and white--the newspapers--"bodies falling from tenth-floor balconies, explosions" (50). While Elizabeth seems overwhelmed by stasis, she is realist enough to know that although it is too late to save her marriage, she must act to save her children, her home and herself.

Atwood portrays the dilemma of the modern male in her characterization of Nate. He is divided, his domestic life is fragmented; he is father, husband, son, lover and ex-lover; lawyer and carpenter--a creator of toys, he is a "segmented man". When he moves in with his lover Lesje and returns to his former house to be with his children, "his own house rebukes him," he is not a member, he is "dismembered" like Elizabeth's dead lover who shot his head off (223). In his final section of the book "Nate is running," something he has been doing

throughout the novel. He is running towards another woman. He will wait at the museum for Lesje and "go home" to a future that could portend of hope or disaster (289).

In these times of exploding families, Atwood identifies the womb envy of some men. Nate, for example, kind, sensitive and concerned, strives to define himself in new ways--as an involved father. Atwood suggests that men, like women, have responsibilities towards their children even though many, Elizabeth's father for example, ignore or even desert their children. Both Elizabeth and Nate are "on call" for theirs, and it is the children who represent Nate's greatest loss as the marriage disintegrates. "What's for dinner, Dad?" are words that remind him of the enormity of that loss (8). As he weeps over his "lost" children, who will stay with their mother, he recognizes "he should have held on more tightly" to his marriage (149). He longs to be like Zeus whose daughter Athena was unmothered; "he'd like to think his children had sprung fully formed from his forehead. Then they would be entirely his" (72). In Nate, Atwood presents a male character who is a loving, caring man struggling to reconcile his own ethical nature with the expectations of society. In her essay on male character, Atwood says: "What is there when we're talking about men,

is a state of change, new attitudes, overlapping with old ones, no simple rules any more." Twentieth-century fiction, she says, reflects the confusion, desperation, anger and conflicts we find out there in the "real world" (SW 428).

The character of Lesje, so closely associated with the museum, is further developed with Atwood's detailed descriptions of Lesje's home life; they illustrate that her natural "place" is not in the home, but rather that she sees home and marriage as a guarantee of acceptance in a community from which she feels excluded. Lesje and William live on the fourteenth floor of a downtown apartment building "where it's all happening," an arrangement which proves to be unsafe, and neither nourishing nor happy (36). It is unsafe because she is raped by William; it is unnourishing because neither partner can cook which means they eat meals of Betty Crocker's Noodles Romanoff or delicatessen food from Ziggys. Lesje is unhappy because she had thought the normal pattern of modern domestic life consisted of the couple living together for awhile and then getting married, but Lesje knows William will not propose, that he finds her "exotic" but because of her ethnic background not suitable to take home to his Wasp family. Lesje's domestic life is an anomoly, living together is

"amorphous," while marriage and divorce provide a framework, a beginning and an end that can be discussed at the dinner table (176).

By contrast with the lasting quality of the museum, suggested by its function to preserve things, the house Lesje shares later with Nate has a transient atmosphere suggesting the impermanence of modern domestic relationships. Owned by a developer who is about to turn it into row housing, it boasts no furniture, "nothing radiating back to her from the bare walls," and Nate's carpentry leaves small piles of sawdust in the living room. Lesje's home is a makeshift arrangement neither physically nor emotionally nourishing. To her "a stove is a serious commitment" (177), one she is incapable of making. Living with Nate, Lesje gulps "instant coffee with artificial whitener" and chews on "a stale bran muffin" (190) unless Nate cooks a more nourishing meal. While Atwood clearly shows Lesje as a domestic misfit, she also demonstrates that she is a woman who seeks acceptance through the social institution of marriage and the traditional role of wife and mother. The words "home," "love," and "mother" disturb her because they resonate not only with the domestic life Elizabeth and Nate share but with popular domestic tradition (114). The fact that she does not naturally fit into the

stereotypical role of wife makes her feel excluded and alienated from social norms as does her ethnic background. She seeks solace in the green world of prehistory.

Atwood uses three narrative strategies to further develop her characters, promote her themes and her ideas about modern domestic life: the first, describes the journey home taken by each of the three main characters; the second is the analogy Atwood draws between Elizabeth's search for home and the quest of Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz, and finally, the use of an archetypal pattern of transformation to describe the protagonist's quest for rebirth.

Atwood demonstrates that people bring to their domestic relationships an inescapable past, a past she makes part of her narrative strategy as each of the three main characters go home to mother. Home is the place to which the questing hero returns with the elixir. Home is where, according to popular belief, one can expect consolation and salvation, where the hero or heroine may even receive magical aid. Family ties, especially with parents, are meaningful in the individual's search for identity or renewal, a theme Atwood explores in Surfacing. In that novel, the heroine returns to her family home to find the legacy of both dead parents; the

discovered "tokens" and her participation in certain "mysteries" help restore her identity as well as her ability to feel. Similarly, the characters in Life Before Man seek redemption from the "lost world" that is the landscape of the novel; they seek a key to freedom from its claustrophobic and static atmosphere, and direction on the pathway of the hero. Elizabeth's journey home is metaphysical while both Lesje and Nate make physical journeys home.

The journey home associates each of the characters with an archetype of classical mythology--the Demeter/Persephone myth, the hero and the matriarchal Great Mother. Two themes concerning woman's empowerment recur in Atwood's work, both acknowledge that power for women is grounded in nature: one is the Demeter/Persephone myth in which the daughter finds renewal through the mother, and nature is restored, the other is the notion that power is resident in woman's body. Carol Christ, in her study of Surfacing, identifies the heroine's quest for authentic selfhood and power as one in which "spiritual insight surfaces through attention to the body" resulting in her unilateral decision to become pregnant (333). Elizabeth's metaphysical journey home is a quest into the unconscious, a rebirth which also begins with the body.

Part of her reconciliation with her "self" is to put to rest the ghosts of her mother and sister. Elizabeth begins to exorcize the past with her "kin" as she bathes her own body in "Bodykins" (bubble bath) reciting: "Two bodies have I/Though both joined in one,/The stiller I stand/The quicker I run" (77-78). The identification of her body as two bodies--daughter and mother--is the key to the inward quest and consistent with the frequent melding of the Demeter/Persephone figures. Furthermore, as Catharine F. Smith says in an essay on seventeenth-century English mystic Jane Lead: "we must speculate that anatomy is part of epiphany. Our bodies, our visions is one of the aesthetic implications of feminst thought" (Gilbert and Gubar, Sisters 18). The symbolic ties among the three female bodies of Elizabeth, her mother and her sister are represented by the three bowls in Elizabeth's living room.

One of the central feminist ideas expressed by Atwood in the novel connects vessel and the female body, the use of clay pots and their Mother-Womb symbolism. The bowls in Elizabeth's living room, with their "asymmetrical curves" meant to hold "offerings" but hold instead "their own beautifully shaped absence" (16), are sacred to Elizabeth, and obvious symbols for herself, her dead mother and her dead sister. The vessel is a

feminine symbol of transformation inherited from what Adrienne Rich calls the "prepatriarchal" goddess-cults (94-97). The breaking of the bowl which Elizabeth throws at Auntie Muriel, her surrogate mother, is a "sacred" act, a catharsis from which she draws on power emanating from the beneficent Great Mother. She throws off the fear and anger she feels towards the "monster" mother thus activating her own capacity for renewal.

No similar cathartic act exists for Nate as he returns home to visit his mother. Here, Atwood examines the nature of heroism in the modern world in connection with her characterization of Nate. He returns to his mother's home where: "His father, no amputee but a simple dead man, smiles down at him now from the mantelpiece" (117). He had thought of his father who died in the war as a "hero" but then, he learns he died of hepatitis in England "without ever reaching the real war" (117), a fact he wishes he had known earlier since "he would have felt less overshadowed. It's hard to compete with any dead man, he knows, much less a hero" (117). And comparing himself with his wife's dead lover he sees another "hero" with whom he can't compete. "What is smashing a window compared to blowing off your head?" he asks (9).

Mythic heroes are consistently toppled in Atwood's writing, usually succumbing to satire or parody. Haunted by the classical myth of the hero and its modern versions, Nate envisions himself as Hercules slaying the hydra or as modern hero like Superman and Spiderman. In a bathroom scene, Atwood demonstrates the vulnerability of Nate to the hero myth while at the same time showing how impossible it is for him to be heroic under the circumstances. Atwood arouses sympathy for the character of Nate as she treats his aspirations for heroism with humour Just as Elizabeth looks down on Nate as he works in the cellar, so she looks down on him in the bathroom which she enters uninvited while he takes a bath. Nervous, naked and exposed, he is aware of "soap curds, the grey particles, the flecks of his own skin that litter the water" (91). Unhappy about the state of vulnerability forced on him by Elizabeth he imagines as he scrubs himself with a loofah, that he is a sponge diver with "a knife between his teeth" in combat with a giant squid. He is a modern version of the classical half-man, half-god, Heracles struggling with the Lernaean Hydra (Morford and Lenardon 320). Atwood thus draws an analogy between Nate's view of his life as victim of Elizabeth's need for control and his "eyeball-to-eyeball combat" with the many-tentacled creature in the waters

obscured by "clouds of ink" (91). Elizabeth's tentacles, that is, her need for control, put her in contact with Nate's lovers and his mother as she orchestrates their lives.

Atwood treats these hero fantasies humorously but they reveal the frustration felt by the twentieth-century male in determining his mode of behaviour in personal relationships and in the community. As Nate goes into a telephone booth to call his lover Lesje, even he sees his heroism as ironic:

> Glass cubicle, light on, total exposure. Feeble-minded creep goes into booth, removes clothes, stands there waiting for Superman to take over his body while people stare from passing cars and some old lady calls the police. (27)

The flesh and blood heroes are dead and are not truly "real" heroes in the classical sense. Classical heroism appears absurd in the modern world.

Lesje believes her identity and power are somehow locked in the past--in her ethnic identity--harboured by the family matriarchs. She is convinced her documents of identity are out of order; she searches in dress shops and department stores "looking for something that might become her, something she might become" (18). When she is raped by William, she goes home to mother, but, as discussed earlier, her mother's denial prohibits consolation. There is the English bone china, the roast

beef which is "a little tough. Her mother has never known how to cope with roast beef" and the apple pie (175), symbols of the mother's denial of the family's Ukrainian and Jewish roots. But like Elizabeth, Lesje longs for "a mother's blessing" yet cannot "imagine her own mother doing such a thing" (249). The conflict between her Jewish and Ukrainian grandmothers is partly to blame for Lesje's identity crisis, but the old women are also the key to quest. Lesje regrets not having listened properly to them, and now she "wants these voices back"; she wants "to dance with flowers on her head," to be "endorsed, sanctified" (249).

As she had done since childhood, Lesje retreats to the green world of prehistory. She sometimes imagines herself as a "hero" in _The Lost World_ of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Lesje _Green_ is what Annis Pratt, in her study of _Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fiction_, terms a green-world archetype who finds solace in nature; nature becomes an ally, "a kind of talisman that enables her to make her way through the alienations of male society" (21). When rejected males use rape as their weapon, as William does, the green goddess retreats to nature just as Daphne flees Apollo by turning into a laurel. Lesje's green-world setting is a terrain of the mind, an escape from her own inability to cope with life. She retreats

from her sawdust-laden living room and dirty kitchen floors to the Upper Jurassic. "There's nowhere else she wants to be, but this time it isn't exploration; she knows the terrain too well. It's merely flight" (244).

Like other Atwood women who locate their redemption through their physical being, Lesje's social integration eventually comes through the body. At first, she seeks integration through others, through "William Canadian" and later through Nate, but eventually through a child. Lesje hopes to achieve a sense of belonging through her unilateral decision to become pregnant--a means of fitting into the social structure of marriage and domestic life. Just as the heroine of Surfacing achieves redemption through the body and with the help of her mother, so Lesje hopes to achieve integration into community by becoming pregnant.

Two, often interwoven narrative strategies define Elizabeth's search for renewal. Her return home to the Great Mother is analogous to The Wizard of Oz story which portrays a young questing heroine in search of home. Atwood's use of the odyssey of Dorothy in The Wizard of Oz parallels the act of remembering for Elizabeth, for whom Remembrance Day is almost every day of her life. Like Dorothy, she is an orphan who lives with an aunt and uncle. Dorothy's home is wrenched from the Kansas

landscape by a cyclone, Elizabeth's is destroyed by alcohol, neglect and abuse. The quest is to find her way back home to solid ground, to live with the "remembrance" of her neglectful mother and abusive aunt and still remain whole.

This quest involves a catharsis, an important stage in the rebirth of the female hero. Davey suggests the characters in the novel refuse the "deconstructive cathartic act--refuse to smash objects or relationships, or to descend into madness or exile" (85), but he fails to note the significance of Elizabeth's confrontation with Auntie Muriel. Just as Dorothy kills the Wicked Witch of the West by throwing water at her, Elizabeth kills her fear of Auntie Muriel by throwing one of her own prized "Kayo" bowls at the older woman. Auntie Muriel, her substitute mother, has refused Elizabeth a positive memory of her real dead mother, Elizabeth has retaliated by refusing to call her "mother." Auntie Muriel was "wicked"; she witheld the aspirin and told Elizabeth menstrual cramps are "God's punishment." She denied her the thrill of Halloween, sending her to bed early instead. But while Elizabeth does not accept her aunt's abuse, she tries to understand her behaviour, thereby recognizing that Auntie Muriel was thwarted by a domineering father who wouldn't let her go to college

because college was for boys. "Auntie Muriel had a strong personality and good mind and she was not pretty, and patriarchal society punished her" (106).

Elizabeth is momentarily jubilant when she throws the bowl at Auntie Muriel because she has smashed her own fears of the woman. She does not, however, rejoice at her demise. She remembers that Dorothy was not jubilant when the witch turned into a puddle of brown sugar. "She was terrified" (258). Elizabeth's forgiveness of her aunt comes as the older woman is dying of cancer. The aunt of her childhood has "melted" as did the wicked witch. She holds the old woman's hand (as she had her dying mother's) and whispers: "It's all right. It's all right" (260). The throwing of the vase which sends Auntie Muriel away from Elizabeth's home--a territory she guards throughout the book, and the subsequent forgiveness of the woman are both cathartic acts and steps in the process of the protagonist's rebirth.

Elizabeth knows getting home depends on her. Her survival on the trip down the "yellow brick" road of life depends not on a powerful male figure, a mythical god who can perform supernatural functions, but on herself, on her own refusal to be a victim. Oz is a fraud. Had Dorothy known it, she herself had the power to get back home vested in the silver shoes she was wearing. The

power, says Atwood, lies not in others but within. Elizabeth didn't blame her father for deserting her mother and herself, instead she blamed her mother for allowing it. Atwood's portrait of Elizabeth is the portrait of a survivor. To survive in a world where home is savaged by natural or man-made forces is an act of heroism. Elizabeth is like the cactus in Power Politics "gathering/ itself together/ against the sand, yes tough/rind & spikes but doing/the best it can" (36).

A second narrative strategy used to explain the process of rebirth for Elizabeth fits an archetypal pattern of transformation described by Annis Pratt in her study Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fiction. Unlike Lesje and other young heroines who quest for social integration, the middle-aged female hero Elizabeth seeks "to integrate her self with herself" (136). This involves a plunge into the unconscious which Pratt says takes the heroine beyond "social boundaries and back again." The ultimate goal is the renewal of society (137).

Pratt's outline for women's quest for rebirth consists of five important phases, all of them stages through which Atwood's protagonist in Life Before Man passes: Phase I: The Splitting off from Family, Husbands, Lovers. Phase II: The Green-World Guide or Token. Phase

III: The Green-World Lover. Phase IV: Confrontation with Parental Figures. Phase V: The Plunge into the Unconscious.

Phase I: Although she has had a lover, Elizabeth has not cut herself off from her family, but rather has maintained a "civilized" connection with her husband (who also has a lover), and made their two daughters the primary consideration for both herself and Nate. The journey inward begins with an "acute consciousness of the world of the ego" and a consequent turning away from societal norms (Pratt 139). After her lover Chris commits suicide, Elizabeth cuts herself off from her usual domestic involvement leaving Nate to make dinner for the children. "Her remoteness from them, the distance she has to travel even to hear what they're saying. She wants to be able to touch them but she can't" (28).

Phase II: This stage of the green-world guide or token happens when an ordinary phenomenon takes on extraordinary portent and helps the heroine cross the threshold of her adventure. For Elizabeth the Planetarium is ordinary; part of her job is to help with the posters and displays, but she has never been inside. When she decides to go in--to cross the threshold--two signs are juxtaposed outside, one conveying the ordinary

which says: "Information. Advance Ticket Sales," and the other--the extraordinary--a quotation from Dante: "The heavens are calling you and wheel around you displaying to you their eternal beauties and still your eye is looking on the ground" (64-65). Thus, a natural phenomenon--the universe--works its magic in the transformation process despite Elizabeth's recognition that it is not really the sky she is staring up at but "a complicated machine with tiny lights" (67).

Phase III: The green-world lover, actual or remembered, male, female or animal, leads the heroine away from society and towards her own unconscious depths. Pratt uses Joe in <u>Surfacing</u> as an example. He is real but seems "semianimal, archaic" as is Chris in <u>Life Before Man</u> (Pratt 140). Elizabeth recalls the first time they made love, it was in the museum "among scraps of fur, shavings of wood, beside the partly finished replica of an African ground squirrel" (63).

Phase IV: The heroine's confrontation with a parental figure consists of Elizabeth's violent dismissal of Auntie Muriel from her home, her throwing of the "sacred" vessel at the older woman. She must come to terms with her biological parents and does so in what Pratt describes as the subconscious, the heroine's "repository of personal memories" (140). Elizabeth

blames her mother for not recognizing her father for what he was and for not refusing to be a victim.

Phase V: This final stage concerns the plunge into the unconscious which for Elizabeth consists of dealing with the ghosts of a brutalized past. Having confronted the figures of the subconscious, says Pratt, the hero can journey toward the unconscious, "the realm from which the green-world lover and the guide or token have summoned her" (141). These two figures "seem matrilinear in the general sense of suggesting a realm of inherited feminine power" (Pratt 141). The heroine's quest for mother and home is brought to a satisfactory resolution with her forgiveness of Auntie Muriel, and with a renewed sense of her own motherhood--an integration of "her self with herself." Her rebirth is celebrated when her daughters give her a birthday party, candles on the cake and "pink and blue streamers" around the walls.

> Elizabeth, who hadn't expected to be moved, sat down on one of the kitchen chairs and locked her smile into place. Lockjaw. This was the shadow of all the birthday parties she'd never been given. Her own mother had either forgotten or found her birth no cause for celebration. (227)

At the end of the novel the protagonist looks outward. Elizabeth feels "not lonely, but single, alone" (291); touched by the Chinese peasant art she had earlier scorned, she shows an appreciation of the "ordinary."

There is no "catastophe" in the paintings but she cries anyway. "It's the turnips in their innocent rows, ordinary, lit from within, the praise lavished on mere tomatoes" (291). She performs an ordinary domestic gesture by going to the supermarket to get something for dinner. And, for the first time, she looks outward beyond the narrow confines of her own life: "China does not exist. Nevertheless she longs to be there" (291). She has all along recognized her place in the home, but now she connects with community.

Atwood insists, then, that we recognize that "home, sweet home" can be a dangerous place, but she also argues that we have the power to minimize the damage. In spite of her early homelessness, neglect and abuse, Elizabeth resists the seduction of suicide.

> I'm a mother if not exactly a wife and I take that seriously. I would never leave an image like that behind for my children. I've had that done to me and I didn't like it. (86)

She replaced guilt with anger, defended her territory, and despite "summoning voices she can hear from underground" she is "still alive" and "has two children" (278). She even thinks with anticipation of "her house," as the conclusion of the novel brings a recognition of her achievement, that she has broken the cycle of violence and has built a home for herself and her

daughters. "Despite the wreckage," she's built "a dwelling over the abyss, but where else was there to build it?" (278).

The novel declares that home can be a refuge in an increasingly impersonal and brutal society; that fathers, as well as mothers, can be nurturing, and that children are to be cherished; but it also sees domestic relationships, especially between men and women, as problematical. In Life Before Man, Atwood argues that women can locate the power exemplified in the Demeter/Persephone myth, even when that bond does not appear to exist in reality. The secret, Atwood maintains, lies in identifying the humanity, the goodness, and the power in women's stories, and then recognizing that she must assert that power by refusing to be victimized. As the heroine of Surfacing expresses it: "This above all to refuse to be a victim. Unless I can do that I can do nothing. I have to recant, give up the old belief that I am powerless and because of it nothing I can do will ever hurt anyone" (191). The refusal of Elizabeth to be a victim is a brillant affirmation of survival as an act of heroism.

As this essay demonstrates, Atwood uses myth as a means of truth-telling to challenge the traditional assumptions about home and women. Atwood's retelling of

classical myths, in combination with realistic detail, describes the physical, emotional, psychological and social impact of a patriarchal system on women. The myth of the Minotaur describes the concerns women have about being engulfed in domestic relationships with men; the concept of body insecurity felt by women is named in Atwood's revisions of Bluebeard. The Demeter/Persephone myth names the power possible in the mother and daughter relationship. Even the myth of the Medusa Mother eventually allows the daughter to look beyond the monster reflected in the mirror to acknowledge a mother's humanity.

NOTES

Chapter I Rewriting the Myth

[1]As an example, Pratt says Frye sees Venus as "the white goddess who always kills, and whose rebirth is for herself" while to the woman writer she appears beneficent rather than destructive. Annis Pratt, Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fiction (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981) 138.

Chapter II No Place Like Home

[1]John Howard Payne, "Home, Sweet Home", From the Opera Clari, the Maid of Milan, John Bartlett, Familiar Quotations, ed. Christopher Morley, 12th ed., (Boston: Brown, 1951) 365.

[2]Alfred Lord Tennyson, "Alymer's Field", Bartlett 465.

[3]Atwood says that "the maze I use is a descent into the underworld. There's a passage in Virgil's Aeneid which I found very useful, where Aenaes goes to the underworld to learn about his future." Linda Sandler, "Interview with Margaret Atwood," The Malahat Review 41 (1977): 16.

[4]Duncan is an important character in the book but he is not discussed here because at no time is he a serious contender for a domestic relationship with Marian. His role is symbolic rather than realistic. The antithesis of Peter, this withdrawn, self-centred, sometimes ghostly and often child-like figure is associated with Marian's withdrawal as she wrestles with her decision to marry Peter. Duncan is also connected to the Descent and Return motif serving as an Underworld guide.

[5]The brutality of men towards women and the themes of dismemberment and woman's "body insecurity" continue to be of concern to Atwood. See her story "Weight," Chatelaine Nov. 1989: 155.

[6]Atwood tells director Rubbo that she has a muse for poetry--an old woman. Margaret Atwood: Once in August, prod. Michael Rubbo and Barry Howells, dir. Michael Rubbo, National Film Board of Canada, 1984.

[7]Atwood views the traditional identification of women and nature as a potential source of power and vision. Also, she makes a point of saying that both men and women are part of the "biological, ecological universe." Karla Hammond, "An Interview with Margaret Atwood," The American Poetry Review Sept.-Oct. (1979): 29.

Chapter III A Woman's Place

[1]Atwood says "matriarchal religion" appeals to her "mythologically" but she would not want to see it as a reverse of "male theology" by exalting women and giving men secondary place. Hammond 29.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Works

Atwood, Margaret. Bluebeard's Egg. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart-Bantam, 1984.

---. The CanLit Foodbook: From Pen to Palate--a Collection of Tasty Literary Fare. Toronto: Totem, 1987.

---. Dancing Girls. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart-Bantam, 1979.

---. The Edible Woman. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart-Bantam, 1979.

---. Lady Oracle. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart-Bantam, 1977.

---. Life Before Man. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart-Bantam, 1980.

---. Murder in the Dark: Short Fictions and Prose Poems. Toronto: Coach House, 1983.

---. Power Politics. Toronto: Anansi, 1972.

---. Second Words: Selected Critical Prose. Toronto: Anansi, 1982.

---. "Margaret Drabble: The Magic of the Ordinary." Ms. Magazine Nov. 1987: 62, 65.

---. "Weight." Chatelaine Nov. 1989: 155-156, 158, 60, 162.

Secondary Works

Abrams, M. H. A Glossary of Literary Terms. 4th ed. Toronto: Holt, Rineheart & Winston, 1981.

Bartlett, John. Familiar Quotations. 12th ed. Ed. Christopher Morley. Boston: Brown, 1951.

Baum, Frank L. The Wizard of Oz. New York: Holt Rhineheart & Winston, 1982.

Bettelheim, Bruno. The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales. New York: Vintage, 1977.

Campbell, Joseph. The Hero With a Thousand Faces. Princton, N.J.: Princton University Press, 1968.

Conran, Shirley. Superwoman: Everything You Need to Know About Running a Home in Canada Today. Markham, Ont.:Penguin, 1978.

Davey, Frank. Margaret Atwood: A Feminist Poetics. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1984.

Du Plessis, Rachel Blau. Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985.

Eliade, Mircea. Myths, Dreams and Mysteries. New York: Harper Colophon, 1975.

Elias-Button, Karen. "The Muse as Medusa," The Lost Tradition: Mothers and Daughters in Literature. Eds. Cathy N. Davidson and E.M. Broner. New York: Frederich Ungar, 1980.

Erenreich, Barbara and Dierde English. For Her Own Good: 150 Years of Advice to Women. Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press, 1979.

Bullock, Alan and Oliver Stallybras, eds. Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought. London: Fontana, 1977.

Frye, Northrup. Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology. New York: Harbinger, 1963.

Gilbert, Sandra M. and Susan Gubar. The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979.

---. No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century. Vol. 1. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988.

Griffin, Susan. Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her. New York: Harper & Row, 1980.

Hall, Catherine. "The History of the Housewife." The Politics of Housework. Ed. Ellen Malos. London: Allison and Bushby, 1980.

Hammond, Karla. "An Interview With Margaret Atwood." The American Poetry Review. Sept.-Oct., 1979. 27-29.

Harding, M. Esther. Woman's Mysteries Ancient and Modern. Los Angeles: Pantheon, 1955.

Lucas, Alec. Introduction. Great Canadian Short Stories. "The Office." By Alice Munro. New York: Dell, 1971.

Luxton, Meg and Rosenberg, Harriet. Through the Kitchen Window: The Politics of Home and Family. Toronto: Garamond Press, 1986.

Manheim, Ralph, trans. Grimms' Tales for Young and Old. New York: Doubleday, 1977.

Matthews, Carol. Transforming Hags: Old Women in Canadian Fiction. Victoria: University of Victoria, 1986.

Millett, Kate. Sexual Politics. New York: Doubleday, 1971.

Morford, Mark P.O. and Lenardon, Robert J. Classical Mythology. New York: David McKay, 1971.

Neuman, Shirley and Wilson, Robert, eds. Labyrinths of Voice: Conversations with Robert Kroetsch. Vol. III. Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1982.

Orbach, Susie. Fat is a Feminist Issue: The Anti-Diet Guide to Permanent Weight Loss. New York: Berkley Books, 1979.

---. Hunger Strike: The Anorectics Struggle as a Metaphor For Our Time. New York: Avon, 1986.

Margaret Atwood: Once in August. Prod. Michael Rubbo and Barrie Howells. Dir. Michael Rubbo. National Film Board of Canada, 1984.

Pratt, Annis. Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fiction. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981.

Rich, Adrienne. Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution. New York: W.W. Norton, 1986.

Rabuzzi, Kathryn. Motherself: A Mythic Analysis of Motherhood. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988.

---. The Sacred and the Feminine: Toward a Theology of Housework. New York: Seabury Press, 1982.

Ruskin, John. Sesame and Lilies. London: George Allen, 1907.

Sandler, Linda. "Interview with Margaret Atwood." The Malahat Review 41.24 (1977):7-27.

Simpson, J.A. and Weiner, E.S.C., eds. The Oxford English Dictionary. 2nd ed. Vol. 10. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989.

Smith, Catharine F. "Mysticism and the Woman Cloaked with Sun." Shakespeare's Sisters: Feminist Essays on Women Poets. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, eds. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979.

Thompson, Stith. Motif-Index of Folk Literature. 6 vols. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1957.

Walker, Barbara G. The Crone: Woman of Age, Wisdom, and Power. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985.

---. The Woman's Dictionary of Symbols and Sacred Objects. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988.

---. The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983.

Woolf, Virginia. "Professions for Women." The Virginia Woolf Reader. Mitchell A. Leaska, ed. New York: Brace Jovanovich, 1984.

VITA

Surname: Lee   Given Names: Jerrine Emma

Place of Birth: Winnipeg, Man.   Date of Birth: June 28, 1930

Educational Institutions Attended:

Concordia University   1975-76

University of Victoria   1976-81, 1988-1990

Degrees Awarded:

B.A.   University of Victoria   1981

PARTIAL COPYRIGHT LICENSE

I hereby grant the right to lend my thesis to users of the University of Victoria Library, and to make single copies only for such users or in response to a request from the Library of any other university, or similar institution, on its behalf or for one of its users. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by me or a member of the University designated by me. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Title of Thesis:

Myth and Belief in Margaret Atwood's Domestic Fiction

Author:
(Signature)

JERRINE LEE
(Name in Block Letters)

April 11, 1990
(Date)