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FEMALE CHARACTERS IN THE NOVELS OF TONI MORRISON, MARGARET ATWOOD AND ANITA DESAI FROM THE THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES OF FEMINISM, POSTMODERNISM AND POSTCOLONIALISM

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ŽENSKI LIKOVI U ROMANIMA TONI MORISON, MARGARET ETVUD I ANITE DESAI IZ TEORIJSKE PERSPEKTIVE FEMINIZMA, POSTMODERNIZMA I POSTKOLONIJALIZMA

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Female Characters in the Novels of Toni Morrison, Margaret Atwood and Anita Desai from the Theoretical Perspectives of Feminism, Postmodernism and Postcolonialism

The subject of this dissertation comprises three segments: while the primary focus is on the research of the female characters of the three chosen authors, this paper also deals with the issue of female authorship, that is, the social circumstances that have to a great extent shaped and still impact the literary work of female writers and finally, the dissertation reflects on the manner in which female authors approach the women's issue, that is, how they shape the female identity.

The aim of this dissertation is to explore and answer the question what is that makes women from culturally opposed communities different, and what is that they, despite the numerous sociological discrepancies, still have in common. Thus, the main task of this research was to shed light on, still rather vaguely defined, "women's issue" by drawing parallels between the women, that is, the female characters who live in specific political, sociological and cultural conditions typical of the West (female characters of Margaret Atwood and Toni Morrison) and typical of the East (female characters of Anita Desai). In order to reach the answer to a complex question such as this one, the dissertation tackles the matters that the authors themselves find the most relevant, that is, the themes instrumental in defining the female identity. By means of the analysis of these life matters, the dissertation provides insight into not just the psyche of individual characters, but also illustrates the dynamics of an entire society: beliefs, customs, hierarchies of power, etc. The themes that have been given the most attention are: marriage, motherhood, friendship between women, female sexuality, family and the relationship of one with the community and with oneself. By the method of comparison, the research work reached the conclusion that social factors, such as economic climate, political orientation and the quality of the educational system, undoubtedly affect the level of awareness of women, the attitude of the society toward women and the attitude women nurture toward themselves. Nevertheless, regardless of the numerous and significant differences between the women in the East and West, there are segments they have in common, despite the external, social factors. These

similarities provide the answer to the question what makes the essence of women, that is, what makes them special and different from men.

The second aim of this dissertation is also related to the "women's issue", but in the sphere of authorship, that is, literature, literary theory and criticism. It reflects on the impediments and prejudices that surrounded the first proclaimed female authors, who through their battle for the right to share their ideas in the written from actually carried out a revolution in the name of liberation of the female gender. Namely, the female struggle for the right to write and publish is much more than a simple fight for a place in a profession - it is a fight for the freedom of thought, the freedom of speech and for the right to be actively present in the public life. By relying on history of literature, as well as feminist criticism, the dissertation deals with the presence of female authors in the world of literature and the status they are given in the world of literary criticism. Moreover, it refers to the key authors and works that pioneered when it comes to the introduction of the "women's issue", underlining the importance of the female emancipation in and through literature. Alongside the matter of female authorship in general, the research also included the literary experiences of the three mentioned authors, focusing on how they define the process of writing, what it feels like to be a female author and in what ways they shape their heroines. This makes the third task of this research and that is the relationship female authors have toward their female characters. Namely, based on the chosen authors and novels, the dissertation explores the motivation behind creating heroines the way they are, literary techniques and ideological convictions that female authors rely on in creating psychological profiles of their female protagonists.

The critical analysis is carried out on the basis of three theoretical perspectives: feminism, postmodernism and postcolonialism. These theories were chosen due to their relevance when it comes to the "women's issue" and female authorship. Bearing in mind that feminism is always referred to in relation to the female existence, the feminist theory naturally had to be one of the fundamental elements of this project. The analysis reflects on the relationship the chosen authors themselves have toward the feminist ideology, which is ambivalent in the case of all three of them. This framework is referred to in the analysis of the heroines as well, where its contribution to raising awareness and female emancipation is assessed. Since in the process of research of the

subject of this project it became clear that a single theoretical perspective is not sufficient for implementing a comprehensive analysis of the "women's issue", the dissertation includes two additional theoretical approaches besides feminism: postmodernism and postcolonialism. Namely, all three authors are referred to as postmodernist authors and their work, indeed, reflects numerous postmodernist characteristics. Hence, with regard to the postmodernist aspects of the chosen novels, the dissertation bases itself on the analysis of the attitude postmodernism takes towards female authors and the female gender in general. Bearing in mind contradictory opinions of critics regarding the rapport between postmodernism, which is oriented toward literary form and experimentation, and the "women's issue", which requires space for meaningful content, the dissertation is trying to find a point of convergence, that is, elements of postmodernism conducive to conveying the complexity and difficulties of female existence. It locates this consensus between apparently irreconcilable opposites in the subversive power they share. Finally, a big segment of the theoretical basis of this doctoral project is the theory of postcolonialism, which explores asymmetrical hierarchies of power, spirit of imperialism and the master-slave relationship, which is often identified as the basis of the relationships between men and women in the communities the three authors write about. While the connection between the theory of postcolonialism and the work of Anita Desai is obvious, the dissertation lays out the arguments which make this theory not just relevant but also necessary when it comes to the analysis of works by Atwood and Morrison, as well. This kind of approach reveals not just that postcolonialism is not exclusively linked just to the territories that were formally and politically in the status of colonies, but also applies to those territories that were or still are the subject of social and cultural exploitation, which is the case with Canada. Furthermore, colonialisation and imperialism do not have to apply to entire territories, they can influence only certain racial or ethnical groups, such as the black population in parts of the USA, which is one of the issues Morrison tackles in her novels.

The conclusions reached at the end of research work on the basis of extensive comparative analysis, application of relevant theoretical approaches and with reference to renowned critics suggest the significant impact of the social, primarily economic and political, factors on the position and role of women in society. Apart from that, cultural

differences between the East and West determine the priorities and values of women, who accordingly create the image of themselves and their own worth. However, what women worldwide share is the need to find and build their sense of self, either through professional endeavours or through relationships with others, for instance through motherhood, marriage or close friendship. Hence, the three authors insist on making their heroines find their paths, often fraught with challenges and temptations by disposing of fear, illusions and female ills, such as vanity and envy. On that road of self-discovery they recognise the complexity but also the beauty of female friendship, which gives them a context they can use in rebuilding or strengthening their suppressed or even erased identity.

Key words: women's issue, female authorship, female characters, feminism, postmodernism, postcolonialism, identity, Desai, Morrison, Atwood.

Area of Study: Literary Science
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Ženski likovi u romanima Toni Morison, Margaret Etvud i Anite Desai iz teorijske perspektive feminizma, postmodernizma i postkolonijalizma

Predmet ove doktorske disertacije sastoji se iz tri dela: dok je primarni fokus istraživanja bio na junakinjama tri navedene autorke, rad se takođe bavi i pitanjem ženskog autorstva, tj. društvenim okolnostima koje su u velikoj meri formirale, a i danas utiču na književni rad ženskih pisaca, i na kraju, posvećena je pažnja i načinu na koji autorke pristupaju ženskom pitanju, tj. tome kako oblikuju ženski identitet.

Cilj disertacije je da istraži i odgovori na pitanje šta je to što žene sa različitih meridijana, iz kulturološki nespojivih zajednica razdvaja, a šta im, pak, uprkos tome ostaje zajedničko. Dakle, zadatak ovog istraživanja bio je da rasvetli, još uvek donekle nejasno definisano, "žensko pitanje", tako što će uspostaviti paralele između žena, tj. ženskih likova, koji žive u specifičnim političkim, sociološkim i kulturološkim uslovima tipičnim za Zapad (junakinje Margaret Etvud i Toni Morison) i Istok (junakinje Anite Desai). Da bi se došlo do odgovora na ovako složeno pitanje, rad se prvashodno bavi temama kojima su same autorke podarile najviše pažnje, tj. onim temama koje su se pokazale ključnim za definisanje ženskog identiteta. Na osnovu analize ovih segmenata života, disertacija pruža uvid ne samo u psihu pojedinačnih likova, već oslikava i celokupnu društvenu dinamiku: verovanja, običaje, hijerarhije moći, itd. Teme kojima je dato najviše prostora su: brak, majčinstvo, prijateljstvo među ženama, ženska seksualnost, porodica i odnos pojedinca prema sebi i zajednici. Metodom komparacije došlo se do zaključaka da društveni faktori poput ekonomske situacije, političkog usmerenja i kvaliteta obrazovnog sistema nesumnjivo utiču na nivo svesti kod žena, odnos društva prema ženi, kao i žene prema sebi. Međutim, bez obzira na brojne i značajne razlike između žena na Istoku i Zapadu, ostaju sfere koje su im zajedničke, bez obzira na spoljne, društvene faktore. Ove sličnosti daju odgovor na pitanje šta čini suštinu žene, tj. šta žene čini posebnim i drugačijim.

Drugi zadatak disertacije takođe je vezan za "žensko pitanje", ali u oblasti autorstva, tj. u književnosti, književnoj teoriji, kritici i izdavaštvu. Rad se osvrće na teškoće i predrasude koje su okruživale prve proslavljene žene pisce, koje su svojom borbom za pravo na pero izvršile svojevrsnu revoluciju u ime ženske slobode. Naime,

ženska borba za pravo na autorstvo mnogo je više od borbe za mesto u nekoj profesiji - reč je o borbi za pravo na mišljenje, pravo govora i pravo na aktivno prisustvo u javnom životu. Disertacija se, oslanjajući se na istoriju književnosti, kao i feminističke kritičare, bavi zastupljenošću ženskih pisaca u svetu književnosti, kao i statusom koji one imaju kao književni kritičari. Takođe, spomenute su ključne ličnosti i dela koji su među prvima uveli pitanje ženskog autorstva i naglasili značaj ženske emancipacije u i kroz književnost. Pored pitanja ženskog autorstva uopšte, disertacija se bavi i literarnim iskustvima tri pomenute autorke, fokusirajući se na to što je za njih pisanje, kako je biti žena pisac i na koji način oblikuju svoje junakinje. Ovde je reč o trećem zadatku ovog istraživačkog rada, a to je odnos ženskih pisaca prema ženskim likovima. Naime, na temelju odabranih spisateljica i romana, disertacija sagledava njihovu motivaciju za odabir junakinja, objektivnost, književne tehnike i ideološka uverenja na osnovu kojih se vrši kreiranje psiholoških profila likova.

Kritička analiza sprovedena je na osnovu tri teorijska okvira: feminizma, postmodernizma i postkolonijalizma. Ove teorije su odabrane zbog svoje relevatnosti kada je reč o navedenim temama vezanim za žensko pitanje i autorstvo. S obzirom da se feministički pokret uvek vezuje za pitanje ženske egzistencije, svakako da je feministička književna teorija morala biti jedan od fundamentalnih oslonaca ove disertacije. Rad čini osvrt na odnos koji same autorke imaju sa i prema feminističkoj ideologiji, koji je u sva tri slučaja znatno ambivalentan. Ova teorija je konsultovana i u analizi samih junakinja, u kojoj se ispituje njen doprinos osvešćivanju i emancipaciji žena. Budući da je u procesu istraživanja ove teme postalo jasno da je jedan teorijski okvir, koji god to bio, nedovoljan za sveobuhvatnu i temeljnu analizu "ženskog pitanja", u teorijsku građu uključene su još dve struje: postmodernizam i postkolonijalizam. Naime, tri autorke su pisci koji se svrstavaju u epohu postmodernizma i čiji rad, zaista, odiše odlikama karakterističnim za ovaj pravac. Disertacija se, u pogledu postmodernističkih elemenata prisutnih u odabranim delima, bazira na istraživanju odnosa koji postmodernizam gaji prema ženama kao autorima i ženskom biću uopšte. Imajući u vidu oprečna mišljenja kritičara kada je reč o dinamici između postmodernizma, orijentisanog ka književnoj formi i eksperimentu, i "ženskog pitanja", kome treba prostora za smislenu sadržinu, analiza pokušava da pronađe tačke spajanja, tj. elemente postmodernizma koji ipak pogoduju saopštavanju kompleksnosti i

bremenosti ženske egzistencije. Disertacija taj konsenzus između, naizgled nepomirljivih suprotnosti, pronalazi u njihovoj zajedničkoj subverzivnoj moći. I konačno, veliki segment teorijske građe čini teorija postkolonijalizma, koja ispituje asimetrične hijerarhije moći, imperijalistički duh i odnose gospodar-rob koji se neretko identifikuju u osnovi odnosa između muškaraca i žena u zajednicama o kojima autorke pišu. Dok je povezanost između teorije postkolonijalizma i rada Anite Desai očigledna, u disertaciji su izloženi argumenti koji ovu teorijsku struju čine ne samo relevantnom, već i neophodnom u analizi dela Etvud i Morison. Ovakav pristup otrkiva da postkolonijalizam nije vezan isključivo za teritorije koje su bile u formalnom statusu kolonije, već i za one koje su bile ili su i danas predmet kulturološke i sociološke okupacije i eksploatacije, kao što je to slučaj sa Kanadom. Takodje, kolonizacija i imperijalizam ne moraju biti primenjeni na određenu teritoriju, već i na samo određenu etničku ili rasnu grupaciju, kao što je slučaj sa crnim stanovnicima određenih delova Sjedinjenih Američkih Država, što čini predmet romana Toni Morison.

Zaključci do kojih je teza došla na osnovu obimne uporedne analize, primene spomenutih teorijskih okvira i konsultovanja brojnih autoriteta u oblasti književne kritike upućuju na nemerljiv značaj koji društveni, pre svega, ekonomski i politički, faktori imaju na položaj žena i njihovu ulogu u društvu. Pored toga, kulturološke razlike između Istoka i Zapada određuju prioritete žena, kao i vrednosne sisteme, na osnovu kojih one izgrađuju sliku o sopstvenom identitetu i vrednosti. Međutim, ono što je ženama u svim delovima sveta zajedničko je potreba da se posvete pronalasku i izgradnji sopstvene ličnosti, bilo da je to kroz profesionalno ostvarenje ili kroz odnose sa drugima, poput majčinstva, bračnih odnosa ili bliskog prijateljstva. Stoga, pomenute autorke insistiraju na tome da njihove junakinje pronađu svoj put, često prožet brojnim izazovima i iskušenjima, odbacujući strahove, iluzije i ženske boljke poput sujete i ljubomore. Na tom putu samospoznaje, one otkrivaju složenost, ali i lepotu ženskog prijateljstva, koje im daje kontekst na osnovu koga mogu da izgrade ili učvrste svoj ugroženi ili srušeni identitet.

Ključne reči: žensko pitanje, žensko autorstvo, junakinje, feminizam, postmodernizam, postkolonijalizam, identitet, Desai, Morison, Etvud.

Naučna oblast: nauka o književnosti

Uža naučna oblast: anglistika

UDK broj:

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The Subject of Research

The subject of this dissertation is the women's issue or the condition of being a woman from the perspective of three contemporary female authors from different cultural and political backgrounds. The subject also covers the particularities of being a female author and it thus explores professional lives of the three authors in question. Another dimension of the subject is the nature of writings on women by female authors. Thus, the subject is three-fold, seeking out answers to the questions of female universality but also revealing crucial distinctions between the experience of womanhood in different parts of the world.

One of the reasons why this dissertation has three female authors as its subject lies in the fact that for centuries now the female presence in many areas of public life, including art, has been a contentious issue. Women's voices as well as their overall presence have been erased from history and denied a possibility of addressing the public or participating in shaping the social reality in any meaningful or creative way. The truth is that nobody wanted to hear a woman's opinion nor did they think that they had any. Throughout history, especially in the Middle Ages, it was considered dangerous and sinful for a woman to have ideas of her own, hence the burning on stake of thousands of alleged "witches". It is today common knowledge that women who refused to honour the ideal of femininity, that being a docile, subservient woman, were described as "monsters", "witches" or even "the devil himself" or "the Satan". The oppositions angel-devil and virgin-whore have been applied to the female gender for centuries, implying that there is no middle ground between the two and that women must choose which one they want to be. The nature of this kind of binary opposition (angel-devil) relies on the Christian symbolism and suggests that free-thinking women are most commonly linked to something forbidden, sinful or even evil and demonic.

A woman with a pen becomes dangerous for the process of writing provides her with a better insight into her own thoughts and feelings but also gives her the benefit of

freedom and privacy, which she could rarely enjoy. Although the first form of women's writing was in the form of diary, which recorded their daily lives or some important events, women gradually began to move away from the realms of mundane to the realms of fantasy and mythology. Many of them discovered poetry, which allowed them to express their deepest and most secretive desires and fears, but also to create worlds of their own. Apart from being a good way to fulfill their time, writing also became a way to escape reality. Although many of them have already found comfort in reading, writing proved to be not just a good distraction but also offered the chance to embrace the power of creation. Writing enabled women to express the emotions they were taught to suppress and create worlds of their own, worlds in which they had more freedom and more power. However, writing also allowed them to question practices they were not to question. Gradually, many of them were empowered by the power of their written word that they started having ideas that could be considered 'revolutionary'. The issue of censorship is almost as old as writing itself. Those who had the political power also decided about who could read and what could be read. Control was even more stringent when it came to who could write. Hence, the first women authors had to find witty ways of overcoming their gender if they wanted to publish their books. One of the most common ways was the use of male pen names.

Although it may seem to many that days of gender inequality and discrimination are over, we must not forget that women were granted the right to vote only some sixty, seventy years ago, while in Switzerland, the country that is nowadays considered to be the closest to utopia, this right was granted in 1971. Therefore, it should be kept in mind that the period of formal political and social equality cannot, by any means, be compared to the centuries of oppression at all levels and in all social systems. Victims of domestic violence were and still are most commonly women. The lack of awareness and support systems enables the perpetuation of aggressive and oppressive models of behaviour that deny women rights to freedom and safety. The stigma that is often attached to women who are abused is what prevents many of them from speaking about it. Shame and fear that seem to be intertwined with the issue of female sexuality are just one of the phenomena that define the experience of living as a woman. This dissertation attempts to reveal how women themselves view their own position in the today's world, which is allegedly free of gender bias. The analysis of the authors' struggle in the world

of literature, publishing and literary criticism aims at exposing the prejudices and limitations they faced as women in predominantly male worlds. The comparative analysis of their characters and the issues they deal with, the dissertation presents the questions of constructing female identity at the time when the feminist thought emerged but was countered by fierce opposition of the long-established conservatism.

The Analysed Authors

Margaret Atwood, Toni Morrison and Anita Desai have been chosen as subjects of this doctoral research for their relevance in today's literature and society in general and for their courage to be honest and direct in depicting the condition of womanhood, with all its troubles, blessings, burdens and limitations. The comparative analysis of their work and their female protagonists exhibit a plethora of common worries and hopes of their literary and social agendas.

Margaret Atwood creates solitary, confused heroines who lost their true identities trying to accommodate themselves to the requirements of society. She is sympathetic but also rather critical towards her protagonists, who often resort to shortcuts, deceptions and self-deceptions when faced with conflicts. This dissertation deals with her novels *The Robber Bride* and *Surfacing* and explores the lives of five female characters altogether, underlining common traits and general female tendencies. Atwood does not have a favourite 'type' of woman, instead she creates and observes prominently different personalities in the hectic world of today.

Toni Morrison, known for her 'three-women households' does research on the peculiarities of black women and their needs and problems that differ from those of non-black women. She refers to her African heritage when criticising the lifestyle choices blacks have adopted despite the obvious incompatibility between these patterns and their mentality. She is a fierce critic of cultural appropriation that happens in both directions, as she insists on the authenticity of existence. In *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula* she embarks on the task of deconstructing the psyches of socially inadequate females, who are. due to life circumstances or their own choice, labelled as outcasts in their communities. Hence, by observing the individual, Morrison, in fact, makes references

to the pathology and deviation of entire communities, which have become resilient to empathy and acceptance.

Anita Desai, as the representative of the East and the Orient, sheds new light on the phenomenon of womanhood in the Indian society. With a unique perspective on an Indian who has spent most of her life in the West, Desai gives an objective commentary of the social prohibitions and traditional belief systems that hinder psychological and emotional liberation of women. Her novels *Fasting, Feasting* and *The Clear Light of Day* explore the lives of negatively labelled spinsters who are contrasted with the characters of their married sisters, as instances of the Indian ideal of womanhood. These works point out to the paradoxes of the Indian society, which, on one hand, protects women and worships the notion of womanhood, and on the other, denies them the rights they are formally granted by the Constitution. The precariousness of their position is understood once the clashes between the Western and Eastern cultural influences are revealed, as the main causes of their social and emotional estrangement.

Theoretical Perspective Applied in the Analysis

The theories which are used as theoretical framework for the analyses of the characters in this dissertation are the feminist theory, the postcolonial theory and the theory of postmodernism. These perspectives have been chosen due to their relevance when it comes to the form and content of the novels in question. Namely, the above-mentioned theories are the most dominant theoretical practices of the twentieth century and have, in addition, been referred to the most when it comes to the chosen authors' work.

The feminist theory is usually consulted when questions of the women's issue emerge in literary works. The chapters that deal with novels try to provide a better understanding of the feminist literary agenda since it is a movement that has stirred a great deal of attention and gained negative publicity. The dissertation's primary goal is to explore the female individuality in different social backgrounds and it does not have the war between the sexes as its subject. Although the first chapter, which deals with the female authorship, mentions the political aspects of the feminist struggle, the biggest

portion of the dissertation refers only to the impact the movement had on literature and raising-awareness in women. Since it cannot be denied that the public worldwide still holds an ambivalent position towards feminism, mostly due to the misrepresentation of its agenda, one of the tasks of this work is to unveil its contributions to the status and well-being of women despite cultural, national, racial and class diversities. The chapters look into the attitudes of authors towards feminism, unveiling their support of it but also hesitations and concerns about it. Feminist concepts are also examined in reference to the protagonists themselves, who exhibit different attitudes towards life, themselves and women in general. For the sake of establishing a trustworthy representation of the feminist ideas, the dissertation consults the works of some of the major feminist critics and theorists, such as Hélène Cixous, Judith Butler, Simone de Beauvoir, Bell Hooks, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, etc.

When postcolonial theory is in question, it is generally brought into connection with the work of Anita Desai as its implications are rather obvious in the case of political and social backgrounds of her heroines. Nevertheless, besides the fact that America is not a postcolonial region and that Canada has never been considered postcolonial or colonial in the way that India was, elements of Atwood's and Morrison's work can also be examined by means of this framework. It reveals the cultural repercussions of Canada's postcolonial status and its self-effacing attitude towards itself. Similarly, the postcolonial perspective can be successfully applied with respect to Toni Morrison's black, marginalised heroines, who stand as evidence of racial and cultural imperialism and exploitation as a racial minority within their own country. The theorists whose views have been included are, among the others, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak , Justin Edwards and Neil Lazarus.

Postmodernism, which is considered to be the most relevant regarding the contemporary literature, holds a somewhat vague attitude towards the issue of women. There are fierce debates on whether this framework leaves any space to female authors and their concerns. Postmodernism is reputed to be a theory that stresses the formal aspects of literature, thus being inadequate for the issue revolving around the essence and position of women. Nonetheless, theories of Linda Hutcheon and Brian McHale render this problematic in a different light, by exposing numerous places of convergence between postmodernism, feminism and postcolonialism, making this

theory more than relevant to the subject of this dissertation.

Themes

The themes that are covered are those that shape female existence. By comparing and contrasting the characters' experiences, new insights about female struggles, fears and concerns are obtained. The focus of the research includes the themes of female sexuality, motherhood, relationships between women, the concept of family, the construction of self-image, attitudes toward society and imposed patterns of behaviour.

Female sexuality has been the light motif of innumerable literary pieces by both men and women, but the perspective that female authors take towards this subject is undoubtedly one of personal experience, coloured by autobiographical elements. These accounts are trustworthy and do not strive to mystify this field that has always been a subject of special interest. Namely, female sexuality has always been something that demanded research, exploration and detailed explanation. It seems that the 'mystical' and 'mythical' female sexuality, as it is often described in works by mostly male authors, proved to be some kind of a puzzle that gave women the label of different, incomprehensible, or simply Other. Since the definition of the females as Other has roots in anatomy, that is, in the genitals, which is also suggested by Freud's theory of 'penis envy', female sexuality is given a great deal of attention in this dissertation.

Motherhood is another theme that occupies the three authors' attention. It is an unavoidable subject when female characters and writers are in question. The dissertation looks into and comments on the ways that motherhood is conceptualised in the East and West and the importance it has in various women's lives. It is evident that all three of them offer distinct patterns of motherhood and are not afraid to show the other, not so sublime side to being a mother. They often depict mothers who are on the verge of poverty and starvation, deprived of any support, forced to take radical actions. The motif of mothers as single parents is also a current one, as this phenomenon has become one of the distinctive features of the modern society.

As these authors are primarily interested in the emotional and social relationships between the individual and his/her closest surroundings, they dedicate a great deal of attention to the dynamic of relations between women. They speak of female friendship, biological and non-biological sisterhood, mothers and daughters. Although their outlooks on life differ, they shed light on the complexities of the female psyche and opine that women should be able to count on each other and tackle life difficulties with joint forces.

Another point of interest of this dissertation is the concept of family. Atwood, Morrison and Desai come from backgrounds that are based on utterly diverse foundations that include different ideas of what family life should involve. In spite of the fact that they hold diverging perspectives on this issue, all three of them are convinced that the concept of family, as it exists in their societies, should be reevaluated. While they argue about the problems of family life, some of them also devise alternative communities that could act as a replacement for the traditional concept of nuclear family.

One of the primary tasks of this dissertation was to look into and reveal ways in which these three authors construct female identity. Their approaches and techniques vary with regard to the ideological and theoretical framework they opt for, but on the whole, their heroines stand as proof of the complexity and at times even evasiveness of the female psyche. While they also observe the relationship between the individual and the community, they are primarily concerned with the construction of self-image and achieving self-acceptance. On their journeys through the vast territories of their inner beings, they are met with self-deception, illusions, guilt and regrets.

Outline of Chapters

Chapter one deals with female authorship and the women's issue in general. It lays the foundation for the introduction of the question of women in literature and in society overall. This chapter further explains the motivation behind the choice of topic of this research. It sets out the historical accounts and examples of women in literature,

clarifying their position of struggle to be accepted and criticised on equal terms. Furthermore, this section looks into the definitions of woman in the West and East respectively, drawing parallels and conclusions. Moreover, it gives a brief summary of the cultural and religious traditions that have shaped the perspective of what women are supposed to be and how they should be treated. The purpose of this chapter is to usher in the story of limitations and challenges women are faced with, which is explored in detail in the following chapters.

Chapter two covers the work of Margaret Atwood. This section was conceptualised not as a summary of her life or biographical data, but as an account of her way through the world of literature, literary theory and criticism. It depicts her journey from being a terrified, unsecure girl who loves writing to being described as one the greatest authors of today. This chapter is based, to a large extent, on her own views and comments about literature, art, life and being a woman. It makes a reference to her crucial role in building up Canadian literary theory and cultural identity. Moreover, it also includes a discussion on her attitude towards feminism and womanhood. Next, this chapter gives a summary of Atwood's writing style, techniques and theoretical approaches. In addition, it clarifies the manner in which she constructs female characters and approaches the female identity.

Chapter three covers the analysis of the four protagonists of the novel *The Robber Bride*. It first gives a short introduction of the plot and gives basic information about the characters. Subsequently, it deals with the heroines one at a time, providing detailed accounts of their identity struggles. This chapter also includes the exploration of the elements of the three theoretical perspectives that are present in the novel. It centers on the feminist thought as the novel deconstructs various kinds of relationships between women, as well as the emotions that are considered to be typical of the female sex, such as envy and cunningness. Besides being centered around the individuals and their self-image, this section is also concerned with the phenomenon of female friendship, which can quite often succumb under the pressure to keep up appearances or compete with each other. Following the individual analysis of the characters the chapter ends with a conclusion which compares them and gives comments on the outcomes of their search for a repressed identity, acceptance and peace.

Chapter four explores the novel *Surfacing* and its unnamed protagonist, on a journey from self-deception and victimisation to redemption and peace of mind. In the guise of a detective story, the novel follows the quest of the female protagonist for her repressed memory and the truth about herself. The painful memories once revealed lead her to the verge of madness and compel to abandon the human community altogether. The chapter keeps record of her psychological and emotional turmoil that are part of her transformation. Furthermore, this section consults the theoretical frameworks in analysing the author's process of identity construction and deconstruction. It focuses on the theory of postmodernism to the greatest extent but it also makes use of the concepts of postcolonial theory. In addition, when it comes to the part which deals with female sexuality and motherhood, feminist authors, such as Judith Butler, Toril Moi and Julia Kristeva, are referred to.

Chapter five is centered around the work of Toni Morrison. Similarly to chapter two, it sets out her views on the issue of being a woman and being a female author. In addition, Morrison is concerned with what it means to be a black female author, emphasising that it involves double marginalisation. This chapter clarifies her critical work as well, for she is known for establishing the foundations for evaluating black literature. Moreover, the chapter makes a mention of her work in giving the black literature its fair place within the project of American literature. Also, this section looks into the peculiarities of Morrison's female characters, as she is reputed for breaking the prejudices about black women, especially black mothers.

Chapter six is dedicated to the novel *The Bluest Eye*. It explores the devastating psychological consequences of incestuous rape of children. The plot is centered around two girls in the same black community and it presents the consequences of their family life and upbringing. The differences of their destinies amount to the importance of support of the surroundings in the crucial years of childhood and adolescence. Furthermore, this chapter comments on the construction of two opposite female identities, one of self-respect and the other of self-deprication. It focuses on the relations Morrison usually writes about, those between the individual and his family and the individual and the whole community. Moreover, it looks into ways of evading reality, such as sell-deception and finally madness. This chapter refers to the theory of postmodernism in observing the form of the novel and the elements of repressed

memory, past and history. Also, it is based on Bell Hook's views on the nature and consequences of family abuse in the case of black women. In addition, this section undertakes the analysis of the interaction between symbolism of popular culture and the consumer society, on one hand, and the black female recipients, on the other. Hence, it tackles the issues of the standardisation of beauty as white, implying that black is ugly.

Chapter seven presents the analysis of *Sula*. It is Morrison's novel that could be defined as the most feminist one in her opus. Namely, this chapter explores the impact of the feminist theory in shaping the character of strong-willed, independent Sula. It reveals how strikingly odd such a female figure appears to be in a conservative, rural black community. This section draws comparison between Sula and her best friend Nel, who is a typical "feminine" woman. Hence, it deals with the opposition between the infamous "monster woman", who evokes fear and hatred in the community, and the epitome of a "good woman", who is accepted by her peers, but has to sacrifice herself and stifle her needs. Besides exploring their individual identities, this chapter also focuses on the nature of intimate female friendship and the concept of soulmates. Furthermore, it observes the dynamic of life in a "three-women household", typical for Morrison's protagonists. Next, it analyses the phenomenon of sexuality of black women, exploring prejudices and moral constraints around it. This chapter is based on the feminist theory but it also makes use of the postmodernist criticism, especially with regard to the form of the novel.

Chapter eight is dedicated to the characteristics of Anita Desai's authorship. It is based on the exploration of her attitudes toward writing and her experiences of being a female writer. Furthermore, it deals with her special perspective of an Indian woman, living and writing in the USA. This chapter, thus, focuses on her unique perspective of somebody who sees India as both a homeland, and a foreign territory. Here I attempted to provide clarifications of her manner of writing and creating heroines who are psychologically and emotionally alienated from their surroundings and themselves. It also looks at her views on the three theoretical perspectives and the ways she incorporates them in her novels. Moreover, this chapter also reflects on the distinctive features of the Indian society and culture that have impacted not just Desai herself but also the process of construction of her female characters.

Chapter nine features the analysis of the characters in the novel *Fasting, Feasting*. It sets out the process of identity formation and identity struggles within the Indian family. Although it centers around psychological and emotional turmoil of the protagonist, Uma, this chapter also looks into the peculiarities of overall female existence in a conservative society in the process of modernisation and Westernisation. This section deals with the marginalisation of woman at multiple levels, as well as their own lack of awareness about themselves and others. Furthermore, it explores relationships between women, between daughters and mothers and between sisters, to be precise. Moreover, the chapter reflects on the Indian practices, such as dowry and the arranged marriage, which have come to determine an Indian woman's life to a great extent. In this part the dissertation includes theories of postcolonialism and feminism, drawing parallels between them, in the effort to establish an adequate approach toward the issue of the Third-world woman.

Chapter ten is dedicated to the characters of two sisters in the novel *The Clear Light of Day*. It provides the analysis of two opposite patterns of self-actualisation by contrasting the characters of Bim and Tara. By offering two distinct recipes for living, an independent, struggling existence in loneliness and a life of being taken care of, Desai explores the lives of women who tend to define themselves within the feminist framework and those who are referred to as "real women". The chapter deals with both characters individually at first and then compares them with the aim of reaching conclusions on which lifestyle is more adequate for a society such as India. This chapter relies also on the review of political and cultural circumstances surrounding these women's lives and affecting their choices. It also covers the issues all three authors are interested in, marriage, motherhood, sisterhood and family. Postcolonial and feminist criticism are consulted in establishing the image of the community the protagonists are part of.

Chapter eleven is conceptualised as a summary of the analysed characters and the three authors. Its aim is to provide a detailed comparison of the authors' literary agendas, especially in respect to creating female characters and being a woman writer. Moreover, by establishing similarities and discrepancies in the protagonists' characters, this section attempts to draw conclusions on the universality of womanhood, i.e. what makes women across the world similar and relatable. Furthermore, this chapter points

out the differences in their attitudes towards themselves and in the ways they are treated by the society that result from the distinctiveness of their backgrounds. Hence, it could be said that this part was intended as an exploration of the differences between the West and East that eventually limit or facilitate the female existence. On top of that, it looks into the concepts of womanhood, those of the society and those of the individual, thus dealing with the notions of self-image and stereotype. In addition, it reflects on the various ways that a female identity can be constructed and maintained.

Conclusion presents the results of the research and the obtained insights in a concise manner. It reiterates the parallels between the authors and sums up the arguments on the status of female writers and the nature of female authorship. Furthermore, it includes conclusions on the major issues of female existence, such as marriage, sexuality, motherhood and family by means of referring to the characters analysed in the previous chapters. Moreover, it addresses the conclusions concerning the ways in which female authors deal with the construction of female identity and in general with the issue of being a woman in a modern society.

1. FEMALE AUTHORSHIP AND THE WOMEN'S ISSUE

1.1. Female Authorship

The women's issue became a vital matter in advanced, democratic societies and is discussed in areas ranging from the human rights, literature, politics, culture and sociology. The position of women and gender equality must be dealt with in all societies that strive for harmony and their citizens' general well-being. This issue came into focus once women became aware of the limitations of their existence and the oppression they were subjected to for centuries. Nevertheless, this awakening did not occur simultaneously all over the world, by contrast, the West and East nurtured significantly different attitudes towards women and thus, they approached this social revolution in different ways at different time.

During the times of confinement and loneliness, many women found comfort in writing. Due to the limited range of occupations women were allowed to opt for, many women had to earn for their living by doing non-creative, repetitive jobs, mostly domestic in nature. Since they were not considered suitable for pursuing higher education, they could not choose careers such as, a doctor, lawyer or banker. Furthermore, not only did women have a limited choice of occupations available to them, they were also not allowed to fulfill their spare time with activities that men considered inappropriate for them. Hence, the societies of previous centuries made clear distinctions between the lifestyle adequate for men and the lifestyle allowed for women. Even in the domain of leisure and hobbies there were double standards regarding the activities men and women could indulge in. While men were allowed to and were even at times praised for binge-drinking, gambling and womanising, women, on the other hand, were expected to spend their free time knitting, reading or socialising with one another. The stringent control of personal activities was implemented at all levels, starting from family. Namely, young girls were trained and monitored by their mothers and aunts on how to maintain an air of respectability and decency, all with the aim of marrying well. Among the activities that were not encouraged was writing. Namely,

even though girls and women were allowed to read, their reading material had to be previously approved. If a text abounded in lascivious language or advocated philosophy that was deemed socially harmful, then it would have been put on the list of prohibited literature. It is clear that a society that thrived on its citizens' obedience would not allow them access to revolutionary or liberal ideas and encouragement. Hence, although reading of some contents was possible, writing for women was discouraged on the grounds that they simply had nothing relevant to say. Indeed, in that day, it was beyond imagination that a woman could know something essential about the world or that men should read what a woman would write. A fact that contributes to the argument about the attempts to erase women from all relevant social practices, including their participation in art, is that in Shakespeare's times women were not allowed to act and all roles in a play, including the roles of women, were actually played by men. In addition, the same as reading unapproved books, writing was also deemed potentially corrupting. Nonetheless, despite the fact that they knew their books could not be published and, in most cases, did not harbour such aspirations, many women had the need to express themselves in the written form. Besides being an interesting way to fulfill their time, many of them found comfort, relief and privacy in this creative activity. They usually wrote diaries, which recorded their daily activities, thoughts and feelings, but gradually some of them filled their pages with verses or even philosophic contemplations. Others, however, treated their writings as little escapades from the reality of life and used their imagination to create worlds they could be happy in. Illusioned by romantic ideas of life, marriage and love and later faced with harsh disappointments, they realised they could still find a gateway to that better world and that it could be reached by means of writing and imagination. On their pieces of paper they were still able to meet the prince charming they heard about in fairytales told to them by their mothers. However, there have always been women who refused to be subordinated and restrained and owing to their visionary approach and courage, today we can freely choose the reading to our liking, vote on election, choose a profession and participate in all kinds of public debates. The label of true revolutionaries was definitely deserved by the pioneers of female authorship, including Brontë sisters, for instance. In spite of the fact that writings by women were not considered for publishing, these women succeeded in conveying their message and leaving a long-lasting trace. Faced with social unfairness, they had to

find a way to hide their femaleness and they eventually managed to. They overcame the obstacle in the shape of their gender by publishing books under male pseudonyms. Brontë sisters used the names of Currer (Charlotte), Ellis (Emily), and Acton (Anne) Bell, preserving their initials. Hence, these women managed to outwit society and fulfill their desires to be authors. Their books achieved exorbitant success and excellent criticism, while the general public was in shock later to discover their true identities. The novel *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* by Anne Brontë is today considered to be one of the first sustained feminist novels. (Davies, 1996) Charlotte Brontë claims that men cannot seem to see women in the true light and are guided by the need to classify them either as good or bad, without any middle ground or other character dimensions. She writes about how man cannot read women, which we may understand both literally, with regard to female characters, and metaphorically, when it comes to relationships between men and women in real life:

> If men could see us as we really are, they would be a little amazed;
> but the cleverest, the acutest men are, often under an illusion about
> women: they do not read them in true light: they misapprehend
> them, both for good and evil: their good woman is a queer thing,
> half doll, half angel; their bad woman almost always a fiend.

> (Brontë, *Shirley* in Moglen, 1984: 164)

Morris (1994) elaborates on why the male version of truth and thus the male version of femininity have become universal. She blames it on the male cultural dominance which "perpetuates and authorises male versions of femininity, male illusions about women, as 'human' truth, as the 'reality'. Thus women, too, come to read women as men read them, accepting men's visions of the feminine as their own: 'Women', writes de Beauvoir, 'still dream through the dreams of men'." (Morris, 1994: 15)

Virginia Woolf, considered to be one of the establishers of the feminist thought, although the movement itself was not in sight in her day, often wrote about the conditions of life that limit women, especially women who wanted to write. In her ground-breaking essay, informally one of the manifestos of feminism, *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf looks back on the numerous lacks that constitute a female life and

eventually impede creativity. Although her complaints focus on the material aspects of existence, she, in fact, illustrates the political and social climate that have given rise to the female absence in many areas, including art. However, she also reflects on the constraints upon women's physical movement, keeping them in the confines of their homes. In Woolf's view, the passivity of the mundane life produces the need for expression and creation. She notices the female creative force that was welling up for centuries, waiting to be released: "Women have sat indoors all these millions of years so that by this time the very walls are permeated by their creative force." (Woolf in Morris, 1994: 63) Jane Austen also dedicates attention to gender inequality, shedding light on the male privileges of education and access to reading and writing: "Men have had every advantage over us in telling their own story; Education has been theirs in so much higher degree; the pen has been in their hands. I will not allow books to prove anything." (2008: 153)

From the earliest days of female authorship, the criticism they received was undoubtedly of different tone and based on different grounds from the one directed at their male counterparts. At first their attempts at producing serious pieces of literature were dismissed as inferior and only later did the critics assume a more objective approach. When it comes to the way female authors were accepted in more recent times, many feminists and female artists claim that they still receive a different treatment. A good example is his Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973), in which he claims to be offering a new history of literature. (Morris, 1994: 48) Bloom gives no place to any female poet as he argues that the world of poetry is a world of battles and warriors, a world where there are no women, but only fathers and sons - it is a "battle between strong equals, father and son as mighty opposites." (1973: 11) What is more, Bloom leaves no place for doubt as he unambiguously confirms: "Poems are written by men." (1973: 43) However, he makes one exception when he mentions the role of a poet's muse, which he sees as female. Nonetheless, he remains malevolent toward the female gender, characterising the muse as a whore who has had others before him. This is yet another example of the male tendency to prioritise sexuality when shaping female characters. A common complaint heard from women writers is that their books are judged on the basis of their personality or private lives. The case of Margaret Atwood confirms this phenomenon. Hence, it appears that the reception of books by female

authors is even nowadays under the influence of the first genre of the female writing - diary. Thus, the fact that women first experienced writing through recording accounts of their lives seems to have left a long-lasting impression that women can write only about their personal experiences and that they lack imagination or power of objective or philosophical reasoning. Moreover, many scholars have laid claims about the peculiarities of both male and female style of writing, insisting that each gender has its unique manner of expression. Namely, there was obviously a tendency to equate general characteristics of each gender with their style of writing that undoubtedly simplified and generalised members of both. Thus, it is apparent that discrimination was significantly present not just in the circles of literary criticism and publishing, but also among the scholars who gave and supported views of this kind. This issue will be further elaborated on from the perspective of authors themselves and their personal experiences entering the world of literature far back in the late sixties, early seventies. It is relevant to include statistical data that point to the alarming disproportion in the male-female presence in numerous anthologies, collected by various scholars and published by renowned publishers. Namely, Tillie Olsen found in her research that focused on the anthologies included in the curricula for undergraduate studies that the percentage of female authors is only 9 whereas the percentage of texts by male authors is 91. (2003: 186-9) Joanna Russ, a feminist and one of the female pioneers in science fiction, expresses surprise at these numbers, but is also confused when it comes to the list of female names that are included in some anthologies and left out in others:

> What is so striking about these examples is that although the
> percentage of women included remains somewhere between five
> and eight per cent the personnel changes rather strikingly...Elizabeth
> Barrett Browning and Emily Brontë bob up and down like corks, Edith
> Wharton is part of English literature in 1968 and banished into outer
> darkness in 1977 - and yet there are always enough women for that five
> percent and never quite enough to get much past eight per cent.

(Russ, 1983: 79)

However, although women demand application of equal standards in criticism of male and female authors, some of them admit that the significant differences in lifestyles of the two genders make the comparison of their writings extremely difficult. Pam Morris (1994) primarily asks how women can be judged on the equal grounds as men when they have been left outside the public sphere until recently. So as to establish a more objective and equal approach toward works of women writers, the literary cannon would need to be readjusted. It would have to include forms and content accessible to women in their undeniably different and limited routines. The question of the objectivity of critics cannot be discussed only in the context of literature but requires taking into account history, politics, tradition and all factors that contributed to the discrepancies in status between men and women. This once again underlines the links between fiction and reality, literature and history. How can women receive the equal treatment from literary critics if they do not receive it from their employers and finally, although equality between the sexes is the ultimate goal, it does not mean that men and women are the same or that they should ever be.

> How, then, can we compare unlike with unlike and do justice to the
> achievements of both sexes? Moreover, for much of history and in
> many cultures women have been denied a public voice, closed off
> within the private sphere. Should we not, therefore, include personal
> writing like letters and diaries as legitimate genres within the canonical
> tradition, and how, if we do so, shall we evaluate them alongside work
> like Milton's "Paradise Lost"?
>
> (Morris, 1994: 53)

Despite all the distinctions that may come across as unjustified, the female authorship certainly nurtures a special, different approach towards the analysis and establishment of the women's issues. By obtaining the opportunity to speak for themselves, instead of being spoken about, women embark on a mission to fulfill the silences in literature and the blanks in history. They shape female characters that express levels of existence and shades of meaning characteristic of women's mental and emotional structures. Besides creating authentic female figures, women authors foster a special kind of relationship toward their heroines. Apart from the autobiographical

elements that may appear as a motivation, they develop various attitudes toward them, at times offering compassion and encouragement, at times forcing them to accept responsibility and face life as it is. They see their protagonists as themselves, their daughters, friends or mothers, trying to warn them about the dangers lurking around them but finally letting them find their own path. Even though they are thought to be writing only romance novels, women have actually proved themselves as serious analysts of social, political and cultural matters of their time. Alongside writing for their own satisfaction or to fulfill spare time of their female readers, women also write because their versions of events and experiences give a new shape to history, art and human thought. Even when they write about the contemporary issues, female authors of the postmodernist era refer to the past, on a quest for answers and thereby provide a reconceptualisation of history in the framework of female concerns. Therefore, the importance of writing by women is multifold and it does not only cover the area of culture and art, but it examines, challenges and redefines the political and social foundations of contemporary life. Although women worldwide significantly differ in their lifestyles, beliefs and values, what all female authors insist on, irrespective of their background, is the significance of speaking about themselves and for themselves, on their own terms.

Nevertheless, when the differences between male and female authorship and the treatment they receive is put aside, we are left with yet another issue - the status of subaltern groups within women themselves, such as coloured or lesbian female authors. Their especially precarious positions give their work different dimensions and contexts and there is also the question whether they should be approached with different criteria, as well. The superiority of the white women from the developed world gives rise to suspicion and hesitation in women of other backgrounds with regard to supporting the feminist movement or cause. The problems within the feminist movement itself will later be discussed in further detail.

1.2. Women's Issue in the East and West

Most feminist authors and theorists and all those interested in the women's issue revert to history and mythology in the attempt to find roots of oppression of the female sex. While some use historical accounts to support their claims of a centuries long discrimination and terror women were subjected to, others direct their attention to societies and communities that worshipped female deities or were centered around maternal figures. The review of the treatment of women in different times and frameworks should include historical data, but also literary documents, oral traditions and religious dogmas. This dissertation will attempt to provide a summary of various factors that impacted the formation of the positions that women hold today in the West and East respectively.

The modern society has to a great extent been shaped according to the official stands of the religious communities. All major religions present today still base their teachings on the beliefs and practices set out in the religious scripts thousands of years old. These texts give guidelines for a religiously right lifestyle and include rules and advice on diverse spheres of life, including marital unions and attitudes toward women. Thus, it is relevant to turn to these documents in search of useful clues. Miti Pandey in her book *Feminism in Contemporary British and Indian English Fiction* (2010) explores the ways in which different religions define women in relation to men. She states that the Bible establishes Adam as the master who is assigned the power to name animals and everything else on Earth, including Eve. She adds that St.Paul himself ascribes a secondary position to woman. (2010) Indeed, *The Bible* preaches that Eve is made from an Adam's rib, emphasising that woman is a product of man and that she is literally secondary since she was created second. *The Bible*, thus, suggests that man is a primary being and puts him in the position of the master of all other beings created, including his wife, Eve. Christianity also posits that man is created according to the God's image, but does not say the same for woman. What is more, the first manlike representations of God and even allegoric representations in icons and frescos in Orthodox Christianity today always present God as an elderly, wise man. Hence, it is apparent that even the spiritual spheres of life and immaterial existence reveal the always present tendency to

distinguish between the two sexes and their inherent roles. Saint Mary is made holy by the act of immaculate child birth, not her personal characteristics that we do not know much about. She is worshipped as a mother figure, which sets the standards for all women, representing the role of child bearing as the ultimate goal of self-realisation and spirituality. However, I would like to point out that although the Blessed Virgin Mary does hold power and status, her position is derived from her relation to Jesus. Again we notice the link between man and woman, that is, the link that ties a woman to a man and his power, placing her below him in the hierarchy.

Pandey (2010) explores other religions as well and comes to an observation that all share the tendency to diminish the significance of women. She writes that Koran also emphasises the superiority of men over women. Furthermore, Koran allows men to marry four women, while women are expected to be virgins when they marry and share their husband with other women. Regarding Buddhism, it considers women to be "an obstacle in the development of man". (Pandey, 2010: 2) Judaism, similarly, does not award an equal position to women. Pandey even makes a reference to the philosopher Pythagoras and his numerical symbolism, arguing that it attributes positive characteristics to maleness, while assigning the negative ones to femaleness: "He maintains that the number One stood for God, head and maleness, whereas number Two represented femaleness and divisiveness." (2010: 2) Pythagoras's accounts imply that the man is whole while the woman is not, that she needs to seek some outside fulfillment or to complete herself through a union with a man.

When Western and Indian tradition are compared concerning their attitudes toward women, we notice that Indian mythology and Hinduism worship women as divine and superior beings. Pandey (2010) insists that women are most tyrannised in Western societies that pride themselves with democratic values and human rights protection. However, she reminds us that in ancient times matriarchy was the rule in many parts of the world, including the patriarchal West of today. "It is believed that among the hominids and early humans (Homo Sapiens) family centered round the mother. Different female deities like Ishtar in Babylon, Astarta in Phoenicia, Cybele in Phyrgia, Isis in Egypt personified the creation of life, rebirth of nature and hope of resurrection." (Pandey, 2010: 2) Apart from strong female figures from mythology, history abounds in examples of courageous women who successfully reigned over vast

empires. They include the glorious Cleopatra, the queen of Egypt, Queen Victoria and Queen Elisabeth, female sovereigns from more modern times. These women have proved that a woman can impose her authority and face political and military challenges as well as any male ruler. Apart from being fine instances of female power and skillfulness, their legacy empowered and is still empowering the entire female sex. When it comes to the Indian tradition, many religious and mythical accounts suggest that women enjoy respect and honour in India. Unlike many cultures that favour the birth of a son, especially if it is the first child, in India it is an honour to give birth to a daughter. (Pandey, 2010)

> Devahuti, the daughter of Manu[1], was married to Rishi Kardam.
> Their union resulted in the procreation of nine daughters in succession.
> Their only male issue was Kapil who initiated Sankhya Shastra.
> The nine daughters of Devahuti were the most shining jewels of
> Indian womanhood. They included Kala, wife of Saint Marichi;
> Arundhati, the Saintly wife of Vashishta; Anusuya, the very epitome
> of feminine chastity and wife of the illustrious Saint Atri.

(Pandey, 2010: 2)

Nevertheless, when it comes to the treatment of women in Hinduism itself, different accounts suggest that it varies from granting women equal rights and hounour to restricting them in various respects. While some place the blame for these restrictions on Hinduism, others attribute it to culture and customs, pointing out that Veding literature looks at women in a positive light, in some occurrences even giving them the status of goddesses. (see Jayaplan, 2001) There has been discussion that the perception of an Indian woman has drastically changed in more modern times compared to earlier traditions. Sarkar (2001) claims that in modern times there is a requirement for women in India to remain chaste at all costs, which is at odds with the documents that describe this society at its earlier stages, where it was considered normal for women to take up various professions they were later denied access to. Jean and Dubois (1987) have observed that European scholars tended to describe Hindu women as "naturally chaste"

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[1] In Hindu religion, Manu is considered to be the progenitor of humanity

and "more virtuous" than other women. This could be interpreted as yet another example of Othering - experiencing and shaping the Orient as different and exotic. Jean and Dubois (1987), however, explain this by saying that the Europeans, due to being foreigners, were not allowed access to the secret places and practices of Hindu women of the time. Nonetheless, there is the always present feeling and assumption that women in India are more constrained, fearful and servile than both, white and black women. This assumption is primarily rooted in the peculiarities of their upbringing - the stringent rules of behaviour, moral codes and plethora of social and religious customs that had to be obeyed. Although the Indian woman is believed to be subordinated in all spheres of life, there are however, areas in which she receives a better treatment than other women. But, on the whole, her position remains deeply paradoxical and arbitrary, depending on the region and local customs. Speaking of the religious dogmas, Hindus believe that Gods have both, male and female elements that make them whole. The Upanishads, the part of Vedas that focuses on philosophy, features several female sages and seers (e.g. Gargi and Maitreyi) as opposed to the most Western religions, women were allowed to attend schools for Vedic priests. (Narayanan, 1998)

One of the aspects of women's life in India that is often under literary or social scrutiny is the institution of marriage. Although legal and religious systems do not necessarily discriminate or oppress women per se, it appears that the institution of marriage does so in a certain extent by placing the emphasis on the husband and the fulfillment of his duties. Titus (2010) writes that the dharma of a married woman is tied to her dedication and loyalty to her husband. He refers to the marriage of Rama and Sita, from the epic Ramayana, that is seen as ideal and that imposes standards of good behaviour for wives. Titus claims that Sita is idealised in so far as she renounces her comfort in order to support and empower her husband's dharma (i.e. his role in life) Hence, Ramayana places the ideal marriage within the framework of female subordination to the husband, considering male duties in life more essential for the society. It appears that although there are not many written prohibitions for women, there is the even more powerful desire to meet the criteria that define a "good wife" or a "good woman" that are restricting and uncompromising. Apart from the desire to obtain the "good woman" label, there is also the fear of public judgment and negative labelling - a well-known mechanism in the West, as well. In general, it seems unavoidable to be

given some label and there appears to be no middle ground between a "good" and a "bad" woman when Indian society is concerned. Therefore, we conclude that there is a tremendous pressure Indian women are exposed to on a daily basis, trying to establish and preserve a good image of themselves in the circle of their families, communities and the entire society.

Undoubtedly one of the darker sides of Indian society is its attitude towards widows. This sensitive topic covers various customs and practices that range from restricting to sadistic. The fact that there have been strong efforts to label and ostricise widows is evident in the custom that they are always dressed in white. This implies the underlying need to seclude them from the community by letting all other members know their status. Except prohibitions to remarry, Bowker and Holm (1994) suggest that widows are also "expected to commit their lives to an austere pursuit of religion." (79) Novels by Indian female authors abound in examples of widows, usually distant cousins of the family, their misfortunes and miserable existence. Very often these accounts include stories of pilgrimages and the widow's obsession with religion and spirituality. Furthermore, they are clearly marked as outsiders, avoided and looked down on even by their family and relatives. What is more, there are accounts of their being abused and exploited as free workforce. What is interesting is that despite their lives of deprivation and sacrifice, somewhat similar to that of ascetics in Christianity, widows in India are given very little respect or understanding. Most commonly they are treated as a simple nuisance, or a mad, old woman. Even though most feel sorry for them, they offer no sympathy whatsoever. The only exceptions are those equally judged and abused as them - unmarried girls. These two kinds of women usually find comfort in each other and their interaction reveals the wisdom, spirituality and emotional depth of widows.

Speaking of the status of widows in India, especially infamous is the Sati or 'Suttee' practice. The practice, namely, refers to a ritual when a recently widowed woman immolates herself, either by free will or by force, usually at her husband's funeral. This practiced was generally prohibited in the whole territory of India by Queen Victoria in 1861. Nevertheless, it was still practiced in some areas, including Nepal, where it was not banned until 1920. Due to the still strong influence of this practice, which was considered honourable, The Indian Sati Prevention Act (1987) further

outlaws any type of committing, assisting or even glorifying the Sati practice. Nonetheless, despite all the legal precautions, there are still records of casualties of this practice every year. Harlan (1992) adds that after her death at the funeral pyre, the woman obtains the venerated status of a satimata.(119)

1.3. The Women's Issue in Feminism

It is thought that the feminist movement was sparked by the civil rights campaigns and outbursts of general dissatisfaction in France and in the USA in the 1960s, when female activists noticed that the female agenda remained on the margins despite the rhetoric of freedom and equality employed by their male "comrades". Even though in theory the gender equality seemed to be an appealing and acceptable idea, the stereotypical perceptions of women still lingered in all domains of life. (Morris, 1994: 13) It could be said that the feminist movement was created when women came to the realisation that their cause had to be fought for separately since the battle for freedom and equality seemed to have failed them.

The feminist movement as a political cause is closely linked to feminist literature and literary criticism that serve as its documents and manifestos. One of the first areas where gender inequality is directly addressed is undoubtedly literature, with the already mentioned female authors who lamented their lives that denied them the opportunity to create art as freely as men did. These accounts could not but make reference to history and politics that constructed the power relations and those gradually gave birth to the political agenda of feminism.

Any serious discussion on feminism inevitably leads to the question what feminism exactly stands for. It must be said that this movement has gained a great deal of attention in the general public, which led to its popularisation but also rendered diverse versions of its agenda. Namely, today's insistence on human rights that are advocated and protected by many organisations, especially in the West, has turned freedom and equality into a catchphrase, often used without any understanding of what it actually involves. However, it seems that feminism became an especially interesting

subject in popular culture, which gave to it new shades of meaning. Nevertheless, despite the significant numbers of supporters, feminism still faces a fierce opposition that sees it as a hostile organisation that aims at distorting the social system by erasing or disfiguring the notions of marriage, family, heterosexuality, childbearing, etc. This argument is supported by the descriptions of feminists as enraged, hysterical women who hate men, which is what the majority of those who oppose it believe. Furthermore, women who fight for this cause are most frequently described as being 'butch' or 'tomboys' and are expected to be lesbians. The novels that are the subject of this dissertation also provide good examples of these stereotypical accounts of feminists. Furthermore, the feminist struggle is generally seen as a sort of war between the sexes, although its goal is not to judge or persecute men but to ensure better conditions for women. However, the fight for a future of gender equality involves a reconsideration of the past and therefore of various literary and historical documents that reveal the underlying power hegemonies and dynamics of male-female relationships that were not, in most cases, equal or fair. This dissertation deals with authors that never declared themselves as feminists but were labelled as such by others, either critics or public, or both. Their novels focus on female characters who also contemplate their femininity and tackle issues such as, marriage, childbirth, abortion, sexuality, etc, that are usually dealt with within the framework of feminism. Finally, we reach the question from the beginning - who should be called a feminist? Those who consider themselves to be feminists, those who are labelled as feminists by others, those who write about women or simply everyone who believes in gender equality? This thesis does not directly answer this question but looks into the vagueness that today the term feminism carries and the ambivalence it still produces.

Most feminist or women's studies curricula begin with *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Freidan, the piece that is commonly credited with triggering the second wave of feminism in the USA. Friedan carried out a thorough research on lives of American housewives and found out that despite the material comfort, marriage and children, a big number of them felt unhappy. Friedan is still celebrated as one of the crucial figures of feminism because she had the courage to say that perhaps marriage and children are not enough. Furthermore, Friedan criticises the contents of women's magazines, mostly run by men, which insist on portraying the satisfaction that arises from housework and

glamourising the women's daily routine, hence making it more appealing. She rejects theories, such as Freud's, that women's destiny is defined by biology and that career women are neurotic due to "penis envy". In addition, she claims that the structure of education for women is different from the one for men, being based mostly on functionalism. She attributes this to the fear that too much education would ruin women's femininity or their sexual function.

A work that is one of the first attempts at providing a history of women's writing is *Literary Women* by Ellen Moers. It gives a review of texts of English and French literature dating back to the late 18th century. While many critics (e.g. Moi 2002) consider it to be merely a stepping stone that opened doors for more serious feminist literary histories, Morris (1994) singles it out for establishing links between the female authors who were contemporaries, underlining the need for the female friendship and support, as well as determining the special nature of the female voice: "Each of these gifted writers had her distinctive style; none imitated the others. But their sense of encountering in another woman's voice what they believed was the sound of their own is, I think, something special to literary women." (Moers, 1986: 66)

Cheryl L. Brown and Karen Olson in their anthology *Feminist Criticism: Essays on Theory, Poetry and Prose* deal primarily with criticism written by women about women authors and their work. Their conclusion is that the problem does not lie just in the difficulties of female authors to have their work published but that the same problems apply to works of female critics as well. "What women critics were writing about women's literature was not being published in respectable numbers and was not readily accessible to concerned students and teachers." (1978: xiii) Therefore, their anthology has only female contributors and introduces the trend of the women-centered approach. (Moi, 2002: 50)

The next book should not be omitted for it gave a tribute and opened doors to female authors who were not known to the wider audience. It is Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of their Own*. Showalter focused only on British novelists and included a wide range of authors from Brontë sisters to Doris Lessing. Besides giving recognition to authors out of the spotlight, this anthology deals with the peculiarities of women's writing as a subculture and elaborates on the reasons why it is not possible to speak of women authors as of a unified group. Namely, she casts light on historical and social

factors that impeded women's development of collective identity that would have allowed them to make more significant changes.

Gilbert and Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* focuses on the extremes of presenting women either as angelic or monsterlike. They reflect on the stereotypical image of female writers as mad women who write hysterically from the confines of their rooms. They see the monster women as a woman who rejects to be selfless and wants to tell her own story. It is one of the first instances of literary theory and criticism that deals with the fragmentation of identity and uses characters as "avatars" of the author's own self.

It is important to state that feminism is not a homogenous movement, it, by contrast, consists of many subgroups whose attitudes differ on subjects, such as marriage. There are, for instance, cultural feminists, who believe that women must establish an alternative women's culture to counter the dominant one, founded by men. They study women's participation in all kinds of art and believe in the spiritual strength of women. (Pandey, 2010) The radical feminists, on the other hand, seek to deconstruct the class/caste system, which is according to them, dependent on sex. (Pandey, 2010) On the subject of marriage, opinions vary from the more radical ones that consider it to be an "organised rape" to those who opine that the concept of marriage is in need of adjustment or simply demand more freedom for women, within or outside marriage. Nevertheless, what they all have in common is the consensus on the need of gender roles revision and the importance of female friendship and sisterhood.

The concept and implementation of feminism largely differ in different regions of the world. While in the West it is relatively coherent, its form in the Orient had to undergo some conceptual alterations. Namely, India saw the emergence of the feminist thought much later due to the general lack of awareness of women. The strict traditional customs of the Indian society left little space for change or even reevaluation. However, with the arrival of the British, the social climate began to change and India witnessed the awakening of women. What further differentiates between Indian and Western feminism is the fact that in India men were those who ushered the introduction of female rights. The members of the British gentry and higher classes of Indian officials stood up for the establishment of legal protection of women's rights.

In India the position was different. It is the male section of the

society that raised its voice against masculine tyranny. It was Raja

Ram Mohun Roy who raised his voice against the barbaric Sati system.

Legislative reforms like Sharda Act[2] and Hindu Code Bill[3] were

sponsored by men. Consequently, sufficient legal and constitutional

security has been ensured to women in the Directive Principles of

State in the Constitution of India.

(Pandey, 2010: 4)

When India obtained independence (1947), Indian women were granted equal rights by the constitution. Thus, Pandey (2010) concludes, women's movements did not need to act as aggressively as their Western counterparts. Nevertheless, gradually women in India realised that rights they were entitled to legally and formally in reality they were not able to use. Hence, the struggle of Indian feminists began and it also relied greatly on literary works, as did the Western one. The most common themes related to women's existence that Indian novelists took up is the experience of spinsters and widows, who are labelled as outcasts of society. When it comes to the critics who especially focus on the status of subaltern women, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak must be singled out for her sharp and compassionate elaborations on this particularly limited social group.

It should also be noted that black female authors, as well as black women in general, expressed hesitation to join or support feminism, perceiving it as a project intended for white women. They did not feel that their cause was covered by the agenda of feminism as they personally did not see their problems with oppression and discrimination resolved. According to many scholars, the key issue is the division between the white and black women which is rooted in the master: slave or the master: servant opposition, which existed for so long and repercussions of which are still felt. This absence of unity between black and white women is what most feminists see as the burning issue or a bone of contention within feminism itself and it is what prevents it from acquiring wider significance. Frequent complaints that black female authors and critics voice are related to the academic superiority of white women, who do not appear

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[2]Child Marriage Restraint Act 1929 popularly known as the Sarda Act fixed the age of marriage for girls at 14 years and boys at 18 years. See Gulati (1976)

[3] Several acts passed in the 1950s with the aim of reforming Hindu personal law . See Williams (2006)

solely as victims of sexism but as agents of racism, as well. What all of the black female activists agree on is that until white privileged women accept their share of responsibility for racial discrimination committed against black women, the feminist movement will not experience further consolidation or expansion. (see Hooks, 1989)

1.4 The Women's Issue in Postmodernism

This section will try to give some answers to the question of the relation between postmodernism and feminism, or more precisely, deal with the ways in which postmodernism treats women, both as authors and as characters. Being contradictory in its essence, postmodernist theory does not give clear answers. One of the reasons for this is that many theorists within the movement still hold different stands regarding the position of women in the postmodernist agenda. It is a widespread belief that the literature on women is more concerned with the content than form or style. Many critics believe that postmodernism's concern with stylistic experimentation does not enable women authors to express their ideas. (see Felski, 1989 and Hite, 1989) Ann-Jannine Morey adds that what was labelled by the androcentric establishment as "innovative" or "radical" may be generally irrelevant to women's writing. (2000: 248) As a consequence of the incompatibility of postmodernism's emphasis on form and feminist concerns and "for having found themselves silenced in most postmodern discourses by phallogocentric structures, some feminist theorists have chosen to bypass postmodern discussion for more fruitful engagement elsewhere." (Morey, 2000: 259) Nevertheless, if we take a look at the postmodernism's primary goal - challenging the old canons - we perceive a link with the feminist agenda. Namely, both frameworks are intent on bringing about change and expanding the boundaries of knowledge. Furthermore, they share the need to question and confront history and acknowledge the existence of other versions. Morey says,

> (...) the content of women's writing (which may or may not
>
> employ experimentation) offers a radical challenge to conventional
>
> canonical universes. Contemporary women's writing makes knowing

use of metaphoric duplicity of language in order to dissolve (without

entirely destroying) the authoritative boundaries of traditional,

Western knowledge about meaning and the ultimate nature of things.

(2000: 248)

It is relevant to include here the idea of two different types of postmodernism: an oxymoronic "traditional postmodernism" and an ambiguously situated "feminist postmodernism". The traditional kind "retains its lock upon traditional Western gender constructions" although it is keen on "experimentation with form-meaning structures". (Morey, 2000: 258) The need for a female version of postmodernism is supported by a study on women readers and postmodernism carried out by Elizabeth Long. The study focused on white middle-class women's reading groups. The findings indicated that "educated and articulate female respondents (were) reading for realism, self-knowledge and morally significant characters (...) while dismissing the products of postmodernism with its decentered and fragmented selves as 'incoherent' and 'uninteresting.' " (Morey, 2000: 259) Morey proposes an answer for these surprising results by claiming that "the female reader and writer occupy a different location relative to representation and postmodernist issues than the male reader and writer, hence the necessity of distinguishing feminist postmodernism from its traditional masculinist variation." (2000: 259) Hutcheon, nevertheless, considers the gap between postmodernism and feminism to be significantly smaller. As a matter of fact, she sees feminism as a "shaping force of postmodernism" (In Morey, 2000: 260) In *Poetics of Postmodernism* Hutcheon states that postmodernism and feminism "share a concern for power - its manifestations, its appropriation, its positioning, its consequences, its languages", and they are trying to "challenge our traditional essentialised anchors in God, father, state and Man through the acknowledgement of the particular and different." (Hutcheon in Morey, 2000: 260)

1.5. The Women's Issue in Postcolonialism

The position of postcolonial female writers is also increasingly difficult as it is the case with their black counterparts. Namely, faced with the cultural appropriation and imposed assimilation during colonisation, Third-world authors responded by creating texts rather nationalist in nature. The goal was to preserve and enhance a feeling of national identity in times of political and social crises. However, authors and critics seem to have excluded female colleagues and what is more, omitted references to the female identity whatsoever. Hence, women who wanted to voice their concerns found themselves in an ungrateful position since any criticism directed at the male efforts in fighting colonialism would have seemed as disavowing their national identity. Furthermore, the proclamation of the feminist agenda was a risky move since it meant accepting and affirming Western values. Thus, Third-world women had little space for self-affirmation, being trapped between two opposing currents, imperialism and nationalism and finding themselves on the margins of both.

> However, in the postcolonial context it is very difficult for African,
> Indian, Caribbean, Egyptian or any 'third-world' woman to criticise
> such writing without being accused of (and indeed herself feeling) a
> lack of identification with national values and traditions. Even the
> position 'feminist' is a difficult one for 'third-world' women since it is
> so closely associated with American and European women.
>
> (Morris, 1994: 178)

Among the many similarities that postcolonial and black literary criticism share is that in both the struggle against the oppressor actually seems to be centered on men and their fight for taking over power. Although their battle against racism flourishes on the rhetoric of freedom and equality, they seem to shun it when gender discrimination is in question, unambiguously confirming the existence of double standards for men and women. "Despite the cultural focus of postcolonial theory, however, its two most influential writers, Frantz Fanon and Edward Said almost wholly ignored the experience and role of women as colonised people." (Morris, 1994: 177)

2. TONI MORRISON'S AUTHORSHIP

Toni Morrison produced some ground-breaking literary work during her prolific career, in terms of both, content and style, writing compelling stories about the lives of those on the margins of society - blacks and women. She is a winner of the prestigious Pulitzer Prize (1988) and the Nobel Prize for literature (1993). Her work was welcomed by critics and readers, being a compact mélange of art and politics. Besides novels, she is most acclaimed for, Morrison also produced critical works, such as *Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature* and *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and Literary Imagination*, wrote books for children and delivered numerous memorable speeches. In *Playing in the Dark* and *Unspeakable Things Unspoken* she reflects on her experience of being a writer, but also looks into the treatment of black identity in American fiction. She embarks on a search for the ways of creating and erasing identities and is determined to reveal how literature condoned or opposed discrimination. Her focus is set on the group perhaps the most discriminated against - black women. Their lives, in which they must deal with racial and sexual discrimination on a daily basis, provided an excellent foundation for Morrison's literary agenda. Apart from being a successful artist, Morrison is also a very perceptive observer and critic of social trends and politics. Her novels and literary criticism dwell on the issues of oppression, cultural appropriation and stereotyping. Singled out for its fierce commentaries on oppressive power hegemonies, her literary and social ideology are often brought into connection with feminism and black nationalism.

Morrison tackles the problem of being a female author nowadays, a black woman author, to be precise. Most of her novels feature female protagonists, which reveals her special interest in the construction of female psyche. She usually places her heroines in all-women communities in order to explore relationships between women, primarily the mother-daughter relationship and female friendship. Her female characters are bold, audacious and often border on madness. Their actions are contested by the wider community as they refuse to comply with strictly defined gender roles. Their rebellious nature is often seen as unearthly and demonic so they are excellent examples of social labelling of women as 'monsters' or 'witches'- the labels most often associated

with free-thinking women.

When it comes to the structure of her texts, they can be read through lenses of various theoretical perspectives, including feminism, postmodernism and postcolonialism, which will be applied in this dissertation. They are not just literary, but also political and critical texts that should be read at different levels. Careful reading of her work reveals common features and recurrent motifs, such as the ambivalence of motherhood, the complex nature of female friendships, mythical power and social powerlessness of women, traumatic effects of repressed memory, haunted past, residual effects of slavery, etc.

2.1. Morrison's View on African Heritage and
the Place of Black Literature in the USA

Morrison takes pride in her African heritage and insists on including elements of African cultural tradition into her work. She openly speaks about cultural appropriation and misrepresentation the black culture is exposed to. She is adamant when claiming that those who are non-black cannot understand and speak of the experiences the black community has undergone. She argues that none other but blacks can give themselves a voice to shape their identities. She is clear when she claims that black literature cannot be studied as part of American literature, having in mind the discriminatory nature of the traditional literary canon. Therefore, Morrison has herself produced literary criticism with the aim to shed light on the special historical, political and social circumstances in which black literature was shaped and which should therefore be taken into account when analysing it. As a matter of fact, the core of her literary creations in fact consists of discarded fragments and silenced voices of history. Narrators of her stories are those who in reality had no right to speak, let alone address an audience. However, she acknowledges that the tables have turned and that blacks have managed to obtain a voice of their own, which finally allows them to speak for themselves and become the subject of their own narratives. In *Unspeakable Things Unspoken* she claims that blacks are not, in fact, "Other", but choices.

Now that Afro-American artistic presence has been "discovered"

actually to exist, now that serious scholarship has moved from silencing

the witness and easing their meaningful place in and contribution to

American culture. It is no longer acceptable merely to imagine us and imagine

for us. We have always been imagining ourselves. We are not Isak Dineren's

"aspects of nature", nor Conrad's unspeaking. We are the subject of our own

narrative, witnesses to and participants in our own experience, and in no way

coincidentally in the experience of those with whom we have come in

contact. We are not, in fact, "Other". We are choices

.

(Morrison, 1988: 133)

Thus, she opens history to revision, supplementing it with the missing parts that were meant to be forgotten. Consequently, the body of her texts poses a threat to the established social formations and approved versions of history. In light of those circumstances, it is clear why she is such a strong proponent of black literary theory and criticism. In her essay *Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature* Morrison presents the traditional canon as a "protected preserve" of the works of "White men", which according to Andrea Dimino marks her entry into an academic debate in which "the combatants seek to defend the canon or to transform it." (Dimino, 1997: 38) With the recently accessible perspectives of the black intelligentsia which contest its supremacy over truth, it is clear that the supporters of the traditional canon must struggle to retain the status quo. Morrison expresses her views on what is a writer's role and says that writers must transform politics into "intelligible, accessible, yet artistic modes of discourse." (In Dimino, 1997: 40) Similarly to Edward Said, whose work she admires, she aims to expose the links between "canon building" and "Empire building" (Dimino, 1997: 40)

Canon building is empire building. Canon defense is national

defense. Canon debate, whatever the terrain, nature and range (of criticism,

of the history of knowledge, of the definition of language, the universality

of aesthetic principles, the sociology of art, the humanistic imagination),

is the clash of cultures. And all of the interests are vested. (Morrison, 1988: 132)

She is adamant that literature reflects the political ideologies and accuses the American literature of the 19th century to be a mirror of the same restrictions and codes imposed on the black that enabled the white population to devise a satisfying sense of nationhood.

> It has occurred to me that the very manner by which American
> literature distinguishes itself as a coherent entity exists because of this
> unsettled and unsettling population. Just as the formulation of the
> nation   necessitated coded language and purposeful restriction to deal
> with the racial   disingenuousness and   moral frailty at its heart, so too did
> the literature, whose founding characteristics extended into the
> twentieth century, reproduce the necessity for codes and restriction.
>
> (Morrison, 1992: 5,6)

With regard to her attitudes on the issue of race and literature, Morrison places significant emphasis not just on its importance for the writings of blacks, but also for shaping and distinguishing the white literary project. She opines that although the black identity was to the biggest extent missing in the American literature of the 19th century, that its absence or shadow shaped "the choices, the language, the structure, the meaning of so much American literature." (Morrison, 1988: 135, 136) She describes the search for the African presence in American literature as "a search, in other words, for the ghost in the machine." (Morrison, 1988: 136)

One of the reasons why black literary criticism did not see eye to eye with its Euro-American counterpart is the latter's insistence on the separation of the literary text from its author. (Peach, 2000: 1) According to Peach, black writers needed to reclaim the identity and narrative voice in "countering centuries of dispossession and misrepresentation." (2000: 1)

2.2. The Importance of Language and Writing
for Morrison

Toni Morrison allocates a big role in writing to language. She sees writing as "an act of language" but also first of all, as "an effort of the will to discover." (Morrison, 1988: 146) In her critical works she expresses her love of the creative power of language but also deals with the ways the language defines gender or difference. In *Playing in the Dark* she describes her struggles with language in creating black identity.

> I cannot rely on these metaphorical shortcuts because I am a black
> writer struggling with and through a language that can powerfully
> evoke enforce hidden signs of racial superiority, cultural hegemony,
> and dismissive "othering" of people and language which are by no means
> marginal or already and completely known and knowable in my work.

(Morrison, 1992: xi)

Morrison is open about her audience and says that she is writing for black women. As a primary reason, she cites her own experience of being a black woman, which she cannot distance herself from when writing. Although she does not hold any grudges toward white women, she is among the black female authors who believe that traditional feminism is actually white feminism that failed to address problems of black women. She also looks back on her personal experience of being a woman writer and comments, "I am valuable as a writer because I am a woman, because women, it seems to me, have some special knowledge about certain things." (McKey in Peach, 2000: 13) Indeed, Morrison places significant emphasis on the special kind of knowledge and power women have access to throughout her novels. Her characters absorb knowledge from myths and their connections with forces of nature and inner instincts. Besides describing the particularity of being a woman writer, Morrison also writes about being a black woman writer, which involves other social dimensions. In *Playing in the Dark* she reveals how, being a coloured woman writer, she has to think about the amount f freedom assigned to her: "(…) how free I can be as an African-American woman writer

in my genderised, sexualised, wholly raciallised world." (In Peach, 2000: 10) Furthermore, she argues that black women writers address different issues and use approaches different from those of white women writers or both black and white male authors. She also assigns different intentions to their writings. "I write for black women. We are not addressing men, as some white female writers do. We are not attacking each other, as both black and white men do. Black women writers look at things in an unforgiving/loving way. They are writing to repossess, rename, reown." (McKey in Peach, 2000: 13) Although critics have made references to her work as feminist, she has never identified her ideology as such. She opines that imagination requires freedom from any strictly defined categories.

> In order to be as free as I possibly can, in my own imagination,
> I can't take positions that are closed. Everything I've ever done,
> in the writing world, has been to expand articulation, rather than to
> close it, to open doors, sometimes, not even closing the book –
> leaving the endings open for interpretation, revisitation, a little
> ambiguity. I detest and loathe those categories.

> (Morrison in Jaffrey, 2008: 140)

2.3. Morrison and Ideologies

Morrison is careful about the implications that belonging to a particular ideological movement could involve. In case of feminism, she voices concerns that defining her works as feminist could render them repellent to readership. Although she is a supporter of the fight against patriarchy, Morrison does not believe in taking refuge in any kind of extreme counter-attack. She insists that her view of a better society is the one of equality, the freedom of choice and more opportunities for all. "It's off-putting to some readers, who may feel that I'm involved in writing some kind of feminist tract. I don't subscribe to patriarchy, and I don't think it should be substituted with matriarchy. I think it's a question of equitable access, and opening doors to all sorts of things."

(Morrison in Jaffrey, 2008) Speaking about her experiences as a woman and as a black person, she cannot determine which role had more impact on her work. She believes it is the unique combination of both categories that provided her with a very distinctive perspective.

> I think I merged those two words, black and feminist, growing
> up, because I was surrounded by black women who were very tough
> and very aggressive and who always assumed they had to work and rear
> children and manage homes. They had enormously high expectations of
> their, daughters and cut no quarter with us; it never occurred to me that
> that was feminist activity.
>
> (Morrison in Jaffrey, 2008: 142)

Morrison admits she has a problem with categories and labels and finds this to be one of the reasons she is reluctant to think of herself as a feminist. In recalling her childhood, she elaborates on many practices of black women that only later received the label 'feminist', such as female friendship. Writing about the courage and sorority of black women that existed long before feminism was born, Morrison demonstrates that feminist practices were actually applied even before its official theoretical agenda. With hindsight, she realised that black women were actually what later came to be known as 'feminists'.

> So I was surrounded by people who took both of those roles seriously.
> Later, it was called 'feminist' behavior. I had a lot of trouble with those
> definitions, early on. And I wrote some articles about that, and I wrote
> Some articles about that, and I wrote 'Sula', really, based on this
> theoretically brand new idea, which was: Women should be friends,
> with one another. And in the community in which I grew up, there were
> women who would choose the company of a female friend over a man,
> anytime. They were really 'sisters', in that sense.
>
> (Morrison in Jaffrey, 2008: 142, 143)

2.4. Black Women vs. White Women and
the Shortcomings of Feminism

The position of black women writers is indeed a precarious one - they are the most marginalised group and yet have the biggest task at hand - to fulfill all the holes in historical narratives with their silenced black, female voices. Although there are undoubtedly many parallels between experiences of oppression for women worldwide, there still remain prominent differences, as well as the uneven presence in literary and critical circles. Nevertheless, it appears that postcolonial theory and black literature have more ground in common when it comes to the issue of women, having in mind the similarities of their equally silenced pasts.

One of the most renowned black feminists of today Bell Hooks elaborates on the position of black women in traditional feminism and gives guidelines for further consolidation of their agendas. In *Talking Back* Hooks describes the ways in which black women are excluded from the feminist criticism, as both subjects and objects and dwells on the consequences of the white academic elitism. She perceives the tendency to produce and present literary theory and criticism as complicated and hard to grasp, which renders them inaccessible to a wide range of social groups that could otherwise benefit from them. Hooks considers this tendency subversive to feminist scholarship. (1989: 36) Thus, she insists that feminist theory should be shaped and conveyed in a more accessible way so as to come across as relevant and approachable. She urges for the consolidation within the feminist movement and stresses the need for its engagement within the black community. "When one girl in four is a victim of male incest, one woman in three is raped, and half of all married women are victims of male violence, addressing ways men and women interact with one another daily must be a concern of a feminist." (Hooks, 1989: 130)

Furthermore, Hooks admits that black women are reluctant to join or support the feminist movement because they do not feel that it is addressing them in any respect. In order for feminism to be made into a coherent movement with social and political influence, Hooks argues, there must be a common understanding on what feminism stands for. To that end, she proposes that feminism be defined broadly as a "movement

to end sexism and sexist oppression." and holds that this formulation would allow the establishment of a common political goal. (1989: 23) Finally, Hooks claims that with the aim of reaching a program of unified feminism that would encompass the participation of black women, it is vital to acknowledge the role white women have as oppressors. Namely, although they are also discriminated against by men on the basis of their gender, white women are not only victims but also oppressors. Hooks attributes this phenomenon to the old servant-served opposition that still lingers in relationships between white and black women on a daily basis.

> At times the insistence that feminism is really a 'white female
> thing that has nothing to do with black women' masks the black
> female rage towards white women, a rage rooted in the historical
> servant-served relationship where white women have used power to
> dominate, exploit and oppress
>
> .   (Hooks, 1989: 179)

She attributes this power inequality between females to the pervasive influence of media, which link the concepts of beauty, self-confidence and success with the images of white women exclusively. "Black women's consciousness is shaped by internalised racism and by reactionary white women's concerns as they are expressed in popular culture, such as daytime soap operas or in the world of white fashion and cosmetics products, which masses of black women consume without rejecting this racist propaganda and devaluing of black women." (Hooks, 1989: 179) Hooks's feminist perspective can be applied to Morrison's female characters since they express similar concerns regarding the position of black women in society. Namely, both, Morrison and Hooks, place the biggest emphasis on family as the basis for development and explore the long-term consequences of family abuse. "If we cannot convince the mothers and/or fathers who care not to humiliate and degrade us, how can we imagine convincing or resisting an employer, a lover, a stranger who systematically humiliates and degrades?" (Hooks, 1989: 22)

Hooks and Morrison agree that the root of family abuse in black communities lies in the dehumanisation of the black man who feels powerless and humiliated when he cannot perform his manly duties. The best example is Pecola's father (*The Bluest*

Eye), who sexually abuses her, propelled by his own impotence in the world of white subjugation. "The seemingly positive aspects of the patriarchy (caretaker and provider) have been the most difficult for masses of black men to realise, and the negative aspects (maintaining control through psychological or physical violence) are practiced daily." (Hooks, 1989: 178)

Finally, Hooks underlines the need for feminist action that would benefit not just women worldwide but would be a platform for social freedom and equality in general. She reminds that gender oppression is the most common kind of oppression today. "Feminist struggle to end patriarchal domination should be of primary importance to women and men globally not because it is the foundation of all other oppressive structures but because it is the form of domination we are most likely to encounter in an ongoing way in everyday life." (Hooks, 1989: 21)

2.5. Morrison's Female Characters and Concerns

Morrison's heroines are typically young women who fight with remnants of their oppressive past, both in real life and in their souls and are also discarded by the black community and other black women for their contempt of the black imitation of the white man's patterns of life. They do not conform to the expectations of their communities and do not wish to fulfill the stereotypical gender roles. They are bold enough to give their personal definitions of freedom and happiness that do not necessarily include marriage, family and motherhood. The women in Morrison's fiction establish all-women households where they live with their mothers, grand-mothers and sisters, thus revealing the dynamics of these relationships. Susan Willis noted and named this pattern in Morrison's novels 'three-women utopian households' (In Duvall, 1997: 41) According to Duvall, these households serve as a "space for mediation on the sexual politics of the community." (1997: 10) He also maintains that the three-women household is a site of the mediation on the alternative spirituality of the maternal body that may be a counterforce to the patriarchal world of Christianity. However, he states that such a revolutionary move requires the support and participation of a larger female

community that needs to be spiritually integrated. And understanding and support between women is exactly what is missing in all of her novels. (Duvall, 1997: 11) Despite their family ties, her characters all struggle to define themselves as individuals and might at times appear selfish and self-centered. By offering this kind of community as an alternative for the nuclear family, Morrison criticises the black appropriation of this social structure of the whites and suggests that it is not an ideal solution for the blacks. "The dysfunction of the nuclear family is particularly freighted for Morrison, since she sees African-Americans who attempt to live within its frame as inauthentically trying to assimilate to the values of white culture." (Duvall, 1997: 11) Although she does not express any contempt of men, Morrison gives them little space and focuses on the conflicts between women, instead. Indeed, her heroines do not seem to be held in check by men, but by other women's judgment and resentment. Hence, she writes about envy, possessiveness, pride and the insistence on Christian Puritanism, which torment women and leave virtually no space for the freedom of thought. Perhaps even stronger than in the case of white women is the stereotype of a black homemaker. Known as extremely obedient and diligent, black women were praised as house help in homes of wealthy white people, like Pauline Breedlove in *The Bluest Eye*. As the novel suggests, having no other options for decent employment, black women enjoyed working in other people's households because it gave them an opportunity to get some recognition for their work, recognition they almost never received at home. Working as housekeepers, they acquired some insight into the world of white people, and could for a short while immerse themselves in the beauty of comfort and abundance they were deprived of. However, the stereotype of black women as good only for house-keeping and giving birth remained present for too long and is yet another marker of the underlying white supremacy Morrison has set out to expose. Although in trying to obtain self-definition and claim ownership over their lives these protagonists often find themselves in confrontations, Morrison insists on the female unity and friendship, which is evident in the ending of the novels *Love* and *Sula*. In order to counter the importance placed on the institution of marriage in the Euro-American world, she demonstrates how these women have found their actual soulmates not in their husbands but in each other. However, brainwashed by the Western pattern of happiness, they fail to acknowledge that and are deprived of each other's love. Desperately attempting to meet the demands society has

put on them, they usually take on two patterns of behaviour. Either they try to play the role of a perfect wife and mother or they opt for a life of defiance and experimentation, both of which leave them unsatisfied and emotionally drained. The best example would be the characters of Nel and Sula, who try to deal with the limitations of their race and gender in completely different ways and at the end both seem unhappy. Their destinies show that the options for women at that time were rather limited in scope since they could choose only between a life of selfless sacrifice or a life of selfish defiance that involved being labelled with a scarlet letter. In her dealing with the subject of victimisation, Morrison seeks to expose all the ways and social norms that oppress women and suggests that the oppression of and aggression towards them take place on many levels and are psychologically much more difficult to overcome than those men face. As a case in point, Seth points out the horrors of being a female slave. "(...) by focusing on every phase of a slave woman's life, from infancy to childhood, from girlhood to motherhood, and on to old age, *Beloved* makes brutally clear that aside from the 'equality of oppression' that black men and women suffered, black women were also oppressed as women." (Grewal, 1996) Besides the regular toil and inhumane life conditions, slave women were also exposed to sexual harassment, abuse and humiliation. Gurlen Grewal notes, "they were routinely subjected to rape, enforced childbirth, and natal alienation from their children. As Morrison's novel shows, physical abuse is humiliating, but the added emotional plan of a mother is devastating." (1996: 6) It can thus be concluded that Morrison insists on portraying the burdens of being a woman, regardless of whether they were free or slaves.

The primary dimension that distinguishes women from men and especially marks the female body is motherhood. It is the only power given to women that is denied to men. It is the natural order that cannot be contested by the force of patriarchal law. It is the power that sometimes emerges in the form of a blessing and sometimes it comes as a curse or punishment. Motherhood is a woman's privilege that simultaneously imposes rules and expectations. Nonetheless, it is the power that gave rise to mythical depictions of women as goddesses, witches or even monsters. The motif of motherhood is a recurrent one in mythology, from the love of Demetra for her daughter Persephone, she could not let go, to the evil mother, Kali. Morrison depicts motherhood realistically, without any pretense of idealism or sugarcoating. She represents it as the deepest love

and a life-long connection but also as a sacrifice not every woman is ready to make. De Weever observes that Morrison's novels feature a range of mythical mother figures, such as the nurturing mother who devours her children (e.g. Sethe) as an answer to the stereotype of the black mother. (Peach, 2000: 14) According to Peach, 'the black mammy' is an especially damaging stereotype because it legitimises the association of black women with motherhood as their only function. (2000: 14) Thus, Morrison openly writes about women who do not wish to become mothers and decide to build their own personalities instead. A case in point is Sula, who dismisses her grand-mother's suggestions to marry and start a family by replying, "I don't want to make somebody else, I want to make myself." Peach adds that it is not surprising that many black women writers do not give conventional accounts of motherhood as "romantic" but instead opt for heroines who "seek psychic development on their own terms". (2000: 15) The biggest form of rebellion, however, is Sethe's decision to murder her own children so as to save them from becoming slaves. Her determination not to define herself as a breeder of slaves was so strong that she rather chose death for her children. Her act of madness is a painful testimony of the psychological horrors of slavery that made her choose death over it. Morrison's heroines have to find ways of dealing with loss, personal and the inherited one. They have to deal with the demons from the past, brought about by the traumatic experiences of their enslaved ancestors. This phenomenon matches Jung's theory of the collective unconscious, in which he argues that every woman extends backwards into her mother and forward into her daughter, which means that every mother contains her daughter in herself and every daughter contains her mother. Thus, Morrison's metaphors regarding maternity could be understood as archetypes of the mother, presumably the first and strongest of all archetypes. According to Jung, archetypes are "living psychic forces that demand to be taken seriously". He adds, "an archetypal content expresses itself, first and foremost, in metaphors." (In Grewal, 1996 :15) However, the images of haunting and the spirit of Beloved could also be explained with the Freudian principle of "the return of the repressed" or with a West African belief that holds that the dead live as long as they are remembered. Hence, remembering and storytelling are ways of keeping the hungry dead alive. (Grewal, 1996) In the essay *Stabat Mater* Kristeva gives her own powerful definition of motherhood, "A mother is a continuous separation, a division of the very

flesh, consequently a division of language." (In Grewal 1986) It emphasises the painful side of motherhood, the experience of separation and loss.

Another issue Morrison is trying to deconstruct in her novels is female sexuality. As women, her heroines are forced to give their sexuality some purpose. Those who decide to abide by the social norms, have children, like Nel, while others might seek meaning and fulfillment in promiscuity, like Sula. Some of them have liberal definitions of sexuality, like Sula's mother, Hannah, but the biggest sin of all that the black community does not ever pardon is having sexual relations with white men. That act is the most despised one and it made Sula the target of all the wrath the community was capable of. It made people stay away from her like she was infected by plague or was the devil himself. They interpreted her actions as the repudiation and mockery of their national pride, they were building up for centuries. It is yet another proof that a woman's sexuality is considered to be public, since the ways one employs it seem to have the power to offend, enrage or embarrass the entire community. By contrast, male bodies and sexuality are rarely a topic of any conversation or public consideration, except in a playful or boastful way. Male sexuality is seen as yet another task they should perform, the more the better, and by doing so, prove their normality. Male promiscuity fits the pattern of a powerful, masculine, determined man who is in control. In control of what or who? And what is the connection between a man's sexual urge and his desire to establish control? However, the fact that female sexuality is susceptible to public scrutiny has led Sula to use it in order to make a statement - a statement of reclaiming her body and ignoring the rules imposed on women. It was already mentioned that Morrison's female characters live in female communities and are linked with mythical descriptions of women, with the special emphasis on the characters of grand-mothers who are thought to have supernatural powers or knowledge of rituals and laws of nature, like Baby Suggs in *Beloved*, or are seen as ordinary but very powerful characters, like Eva in *Sula*. They are worshiped by entire communities and their houses are places of gatherings, where people come asking for help when in need. These characters are portrayed as some kind of female priestess, endowed with special powers of understanding and healing others. What is more, they are the ones who establish homes for their families and build life from nothing. It could be argued that in this respect they indeed deserve the label of 'miracle-workers'. In *New Dimensions of*

Spirituality Demetrakopoulos and Holloway (1987) note that Morrison's novels feature "a celebration of African archetypes", among which is the Great Mother, as the embodiment of nature and wisdom. In the light of Jung's theory developed in *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious,* when the archetype of the mother is transferred to the grandmother, it becomes even more powerful and consequently, grandmothers are associated with the qualities of wisdom or, in some cases, even witchcraft. They embody the common duality between good and evil and are portrayed as malevolent as well. This brings to mind the binary opposition theory, which seems to be ingrained in the perception of all females. (virgin-whore; angel-devil; fairy-witch)

Apart from focusing on the characters who are trying to find adequate self-definitions in a highly racialised and genderised world, Morrison also dwells on the phenomenon of blacks' self-hatred. She argues that the ideals of white popular culture which impose the standards of beauty imply that white is beautiful, while black is ugly. The media propaganda managed to inculcate this harmful mantra into generations of black girls and women. "Throughout the narrative, the materials of mass culture are used to define the white standard and to preclude any black self-definition." (Byerman, 1997: 133) The perfect example of the detrimental effect of the racially coloured popular trends is the self-hatred of Pecola's (*The Bluest Eye),* which later transformed into madness. Surrounded by products, such as dolls and sweets loaded with ideological messages of the white consumer society, Pecola realises her image does not fit the standards of beauty or popularity and consequently, does not manage to establish and maintain the feeling of self-worth. Seeing hatred in everybody else's eyes, she developed it herself. Her self-loathing culminated as severe madness when she started imagining she had blue eyes and talking to herself. Her only hope of acceptance was to somehow get blue eyes as those of Shirley Temple, who everybody loved. "White dollars, Mary Jane candies, movies, advertising, and most important in this study of daughters, Shirley Temple all embody presence in the text, against which blackness is an absence." (Byerman, 1997: 133) Speaking of the presence of race in the dominant culture, Morrison observes:

> The habit of ignoring race is understood to be a graceful, even
> generous, liberal gesture. To notice is to recognise an already
> discredited difference. To enforce its invisibility through silence is to

allow the black body a shadowless participation in the dominant cultural

body. According to this logic, every well-bred instinct argues against

noticing and forecloses adult discourse.

(Morrison, 1992: 9, 10)

Morrison argues that self-hatred is passed on and down, creating a circle of hatred among the black community. The feelings of powerlessness and humiliation, brought about by white supremacy, created a powerful need for violence that they could inflict on nobody else but themselves. In that way, the circle of violence among the blacks is established. Men, who feel mentally castrated, exercise violence on their wives and daughters, realising they cannot give them anything else they are expected to provide as men. Frantz Fannon argued for the need of retaliation and the use of violence against the oppressors as the only means of regaining not just freedom but the right to live like a human being. Among his reasons for the use of counter-violence he includes self-hatred and aggression within the black community. In *Wretched of the Earth* he is adamant when saying that if the aggression is not directed toward the source of it, that is, the oppressor, it will be misdirected, breeding more hatred and aggression among the blacks themselves. "The native's weapon is proof of its humanity. For in the first days of the revolt you must kill - to shoot down a white man is to kill two birds with one stone, to destroy an oppressor and the man he oppresses at the same time." (1986: 24) For Fanon, violence is a vital means of psychic and social liberation. (Edwards, 2008: 69) "Violence is man recreating himself: the native cures himself through force of arms." (Fanon, 1986: 23) Edwards describes the circle of violence within the black community, "the cycle of violence begins as white-on-black violence and then moves into the black community and continues as black-on-black violence." (Edwards, 2008: 71) Furthermore, as it is the case in postcolonial literature, there are those who resort to imitating the oppressor and acquiring his language and culture in order to obtain social and economic status. They renounce their national and cultural identities with the aim of becoming accepted by the oppressor as one of their own. In such pursuits, they are often in charge of some ruthless tasks, such as, punishing and betraying their own so as to prove their devotion. This kind of behaviour is also motivated by the strong feeling of sell-hatred and hatred towards one's own origins. In climbing up the career ladder, these

people spread contempt for their own culture and do their best to annihilate it. They would boast with their lighter skins and white ancestors, trying to prove they have managed to remove blackness of themselves. A good example is Bill Cosy, a successful hotelier in the novel *Love*, who set up and ran a seaside resort for the wealthy and never allowed his black personnel to mingle with the guests. Although he himself was black, he was a racist who acquired the ways of the white people and liked to pretend to be one of them. "Moreover, Chinweizu's thesis that some African people have been so brainwashed by European propaganda that self-hatred characterises the African petty bourgeoise must have encouraged Morrison to pursue her interest in what drove some African-Americans to seek a white American identity." (Peach, 2000: 6)

2.6. Morrison and Postmodernism

Morrison's novels are labelled as postmodern primarily due to some of the characteristics of her style. Namely, she prefers circular narration to the linear one and uses it as a technique for reviewing the past. This kind of perspective sheds a new light on history, which becomes reinscribed. Her narrators take us on a journey of revelation, through a haze of fragmented memory and retrospection. She avoids the first person narration in order to grant some privacy and mystery to her protagonists, who after all remain beyond the full grasp. Her puzzling and sometimes completely irrational heroines point to the fact that truth is evasive even though they themselves are trying to find it. Their quest for the truth could be summed up as a quest for personal meaning, for some purpose in life. Her characters are marginal, decentered subjects whose insightfulness verges on the insanity. Peach argues that the core of black writing resides in the perception of the individual as "the subject of a political state, susceptible to the forces of control through language or discourse." (2000: 30) Morrison's use of the so-called slave narratives, besides having a powerful effect on readers, was intended to portray slaves from their own perspective and persuade readers they were "human beings worthy of God's grace and to encourage them to press for the abolition of slavery." (Peach, 2000: 24) Thus, her narrative techniques were not only employed for

the sake of the style but were also conducive to raising awareness about the importance of the battle for human rights. Perez-Tores observes the place of postmodernism in Morrison's writing and comments: "It filters the absent or marginalised oral discourse of a pre-capitalist black community through the self-conscious discourse of the contemporary novel." (In Peach, 2000: 20) Denis Ekpo comments on the relevance of postmodernism for the entire African-American writing: "postmodernism in providing reconceptualisation, reconstruction or reiteration of African perceptions of the West might actually offer a route out of the Afrocentric ideal of contemporary African cultural and strategic thoughts." (In Peach, 2000: 20) Morrison wanted to demonstrate that contrary to some belief, black people were capable of expressing complex ideas and storytelling. She also tackles the issue of illiteracy by implying that depriving blacks of education was part of the enslavement project, which maintained prejudices about their natural intellectual inferiority.

Her exploration and redefinition of history is also typical of the postmodern, as she refuses to accept it as a canon and is determined to challenge its authenticity. By giving voices to those who were silenced through history, she provides us with the missing pieces of the puzzle, which is the past. In her narration past is treated like yet another character because through her revision, she enables it to come alive in the present day. it exists in the present and seems to be alive. Furthermore, in analysing the relationship of the individual with the community, she depicts the consequences of history in both, private and public life. Steven Connor claims that the novel is not "passively marked with the imprint of history" but is also "one of the ways in which history is made and remade." (In Peach, 2000: 22) Connors adds, "the processes of writing and reading novels are not fully distinct or finally distinguishable from the forms and processes of conflict, deliberation and evaluation that belong to the social, economic or political realms" (In Peach, 2000: 22) When we analyse the relationship of Morrison's heroines with history and past, we perceive that their rather independent and isolated functioning on their own terms can be defined as existence on the "edge of culture". For Rigney, "the edge of culture" refers to "the wild zone just outside of and beyond history, the province of women, mythic figures who are not themselves actors in history but necessary mediators between biology and history, conservators of myth." (1991: 67) Jill Matus in her study on Morrison, *Toni Morrison: Contemporary World*

Writers, states that Morrison's fiction represents a rich testimony to the past and to the special ways in which imaginative literature can speak of the past. (in Peach, 2000: 22) Rigney argues that Morrison reinscribes femininity, identity and also history that are less individual than racial and national. She adds that the history as a construct in Morrison's novels is a psychic and mythic history and a feminine subtext, the one that Cixous and Clement describe in *The Newly Born Woman* as "a history, taken from what is lost within us of oral tradition, of legends and myths - a history arranged the way tale-telling women tell it." (Rigney, 1991: 61) Remembering proves as harmful to Morrison's heroines for it forces them to face the repressed traumatic experiences and what is more, prevent them from living in the present, which according to Grewal (1996), they cannot afford due to the demands of daily life. Caruth (1995) elaborates on this phenomenon of a repressed trauma by stating that a traumatic event is not experienced when it occurs, but is actually triggered only in connection with another place, and in another time. Morrison's concept of the past can be described by using Derrida's term as an "unfolding of presence" since it is a "past that has never been present and is more the product of construction than recollection." (Peach, 2000: 26)

Morrison was faced with a difficult task imposed on her by the choice of her narrators and characters. Namely, she had to devise a language for speaking about the unspeakable. Thus, her novels consist of a great deal of showing and implying and at the same time they demand significant participation from the reader, who is meant to pay attention to subtle insinuations and read between the lines. Writing or narrating about taboos and horrors such as incest, rape and murdering of your own children cannot be straight-forward. It requires careful examination of the past and sometimes even the help of the visitors from the past. Similarly to other postmodern writers, Morrison had to create a discourse on pain and loss. In words of Henry Luois Gates, Jr., *Beloved* invents and articulates a "language that gives voice to the unspeakable horror and terror of the black past." (In Plasa, 1998: 11) Sharing stories where one was the object of violence make one the object of pity as well. Besides sadness, it breeds a sense of shame and embarrassment for one does not just feel different from everyone else, one does become different than everyone else - labelled by pity and compassion. In the case of Pecola, when the story of her misfortune became public, she had no other choice but to resort to madness and interpret their avoidance and comments as jealousy rather than

as contempt and pity. The importance of discourse and language is especially analysed in postmodern theory, which suggests that discourse is not just the mirror of reality but also an agent of reality. Hence, the language we employ impacts the construction of ideologies we live by. "Poststructuralist theories of language draw attention to the need for us to question the relationship between language, meaning and what we normally regard as 'social reality' more than we usually do. Language does not merely reflect 'reality', it constructs it." (Peach, 2000: 29) According to Peach, one of Morrison's concerns is the nature of language which she perceives as ideologically coloured. He adds that language is not "a transparent window onto the world; it is more like a piece of stained glass that distorts and colours what we see through it." (2000: 29)

2.7. Morrison and Postcolonialism

Postcolonial literature has often been compared to the black literature due to their similarly oppressed and silenced pasts. African Americans can relate to the postcolonial literature because their pasts were in fact also colonised and exploited. Nevertheless, their culture, tradition and bodies were exploited and silenced. Furthermore, in both literatures women deserve the special treatment, since they suffered the most, having been exposed to sexual abuse and harassment. Both, postcolonial and black women were stereotyped and defined as Other but also as exotic and sexually available. As Loomba notices in there is a long pictorial tradition that presents the African continent as a woman and implies that while the region is available for discovery and conquest, the women are similarly exotic, erotic and sexually available. (Edwards, 2008: 97) Namely, their bodies were considered public and they were the victims of the oppressors and their own men, too. According to Susheila Nasta, postcolonial women writers, as well as black women writers, had a difficult task ahead of them once they got the freedom of speech: "the postcolonial woman writer is not only involved in making herself heard, in changing the architecture of male-centered ideologies and languages or in discovering new forms and language to express her experience, she has also to subvert and demythologise indigenous male writing and traditions which seek to label her." (1991: xv) Morrison agrees with the postcolonial

theorist Spivak on the subject of white academics discussing postcolonial or black literature and defines their work not just as biased but also blames them for perpetuating stereotypes of intellectual and cultural inferiority of the coloured. According to Peach, Morrison has complained that the work of African-Americans is too often seen from a reductive, sociological perspective. (2000: 18) She says,

> Critics generally don't associate black people with ideas. They see
> marginal people; they just see another story about black folks. They
> regard the whole thing as sociologically interesting perhaps but very
> parochial. There's a notion out there in the land that there are human
> beings one writes about, and then there are black people or Indians
> or some other marginal group.

> (Morrison in Tate, 1985: 121)

Here Morrison implies that there was a firm belief that black people could not write or were not supposed to write but also that they should not even be written about, because there was nothing worth knowing about them. It is obvious that their social marginality was also mirrored in literature and literary theory and in that is similar to the postcolonial subject. Justin Edwards gives his account of the relationship between African American literary criticism and postcolonial literary criticism. He acknowledges that in the past scholars considered them two separate areas but that according to recent trends in criticism they share a central goal: "destabilizing racial hierarchies and exposing the linguistic and discursive modes that contribute to the perpetuation of unequal power relations." (Edwards, 2008: 24) In addition, he elaborates on the political and social circumstances of living in the USA that match those in developing countries.

> American systems of racial imbalance, segregation and
> disenfranchisement are every bit as 'postcolonial' (perhaps even
> as 'colonial') as the legacies of imperial rule in developing countries.
> What's more because of its racial, religious and cultural heterogeneity,
> the United States becomes a particularly volatile site of colonial
> contestation for political visibility and dominance. (Edwards, 2008: 24)

Finally, another significant feature that both criticisms share is the element of haunting. Liliane Weissberg states that haunting is the common characteristic of postcolonial and African-American literary criticisms and that is the characteristic that Morrison's novel "both invokes and furthers." (Edwards, 2008: 119)

Morrison managed to express strong views of the world of today in a highly imaginative and powerful language, placing special emphasis on her marginalised, fragmented subjects. Her depictions of strong-willed female characters that do not flinch before the difficulties of their racially and sexually oppressive surroundings. In presenting the experiences of female households she gives new definitions to black motherhood and friendship. Although they were not aware of it, her heroines were true feminists, getting by with the power of sisterhood.

3. *SULA*

Sula is perhaps the one of Morrison's novels that deals with the woman's condition in its entirety. All themes covered in the novel serve to illustrate the lives of black women of different age and character in a small town in Ohio. The exploration of the female psyche through the accounts of five female protagonists is the main endeavour in this book. It is an example of Morrison's favourite themes and motifs: female friendships, all-women households, motherhood, duplicity and constraints of living as a black woman. Morrison reaffirms her belief that although family has an enormous impact on one's values and attitudes in life, so does the entire community, as well. Furthermore, like in *The Bluest Eye* she urges her characters to assume responsibility for their actions and fight for their rights. By illustrating female characters that differ significantly in their rapports to themselves and others, she offers different paths that a woman of colour may take, and at the end there are no winners, for it appears they have all suffered some loss. Nevertheless, she once again insists on the importance of finding the other half of yourself, which does not necessarily have to be a man.

Analysis of Female Characters

The story begins with the lives of Nel's mother, Helen, and Sula's grand-mother, Eva. Although the circumstances of their lives differ greatly, they are both portrayed as mothers. While Helen has troubles dealing with sexist and racist comments upon returning to the place of her childhood, Eva has to deal with hunger of her children. Namely, after five years of terrible marriage, Eva's husband, Boy Boy, left her. Although he was not much help and spent most of his time drinking and chasing after women, she had to find a way to provide for her three children. Despite the anger and disappointment she felt due to his abandonment, she realised those feelings were a luxury she could not afford at.

After five years of a sad and disgruntled marriage Boy Boy took off.
During the time they were together he was very much preoccupied
with other women and not home much. He did whatever he could that
he liked, and he liked womanising best, drinking second, and abusing
Eva third. When he left in November, Eva had 1.65 dollars, five eggs,
three beets and no idea of what or how to feel. The children needed her;
she needed money, and needed to get on with her life. But the demands
of feeding her three children were so acute she had to postpone her anger
for two years until she had both the time and energy for it.

(Morrison, 1987: 32)

Faced with the need to survive, she left her children with a neighbor and went on a journey, in search of some solution. When she returned, she had obtained money but had only one leg. What really happened is never explained, but everyone shared the assumption that Eva cut off her own leg in order to get a financial compensation from the insurance. "Eighteen months later she swept down from a wagon with two crutches, a new black pocketbook, and one leg. First she reclaimed her children, next she gave the surprised Mrs. Suggs a ten-dollar bill, later she started building a house on Carpenter's Road, sixty feet from Boy Boys one-room cabin, which she rented out." (Morrison, 1987: 35) Upon her return, she took her children back and started building a big house that would provide her with the security and safety she longed for. The house served as a hostel as well and provided her with an income. Besides the tenants, she lived there with her daughter Hannah and her grand-daughter, Sula. She never remarried and the three of them lived independently in a household without men. However, despite her hatred of Boy Boy, Eva loved men. In fact, it was said that all Peace women loved all men and that the love of men was Eva's legacy to her daughter and grand-daughter. "With the exception of Boy Boy, those Peace women loved all men. It was manlove that Eva, bequeathed to her daughters. Probably, people said, because there were no men in the house, no men to run it. But actually that was not true. The Peace women simply loved maleness, for its own sake." (Morrison, 1987: 42) Although Eva never engaged in sexual affairs, she had many suitors and male friends who would keep her company and who she admired. She made them feel worthy and respectable even when she disagreed

with them. "Eva, as old as she was, and with one leg, had a regular flock of gentleman callers, and although she did not participate in the act of love, there was a good deal of teasing and pecking and laughter. (...) But she argued with them with such an absence of bile, such a concentration of manlove, that they felt their convictions solidified by her disagreement." (Morrison, 1987: 42) Her house was always full of people, laughter and chatting and for that Eva was appreciated in the community. Her courage and determination to secure a home and a decent life for her children all by herself made her an awe-inspiring authority. However, her personality is indeed contradictory. Despite the independence she enjoyed, she proclaimed completely different values and held stereotypical attitudes regarding gender roles. She believed women should take care of their men, do all the household chores and do not ask much from them or from life. She believed women must know how to keep and entertain their men. "With other people's affairs Eva was equally prejudiced about men. She fussed interminably with the brides of the newlywed couples for not getting their men's supper ready on time; about how to launder shirts, press them, etc." (Morrison, 1987: 42) The firmness of her traditional attitudes is evident when she comes in confrontation with Sula. Disapproving her unrestrained lifestyle, Eva thinks Sula should be tamed and have children that would make her settle down. Shocked by Sula's dismissive attitude, Eva shows her cruel, uncompromising nature in accusing Sula of enjoying the sight of her mother's dying. Due to her denial to accept different views on life and womanhood, Eva was rejected by Sula, who decided to take her to a nursing home in order to keep her away. On one occasion Sula admits to her friend Nel that she did it because she was afraid of Eva. It is a surprising paradox that Eva, who was not just left but completely betrayed by a man and later managed to live an independent life, has so little understanding for her grand-daughter's love of freedom. Although she herself was unhappy in marriage and did not seek another one, she still considers marriage to be the only natural choice for women. What is also contradictory is her effort to protect her children on one hand and her killing her son on the other. Although she gave up her leg so as to be able to feed her children and hurried to cover Hannah's body with her own, while she was burning, Eva murdered her son, Plum. When asked to justify her hideous act, Eva claims she could not let a grown man behave like a child who needs his mother's protection. She believed that if he was not able to live like a man, then it was better to die like a man.

He was a man, girl, a big old growed-up man. I didn't have that

much room. I kept on dreaming it. Dreaming it and I knowed it was

true. One night it wouldn't be no dream. It'd be true and I would have

done it, would have let him if I'd've had the room but a big man can't

be a baby all wrapped up inside his mamma no more; He suffocate.

I done everything I could to make him leave me and go on and live and

be a man but he wouldn't and I had to keep him out so I just thought of a

way he could die like a man not all scrunched up inside my womb,

but like a man.

(Morrison, 1987: 72)

This passage implies that Eva was tired of being a protective mother and had no strength left to act as one. Furthermore, it is evident that although she will go great lengths for her children, at the same time she is vindictive if they do not live according to her expectations. By contrast, when Hannah accidentally caught fire, Eva rushed with one leg to save her although it meant she could get killed as well. At that moment she showed no hesitation, as rescuing her daughter seemed to her the only possible option. She is the embodiment of the mythical images of both good and evil mother. On one hand she is the mother who bears sacrifice and on the other she is Kali, who devours her children. She symbolises both life and death and is represented as a powerful figure that brings both. Eva's personality reflects duplicity, she is a caregiver, but also a killer, she lives liberally but judges others who attempt to live in a similar way. Eva is another female figure that discards the stereotype of black women as motherly housewives. Her character differs from the standard norm in many ways, but primarily in her ability to be financially independent and in her attitudes toward her children. Also, she fits Morrison's pattern of single mothers who set up homes on their own and establish communities that present an alternative to the nuclear family concept. This is one of the recurrent motifs in Morrison's fiction and is rooted in her belief that the concept of nuclear family was taken from the Western lifestyle tradition and is frequently not the adequate solution for the black community. Nevertheless, the issue of marriage and raising children is the bone of contention between Eva and her grand-daughter, who is determined to live an experimental life without making commitments to others. Even

though she claims she tried to ignore and forget that sight, Eva accuses Sula she watched her mother burn with interest, implying she felt no pain or sadness. Eva's aggression toward Sula's choices can be interpreted as her inability to understand her motifs or as simply blaming her for not helping and not mourning Hannah.

> She remembered something else too, and try as might to deny it,
> she knew that as she lay on the ground trying to drag herself through
> the sweet peas and clover to get Hannah, she had seen Sula standing
> on the back porch just looking. (...) Sula was probably struck dumb,
> as anybody would be who saw her own mamma burn up. Eva said yes,
> but inside she disagreed and remained convinced that Sula had watched
> Hannah burn not because she was paralysed, but because she
> was interested
>
> .   (Morrison, 1987: 78)

Hannah is not given much space in the novel, but she stands as a balancing figure between two strong female characters, Eva and Sula. The significance of her presence is seen only upon her death, when Eva and Sula's disagreements break the family apart. Some critics have noticed the tendency of Morrison's to portray strong characters of mothers and weak characters of daughters, while others add that grand-daughters are also very strong-willed. This novel confirms this pattern and even the early death of Hannah confirms she is the weakest link in that household. Even though her life was one of simple pleasures, Hannah's character is relevant because of her influence on Sula's personality. Due to her love of men and bodily pleasures, Hannah was prone to engage in sexual affairs with various men. After becoming a window, she was determined to obtain some attention and physical satisfactions on a daily basis. Her flings with men were short-lived and superficial but made her contented. The men she seduced were in most cases husbands of her friends, which made Hannah unpopular with women and left her with no female friends. On other occasions, she resorted to seducing the men who lived in their house, although their wives were there as well. "Hannah's friendships with women were, of course, seldom and short-lived and the newly married couples whom her mother took in soon learned what a hazard she was. She could break up a marriage before it had even become one - she would make love to

the new groom and wash his wife's dishes all in one afternoon. What she wanted, after Rekus dies, and what she succeeded in having more often than not, was some touching every day." (Morrison, 1987: 44) She felt she was not doing anybody any harm and treated sex as something pleasant but trivial. Her attitudes to friendship and sex impacted Sula, who got the impression that liberal sexual behaviour was normal and common. Apart from setting a wrong example to her, Sula overheard her mother admit that she did not like her. This confession ruined any feeling of stability that was keeping Sula within the borders of 'normal' behaviour. " 'Sure you do. You love her, like I love Sula, I just don't like her. That's a difference.' " (Morrison, 1987: 57) It might well be that this sentence was going through Sula's head while she watched her mother burn without revealing any emotion. Although it is not likely that Sula wanted her mother to die, it is true that she did not see it as a tragedy, either.

Nel is the voice of reason in the novel, since she is the most level-headed person. Her commonness stands opposite to Sula's oddness and experimental lifestyle. However, the two of them perfectly complement each other and are the example of closeness and intimacy in a friendship. As they were growing up, Nel and Sula were inseparable to the point they did not realise they were not the same person until Nel got married.

> They never quarreled, those two, the way some girlfriends, did over
> boys, or competed against each other for them. In those days a
> compliment to one was a compliment to the other, and cruelty to one
> was a challenge to the other. Nel's response to Jude's shame and anger
> selected her away from Sula. And greater than her friendship was this
> new feeling of being needed by someone who saw her singly. She didn't
> even know she had a neck until Jude remarked on it, that her smile
> was anything but the spreading of her lips until he saw it as a small miracle.
>
> (Morrison, 1987: 84)

Their friendship was solidified when they had to share a dark secret, only two of them knew, the secret no one ever found out. Namely, while they were playing, Sula dropped a little boy into the river, by accident. There was nothing they could do, but keep silent

and try to forget it. The next time they brought up that event was on Sula's deathbed. As regards marriage, Nel was not particularly thrilled with the idea of getting married. She caught Jude's eye, who was disillusioned with life and believed only marriage with a good woman could bring him some happiness. His dissatisfaction with his job and realisation he could never fulfill his dreams of becoming an actor due to his skin colour led him to seek comfort in getting married. He wished to settle down with a girl who would take care of him and make him feel safe and nurtured. His ideas of marriage were idealistic but also assumed that the wife would be absolutely committed to taking care of him and the house. He recognised the qualities he was looking for in Nel, who seemed the warm, motherly type. Even though she was not in love with Jude, she accepted to marry him simply because she saw how badly he needed it. She felt protective of him and gradually came to enjoy the fact she was indispensable to someone. Although her marriage meant spending less time with Sula and eventually jeopardising their friendship, Nel preferred the new feeling she experienced to the relationship the two of them had. Furthermore, although the knowledge that she was a separate being came as a shock, she realised she liked to be special and unique.

> The more he thought about marriage, the more attractive it became.
> Whatever his fortune, whatever the cut of his garment, there would
> always be the hem - the tuck and fold that his raveling edges; a someone
> sweet, industrious and loyal to shore him up. And in return he would
> shelter her, love her, grow old with her. (...) Nel's indifference to his hints
> about marriage disappeared altogether when she discovered his pain.
> Jude could see himself taking shape in her eyes. She actually wanted
> to help, soothe.
>
> <div align="right">(Morrison, 1987: 83)</div>

Nel did not know anything about herself before Jude pointed it out to her. When the children came, she accepted her new duties accordingly and simply considered that becoming a mother was a normal thing for a married woman. Although her marriage was not perfect, she considered herself rather satisfied. She is the embodiment of an average woman who plays by the book, leading a low-key life of moral virtue. Although she would often reflect on her life and life in general, she was not the type of woman

who would dare to contravene the norms of behaviour. However, it is evident that Jude used Nel as a background that would give him context, a mirror the reflection of which he could come to like. With Nel he could realise himself as the "head of a household", without her he was just another man with a dead-end job. "Without that someone he was a waiter hanging around kitchen like a woman. With her he was head of a household pinned to an unsatisfactory job out of necessity." (Morrison, 1987: 83) This passage implies that Nel was not special to Jude, she just seemed suitable to play the role he needed in order to create a version of himself he could find acceptable. This is also an example of the conviction that women are supposed to feel realised and satisfied with the role of empowering their men. On the other hand, men believe all that they have to give in return to women is protection. It is a common-place cliché that all women need from men is protection, when most of them are perfectly capable to take care of themselves, which they eventually have to do when their husbands leave them, as Morrison illustrates in this novel. For offering protection what men receive is a meaningful context and validation of self-worth. By contrast, women receive temporary protection they are later deprived of. According to the passage, Jude's intention was not to make a couple, but to make himself.

Although Nel and Sula were similar as children, the true nature of their characters becomes transparent when they are faced with life choices of adulthood, such as marriage and children. Nel's married life represents everything that Sula despised and avoided. While for Nel it represented security and stability, for Sula it represented constraints and boredom. Their different attitudes toward life are also reflected in the ideas they express about hell. While for Sula it would mean status quo that lasts forever, for Nel hell is change. The exhaustion of having to face life alone made the daily routine insufferable for her.

> 'The real hell of Hell is that it is forever', Sula said that. She said doing
> anything forever and ever was hell. Nel didn't understand it then, but
> now in the bathroom, trying to feel, she thought, 'If I could be sure that I
> could stay here in this small white room with the dirty tile and water
> gurgling in the pipes and my head on the cool rim of this bathtub and never
> have to go out the door, I would be happy. If I could be certain that I never
> had to get up and flush the toilet, go in the kitchen, watch my children

grow up and die, see my food chewed on my plate. Sula was wrong. Hell
ain't things lasting forever. Hell is change.'

<div align="right">(Morrison, 1987: 108)</div>

In *Unspeakable Things Spoken* Morrison makes distinctions between Nel and Sula by comparing them to plants (nightshade and blackberry). While Sula is peculiar and dangerous, Nel is a reflection of ordinariness and modesty. Nevertheless, despite their obvious differences, they managed to grow together. She links their blackness with the darkness both plants involve in their names.

Both plants have darkness in them: "black" and "night". One is unusual
(nightshade) and has two darkness words: "night" and "shade". The other
(blackberry) is common. A familiar plant and an exotic one. A harmless
one and a dangerous one. One produces a nourishing berry; one delivers
toxic ones, but they both thrived together, in that place when it was a
neighbourhood. Both are gone now, and the description that follows is
of the other specific things, in this black community, destroyed in the
wake of the golf course.

<div align="right">(Morrison, 1988: 152, 153)</div>

The moment of change for both of them is when Nel catches Sula and Jude having sex in her home. It represents the crucial point of the novel, the moment when their friendship ended and they both lose a soulmate. Due to their different outlooks on life, love and friendship, they interpreted the act of affair differently. While for Nel it meant betrayal, for Sula it was not just normal, but absolutely trivial. What was most painful for Nel was the way Jude looked at her when she came in. That look was accusing her of ruining his pleasure and treating her like a nuisance. "So, it's all right. I am just standing here. They are not doing that. I am just standing here and seeing it, but they are not really doing it. But then they did look up. Or you did. You did, Jude. And if only you had not looked at me the way the soldiers did on the train, the way you look at the children when they come in while you are listening to Gabriel Heatter and break your train of thought." (Morrison, 1987: 105) Nel could not bring herself to believe

what actually happened and that her husband treated her like that when theygrew so intimate. " 'You knew me and had listened to the things I said in the night, and heard me in the bathroom and laughed at my raggedly girdle and I laughed too because I knew you too, Jude. So how could you leave me when you knew me?' " (Morrison, 1987: 105) According to some interpretations, Nel is the type of woman who defines herself solely trough relationships with others. Gilligan illustrates this type of women and states, "Childlike in the vulnerability of their dependence and consequent fear of abandonment, they claim to wish only to please, but in return for their goodness they expect to be loved and cared for." (1982: 67) In the end Jude left Nel alone with their children, so besides the emotional pain she had to deal with financial troubles as well. Similarly to Eva, she could not afford hating, mourning or remembering because she had to provide food for her children. Nel is yet another single-mother who accepted the role life had given her to and emerged as a strong, independent woman, although not by choice. She soon realised she would have to settle for small pleasures of daily life and find meaning in the routine. Moreover, she was aware that all the love she could get in life was the love from her children. "It didn't take long, after Jude left, for her to see what the future would be. She had looked at her children and knew in her heart that would be all. That they were all she would ever know of love." (Morrison, 1987: 165) Nel is a docile obedient person, who adheres to all the standards of community and expectations of her surroundings. She was taught by her mother to be submissive and abide by rules. She was a project of her mother's, who wanted to shape her according to her vision, to be beautiful, but not too much, to be black, but not too much. She constantly reminded Nel to pull her nose as a child so that she could alter it a little and be beautiful. Although Helen was happy her daughter did not have her striking beauty, she wanted her to be pretty. Helen knew that beauty could mean a curse, especially on a black woman. Recalling her childhood, she knew that being beautiful, was in a way, asking for trouble. People understood it as a way of bragging, make oneself conspicuous. And for black women it was sometimes best not to be noticed at all. Helen resented sexist comments referring to her body which made her feel powerless and objectified. All the emotions of rage and frustration came back when she had to return to the town of her childhood and stand all the rude remarks thrown her way.

So soon. So soon. She hadn't even begun the trip back. Back to her

grandmother's house in the city where the red shutters glowed,

and already she had been called "gal". All the old vulnerabilities,

all the old fears of being somehow flawed gathered in her stomach and

made her hands tremble. She had heard only that one word; it dangled

above her wide-brimmed hat, which had slipped, in her exertion,

from its carefully leveled placement and was now tilted in a bit of jaunt

over her eye.

(Morrison, 1987: 20)

3.2. Racism in *Sula*

Racism is always one of the themes Morrison explores in her fiction, but in *Sula* it is secondary to sexism. Nevertheless, life choices of black women are dependent not just on their gender, but on their race as well. Already in the introduction Morrison makes a reference to the treatment of blacks. By referring to this particular black community as a matter of history and replacing their dwelling with a golf course, she makes room for a discussion about change, history, violence and difference.

I am translating the anonymous into the specific, a "place" into a

"neighbourhood", and letting a stranger in through whose eyes it can

be viewed. In between "place" and "neighbourhood" I now have to

squeeze the specificity and the difference; the nostalgia, the history, and

the nostalgia for the history; the violence done to it and the consequences

of that violence. (…) The violence lurks in having something torn out

by its roots – it will not, cannot grow again.

(Morrison, 1988: 152)

The racism Morrison is interested in here is racism within the black community itself. Although the history of slavery and oppression of blacks is an unavoidable element in

stories about this community, it is the racist attitudes they incorporated in their own norms of behaviour that Morrison is worried about. Besides the hatred of the white people, there is a great deal of self-hatred and divisions among themselves. The black community is very intolerant of racial mixtures and keeps a surveillant gaze on the colour of skin of its members. Any hint of white blood produces anger and aggression toward the person. It means expulsion from the community and its deepest contempt. The perfect example is Helen's fear about Nel's skin colour and her relief when she saw Nel was acceptable. However, had she been any lighter, she would have needed constant protection. "Nel was the colour of sandpaper - just dark enough to escape the blows of the pitch-black true bloods and the contempt of old women who worried about such things as bad blood mixtures and knew that the origins of a mule and a mulatto were one and the same. Had she been any lighter-skinned she would have needed either her mother's protection on the way to school or a streak of mean to defend herself." (Morrison, 1987: 52) It is evident that being accepted and respected as a member of the black community was extremely difficult due to numerous demands that had to be met, such as skin colour and moral codes that very especially stringent for women. At that time women were not thought to have any other work or care besides their homes and families. The narrowness of their choices made them frustrated and aggressive toward each other and the common way of expressing aggression was gossiping and judging others. Women themselves became their own worst judges and executors, creating labels and social stigma. Any case of jealousy could easily be solved by spreading vindictive rumours. It is public judgment and labelling that made Sula's character acquire mythical dimensions and represented her as completely emotionless and remorseless, almost inhuman. Although the community preached high moral standards, adultery seemed rather common and despite Hannah's reputation for seducing married men, she was considered nothing more than a nuisance. However, Sula's liberal sexual behaviour awoke deep resentment and rage in the community. It was not the fact that she changed so many partners, it was the way she did it and the message she was putting across. She did it in a disinterested way, using men once and then discarding them like trash. Her approach enraged all the women in the community, who took her behaviour as offensive. They wanted to be complimented on their husbands, not to see them discarded. After Sula's game they all rushed to repair their husbands' broken egos. "And

the fury she created in the women of the town was incredible - for she would lay their husbands once and then no more. Hannah had been a nuisance, but she was complimenting the women, in a way, by wanting their husbands. Sula was trying them out and discarding them without any excuse the men could swallow. So, the women, to justify their own judgment, cherished their men more, to soothe the pride and vanity Sula had bruised." (Morrison, 1987: 115) Despite all her acts that did not meet the community's approval, what was deemed as an unpardonable sin was the rumour that Sula had sexual relations with white men. Although nobody could confirm the rumour as true, everyone considered her capable of committing such an impermissible crime. "But it was the men who gave her the final label, who fingerprinted her for all the time. They were the ones who said she was guilty of the unforgivable thing - the thing for which there was no understanding, no excuse, no compassion. The route from which there was no way back, the dirt that could never be washed away. They said that Sula slept with white men. It may not have been true, but it certainly could have been. She was obviously capable of it." (Morrison, 1987: 113) The reason why they considered this rumour utterly despicable is because they saw it as a betrayal of the community, their origin and past. They interpreted it as an act of renouncing herself, renouncing them and joining the enemy. The reaction this rumour provoked testifies about the psychological and spiritual state of the community and its inability to overcome the traumatic history. Although they still had to live near the whites and with the whites, the only thing they were able to control was not to mix blood with theirs. It was one of the privileges they obtained with the abolition of slavery - to choose who to bed with. It was beyond understanding or absolution that one of them would choose to do so without being forced into it. "In any case, all minds were closed to her when that word was passed around. It made the old women draw their lips together made small children look away from her in shame; made young men fantasise elaborate torture for her - just to get the saliva back in their mouths when they saw her." (Morrison, 1987: 113)

3.3. The Relationship of the Individual and the Community

Sula's birthmark was of interest to many critics, who gave it various interpretations. Galehouse interprets it as a biblical reference. "Carolyn Jones argues that the birthmark functions like the mark of Cain, publicly setting Sula apart from the community's actions and ideals." (Galehouse, 1999: 349) According to Galehouse, the difference between Sula and Cain is that Sula chooses to segregate herself from the community and in turn obtains a chance to write her own life: "God's sentence becomes self-authorship". (1999: 350) In *Unspeakable Things Unspoken* Morrison give her interpretation of Sula's peculiarity,

> I always thought of Sula as quintessentially black, metaphysically
> black, if you will, which is not melanin and certainly not unquestioning
> fidelity to the tribe. She is new world black and new world woman
> extracting choice from choicelessness, responding inventively to found
> things. Improvisational, daring, disruptive, imaginative, modern,
> out-of-the-house, outlawed, unpolicing, uncontained and uncontainable.
> And dangerously female.
>
> (Morrison, 1988: 153)

Galehouse adds that Sula's personality is too elusive to make her representative of either group (women or blacks). "As Morrison notes, Sula's 'new world black' is more than moxy and melanin; it is jazz-inspired, something individual, fundamental, and internal, manifesting itself in a resistance to existing social mores and a cultivation of the untried and the unknown." (Galehouse, 1999: 340) Galehouse compares Sula to Beloved in describing the extent to which "one woman's rejection of every available social script generates tangible, even fatal, public tension." (Galehouse, 1999: 340) Kubitschek and Gillespie define what the labels 'good woman' and 'bad woman' mean in the context of *Sula*, "the 'good woman' masks assertion in evasion, denying responsibility by claiming only to meet the needs of others, while the 'bad woman' forgoes or renounces the commitment that binds her in self-deception and betrayal." (2000: 71) In this context, neither Nel nor Sula could be considered realised adults since they represent two

extreme stands and both are essentially frightened and limited.

What made Sula inadequate was the incomprehensible nature of her motifs. Nobody understood what her goals could be but tended to interpret them in relation to their own codes, which made her essence impenetrable to them. The truth was that she had no agenda, no goals but to live according to her urges and whims. She wanted to feel pain, satisfaction, sadness. She avoided anything that seemed permanent and demanded her commitment. She proved herself incapable of belonging to anyone and knew nothing of jealousy or possessiveness. Apart from being emotionally uncommitted, she had no desire for material possessions either.

> As willing to feel pain as to give pain, to feel pleasure as to give pleasure,
> hers was an experimental life, ever since her mother's remarks sent her
> flying up those stairs, ever since her one major feeling of responsibility
> had been exorcised on the bank of a river with a closed place in the middle.
> She was completely free of ambition, with no affection for money, property
> or things, no greed, no desire to command attention or compliments - no
> ego. For that reason she felt no compulsion to verify herself - be consistent
> with herself.
>
> (Morrison, 1987: 118, 119)

Her free spirit and enormous curiosity required her to travel and adopt a nomadic lifestyle. In her quest for the knowledge of the world, she even went to college, which gives another shade of rebellion to her character. However, when it comes to the development of her identity, Galehouse (1999) argues that Sula does not grow in the course of narration that, on the contrary, her development is complete by the middle of the novel: "She does not question herself and she has no revelations or regrets, yet she manages to propel the story forward by the sheer unpredictability of her actions" (Galehouse, 1999: 342) Sula did not live like a woman is expected to, she lived a life reserved for men, but in her opinion, there was no difference.

3.4. Nel vs. Sula– "The Good Woman" vs. "The Monster Woman"

The contrast between Sula and Nel is evident when it comes to their definitions of man and woman. Namely, on Sula's deathbed, Nel accuses her of living life like a man, since she wanted to have it all. Nel believes only men can have it all and be all, which is impossible for women, especially black women. On the other hand, Sula fiercely disagrees and is convinced that she deserves to have it all if she can do it all. For her, there is not, or at least should not be any difference in what men and women are allowed to be.

> 'You can't have it all, Sula'. Nel was getting exasperated with her
> arrogance, with her lying at death's door still smart-talking. 'Why? I can
> do it all, why can't I have it all?' 'You can't do it all. You a woman and a
> coloured woman at that. You can't act like a man. You can't be walking
> around all independent-like, doing whatever you like, taking what you
> want, leaving what you don't.' 'You say I am a woman and coloured.
> Ain't that the same as being a man?' 'I don't think so and you wouldn't
> either if you had children.' 'Then I really would act like a man. Every man
> I ever knew left his children.' "
>
> <div align="right">(Morrison, 1987: 142, 143)</div>

When Nel feels the need to discuss something with Sula, she realises talks with her were like talking with herself. She could understand herself better because Sula never competed or judged. In her company Nel was able to be herself and meet herself. "Talking to Sula had always been a conversation with herself. Was there anyone else before whom she could never be foolish? In whose view inadequacy was mere idiosyncrasy, a character trait rather than a deficiency? Anyone who left behind that aura of fun and complicity? Sula never competed; she simply helped others define themselves." (Morrison, 1987: 95) Sula was not just her friend, she was the other half Nel needed to feel whole. Nel did not miss Jude all along, she missed Sula, since despite the definition of marriage, Jude was not her ideal partner. " 'All the time, all the time, I thought I was missing Jude.' And the loss pressed down on her chest and came up into

her throat. 'We was girls together.' she said as though explaining something. 'Oh lord, Sula,' she cried, 'girl, girl, girlgirlgirl.' " (Morrison, 1987: 174) According to Coleman, *Sula* is a feminist novel in which the two women "complement or complete one another" and represent "two halves of personality that combine to form a whole psyche." (In Galehouse 1999: 350) Morrison compares Sula's peculiar personality and lifestyle with that of an artist. Her life is also devoted to exploration and experimenting, living according to impulses and feeling with all the senses. A life of freedom, liberated from material possessions and emotional baggage is typical of artists, who make their lives into yet another art form. However, Morrison marks Sula as an artist without an art form, who is thus burdened with the tension of unused creative energy building up inside her. Hence, Morrison concludes the surplus of artistic impulses, energy and curiosity make her dangerous. "Had she anything to engage her tremendous curiosity and her gift for metaphor, she might have exchanged the restlessness and preoccupation with whim for an activity that provided her with all she yearned for. And like an artist with no art form, she became dangerous." (Morrison, 1987: 121) When Nel and Sula discuss each other's life choices before Sula's death, they both remain adamant in their stands and the novel does not give readers the final scene of forgiveness or of two of them embracing each other. However, once they are left alone, they reconsider their lives and realise they both were wrong and guilty of letting their soulmate go. The differences in their upbringing made it impossible for them to understand each other. Sula blames her family for making her believe that all men were available and could be used according to their liking. Although she knew that women in general spent so much energy on keeping their husbands by their side and were wary of other women, Sula was convinced Nel was not one of them.

> But having no intimate knowledge of marriage, having lived in a house
> with women who thought all men available, and selected from among
> them with a care only for their tastes, she was ill-prepared for the
> possessiveness of the one person she felt close to. She knew what other
> women said and felt, or said they felt. But she and Nel had always seen
> through them. They both knew that those women were not jealous of

other women; that they were only afraid of losing their jobs. Afraid

their husbands would discover that no uniqueness lay between their legs.

(Morrison, 1987: 119)

Although many critics see Nel as a victim, both of society and her own moral codes, Kubitschek and Gillespie interpret her as selfish and self-righteous. "Nel cannot admit that Sula's point has any validity; preoccupied with her own goodness in overcoming selfish resentment of the betrayal. Nel glories in being the only woman in town willing to visit the dying Sula." (2000: 74) At one point in the conversation Nel even accuses Sula of not being able to keep a man. Sula's answer is that she sees no point in trying to keep a man. What is more, given the example of her own family, she is convinced all men eventually leave their wives despite all their efforts. Thus, it can be said that Sula preferred not to get involved with a man at all for fear of not being left in the end. She thought it would spare her the effort. It is important to note that Morrison does not necessarily criticise Sula's decision to avoid emotional entanglements with men, having in mind that once when she let her guard done and thought she could after all settle down, Sula was let down and left. She did not even know his name, but for the first time she felt an emotion she was able to interpret as possessiveness.

His clear comfort at being in her presence, his lazy willingness to

tell her all about fixes and the powers of plants, his refusal to baby or

protect her, his assumption that she was both tough and wise - all

of that coupled with a wide generosity of spirit only occasionally erupting

into vengeance sustained Sula's interest and enthusiasm.

(Morrison, 1987: 128)

 This event proves that Sula is not insensitive; on the contrary, her disillusionment was so intense that she started blaming herself for not knowing his name. "I didn't even know his name. And if I didn't know his name, then there is nothing I did know and I have known nothing at all since the one thing I wanted was to know his name so how could he help it but leave me since he was making love to a woman who didn't even

know his name." (Morrison, 1987: 136) This is the only time we see a different side of Sula, the only occasion when she does not act reasonably but is instead guided by emotions. His decision to leave her only strengthens her lack of trust in men and decision to avoid commitment.

3.5. Female Sexuality

Female sexuality is one of the themes that *Sula* explores. All the female characters treat their sexuality in different ways. While Nel's sexuality is in service of procreation and we learn nothing about her desires, which she keeps subdued. On the other hand, Hannah indulges sex as a kind of recreation and does not assign any deeper meaning to it. Her careless seduction of taken men taught young Sula that sex does not require any emotional connection and has nothing to do with love. And finally, Sula's attitude towards sex is one of exploration. She admits that during sex she manages to reach the emotional state she has always yearned for - the one of sorrow. "She went to bed with men as frequently as she could. It was the only place where she could find what she was looking for: misery and the ability to feel deep sorrow. She had not always been aware that it was sadness that she yearned for." (Morrison, 1987: 122) Although she first thought that sex gives her pleasure, she realised it was after all sorrow, the feeling she needed all along. This state of mind allowed her to feel like herself. However, despite the numerous entanglements with men, she realised they could not be her friends and that it was friendship she was looking for. "They taught her nothing but love tricks, shared nothing but worry, gave nothing but money. She had been looking all along for a friend, and it took her a while to discover that a lover was not a comrade and could never be - for a woman. And that no one would ever be that version of herself which she sought to reach out and touch with an ungloved hand." (Morrison, 1987: 121) It is clear that while Nel's attitude towards sexuality is inextricably linked with emotions and the contact with her partner, Hannah's and Sula's sexualities were all about themselves - satisfying or exploring themselves. There are critics, however, who interpret *Sula* as a lesbian text. "It works as a lesbian novel not

only because of the passionate friendship between Sula and Nel but out of Morrison's consistently critical stance toward the heterosexual institutions of male-female friendships, marriage and the family." (Smith, 1982: 165) While Smith has a point regarding Morrison's criticism of these institutions, numerous other critics argue that there is no solid evidence in the text that would allow for a lesbian interpretation of *Sula*. Thus, it remains a story about female friendship and struggles to define oneself.

3.6. Motherhood and Marriage

Another theme of interest for Morrison is motherhood. However this novel in particular deals with the issue of being a single mother. Nel, Eva and Hannah are all single mothers and two of them were left by their husbands. They remain alone without any financial support and realise that from that moment on their lives will be only a struggle for survival. Nevertheless, none of them ever consider starting a new life or leaving their children, like their husbands did. Despite the difficulties of motherhood that they do admit having, they do not question their parental responsibilities. Although Morrison refuses to present motherhood as a state of perfect bliss, she does underline the fact that mothers are those who assume the biggest part of, if not the entire, care of their children without questioning their duties. In the article *Demystifying the Myth of Motherhood* Ghasemi and Hijizadeh argue that the difference between Morrison's characters of mothers and the stereotyped mother figures is "their attempt at determining the course of their own and their children's destinies." (2012: 477, 478) This is obvious in the example of Eva, who decides to kill her son due to his inability to live life according to her expectations. Ghasemi and Hijizadeh see Morrison's revision of the black motherhood as a significant contribution to correcting the historical records with regard to black maternity, "which is just another form of victimisation of the black woman, society's exploitation of the mother-child bond." (2012: 477) Morrison's disappointment in men as husbands and fathers encouraged her to offer an alternative type of household as a contrast to the nuclear family. It is important to mention that all the women in *Sula* who once believed in marriage and thought they needed a man

eventually manage to live independently and become the providers for the family. In response to Freud's notion of "penis envy", Spivak proposes the idea of the notion "womb-envy" as "something that interacts with the idea of penis envy to determine human sexuality as the production of society." (Spivak in Carter, 2012: 142) Some interpretations link the differences in Nel's and Sula's attitude to themselves and others with the conditions of their upbringing. Namely, the financial situation of a household determines the dynamics of family life and often the level of emotional closeness between a mother and her children. The pressing need to provide for her children made Eva emotionally detached and her relationship toward her children contradictory. "In the poverty which constructs her reality, the survival of Eva's children is constantly threatened, and her emotional connections with them are thus frequently heightened (hence the fiery nature of her relationships). Paradoxically, in order to deal practically with this threat, Eva must distance herself." (Gillespie & Kubitschek, 2000: 76) They add that the distance between Peace mothers and daughters is what provides the daughters with freedom in creating a self, but at the same time it limits their capacity for "emotional nurturing, empathy and connection." (2000: 81) The dysfunctional relationships Nel and Sula had with their overbearing or neglecting mothers are compensated through their complementing friendship. "The friendship between Sula and Nel in many ways nurtures both girls by supplying the lacks in their mother-daughter relationships." (Gillespie & Kubitschek, 2000: 82) The life circumstances made these women realise they were capable of living independently, although it was not their choice to have to do so. Nevertheless, in spite of their bad experiences, they seem eager to convince other women that marriage is still the only way for a woman to realise herself. Eva's aggressive disapproval of Sula's lifestyle and her insistence on her to marry prove this point. Nel also criticises Sula's inability to keep men by her side. It is evident that Morrison criticises female refusal to change their ways and realise there are more options for women that should be equally acceptable than just the traditional one which involved getting married. It is also interesting to explore the fact that none of the heroines actually talk about love. Instead, they mention possessivness, marriage, settling down, keeping a man which all point to the fact they were more interested in form than the essence. Their insistence on marriage is not related to love or sharing life with an adequate partner, but with fulfilling one's duty and keeping an image of

decency. It is clear that much of the private life was structured according to the demands of public life and that often the two could not be separated. It is implied in the novel that all the decisions were made with thourough consideration of the public opinion. "(...) in response to Sula's egolessness, the town develops a collective ego that effectively writes her out of her own story." (Galehouse, 1999 : 360)

3.7. Female Friendship and Women-run Households
as Alternatives to Marriage

The final conversation Sula and Nel have before Sula's death leads us to a postmodernist ending. The one of new understanding and some regrets but with no final answers of happiness. While Nel blames Sula's life choices for staying lonely, she replies by cherishing the loneliness because it is her own - chosen. On the other hand, Sula characterises Nel's loneliness as imposed by others, an unfortunate outcome. " 'But my lonely is mine. Now your lonely is somebody else's. Made by somebody else and handed to you. Ain't that something? A secondhand lonely?' " (Morrison, 1987: 143) As Galehouse observes, Sula's ending up alone is fine, but what is not acceptable in the eyes of the community is for her to cultivate her loneliness. (1999: 354) Indeed, at the end both protagonists remain lonely, but Sula finds comfort in the knowledge that she alone created her destiny, while Nel has to find hope in her children. Both characters realise their mistakes and regret not resolving their confrontation earlier because what they both need at the end of the day and what they were missing all along was one another. Even in death, Sula's first thought is to share this new experience with Nel. "Sula felt her face smiling. 'eell, I'll be damned,' she thought, 'it didn't even hurt. Wait'll I tell Nel.' " (Morrison, 1987: 149) They represent two conflictual halves of each woman, fighting for freedom on one hand and embracing married life and starting a family, on the other. Their characters are extreme in their views, but together they could work on establishing balance. The message the ending puts forward is why marriage holds the priority over friendship and how come nuclear family is still an ideal among the black community although there are rare examples of its successful existence.

Morrison offers friendship and households of women as alternatives, emphasising that one can find a soulmate not just in a lover or a husband, but also in a friend.

3.8. Elements of Postmodernism

Although this novel is not so much postmodernist in terms of form and literary devices, it is when it comes to the themes, characters and perspectives. The main theme could be defined as a quest for identity or struggle with identity or, on a more global level, an exploration of the female psyche. The novel lays out many existential questions and offers no clear-cut answers. The development of the narrative is similar to the development of Sula's identity - experimental. Although the dilemmas that it voices are serious food for thought, the novel itself does not act as a moral advisor, instead it illustrates both the advantages and drawbacks of two opposite approaches to life. Typically of Morrison, none of the characters are just good or completely bad, they all reflect the many dimensions of real personalities. When it comes to the protagonists, what Morrison and postmodern literature share is a tendency to portray marginal subjects. Morrison's characters, however, are marginalised not just on the basis of their gender, but also on the basis of their race, which makes them ideal for conveying decentering messages. "Without the right to vote, own property or be educated, wives, mothers, mistresses, daughters play the role of sweeps to history, as much a part of an anonymous support system to men of the left as to men of the right." (Lucienne in Hutcheon, 2004: 63) Although it is experimental in its form, postmodernism's aim is to challenge the biased patterns of Western culture, which indeed include the dominant phallogocentric structures. Furthermore, by parodying the institution of marriage, Morrison is making a ground-breaking revision of one of the pillars of Western society by insisting that it is inadequate for the special dynamic of African-Americans. She sees marriage as one of the imposed symbols of Western domination. The influence of the white community, which is still in their physical proximity and occupies the fertile land they were excluded from, is interwoven in the narrative. The subordinate position of the black community is symbolically shown by the place they occupy - the infertile hills

above the river and fields of the whites.

3.9. Elements of Feminism and Postcolonialism and Their Treatment of the Black Woman

This demonstrates that racial segregation is still prominent and that although free, blacks are still denied equal rights. This kind of social background, implied at the very beginning of the novel, is an essential element in the construction of all characters' identities, since it foreshadows the inequality, subjugation, silence and struggle. This kind of social climate is common in both black and postcolonial literature. Postcolonial critics write about the restlessness and haunting that are typical motifs in writings of authors with the colonised past. Although not directly referred to, history is always lingering in the background of these people's present. Except the initial reference and the rage caused by the rumour that Sula has sexual relations with white men, there are no direct mentionings of the confrontations, discrimination or slavery. However, the traumatic past is always present although it becomes rewritten. Sula tries to repress the traumatic events from her past - the two events that resulted in her discarding any sense of responsibility or hope of establishing deeper human bonds. Those are the death of the young boy and overhearing her mother's confession that she does not like her. The guilt of killing an innocent boy, although by accident and the knowledge that even her mother cannot like her caused Sula to put on an emotional shield and give up all expectations of emotional connections. Similarly to Eva's decision to cut her leg for the sake of her children, Sula's decision to give up her vulnerable side is a form of sacrifice. Although she does not feel pain, she is also incapable of experiencing deeper positive emotions that can only be created through close relationships. Their sacrifices are made in the name of survival. It is known in psychology that emotional needs can be satisfied only when the basic ones, such as hunger and the need for safety are satisfied first. The lack of basic life conditions made Eva cold and detached. When she is confronted by Hannah about the relationship she had with her children when they were little, she replies she did not have time to baby them and sugar-coat when she had to keep them

alive. Although *Sula* is primarily marked as a feminist novel, it should not be omitted that feminism was not always the most adequate framework for dealing with black women and Third-world women. Nevertheless, the shortcomings of feminism are corrected by postcolonial theory and consequently, the interpretation in the light of these two approaches is the most comprehensive one. What both black literature and postcolonial literature have to devise is a way to speak about the 'unspeakable.' This is one of the main features of Morrison's fiction, who manages to evoke history without directly referring to it. Choosing women for her protagonists, Morrison sets out to write about the traumatic pasts of grand-mothers and mothers and sometimes equally traumatic presents of daughters. Hutcheon makes parallels between feminism and black theory and practice and acknowledges the impact they have on postmodern theory, which is relevant since Morrison's opus is most often interpreted within the framework of these theories.

> But feminism and black theory and practice, to name only the most
> evident, have qualified the (male, white, Euro-centered)
> poststructuralist rejection of the cogito and bourgeois subjectivity: they
> cannot reject that which they do not have, that to which they have been
> allowed access, feminist theory and art, for instance, know they must
> first inscribe female subjectivity before they can contest it. And this is how
> this and other ex-centric discourses have such an important impact on the
> postmodern - through their inevitable and productive contradictions.

(Hutcheon, 2004: 226)

Although most black women are also victims of racial discrimination and should counter it as well, Hooks reminds us that in most cases the struggles of the black community are in fact struggles of black men to obtain power reserved for white men. "Often the history of our struggle as black people is made synonymous with efforts of black males to have particular power and privilege." (Hooks, 1989: 178) In the light of this, she calls on black women to engage in the feminist struggle that can secure them their rights. She provides an explanation of her own on why black women feel reluctant to join feminist activism.

Key concerns that serve as barriers to black women advocating

politics are heterosexism, the fear that one will be seen as betraying black

men or promoting hatred of men as a consequence becoming less desirable

to male companions; homophobia (often I am told by black people that

all feminists are lesbians); and deeply ingrained misogynist attitudes

toward one another, perpetuating sexist thinking and sexist competition.

(Hooks, 1989:189)

One of the issues that seem to impede black women to raise their awareness about the feminist concerns is very common in Morrison's fiction - misogynist and sexist attitudes women have towards themselves and other women. This concern is one of the fundamental themes in *Sula*. We see that Sula's judges are other women in her community, even her grandmother and her friend Nel. She is the target of the female rage in the community and is labelled as a whore, a sinner, a monster. It is a fact that sexist attitudes are deeply ingrained in the community and how one can react to them is a concern of *Sula*. The option of rebellion is embodied in Sula, while obedience is reflected by Nel. In the light of common misconceptions about feminism, Hooks (1989) underlines that feminism is not supposed to be about what men do to women, but women's efforts to identify themselves. "Using the paradigm of sex, race and class means that the focus does not begin with men and what they do to women, but rather with women working to identify both individually and collectively the specific character of our social identity." (Hooks, 1989: 23)

Conclusion

Sula is Morrison's way of demonstrating that there is a "new world" black woman, aware of herself and courageous enough to confront the entire community for the right to live according to her own vision. By contrasting Sula with Nel, Morrison portrays two extreme models of female behaviour, each with its shortcomings and

comforts. Besides the general struggles they experience being women in a conservative environment, the biggest tragedy of their lives is allowing a man to come between them. Remaining silent and proud for too long, they lost the soulmates they had in each other and had to face the dreary routine in loneliness. Even when death occurs, their desire to share life with one another prevails. Morrison managed to create a compelling story about powerful female friendship, pride and self-righteousness that exceeds time and space. The strong message that lingers long after the novel ends is that in spite of the approach to life a woman takes, a patriarchal one, or a feminist one, there will always be something to lose and regret and according to Morrison, sorority should not be among them.

4. *THE BLUEST EYE*

This novel explores the construction of identity among black girls, exposed to detrimental influences of the media, which impose the white ideal of beauty and equally harmful influence of dysfunctional families. Struggling to confirm their self-worth in the outside world, they are left to the strength of their own character to deal with the pressures and disillusionment of their daily lives. Taught to suffer and keep silent, they automatically adhere to the stereotypical expectations society has imposed on black women. Seen as nothing more than animals, they learn to keep their opinion and emotions deeply suppressed and settle for little and rare pleasures available to them. Only with age do they reach wisdom and a peaceful state of mind.

The novel contrasts the stories of two black girls of the same age, who used to be friends, in order to demonstrate the two scenarios that could develop out of their life conditions. The lack of family support and utter absence of self-confidence led Pecola to search salvation in madness, whereas Claudia managed to preserve sense of self-worth and build her identity despite the discouraging responses of the white-dominated environment. Although the novel does not deal with white racism directly, it deals with its far-reaching repercussions which produce self-hatred and violence among the black community. In order to become accepted and assimilated in the upper circles of society, blacks craved for lighter skins and straighter hair, desperately trying to eliminate any sign of their origin and cultural heritage. They became so brain-washed that they made distinctions between themselves and labelled people as 'coloured' or 'negroes', where the latter group carried the connotation of ugliness, filthiness and inborn inferiority. One of the strongest messages in the novel is the alarming warning directed at the black community to stop renouncing its own tradition and values for the sake of hybrid versions of the white culture. Another message that echoes throughout the novel is the significance of family in building character. Morrison marks family as a social entity the most responsible for instilling children with feelings of self-respect and adequacy.

4.1. Analysis of Claudia

Claudia was raised in a rather normal black family, where there was no abuse or violence in family although general dynamics of their family life was far from ideal. However, compared to Pecola's family, Claudia and her sister Frieda were lucky. The general atmosphere in the United States at that time was the one where blacks were illusioned with their newly-granted right to possess propriety and thus focused all their energy on acquiring it. They were prepared to be extremely frugal and live in shabby rented homes just to be able to buy some property they could some day call their own. Those who could not afford to buy a roof over their heads jealously observed those who could and thus completely new feelings began to emerge within the black community – those of envy and greed.

> The firm possession of a yard, a porch, a grape arbor. Propertied
> black people spent all their energies, all their love on their nests. Like
> frenzied, desperate birds, they overdecorated everything; fussed and
> fidgeted over their hard-worn homes: canned, jellied, and preserved all
> summer to fill the cupboard and shelves; they painted, picked, and poked
> at every corner of their houses. Renting blacks cast furtive glances at these
> owned yards and porches, and made firmer commitments to buy
> themselves "some nice little old place". In the meantime, they saved,
> and scratched, and piled away what they could in the rented hovels,
> looking forward to the day of property.
>
> (Morrison, 1970: 18)

They became greedy, less ready to help others than before and started neglecting their children. Looking up to the luxurious lives of white families that were their employers in most cases, black women began to spend money on their looks, not wanting to fall behind other women in their surroundings. Money gradually became the biggest cause of family feuds, for those who had it and for those who did not. Those who could not provide for their families and secure a roof over their heads were deprived of any

respect and support of the community, as was the case with Cholly Breedlove, Pecola's father. He was a drunk who set his house on fire, leaving his children homeless. "Cholly Breedlove, then a renting black, having put his family outdoors, had catapulted himself beyond the reaches of human consideration. He had joined the animals; was indeed, an old dog, a snake, a ratty nigger." (Morrison, 1970: 18) For that reason Pecola was brought to live with Claudia and Frieda for some time. Although the girls accepted her and shared with her willingly all that they had, their mother was not ready to feed another mouth without making reproachful comments. Her insensitive rudeness embarrassed Pecola and the girls, who saw it as unnecessary victimisation of herself. "My mother's fussing soliloquies always irritated and depressed us. They were interminable, insulting and although indirect (Mama never named anybody - just talked about folks and some people), extremely painful in their thrust. She would go on for hours." (Morrison, 1970: 23) Her character points out the lack of sympathy for the ones in need, such as helpless Pecola. In addition, it demonstrates the bad examples parents set for their children, in obsession with accumulation of material wealth. Claudia, who is the narrator of her part of the story, underlines the fear of being put outdoors that hovered over their entire community. As a consequence of their history spent in slavery with no possessions or security, the black community has developed hunger for ownership, followed by the fear of becoming homeless. The haunting past and the power of the unconscious still exert significant influence among these people, not yet accustomed to the fact that a life of freedom involves responsibility and uncertainty. Thus, the fear of being left without a shelter was the one thing they all dreaded, and that Claudia recalls in terror.

> Outdoors, we knew, was the terror of life. The threat of being
> outdoors surfaced frequently in those days. If somebody ate too much,
> he could end up outdoors. If somebody used too much coal, he could
> end up outdoors. (...) There is a difference between being put out and
> being put outdoors. If you are put out, you go somewhere else; if you are
> outdoors, there is no place to go. The distinction was subtle but final.
> Outdoors was the need of something, an irrevocable, physical fact,
> deafening and complementing our metaphysical condition. But the
> concreteness of being outdoors was another matter - like the

difference between the concept of death and being, in fact, dead.

Dead doesn't change, and outdoors is here to stay.

(Morrison, 1970: 17, 18)

Even though Claudia had a roof over her head and food on her table, she tells about the disrespect their parents had towards them. Namely, they were treated almost like items of furniture, had no vote and were the best when they were out of their parents' way. Furthermore, she describes the parents' anger when they would fall ill, which was an act they found inconsiderate from their part, almost as if they did it on purpose. Their illness was seen as an unpleasant distraction, something keeping the parents away from their work. They were reprimanded for their weakness, for letting the illness win. "My mother's anger humiliates me; her words chafe my cheeks, and I am crying. I do not know that she is not angry at me, but at my sickness. I believe she despises my weakness for letting the sickness "take holt"." (Morrison, 1970: 14) When she comments on the general pattern of communication in the family, Claudia describes it not as having a conversation but as giving instructions. From her account of family life we cannot judge her family as ideal, due to their apparent lack of communication and respect toward their children, yet despite that Claudia managed to develop and protect her identity herself.

Claudia speaks about the divisions that occurred between children according to their wealth, social status and skin colour. She recalls anger and aggression building up in her when she was denied something because she was not good enough or when some other girl flaunted her belongings. Claudia and her sister would resort to using violence against them, both verbal and physical, which became a common way of sorting out interpersonal problems.

> Rosemary Villanucci, our next-door friend who lives above her father's
> café sits in a 1939 Buick eating bread and butter. She rolls down the
> window to tell my sister Frieda and me that we can't come in. We stare
> at her, wanting her bread, but more than that wanting to poke the
> arrogance out of her eyes and smash the pride of ownership that
> curls her chewing mouth. When she comes out of the car, we will beat

her up, make red marks on her white skin, and she will cry and ask

us do we want her to pull her pants down. We will say no. We don't know

what we should feel or do if she does, but whenever she asks us, we know

she is offering us something precious and that our pride must be asserted

by refusing to accept.

<div align="right">(Morrison, 1970: 12)</div>

Bell Hooks explores the relationship that black women have toward feminism and concludes that their reluctance to support this movement lies in the oppression they are subjected to by white women. In addition, she believes the feminist movement will never achieve unity and coherence until white women admit they act as discriminators as well.

This knowledge seems especially important at this historical moment

when black women and other women of colour have worked to create

awareness of the ways in which racism empowers white women to act

as exploiters and oppressors. Increasingly, this fact is considered a reason

we should not support feminist struggle even though sexism and

sexist oppression is a real issue in our lives as black women.

<div align="right">(Hooks, 1989: 21)</div>

In Claudia's surrounding, boys and girls equally practiced violence when they got offended or when something or somebody was not to their liking. They were fond of teasing others with offensive songs that mocked somebody's skin colour or sexual behaviour of their parents, which according to the narrator, are things over which one has no control. She adds that they enjoyed those inappropriate games in spite of the fact that they could apply to them as well. "They had extemporised a verse made up of two insults about matters over which the victim had no control: the color of her skin and speculations on the sleeping habits of an adult, wildly fitting in its incoherence. That they themselves were black or that their own father had similarly relaxed habits was irrelevant. It was their contempt for their own blackness that gave the first insult its teeth." (Morrison, 1970: 55) The descriptions of children's cruel games are indicative of

the general atmosphere that exists in a community and attitudes grown-ups cultivate towards others. Morrison uses these games to illustrate the harshness of life of helpless coloured girls, who are an easy target for everyone.

The phenomenon which has a significant impact on upbringing of girls is the ideal of beauty they are exposed to, through media and in their surroundings. The consequences of not fitting the designated pattern are extremely harmful to mental health and may result in different kinds of disorders, including depression and eating disorders. In case of black girls, the projected images of beauty make them value their race negatively, which results in self-hatred or self-effacing. Since the ideas of aesthetically beautiful did not include black, the implication was that black was ugly or that black was non-existent. Indeed, everywhere these girls looked, they could not find confirmation of their beauty or value. The symbols of popular culture emphasised the blue eyes and blond hair of Shirley Temple, who was adored by everyone. The dolls with her face were deemed the most adequate present for every girl, even those who could not relate to her. When Claudia was given such a doll for Christmas, she did not know what it served for or what she was supposed to do with it. The doll provoked strange, negative emotions that made her want to dismember it. Her desire to break the doll apart was the result of the aggression it awoke in her on one hand, but on the other it resulted from the curiosity to discover what it was that made her so lovable and Claudia did not have. "I could not love it. But I could examine it to see what it was that all the world said it was lovable. Break off the tiny fingers, bend the flat feet, loosen the hair, twist the head around, and the thing made one sound - a sound they said was the sweet and plaintive cry "Mama," but which sounded to me like the bleat of the dying lamb, or, more precisely, our icebox door opening on rusty hinges in July." (Morrison, 1970: 20, 21) Claudia notices that this fascination with the white dolls is simply a reflection of the general admiration everyone felt toward pretty, blue-eyed girls. Claudia wondered why she never inspired such emotions in people. What Morrison is trying to identify as the biggest threat is the lack of awareness between blacks themselves, who do not realise they have been adjusted to share values foreign to them, values that deliberately and systematically exclude them. She especially singles out the problem of parents inculcating their children with these artificially imposed values that make their children feel less worthy only because they are different. According to Claudia's

account, the need to possess led black people to forget about feeling. Material possessions took over experiences. She admits she did not want a white doll for Christmas because simply she did not want anything bought, she wanted an experience of happiness and her family together. Nevertheless, she was not asked about what she wanted since children were never consulted about anything.

> I did not know why I destroyed those dolls. But I did know that nobody ever asked me what I wanted for Christmas. Had any adult with the power to fulfill my desires taken me seriously and asked me what I wanted, they would have known that I did not want to have anything to own, or to possess any object. I wanted rather to feel something on Christmas day. 'Dear Claudia, what experience would you like on Christmas?' I could have spoken up, 'I want to sit on the low stool in Big Mama's kitchen with my lap full of lilacs and listen to Big Papa play his violin for me alone.'
>
> <div align="right">(Morrison, 1970: 21)</div>

Claudia's feelings of confusion and inadequacy were evident when she did not know what to do with the doll she was given. Was she supposed to act like a mother to it? She was certain she had no maternal instincts yet because she was only a child herself. This is an example of stereotypical gender roles girls are faced with from an early age. Even in playing they are shaped according to the expectations the future brings to them. "What was I supposed to do with it? Pretend I was its mother? I had no interest in babies or the concept of motherhood. I was interested only in humans my own age and size, and could not generate any enthusiasm at the prospect of being a mother. Motherhood was old-age, and other remote possibilities." (Morrison, 1970: 20) However, not wanting to disappoint her parents and cause anger, she quickly learns what is expected from her and starts sleeping with the doll although she finds it extremely unpleasant. "I learned quickly, however, what I was expected to do with the doll: rock it, fabricate storied situations around it, and even sleep with it. Picture books were full of little girls sleeping with their dolls. I was physically revolted by and secretly frightened of those round moronic eyes, the pancake face, orange worms hair." (Morrison, 1970: 20) Although it might seem harmless, her decision to accept the doll

as a sign of imposed values marks just the beginning of her subordination and adaptation to the dominant culture. Even though she did it just to please her parents, she unknowingly conformed to the discriminatory values of the white society. What is more, it was something she was taught by her parents, who thought they were giving her a gift, while in fact they were showing her what she should try to become. What Claudia later realised is that the hatred she experienced toward the white doll is the hatred she later directed toward real white girls. For no obvious reason, she felt the urge to hurt and torture them, without knowing how wrong and alarming that was. She later realised that white girls were not to blame, that they were not the enemy, but there was something, still unidentifiable that made them lovable and not her. She and Frieda had the need to find flaws with them, something to make them imperfect and thus more human, more like the two of them.

> Frieda and I were bemused, irritated, and fascinated by her. We
> looked hard for flaws to restore our equilibrium, but had to be content
> at first with uglying up her name, changing Maureen Peal to Meringue Pie.
> (...) They were small triumphs, but we took what we could get snickering
> behind her back and calling her Six-finger-dog-tooth-meringue-pie. But we
> had to do it alone, for none of the other girls would cooperate with our
> hostility. They adored her.
>
> (Morrison, 1970: 53)

Only much later did Claudia realise how terrible her thoughts and urges were and how lucky she was that she did not act on them. She admits that in time she learnt to love them, like something normal, the simple order of things, a habit, something you must do without questioning because you were taught to, like hygiene. "When I learned how repulsive this disinterested violence was, that it was repulsive because it was disinterested, my shame floundered about for refuge. The best hiding place was love thus the conversion from pristine sadism to fabricated hatred to fraudulent love. It was a small step to Shirley Temple. I learned much later to worship her, just as I learned to delight in cleanliness." (Morrison, 1970: 22) Morrison explores the interest girls express in womanhood and the stages and emotions they go through as they approach it. She describes the admiration Claudia and Frieda feel towards Pecola when she gets her

period and explain to her that it means she can have babies. Their speculations about marriage, love and children are based on the impressions they get from observing their parents. They link having children with love but are also convinced that all men leave their wives. "It would involve, I supposed, "my man", who before leaving me, would love me. But there weren't any babies in the songs my mother snag. Maybe that's why the women were sad: the men left before they could make a baby." (Morrison, 1970: 29) They have also noticed that all women are sad all the time which they contribute to the fact that men left them. Still, although they realise they do not have much to hope for and that all their mothers do is complain about their fathers, they seem fascinated with the idea of marrying and of somebody loving them.

Claudia is the narrator of the story again at the end of the novel, when she looks back on their childhood, with the benefit of maturity. "She has something now that she didn't have before: she has a different and richer sense of the relation between the individual and the community, and she has a first-person justified story." (Tirrell, 2000: 18) She voices regrets for not supporting Pecola and reaches the conclusion that the world is not equally fair to everyone and that some people are destined to fail from the very beginning. She observes life as a card game that depends on the combination you were given - completely random but impossible to beat. She is aware that by now she has learnt the rules of the game and knows how to get by in life, but that knowledge comes with a price - the loss of innocence. She acknowledges that public judgment and labelling can be worse than a tragic event itself - it is something that hovers over you like a restless ghost from the past. Indeed, although events themselves come and go, memory and storytelling keep them alive and give them meaning and importance. People shape them to fit their stories, thus obscuring the distinction between reality and fiction. As one of the narrators, Claudia shaped Pecola's character, which still remains vague and more a sketch than a finished drawing.

4.2. Analysis of Pecola

Pecola's essence remains impenetrable, as is the case with postmodernist characters whose identities are fragmented and who often linger in a dimension between madness, dreams, memory and mythical imagery. We do not hear her version of the story, which corresponds to her status of a victim. She symbolises the silenced voices of black women oppressed by means of violence and total exclusion. Since their confessions could rarely be heard in history and its documents, Morrison parodies that approach and portrays Pecola through others' perspective. She is constructed from memory, gossip and assumptions of the community. The only account she gives herself is her conversation with the unknown, imaginary interlocutor, most likely with herself, about the blue eyes she convinced herself she had. That account gives no information about her life except her mental condition and the dire need to escape the reality of her life. All her misfortune results from a simple wish to be loved. She did not yearn for beauty 'per se', but for an opportunity to be accepted and loved, perhaps just to have her existence acknowledged. The question is how love and acceptance came to depend on such superficial criteria such as beauty, not to mention the colour of skin or eyes? The repercussions of such terrible injustice are that girls such as Pecola had basically no chance to develop love for themselves, which made them even more unlovable to others.

What Morrison underscores in this novel is the narrow-mindedness of the black community, which allowed itself to be led astray by the imposed values that cannot be artificially incorporated in their lives without backfiring. The only accounts of Pecola's ugliness and the ugliness of her entire family come from the blacks in their surroundings. It is not the whites that discriminate and abuse Pecola it is her own people. She was traumatised by a boy from her school that accused her of killing his cat and called her terrible names. She was verbally abused and humiliated by his mother as well because she did not want her son to be around 'niggers.' She considered her family to be 'coloured', which she believed was completely different from being a 'nigger'. "White kids; his mother did not like him to play with niggers. She had explained to him the difference between coloured people and niggers. They were easily identifiable.

Coloured people were neat and quiet; niggers were dirty and loud. He belonged to the former group: he wore white shirts and blue trousers; his hair was cut as close to his scalp as possible to avoid any suggestion of wool." (Morrison, 1970: 71) The question is: how can blacks be accepted by others if they cannot accept themselves and if they adopt racist separatism and rhetoric? The imitation of the white culture resulted in the absence of unity among the black community. The best indicator of the social climate in the community is the dynamic of family life. Pecola's misfortune can to a large extent be blamed on the inadequacy of her parents. Devoting all their time to bickering and fighting over money, they neglected their children's upbringing. Playing the roles of a saint and a sinner, they did not act as examples to their children. Focused on their misfortune and wrong choices, they did not live in the present but in a dimension of dreams and lost opportunities. Surrounded by abusive parents who did not acknowledge their existence, Pecola and her brother had to find ways of coping with reality on their own. While her brother found the solution in running away, Pecola was trying to disappear in another manner.

> 'Please, God,' she whispered into the palm of her hand. 'Please make
> me disappear.' She squeezed her eyes shut. Little parks of her body faded
> away. Now slowly, now with a rush. Slowly again. He fingers went, one
> by one; then her arms disappeared all the way to the elbow. Hew feet
> now. Yes, that was good. The legs all at once. It was the hardest above the
> things. She had to be   real still and pull. Her stomach would not go. But
> finally it, too, went away. Then her chest, her neck. The face was hard,
> too. Almost done, almost. Only her tight, tight eyes were left.
> They were always left.
>
> <div align="right">(Morrison, 1970: 39)</div>

Pecola realised that others had two ways of reacting to her - either mocking and insulting or completely ignoring her. In time she realised the latter option was better, it spared her the pain and humiliation. Hence, she wished she would disappear all together.

He does not see her, because for him there is nothing to see. How

can a fifty-two-year-old white immigrant storekeeper with the taste of

potatoes and beer in his mouth his mind honed on the doe-eyed Virgin

Mary, his sensibilities blunted by a permanent awareness of loss, see

a little black girl? Nothing in his life even suggested that the feat was

possible, not to say desirable or necessary. She looks up at him and sees

the vacuum where curiosity ought to lodge. And something more. The

total absence of human recognition – the glazed separateness.

(Morrison, 1970: 42)

Suranyi argues that the skin impedes the storekeeper to see the child within. She adds, "Told in the present tense, which suggests timelessness as well as repetitiveness, the incident confirms for Pecola her lack of self-worth. The dandelions she had formerly thought to be quite beautiful are now simply the weeds everyone has said they are." (2007: 12) The only ones who did not despise her were the three whores, who were equally avoided and looked down on by others. Although they were not the loving kind, they at least gave her some of their time and attention.

Two dangerous trends that were pervading public and private lives in the black community were the increasing importance of physical appearance and taking pride in one's immaculate moral behaviour. The first one resulted in the need of keeping up with the Joneses and the latter in the need to judge others. Both were meant to make one feel better about oneself through comparison with the less fortunate ones. These patterns of behaviour were acquired from the models of the dominant, white culture and are based on maintaining the hierarchies of power. The colonisers tended to portray the colonised as naturally inferior as a race, which enabled them to represent their agendas as projects of enlightenment instead of exploitation. They even referred to scientific evidence to back their theories of the inborn intellectual superiority of the white race. The real danger lies in the situation when that theory is accepted as valid. Morrison draws the attention of readers to the phenomenon of self-hatred between the blacks who longed to have descendants of lighter skin and to that end married "up" trying to remove all the signs of their once black heritage. The perfect example of this is the tenant in the house of Claudia's parents, whose ancestors applied such methods in order to progress up the

rungs. They boasted with their academic achievements, which they saw as proof of the white race's intellectual superiority.

> They transferred this Anglophilia to their six children and sixteen grandchildren. Except for an occasional and unaccountable insurgent who chose a restive black, they married "up", lightening the family complexion and thinning out the family features. With the confidence born of a conviction of superiority, they performed well at schools. They were industrious, orderly, and energetic, hoping to prove beyond a doubt De Gobineau's hypothesis that "all civilizations derive from the white race, that none can exist without its help, and that a society is great and brilliant only so far as it preserves the blood of the noble group that created it."

> (Morrison, 1970: 133)

Hence, the novel is trying to warn against the subliminal messages that arise from the unquestioning acceptance of white as beautiful, intelligent and good and that is that black is ugly, stupid and bad and should therefore be changed or removed.

4.3. Analysis of Pauline Breedlove

Pecola's mother was the victim of the desire to compete with other women regarding physical beauty. Inspired by movie stars they saw in Hollywood films, black women began to spend a great deal of time and money on dressing up. They demanded financial support from their husbands to do so and if they could not fulfill their wishes, the men were deemed useless and their incompetence was the favourite topic of their conversations with other women. Men started to be judged and valued according to their ability to earn money so that their wives would not fall behind in keeping trends. When they moved to a different city, Pauline found herself in a new environment that included a great deal of white people, which meant a bigger influence of their culture as well. She soon began copying other women and caring more about her appearance than the

tidiness of her home. However, her need was costly and led her to have first real problems with Cholly. "Money became the focus of all their discussions, hers for clothes, his for drink. The sad thing was that Pauline did not really care for clothes and makeup. She merely wanted other women to cast favourable glances her way." (Morrison, 1970: 94) When her tooth fell out, she witnessed all her dreams collapsing. She realised she would have to renounce her dream of beauty, youth and excitement and settle for a life of small, daily pleasures. She again found peace in keeping the house clean and ordering things, which gave her an illusion that she was making order and meaning in her life. Incapable of achieving anything more, she dedicated herself to the life of order, cleanliness and moral virtue.

> She was older now, with no time for dreams, and movies. It was time
> to put all of the pieces together, make coherence where before there had
> been none. The children gave her this need; she herself was no longer a
> child. So she became, and her process of becoming was like most of
> ours: she developed a hatred for things that mystified or obstructed her;
> acquired virtues that were easy to maintain, assigned herself a role in the
> scheme of things and harked back to simpler times for gratification.

> (Morrison, 1970: 100)

Gradually Pauline began to take pleasure in judging others and exposing their mistakes because it gave her an opportunity to define herself as superior. When she realised that Cholly was no longer the loving man she married, she tried to make the best of the situation and turn him into a complete sinner she had to bear as a cross. "She let another tooth fall, and was outraged by painted ladies who thought only of clothes and men. Holding Cholly as a model of sin and failure, she bore him like a crown of thorns and her children like a cross." (Morrison, 1970: 100) Pauline treated Cholly as her punishment, as a test of her faith and always asked for God's help when they would fight. Their fights became extremely violent and physically abusive on both sides, inflicting the biggest suffering on their children. Although she considered herself religious and morally virtuous, the vision of God she nurtured was a vindictive God that would punish people on her command. "Mrs Breedlove considered herself an upright

and Christian woman, burdened with a no-count man, whom God wanted her to punish. Mrs. Breedlove was not interested in Christ the Redeemer, but rather Christ the Judge." (Morrison, 1970: 36, 37)

She started working for an affluent white family as a housekeeper, which allowed her to get an insight into a life of luxury and comfort. She realised for the first time what it feels like to be respected and praised for one's work and consequently tried even harder to deserve their affection. She even got a nickname she never had before and felt like part of the family. Her admiration for that family's lifestyle produced hatred and frustration toward her real family. She would stay at work as long as she could and go home in bad spirits. Her influence on Pecola's self-confidence was crucial because she provided her with no support and made her believe that she does not deserve to be loved even by her parents. On one occasion when Pecola came to her master's house, she saw her mother talk in a loving way with the little girl of the family, which she never did with her. What is more, her mother finally chased her away not wanting her to disturb her other life. Furthermore, since Pecola had no other example of what love should be like, she supposed it had to be the relationship her parents had and concluded that love had to hurt and that abuse was also love. Pauline gave no support to Pecola even after her father had raped her, even refusing to believe her. Her refusal to help her daughter resulted in the second rape. Moreover, the accounts of others point to the fact that she, in fact, beat Pecola after she was raped, which probably led to the death of her baby. Even though her father is the perpetrator of the hideous crime, her mother is the one who allowed it to happen and who provided no protection or consolation later on. " 'You don't understand anything, do you? She didn't believe me when I told her.' 'So that's why you didn't tell her about the second time?' 'She wouldn't have believed me then either.' " (Morrison, 1970: 155)

4.4. Incestuous Rape of Pecola

The cause of Cholly's rape of his own daughter is not easy to identify and verbalise. Morrison singles out the reasons behind this tragedy. Even though she depicts the scene when Cholly was humiliated by the hunters at the beginning of the novel, at the end Morrison links this event to his actions later in life and primarily with this case of incestuous rape. Namely, when he was a teenager, Cholly was found having sex by hunters. So as to have fun, they forced him to continue by shouting instructions and insults at them. He was treated like an animal, without the right to human decency. He always remembered this feeling of utter helplessness and subjugation as well as the need for retaliation. With his pride destroyed, he felt aggression building up in him. However, it was the aggression that could not be directed at its source, for he was not supposed to confront the white men. At that time he did not even realise it was the white men he hated, since he knew that kind of hatred would consume him. Instead, he directed his anger toward the only creature more helpless than him, the girl he was caught with, Darlene. Morrison states that Cholly is "symbolically raped" since the pain he suffers is also the one of complete helplessness, inflicted by a savage act.

> Sullen, irritable, hr cultivated his hatred of Darlene. Never did he
> once consider directing his hatred toward the hunters. Such an emotion
> would have destroyed him. They were big, white, armed men. He was
> small, black, and helpless. His subconscious knew what his conscious
> mind did not guess - that hating them would have consumed him, burned
> him up like a piece of soft coal, leaving only flakes of ash and a question
> mark of smoke. He was, in time, to discover that hatred of white men - but
> not now. Not in impotence but later, when the hatred could find sweet
> expression. For now, he hated the one who had created the situation, the
> one who bore witness to his failure, the impotence. The one whom he
> had not been able to protect, to spare, to cover from the round moonglow
> of flashlight.
>
> (Morrison, 1970: 119)

From that moment on, he associated the feeling of powerlessness with anger towards those who did not deserve it, who in fact needed love and protection. When he saw his poor daughter, looking so desperate and disillusioned with life, Cholly felt the same helplessness he felt when he was abused by the hunters. Morrison comments on her attempts to subvert the language in the novel to a "feminine mood" on the example of connecting Cholly's rape of Pecola with the humiliation he experienced by the hunters:

> It is interesting to me now that where I thought I would have
> the most difficulty subverting the language to a feminine mood, I had
> the least: connecting Cholly's "rape" by the white men to his own of his
> daughter: the most masculine act of aggression becomes feminised in
> my language, "passive" and, I think, more accurately repellent when
> deprived of the male) "glamour of shame" rape is (or once was) routinely
> given.
>
> (Morrison, 1988: 150)

He knew there was nothing he could do to help her, to make life more pleasurable for her. When he saw love in her eyes, his rage only grew because he knew there was nothing he could give her in return, nothing to deserve her love with. Although he felt sadness and compassion, he also felt rage, provoked by her miserable appearance. He was not angry with her he was angry at the fact that she was as miserable as she was and he was as useless as always.

> Why did she have to look so whipped? She was a child - unburdened -
> why wasn't she happy? The clear statement of her misery was an accusation.
> He wanted to break her neck - but tenderly. Guilt and impotence rose in a
> bilious duet. What could he do for her - ever? What give her? What to say to
> her? What could a burned-out black man say to the hunched back of his
> eleven-year-old daughter? If he looked into her face, he would see those
> haunted, loving eyes. The hauntedness would irritate him - the love would
> move him to fury. How dare she love him? Hadn't she any sense at all? What
> was he supposed to do about that? Return it? How? What could his calloused
> hands produce to make her smile? What of his knowledge of the world and
> of life could be useful to her? What could his heavy arms and befuddled

brain accomplish that would earn him his own respect, that would in turn allow him to accept her love?

<div align="right">(Morrison, 1970: 127)</div>

Cholly felt that he had to do something to remove that anger and show her some love. However unbelievable it might seem, he felt that by raping her he was actually showing her his love. He considered his act to be an act of love. The scene when Pecola is lying unconscious on the floor with her clothes torn is the most striking image of victimisation she was undergoing. That scene is just a physical representation of the emotional pain she was suffering on a daily basis. The account of incestuous rape is the culmination of the self-hatred in the black community. Many critics of black literature note that the role of the father of a family is quite different for black families, where father himself is dehumanised and labelled as incompetent, which is the case with Cholly. Being a drunk who put his family outdoors, he had no respect or understanding of the community. Seen as a useless sinner by his wife, he eventually accepted that role as the only he could identify with. Some critics, including Bell Hooks, admit that the patriarchal version of the role of the father is something most black men are struggling with. Many of them find it impossible to fulfill their duties accordingly due to the discrimination they encounter. Consequently, they respond with the aggressive behaviour towards the ones below them - women. In many cases of family violence the reasons for the onset of aggressive behaviour lie in the man's inability to provide for his family. "The seemingly positive aspects of the patriarchy (caretaker and provider) have been the most difficult for masses of black men to realise, and the negative aspects (maintaining control through psychological or physical violence) are practiced daily." (Hooks, 1989: 178) According to Fanon,the only solution to the problem of subjugation is to strike back with violence. He adds that if violence is not directed toward the oppressor, it will be exerted on the innocent ones. This circle of violence that begins as white on black violence continues as black on black violence. (In Edwards, 2008: 71) Although it cannot be denied that Cholly's act is unaccountable, Morrison does not describe him as an essentially evil man. He was not always a drunk, before that he was a hard-working, charming man who loved his wife despite her physical defect. However, due to the general circumstances of a black man's life, he lost interest in everything and simply stopped caring. The only thing that kept him going was alcohol. Thus, the

purpose of this novel is not to describe acts of an insane, perverted man but to show what a life of rejection and humiliation can make one do and become. Morrison does not blame Cholly personally but only uses him as a representative of all those victims of society who due to the pain they had suffered were made to inflict it upon others.

4.5. Marginalisation of and Violence Against Women

Pecola's silence and general subduedness are strikingly obvious in the novel, keeping in mind that she is the main character. Although her tragic story may have been much more compelling had it been told in first person, her deprivation of voice is yet another symbol of her overall marginalisation. Hooks dwells on the issue of silence in black families and tells the story from her own experience. She believes this silence of women is rooted in the teaching that "our fathers, because they were men, were not to be spoken to or about, unless they wished to speak with us, and then they were never to be addressed critically." (Hooks, 1989: 128) Moreover, she gives an account of the "two social spaces" they lived in, one was the world without the father - the world full of speech, when volume could be turned up. "We could express ourselves loudly, passionately, outrageously." (Hooks, 1989: 128) The other world was the one where father was present - "a male-dominated social space where sound and silence were distracted by his presence." (Hooks, 1989: 128)

Another issue that the novel reflects on is the status of women that are victims of family violence. That violence can vary from the verbal one, through the sexual one to the physical one, but despite the differences it is detrimental and inadmissible. However, although it is generally assumed that victims deserve the support of their surroundings, institutions and general public, this novel shows it is often not the case. Pecola's admission that her mother not just denied her help but also physically molested her stands as a confirmation of this alarming problem. What is more, victims are frequently marked as the ones who provoked the culprit or are said to have deserved it. The most surprising and worrying fact is that women are those who label other women as guilty or at least not innocent although in those cases they are victims. Morrison

sheds light on this: " 'Well, they ought to take her out of school.' 'Ought to. She carry some of the blame.' 'Oh, come on. She ain't but twelve or so.' 'Yeah. But you never know. How come he didn't fight him?' " (Morrison, 1970: 147) Although Pecola is just a girl, these women are trying to attach guilt to her. They have been taught that women are always guilty regardless of the facts and that it is in their nature to seduce even though they are only children. Hooks warns that within the confines of patriarchal society women who are victimised by males often have to pay the price for "breaking the silence and naming the problem." (1989: 89) And when they take such a courageous step, they are met with judgment and labels such as "battered women", "fallen women" which, according to Hooks, make the victim "a social pariah, set apart and marked forever by this experience." (1989: 89) She links the experience of being a victim of violence in a marriage or an intimate relationship with the loss of innocence. She places the blame for this on the "passive acceptance of concepts of romantic love under patriarchy which have served to mask problematic realities in relationships." (1989: 90) Her stand can be applied to the abuse Pauline suffered in her marriage with Cholly and it is a matter on which Morrison agrees with Hooks, since she also criticises the concepts of romantic love and physical beauty for all the misfortune. Morrison here represents the motif of female sexuality as damned, as a gift and a curse, a cross women have to bear all their life. Hooks reminds us that women who experienced abuse as children are more likely to be victims of it later in life than those who did not. "Exploration of male violence against women by feminists and non-feminists shows a connection between childhood experience of being hit by loved ones and the later occurrence of violence in adult relationships." (Hooks, 1989: 86, 87) The example of the lack of support in the community for the victim is indicative of the general lack of awareness and increased insensitivity toward the helpless. Morrison gives such an explicit account of what the lack of solidarity does in a community as a warning that it is high time to protect each other from the harmful ways of the dominant culture and embrace the tradition and one's true nature. In addition, she underlines the importance of female friendship and solidarity, which is her favourite theme, and is completely absent in this novel. However, even by the depiction of the lack of friendship she manages to convey the message of its importance. As a writer, she is aware that things can be said even when they are omitted.

Although Pecola's madness is a direct repercussion of the rape she was subjected to and her losing the baby, there are also other interesting interpretations for her mental illness. Byerman (1997) interprets Pecola's madness as a consequence of her inability to understand and deconstruct the order imposed by the father. Although Pecola does not seem to oppose any structure of power, she is intent on finding out the truth - the reason for her ugliness and she tries to switch places in the hierarchy, by pretending to have blue eyes, that is, to be a white girl. Her desire for the blue eyes is in itself a rejection of her blackness and by the same token, a rejection of her father. On the other hand, this rejection of the imposed laws can apply to Claudia's character as well, since she is the one who literally dismembers the Shirley Temple doll, in order to see what it is that makes it so lovable. However, Byerman (1997) makes a distinction between the relationship of the white father and his daughters and the black father and his daughters according to the analysis of the authorities the society grants them. "The crucial difference between the white father and his daughters is that the very nature of the system grants some validity to the father's pretense of authority but none at all to that of the daughters. The black father, himself marked as outlaw, lacks even the pretense of authorising power, and his daughters can exist only as a negation. Thus, in each case, the daughter serves as a vehicle for expressing the true conditions of the father." (Byerman, 1997: 137)

> Her effort to construct an order of her own by which to define her
> relationship to reality is itself taken as a criminal act. Unlike a son, the
> daughter is not permitted to know the codes by which she must
> operate; nonetheless, she is held culpable for her inability to interpret
> them correctly. The end result is that her actions are distortions of the
> patriarchal order, especially when they deal with matters of desire and
> power. For Morrison these distortions take the radical form of violence
> and madness, where distance between patriarchal structure and female
> desire is shown to be the causative factor.
>
> (Byerman, 1997: 132)

4.6. The Relationship between the Individual
and the Community

We see that both girls, Claudia and Pecola, were faced with the equally discriminating world and ideals they could not possibly meet, but while one had to seek refuge in madness, the other managed to adapt to such circumstances, although not painlessly. They represent two outcomes of life in a hostile environment and what distinguished one from the other are primarily their own convictions. Although they both realised they did not fall in the category of pretty girls, while Claudia was trying to learn the secret of their beauty, Pecola was searching for the reason of her ugliness. She blamed herself for not being able to accommodate to the society's demands, whereas Claudia was blaming the society for establishing such criteria in the first place. The answer for their different destinies lies in the firm beliefs they had about themselves and their own self-worth. Lynne Tirrell states that while Claudia scrutinised and sought justification for the imposed criteria, Pecola instead scrutinized herself. (2000: 16) Claudia recalls the time when she and her sister were certain they were pretty and felt good in their own skin. Although they realised others might not agree with that, they did not consider themselves any less valuable. By contrast, Pecola never felt good in her own shoes, which is confirmed by her desires to disappear or become somebody else. It might not be accurate to define Pecola as a person with identity crisis since she had no opportunity to develop her identity to begin with. She was not given a chance to meet herself and let the world meet her. Her answer to life was to escape from reality. Unlike many postmodern characters that undergo periods of mental crises and eventually reach enlightenment and their true selves, Pecola had no such luck. She is indeed a tragic heroine who is not given a second chance because she did not even have the first one. However, contrasted with Claudia, Pecola also emerges like a weak and fragile character, who did not realise that chances had to be earned because for some, they are not just given away. Morrison places stress on the importance of convictions one develops or is inculcated with by family. She makes her characters victims of their own convictions. She does not give much importance to destiny or some inexplicable turn of events, she simply lets her characters win or lose by power of their beliefs. This can be

seen in Pecola's case but also in the destiny of her entire family. Namely, they are all labelled as 'ugly' by the entire community and their unprecedented, almost offensive ugliness is mentioned on various occasions. Morrison comments on this phenomenon and attributes it to their own belief in their ugliness.

> You looked at them and wondered why they were so ugly; you looked closely and could not find the source. Then you realised that it came from conviction, their conviction. It was as though some mysterious all-knowing master had given each one a cloak of ugliness to wear, and they had each accepted it without question. The master had said 'You are ugly people. 'They had looked about themselves and saw nothing to contradict the statement; saw, in fact, support for it leaning at them from every billboard, every movie, every glance. 'Yes', they had said. 'You are right.'
>
> (Morrison, 1970: 34)

Since they believed they were ugly, they also felt they did not deserve better lives, and proved that ugliness can only produce more ugliness, as well as despair creates even more despair.

4.7. Analysis of the Ending

When Claudia assumes the role of the narrator to give the overall conclusion at the end, she feels regret for the way the entire community, herself included, treated Pecola. She admits she stayed away from her because it was easier than getting involved even though she senses that her friendship could have been that one thing that would give Pecola the reason to embrace real life over madness. Her doubts are confirmed by the fact that towards the end, Pecola is presented having a conversation with herself and she shows how badly she needs a friend, to the point that we realise it was the only thing she wanted from the very beginning.

Claudia comes to the conclusion that the only people who showed some affection to Pecola were the Maginot Line and Cholly. She interprets his act as an act of love, the only kind he was capable to give. She comments that love is rather like the person who gives it.

> Oh, some of us "loved" her. The Maginot Line. And Cholly loved her.
> I'm sure he did. He, at any rate, was the one who loved her enough to
> touch her, envelop her, give her something of himself to her. But his touch
> was fatal, and the something he gave her filled the matrix of her agony
> with death. Love is never any better than the lover. Wicked people
> love wickedly, violent people love violently, weak people love weakly,
> stupid people stupidly, but the love of a free anis is never safe. There is no
> gift for the beloved. The lover alone possesses his gift of love. The loved
> one is shorn, neutralised, frozen in the glare of the lover's inward eye.

<p style="text-align:center">(Morrison, 1970: 159, 160)</p>

It was already stated that Pecola, despite having the general outlines of a postmodern character, does not fit the pattern completely, but what about Claudia? She, on the other hand, reaches some realisations about the world and herself and also carries the tragic element of not doing anything to change the status quo. Although she herself managed to adapt to a certain point to the environment demands, she did nothing to change them or to help Pecola in overcoming her struggle. That realisation is her own personal failure she has to live with daily. Hooks marks confession and memory as ways of naming reality that allow women to "talk about personal experiences as part of a process of politisation, which places such talk in a dialectical context. This allows us to discuss personal experiences in a different way, in a way that politicises not just the telling, but the tale." (1989: 109) Claudia's storytelling was not just means of coming to terms with herself and accepting blame, but also had a powerful role in attributing political significance to the story, which thus becomes more than a testimony, it becomes evidence.

4.8. General Women's Issues in the Novel

Besides the main plot that covers the story of Claudia's and Pecola's growing up, Morrison expresses other concerns regarding black women's lives, such as the stereotype of a black woman as a breeder of children, limitations of their choices, loneliness and the lack of understanding and the exploitation of black women for household chores.

4.8.1. The Limitations and Stereotypes Black Women Face

The character of Pauline Breedlove is a typical example of a black woman's possibilities in life. Namely, they could be housekeepers at their home, at somebody else's home or in most cases both at once. Black women were deemed unfit for any other work except the domestic one and besides the limited opportunities in life they were also burdened with numerous expectations and demands. Although it was at times humiliating to serve others, usually the white people, they were at least valued for it. Ironically, their effort was praised more in the homes of their employers than in their own homes. Consequently, many of them preferred to stay at work or even move in the employer's house and dedicate their entire lives to raising their children, instead of their own. Black women were known as the ones who raised white children instead of their parents. Pauline Breedlove confirms this - she was devoted to the family she worked for and loved to think of herself as a member of their family. Her desire to belong to their world led to the disintegration of her own family. With the limited opportunities they were faced with, these women tried to make do with what they had and made the care of their 'nests' their primary concern. At times it would seem that they cared more about their homes than their family members. But when the husband was away at work, the woman was alone at home, trying to establish some order in her home and give purpose to her life. Those were the moments of freedom but also the moments of complete loneliness when they would befriend a cat. Thus, cats were often the ones who got most

of their affection, even after they became mothers. "Occasionally some living thing will engage her affections. A cat, perhaps, who will love her order, precision, and constancy; who will be as clean and quiet as she is. The cat will always know that he is the first in her affections. Even after she bears a child. For she does bear a child - easily, and painlessly. But only one. A son. Named Junior." (Morrison, 1970: 70) This quote illustrates the lack of communication and understanding black women did not know how to overcome and instead accepted as a fact of life.

4.8.2. Black Women's Sexuality

Another issue of interest is black women's sexuality. They are commonly portrayed as child bearers and as victims of sexual abuse, first by the slave masters, then by white and black men alike, but they are not thought to enjoy their own sexuality. Indeed, Morrison represents this as one of the stereotypes but also poses a question why black women really seem not to be in touch with their sexualities. She describes Pauline Breedlove's sexual experiences as limited and routine although she does mention her desires. She engages in sexual intercourse with her husband as something that needs to be done, something expected of her to perform, as yet another chore. She avoids too much intimacy and cannot wait for it to be over so that she can redo her hair. "He must enter her surreptitiously, lighting the hem of her nightgown only to her navel. He must rest his weight on his elbows when they make love, ostensibly to avoid hurting her breasts but actually to keep her from having to touch or feel too much of him. (...) When she senses some spasm about to grip him, she will make rapid movements with her hips, press her fingernails into his back, suck in her breath, and pretend she is having an orgasm" (Morrison, 1970: 69) However, she recalls the event when a simple touch of a delicate napkin that slipped free of her sanitary belt made her feel some divine sensation she identified as orgasm. This propels her to wonder why she cannot experience this sensation with her husband. Although female sexuality has become a serious field of scientific study, where many are trying to reach life-changing insights, the question of our concern in this case is not that much a question of sex but of intimacy. It appears

that Pauline does not share enough intimacy with her husband to either enjoy her sexual life more or to tackle this problem. Even after she realises what it should feel like, it remains just a thought since she does not give it much attention. Thus, women themselves did not place emphasis on enjoyment and instead considered sex as another duty or a simple means of procreation. Moreover, it was a general attitude that women do not and need not enjoy sex, for it was the man's area.

4.8.3. Black Women as Child Bearers

However, black women were also associated with children - bearing children and taking care of their own and others' children. It was unthinkable for a black woman to decide not to have children, even more than for a white one. Having children was not considered a decision, but a duty. Nevertheless, Morrison wants to deconstruct this stereotype and by doing so, show women that their bodies are theirs to own and make decisions about. Therefore, she creates female characters that do not fall into the pattern of nurturing, selfless mothers. Her aim is to put the message across that black women are not inherently predisposed for childbirth more than any other women and that 'black mummy' is a dangerous stereotype. She is brave to tackle this prejudice since it is not popular to describe motherhood in any other way but as a rewarding blessing. Nevertheless, Morrison is determined to point out the other side of the coin, as well. Hence, in this novel she portrays Pecola's mother and Claudia's mother as example of not so perfect mothers, worried more about their financial situation than their children. Although they might be heard saying how they work their fingers to the bone to provide for them, they in fact fall victims to the general frenzy of acquiring ownership and taking care of their homes. If they really considered motherhood as their biggest priorities, they would have had better communication with their daughters and provided them with guidance and support. Instead, both girls had to undergo painful adaptations on their own. When it comes to the idea that childbirth is easy and trivial for black women, the novel reflects on it in the scene where a doctor refers to Pauline and black women in general as horses, due to their ability to give birth easily. This misconception

is so powerful that he even claims they feel no pain and deprives them of the care and attention given to white women. His approach is also an example of dehumanisation of black women since he does not address or even look at Pauline when he approaches her bed. She was not considered adequate to be included in the conversation that involved her childbirth. "When he got to me he said now these here women you don't have any trouble with. They deliver right away and with no pain. Just like horses. (...) They looked at my stomach and between my legs. They never said nothing to me." (Morrison, 1970: 99) In the light of his marginalisation of her, she deliberately made loud sounds during her childbirth in order to make them realise she is not an animal and does feel pain like any white woman. "I moaned something awful. The pain wasn't as bad as I let on, but I had let them people know having a baby was more than a bowel movement. I hurt just like them white women. Just 'cause I wasn't hooping and hollering before didn't mean I wasn't feeling pain." (Morrison, 1970: 99) It seems unbelievable that black women were discriminated against even when it came to the right to feel pain. Morrison shows that even science nurtured serious discriminatory misconceptions about black people. Furthermore, science was often used as an excuse for the malicious agendas of the oppressors. McClintock makes a link between the female body and imperialism: "the drawing of the map in the form of the female body offers an abstract image of sexuality that is connected to imperialism. For that land is conceived of as part of a masculinist dream wherein the terrain lies open for the Englishmen, offering itself up to the dominance of white male authority." (In Edwards, 2008: 97) The link they perceive between the female body and oppression and exploitation is another common feature of postcolonialism, feminism and black literary theory. Edwards sees evoked slavery in the story of Pecola's loss and notes, "all that happens has already occurred - under the guise of transportation and slavery. Pecola's loss, the loss of everything good that Pecola might want, the loss of Pecola herself. These multiple and intertwined losses are doomed to come anyway given her home circumstances and the 'colonised history of her race.' " (2008: 72)

4.9. Criticism of History and the
Use of Postmodern Elements

When it comes to Morrison's references to history in this novel, she uses them according to the functions of historiographic metafiction, that is, she relies on the references to historical names, places and events, such as Shirley Temple, Ginger Rogers and the sites of crucial events in the Second World War, such as Poland and the Maginot Line, to give the impression of authenticity. On the other hand, implied author's comments in the narration point to the fictional character of the story. "The function of the conjunction of the historiographic and the metafictive in much contemporary fiction, from that of Fowles and Doctorow to that of Eco and Garcia Marquez, is to make the reader aware of the distinction between the *events* of the past real and the *facts* by which we give meaning to that past, by which we assume to know it." (Huctheon, 2004: 223; original italics) By focusing on the stories of those silenced in the past, Morrison challenges history and offers alternative truths. She does include history in the novel, as she is aware that it has a role in creating our realities, but she parodies it and disputes its versions. Although postmodernism employs parody, of genres, life and history, in order to open them to rewriting, it usually does not mean ridiculing, but Morrison does not flinch from that either when she gives the names of historical places from the Second World War to the three whores. Postmodernism is conducive to Morrison's challenging of the ideologies and hierarchies of power. "The postmodernism does not deny that all discourses (including this one) work to legitimise power; instead, it questions how and why, and does so by self-consciously even didactically, investigating the politics of the production and reception of art. To challenge a dominant ideology, it recognises, is itself another ideology. (Hutcheon, 2004: 224) According to Hutcheon, postmodernism opposes all structures, even its own, considering asking questions to be its only agenda. Commenting on the epilogue of the novel, Morrison states that she was not interested in finding out why injustice happens, but how. "There is really nothing more to say - except why. But since why is difficult to handle, one must take refuge in how." (In Byerman, 1997: 133) Byerman adds that in this novel Morrison is more interested in the effects of mystification than the source of

it. (1997: 133) Although many critics consider postmodernism inadequate for expressing concerns of the Other, according to Hutcheon, one of the contradictions of postmodernism is in fact related to the treatment of difference. "Paradoxes of postmodernism serve to call to our attention both our continuing postulation of that difference and also a newer epistemological doubt. (Do we know the difference? Can we?)" (Hutcheon, 2004: 225)

Conclusion

The power of this story lies not just in the theme itself, but in the choice of the perspective. Morrison admits she wanted the story of violation to be shared by its victims and the most innocent beings, girls: "The novelty, I thought, would be in having this story of female violation revealed from the vantage point of the victims or could be victims of rape – the persons no one inquired of (certainly not in 1965) – the girls themselves." (Morrison, 1988: 149) Morrison's decision to open the novel with the secret already revealed announces the shocking character of the plot but also a daring move of the narrator. "Thus, the opening provides that stroke that announces something more than a secret shared, but a silence broken, a void filled, an unspeakable thing spoken at last." (Morrison, 1988: 149) Morrison elaborates why she chose to feature the story of rape right at the beginning and admits that it functioned as a coy meant to provoke strong emotions and curiosity to know more. However, she mollifies the bitter effect of the rape story with a children song, which reveals that the narrator is a child. Her choice of the narrator inevitably makes the readers question the veracity of the story.

> This foregrounding of "trivial" information and backgrounding of
> shocking knowledge secures the point of view but gives the reader
> pause about whether the voice of children can be trusted at all or is
> more trustworthy than an adult's. The reader is thereby protected from
> a confrontation too soon with the painful details, while simultaneously
> provoked into a desire to know them.
>
> (Morrison, 1988: 148)

The Bluest Eye is not just a novel, it is an experimental study on how to address a story of incestuous rape of a girl. It is a story about tragedy, dark secrets, pain and loss. Moreover, it is a story about lack – a lack of friendship, a lack of understanding, a lack of love. It is also a story of negation – of Pecola, of the rape, of ugliness. Morrison's aim was not just to write a shocking story of rape and provoke strong reactions that would inevitably appear, but to explore why such things happen in the first place. Very courageously, she makes the villain into a victim and creates a chain or circle of continuous violence. For, Pecola was not just a victim of Cholly, she was a victim of her mother, of Claudia, of the storekeeper and finally of the white hunters. Morrison tried and succeeded in putting across a message of the detrimental effect of black powerlessness and the lack of compassion that settled among the blacks.

5. MARGARET ATWOOD'S AUTHORSHIP

5.1. Atwood and the World of Literature

Margaret Atwood is certainly one of the most prominent living authors today, and her contribution to the literature produced by women and about women is invaluable.

Her opus encompasses best-selling novels, which were well-received by both readers and critics and many literary awards, such as the prestigious Booker Prize and Arthur C. Clarke Award, confirm this. She is also a prominent poet and has produced 15 books of poetry. Being a vigilant observer of the contemporary political scene, she is known for addressing burning political or environmental issues. Apart from being a fruitful author, Atwood is credited with remarkable accomplishments in the field of literary theory, primarily with making pioneer steps in establishing the theoretical framework of Canadian literature. Her theoretical study Survival, which will later be addressed in more detail, was seen as the first serious piece that tried to give an answer to the question of Canadian literary and national identities and liberate them from the dominance of British and American canons. At the time considered a breakthrough, today it is still an essential part of the Canadian Studies program.

Born in Ottawa, Atwood, whose father was an entomologist, spent much of her childhood in the backwoods of northern Quebec due to her father's research work. Because of the unusual living arrangements her family had, which required a great deal of travelling and frequent moving, Atwood was homeschooled and did not attend school full-time until the eighth grade. Solitary life and absence of friends provided an excellent environment for reading and writing. As a child, Atwood was a keen reader and started writing very early on and already at the age of 16 she knew she wanted to become an author. Her experiences while growing up are described in some of her works, but the novel *The Cat's Eye* gives the best insight into it. Narrated by a female artist, who remembers her growing up - summers in the woods, the rest of the year at school with friends - readers get the impression that much of it is autobiographical. We see the peculiarities of growing up when you are different from the rest and the troubles

with conforming to or resisting peer pressure. Indeed, much of Atwood's life was poured into her novels. Besides facts from her life, her novels feature places she finds dear or relevant to her life. Like a true patriot, she opts for Toronto when choosing the setting for her plots, describing the particular ambiance it possesses and weaving her personal experiences into it. Note that those descriptions are not always positive, since Atwood favours more natural settings than urban jungles, such as Toronto. Nevertheless, places do have one of major roles in her novels, creating an adequate background for her stories. These motifs allow her to comment on the man's attitude towards nature, animals and himself. Worried that humanity is straying from the right, healthy path, she engages in creating powerful, often disconcerting images of man's savage treatment of animals or the environment. A good example of this is the image of a dead heron in the novel *Surfacing*, killed for the sake of fun and left as a token of man's power and cruelty. Although she uses her works of art to attract public attention regarding environmental issues, Atwood is also personally engaged in supporting this cause and is currently the honorary president of the Rare Bird Club, within Birdlife International.

As it was already said, as a girl, Atwood was a keen reader, and fairy tales were definitely her favourite reading. She especially singles out the Grimm brothers' fairy tales and Canadian animal stories, both of which deserve credit for shaping her literary inclinations. When you read any one of her novels, you cannot but notice her tendency to give mythical characteristics to her characters, plot or setting. Her liking of mythical elements can even be seen in the names of her books, e.g. *Lady Oracle, Oryx and Crake, Double Persephone*. She often makes references to biblical texts (her unnamed heroine in *Surfacing* undergoes a transformation in seven days, making a reference to God's creation of the world). Furthermore, her main character in the novel *Lady Oracle,* Joan*,* is a female novelist who writes medieval romance novels which feature damsels in distress, knights that save them heroically, labyrinths, betrayals, murders and sacrifice. By adding supernatural elements, Atwood manages to disguise real-life scenarios as exciting stories we all enjoy to read, while reminding her readers that reason is not the only tool for handling life. It is noteworthy that Atwood exploits exterior space and events for the sake of foreshadowing or illustrating the inner turmoil her characters are going through. For instance, the main character of *Surfacing* embarks on a search of her

father on an island, which includes sailing and swimming in the lake and searching through the woods, while her actual goal is to find herself, her real self. Similarly, three main characters' houses in the novel *Robber Bride* actually mirror their personalities and attitudes towards life. While Tony is feeling safe in her little 'tower', Charis is living on an island, only observing the life going on in the city and Roz is living in an imposing, luxurious mansion giving away her tendency to exaggerate in everything and her need to stand out.

5.2. Atwood as a Female Author

It is important to consider the onset of Atwood's writing career, especially the challenges she faced for having chosen to be a female writer, which at that time was not considered usual or necessary. Although studying literature in Canada was not thought to be practical either, choosing to write for a living was all the more frowned upon. So, young Atwood had to face deal with major issues if she was to enter the world of authorship - the first being her gender and the second her nationality. Even though today it may sound highly unlikely, in the 60s there was almost no original literature being created Canada, let alone literary theory. The idea of Canadian Literary Studies was far in the future. Despite the fact that she was living in a Western, democratic society, which was not the case with other female authors, such as Desai, Atwood still had to overcome many impediments on her way to becoming an established female author. In her book on writing and her career *Negotiating with the Dead: A writer on writing* she recalls her first steps into the world of writing and publishing. She admits she would never have taken up writing if she had known what that role really meant.

> If I had suspected anything about the role I would be expected
> to fulfill, not just as a writer, but as a female writer - how irrevocably
> doomed! I would have flung my leaky blue blob-making ballpoint
> pen across the room, or plastered myself over with an impenetrable

nom de plume, like B. Traven, author of The *Treasure of the Sierra Madre,* whose true identity has never been discovered.

(Atwood, 2003: 13)

Atwood writes about how her physical appearance as a female author played a much bigger role than it usually does with male authors. Her unusual hair, which subsequently became her trademark, attracted a great deal of public attention. "(...) like Thomas Pynchon, I would never have done any interviews, nor allowed my photo to appear on book jackets; but I was too young then to know about such rules, and by now it is far too late," she admits with regret in *Negotiating with the Dead* (2003: 13). Atwood is honest when characterising this kind of publicity as unflattering: "A man's work is reviewed for its style and ideas, but all too often a woman's is reviewed for the supposed personality of the author as based on the jacket photograph." (Atwood, 1982: 331) She marks the readers' need to relate to the author and connect his/her life with the book's plot, but also suggests that there is a belief that personality of the author matters more in works by female writers than by male ones. It could be inferred from this that women are more bound by their own lives and find it harder to abandon their real selves and step into the fantasy world. Atwood sees this as another prejudice about female authorship.

She remembers her own doubts and insecurities at the beginning of her career. Aware of the constraints imposed on her gender, when she first began publishing in the campus literary magazines, she used her initials instead of her first name because, "I didn't want anyone important to know I was a girl." (Atwood, 2003: 19) This comment is of vital importance for it testifies that women themselves underestimated their own work. To be precise, this kind of prejudice, or not to understate it, discrimination, was being instilled in students in schools: "Anyway, in high school we'd studied an essay by Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch which said that the 'masculine' style was bold, strong, vivid and so forth, and the 'feminine' one was pastel, vapid and simpy." (Atwood, 2003: 19) Her testimony serves as proof of the biased distinction that was being made between male and female writing based on the characteristics thought to be typical of the two genders. Again, we see the tendency to judge on the writing skills in the light of the author's personality or gender. Furthermore, it shows us that literary criticism of that

time was bound by the author-text concept, which would later be contested and rejected by the deconstructionists, mainly by Roland Barthes (see *Death of the Author*). Atwood herself claims there are differences between male and female writers, not in their styles, but in the treatment they receive, especially by reviewers: "however that difference in treatment may manifest itself; (...) sooner or later that will affect them." (2003: 19)

Alongside being treated differently in the world of writing and publishing, Atwood claims she was considered peculiar in other circles as well. She refers to the labels girls were assigned in college days, with special emphasis on artistic girls. Namely, she makes a reference to their sexuality, stating that men considered them more sexually available than other girls. It is also a common stance that women artists are less restrained and inclined to engage in all kinds of romantic affairs or sexual experiments. Atwood continues by saying that girls who were artists, like herself, were often seen as crazier, meaner than others and "subject to tantrums, getting involved with one was therefore more trouble than sex might be worth." (2003: 16)

Discussing the amount of sacrifice one must accept when making a decision to make writing one's his vocation, Margaret Atwood insists that for women authors it is a great deal bigger. She even compares a female author to Hester Prynne, from Hawthorne's novel, suggesting that the embroidered scarlet letter "A" could stand for Artist or even Author instead of Adulteress. Thus, she is comparing a female artist with an outcast, destined to be misunderstood, ignored and looked down on. (Atwood, 2003: 73) Furthermore, Atwood (2003) tries to make a distinction between lives of typical male and female artists, not focusing solely on writing. According to her, women and men artists were not allowed the same type of lifestyles. While men could freely engage in drinking, affairs with numerous women and other kinds of entertainment, women who were doing the same, or at least tried to, were labelled as sluts and drunks. It is yet another example of double standards which have pervaded all areas of life. If they were not labelled as sluts or drunks, women artists were considered depressed, hysterical, neurotic, or to put it simply - mentally unstable. It is indeed one of the most common associations when it comes to female poets. Atwood (2003) makes a reference to mental issues of some of the most remarkable female artists of all times, e.g. Emily Dickinson's reclusiveness, Elizabeth Barett Browning's drug-addiction and anorexia. Many of them

have also committed suicides (e.g. Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexon, Charlotte Mew)[4]. These unfortunate women stand as evidence of, in some instances, insufferable obstacles women who wanted to make their voice heard had to surpass. Due to such unfortunate figures, female authorship became marked as a tragic endeavour destined to consume those who were brave enough or mad enough to pursue it: "(…) and Art was a kind of demonic possession. Art would dance you to death. It would move in and take you over, and then destroy you." (Atwood, 2003: 74) Atwood herself tells about appalling questions to that matter: "I was asked in all honesty, not whether I was going to commit suicide, but when. Unless you were willing to put your life on the line - or rather dispose of it altogether - you would not be taken quite seriously as a woman poet." (2003: 79)

However, Atwood agrees that female artists are not the same as 'ordinary' women. First of all, they refuse to live life by the book, which means getting married and having children. By choosing art, they are either renouncing having families one day, or they are trying to maintain some balance and have it both, which is almost impossible to achieve. It is also another aspect of life where male artists have an advantage over women, for they are not forced to choose, they can and indeed do have both.

> Ordinary women were supposed to get married, but not women artists.
> A male artist could have marriage and children on the side, as long as
> he didn't let them get in the way - a faint hope, according to James
> Connolly et al. - but for women, such things were supposed to be the
> way. And so this particular way must be renounced altogether by the
> female artist, in order to clear the way for the other way - the way
> of Art.
>
> (Atwood, 2003: 73)

This passage clearly points out to the limitations imposed on women, not just women artists, but women who wanted to pursue any other career. When Atwood says that male artists could pursue their art careers as long as their children were not in the way, we have to reflect on this comment and ask ourselves: Who was keeping them out of the men's way? We come to the conclusion which is common knowledge today, that in spite

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[4] See Germaine Greer (1995)

of men's involvement, children are always thought to be primarily a mother's responsibility. Meanwhile, men are left with time and opportunities to fulfill many of their dreams, and live life through many roles and not just the three domestic roles: daughter, wife and mother.

Atwood makes an interesting comparison of women artists and 'ordinary' women by linking them with the figures of priestesses and nuns respectively. Although both of these women are related to Christianity and the service to God, their tasks, freedoms and attitudes differ greatly. We expect humbleness in nuns, to the extent of becoming invisible, whereas priestesses are prominent figures with powers of their own. Moreover, there is something mystical about women and rituals, some pagan image deeply ingrained in the subconscious that often attributes godlike characteristics to these women. The point being that women artists similarly to women priestess have not just the freedom to be, but also the freedom to act. Atwood continues by saying that although most women are 'nuns', there is a choice after all: "The feminine of priest is not only nun but priestess, so you had a choice, and there was a difference: the Christian religion had no priestesses, so there was something pagan and possibly orgiastic implicit in the term. Nuns were cut off from men, priestesses weren't, though their relations with men were not usually what you would call domestic." (Atwood, 2003: 75) Therefore, although there was a choice, it was not an easy one to make. While one life offered safety, it, on the other hand, offered little life, and the other choice provided freedom and power but the cost was very high. The choice to be a priestess came with fierce judgment, or even persecution and execution. We should not forget the horrors of inquisition, during which women were burnt on stake for much less than trying to write. Comparison of this kind is typical of Atwood's style and her love of mythology. She enjoys making such allusions because she deeply believes in the power of such images. "Now it is possible for a woman to be seen as, well, just that: neither nun nor orgiastic priestess, neither more nor less human. Nevertheless, the mythology still has power because such mythologies still have power." (Atwood, 2003: 79)

Through history and in literature men have always been considered the norm, which meant being 'normal', 'common', on the other hand women, being the 'Other', were assigned all kinds of adjectives and qualities that do not fit the 'normal' pattern. Over the centuries the opposite of 'normal' gathered many meanings, among which were

'witch', 'demonic' and 'monster' as well. A reasonable answer to this would be that a simple lack of knowledge about the other sex has produced these kinds of fantastic images, inspired by pagan beliefs common for the ancient people. Another possible theory might be that the power of giving birth, creating another life, so godlike in itself, made women frightening. Let us not forget two of the most common binary oppositions 'angel-devil' and 'virgin-whore' that have been the main tool of literary analysis and social labelling for centuries. Atwood herself believes in duplicity, so she engages in creating doppelgangers and aliases for her characters. Her attraction towards mystery, secrets and grand revelations is evident in most of her novels. One of her novels even bears the name 'Alias Grace'. Moreover, most of her heroines have two names, pen-names, fake names, names written in reverse or altered names. This allows Atwood to express double voices within us with the aim to destroy the concept of one-sided stories and one-dimensional characters. Apart from being a useful literary method, this duplicity stands as a motif of Atwood's own life. Being a world-acclaimed author, Atwood had to develop a public persona that would allow her to keep her private self. She argues that the writers are inevitably doubled, because the writer is both "the person who exists when no writing is going forward, and the other, more shadowy and altogether more equivocal personage, who share the same body and one that commits the actual writing." (Sletteddahl-MacPherson, 2010: 19) She makes a difference between herself as an author and herself as just a woman. When writing Atwood takes on the shape of the author, of that 'monster' with super powers, that sharp and wise creature that can see in future, but also in the past. So, she herself admits there is something monster-like in being a female writer.

5.3. Atwood's Female Characters

When analysing Atwood's novels, one must dedicate special attention to her female characters. A writer specialised in 'women's condition', she makes women her main characters in all her novels except *Oryx and Crake.* By putting her heroines on gruesome tests, she deconstructs their identities in search of answers. Her heroines do

indeed seem frightening, monster-like or often utterly mad, but Atwood does not think of them as peculiar, on the contrary, she is trying to depict ordinary women, who at one point in their life feel off-balance, confused or lost. Fighting with expectations of their environments and their inner instincts, these women must witness their whole lives crumbling down and be ready to rise up and build them from scratch. By going through these ordeals, they emerge as reborn. As typical postmodernist figures, Atwood's heroines do not find blissful happiness at the end, instead they learn to accept life for what it is and themselves for who they are. They learn to make peace with the limitations imposed on them by being human and cherish the revelations they have come at.

These women differ in terms of their professions, in their lifestyles, but what they all have in common is that they are working women and that they are perceived as solitary, insecure figures although they have friendships or relationships. Atwood primarily explores the relationships women have with other women, mostly friends, the bond they have with their children and the attitude they have towards themselves. Despite the fact that men feature in all novels, one cannot escape the feeling that they are minor figures in lives of these women. Namely, they do want to establish relationships with men and for the sake of it make serious changes and sacrifices in their lives, but the general impression is that Atwood wants her heroines to focus on themselves, for the answers they need are inside them. It is an interesting fact that Atwood's characters do not cherish female friendships at the beginning, but going through their transformations, they realise they need other women because they need somebody to relate to. The perfect example is the novel *The Robber Bride,* where three main characters, Tony, Roz and Charis, although completely different and incompatible, are brought together by the disaster that struck them, that disaster being another woman, Zenia. However, her characters have unusual perceptions of closeness and intimacy when, for instance, the main character of *Surfacing* considers Anna her best friend and says she has known her for two months. Furthermore, many of them experience hostility towards other women and think of them as of competition or a threat. Joan in *Lady Oracle* has no close female friends and considers Marlene to be a threat to her relationship with Arthur, but in the end she helps her fake her death and keeps her secret. The best example of an ambivalent friendship between two women is the

relationship between Elaine and her childhood friend Cordelia. Elaine's feelings towards her friend vary from love to hate always with a great intensity, finally emerging as an obsession. Hélène Cixous's essay *The Laugh of the Medusa* could serve as a good basis for analysis of these complex relationships between women. Cixous claims, "women were trained in both self-surveillance and in exercising the surveilant gaze over other women." Moreover, she posits that women have learnt to see themselves and other women through men's eyes, "thereby becoming accidental policemen of the very power structure that excluded them." (Cixous in Howells, 2008: 62) Atwood gives us a rare opportunity to observe the core of female friendships, unmasking true emotions and real motifs. She makes us admit to ourselves that often our behaviour is incomprehensible even to us and that we are not always the best of friends to ourselves. She insists on representing life as it is, a mixture or a fight between good and evil, light and dark, truths and lies that begin within oneself.

Atwood does not have a problem with giving things their real names and believes there is no real progress without reaching the bottom first. In order to provide them with opportunities for growth, she first positions her characters in a blind alley where they have nowhere to go but back. The journey back requires facing the ghosts from the pasts - parents, lovers and most importantly, past selves. That spiritually demanding journey leads them to an epiphany and a complete change of life views. Atwood's use of doppelgangers, false names and counterparts suggests her disbelief in the wholeness of self. As a matter of fact, she constructs her characters' identities as puzzles of very different, sometimes even contradictory elements, subject to constant change. She emphasises that life is a process and that nothing is ever constant. Pilar Somacarrera makes a connection between these split selves and the characters' desire to "reclaim authorship of their own identities via a rewriting and reclaiming of their bodies and of the old codes." (2008: 62) According to her, Atwood's female characters suffer from the crisis of identity and uncertain sense of subjectivity caused by their bodies being used and abused. "With their bodies written on, rewritten, smoothed over by others, these protagonists' sense of presence and fixed identity become tenuous to the point of crisis." (Somacarrera, 2008: 62) Many critics agree that the body is the site of political power. "The body is the site on which political power is exercised and the site on which abuse is practiced and in turn rehearsed." (Somacarrera 2008: 58) In the light

of this theory, bodies of Atwood's female protagonists represent sites of social and political discourses, what is more, they are documented evidence of these processes. The idea of encoded female bodies in need of liberation is not a new one. It can be found in the essay *The Laugh of the Medusa,* published in 1975. In it she rejects the male discourse and urges women to write themselves, thereby inscribing their bodies in codes of their own. Also, we find this notion in the work of Indian feminist Gayatri Spivak, who argues that "there is no such thing as an uncoded body" (In Barr, 1989: 12) Cixous similarly to Atwood, thinks of authorship in terms of controlling one's body, finding one's voice and reclaiming one's life - all aspects of power women were previously denied for so long. Therefore, the connection between body and power is a vital step in analysing works by women and about women.

Speaking on the subject of bodies, Atwood's protagonists frequently experience problems caused by their attitude to their bodies, such as eating disorders. Some of them suffer from eating disorders or indulge comfort food when depressed and angry. Charis from the novel *Robber Bride* is a vegan and is disgusted with various kinds of food, to the extent that she can eat only a few things. Upon glancing at food, she instantly pictures it going through her body and clogging her arteries. Her eating disorder is rooted in her being a victim of sexual abuse as a child. As a consequence, she feels repulsion towards meat as well as sex and basically any kind of bodily pleasure. Other characters enjoy preparing food, talking about food or feeding others. Contrary to Chairs, her friend Roz tends to overeat when under stress or lonely. Although having weight problems, she cannot resist food which brings her comfort she cannot find in her relationships. It is also relevant to mention the novel *The Edible Woman* where the unusual food-related adjective is used as a reference to the protagonist. The novel's title implies the protagonist's conclusion at the end when she realises her fiancé has been consuming her, devouring her, trying to destroy her essence.

Atwood often chooses artists as her protagonists. It enables her to express her insights and share her experience regarding the position of female artists.

> As writers, women writers are like other writers, but as biological
> specimens and as citizens, women are like other women; subject to
> the same discriminatory laws, encountering the same demeaning

attitudes, burdened with the same good reasons for not walking

through the park alone after dark.

<div align="right">(Atwood, 1982: 194)</div>

Apart from that, Atwood believes artists to be the voice of people who should take a stand and defend it. "Indeed, with my interview with Atwood, she argued strongly that her role as an artist was to be a mouthpiece, principally so that the government voice was not the only one which resonated outside Canada." (Setteddahl-MacPherson, 2010: 15) Also, Atwood considers artists to be more insightful than most which makes them good narrators. She often puts her artists in positions in which they have to compromise their art for economic reasons, which leads them to a completely different life than they expected. Atwood establishes that art is yet another site of compromise for many women who try to meet the demands of the society. To illustrate this point, let us take the example of the unnamed protagonist of *Surfacing*. She is a commercial artist but is stuck doing fabric patterns. It was a compromise she had once made that finally lead her to believe she is not good enough for anything else, so she settled.

5.4. Atwood as a Canadian Author

As it was mentioned in the introduction, Atwood is one of the founders of Canadian literary theory. By insisting on defining and keeping Canadian literary identity separate from the British and American dominance, she persuaded the public of the need to put more effort into creating and collecting original Canadian literature. When talking about the limitations she faced being a female author, she also adds that the crisis or lack of Canadian national and literary identities also contributed to her struggles. It is obvious that having a starting point like this, nobody, let alone Atwood herself, could expect success she later acquired.

As its colony, Canada has long suffered British influence in every possible aspect, including culture. This dependence also instilled a sense of inferiority in its people. Devoid of national symbols and unity among themselves, Canada was easy to

keep subdued. Determined to participate in shaping Canadian identity through literature and literary criticism, Atwood published *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*. It was her first serious step into the world of literary criticism and the book's contents as well as agenda made it controversial from the very beginning. How crucial its role was shows the fact that: "Before *Survival* there was no volume of criticism on Canadian literature designed for the general reader." (Staines, 2008: 19) It is important to note that *Survival* was published in 1972, so until that point general reading public had little insight into its own literature. From the perspective of today it seems incomprehensible that such an omission could have been made. It appears that the public had no particular interest in its own literature or that simply nobody thought they should have any interest. To put it simply, before this piece, Canada's literature was not considered worthy of collecting or analysing. "The colonial mentality was still in force, meaning that the Great Good place for the arts was thought to be somewhere else, such as London, Paris or New York, and if you were a Canadian writer, you were assumed by your countryfolk to be not only inferior, but pitiable, pathetic and pretentious." (Atwood, 2003: 58, 59) Although it was a democratic, affluent society, Canada's was still a colony, economically, politically, culturally. Many were shocked at Atwood's insistence on speaking openly about it. "I drew certain conclusions relating to Canada in the world today, and I prefaced the whole thing with a few reasons why people should read their own literature and not just everybody else's. Worst of all, I said that Canada was a cultural colony and an economic one as well." (Atwood, 1982: 38) Judging by Atwood's own comments on the state of Canadian cultural identity at that point, we realise that embarking on a mission to give it form and content required tremendous courage. We must have in mind she was not just trying to collect a reader, she was attempting to persuade her fellow countrymen that they are different and worthy.

It is an undeniable fact that personal and national sense of identities do shape one's own art or one nation's art, but could we not argue that vice-versa is also possible? Is it not possible to change or even build from nothing one's sense of identity by means of art? It is indeed possible and the case of Margaret Atwood's life work stands as the proof of it. On the other hand, the absence of clearly-defined structures allowed Atwood artistic freedom and left her with plenty of space to fulfill according to her liking. It is a unique kind of environment that provides an artist with all the creative freedom denied

to those working within strictly defined structures and cultural identities. Lorna Irvine comments, "they (artists) are participating in a developing literary tradition, rather than reacting to an already established one" and they contribute to the "creation of their country's fictional landscape." (In Slettedahl-MacPherson, 2010: 12) Atwood herself comments on this favourable position. "Everything was interesting," she writes, "but the important thing was discovering the fact of our own existence as Canadians." (Sullivan, 1998: 9)

Apart from being a stepping stone in establishing Canadian literary identity and theory, one of the crucial elements of *Survival,* according to Heidi Sletteddahh MacPherson (2010), is Atwood's elaboration on the concepts of 'basic victim positions'. Namely, she made a division of four stages of victimhood that apply to most of her characters and, according to Atwood, to Canada itself. The first stage is denial of victimhood which we can recognise in Atwood's characters, who have accepted their subordinated positions as normal and by getting used to them, appear utterly disengaged from their own selves. The next stage is the acknowledgment of victimhood which is usually very painful but marks the beginning of the transformation. In this phase the victim places the blame for her position on others, history, God or fate. This phase is followed by refusing to accept the state they are in as unavoidable. The last phase is creative victimhood, which involves finding new ways and emerging as a transformed person. Atwood suggests that authors occupy the stage four, but that "the text may be trapped in one of the earlier positions." (Sletteddahl MacPherson, 2010: 17)

5.5. Atwood and Theoretical Frameworks

Atwood's novels provide critics with plenty of material for analysis and although they are primarily concerned with the 'women's condition' and 'Canadian condition', they cover various issues pertinent to contemporary life. Apart from offering a plethora of themes and motifs for research, they also allow the use of diverse approaches, theories and methods. In the past Atwood's novels were studies by means of formalist, feminist, postmodernist, postcolonial, intertextual, deconstructionist, psychoanalytic,

Jungian approaches, etc. (see Howells, 2008) This paper will look at her work mainly from the theoretical perspectives of postcolonialism, feminism and postmodernism. Owing to Atwood's choice of themes, her construction of characters and general perspective all three of these approaches render interesting insights into the worlds of her female protagonists.

5.5.1. Atwood and the Postcolonial Theory

The very notion of postcolonial theory brings to mind associations of the subdued and exploited far-away places where the coloniser kept the colonised in check by means of violence. Although this general image cannot be disputed, colonisation did not happen only in exotic, Third-world countries and it definitely does not belong only to the past. By using literary texts and other art creations, postcolonial theory is aiming at dealing with the past and its consequences so that a better present could be created. For the sake of a tomorrow it must dig up the haunting yesterday.

Despite its good economic situation and the appearance of being a democratic society, Canada was a colony of the British Empire. Even though in many aspects lives of Canadians cannot be compared to lives of Indian or some African colonised, they still do share some of the burden of a colonised past. What they all share is the tremendous task they have at hand - building up again or for the first time a solid sense of national identity that must follow formal independence.

One of the aspects of identity must be occupied by culture and art. Not just an emblem of identity, culture is one of its creators. The colonised in other colonies, by contrast to Canada, had a big advantage. It was the sense of unity, a sense of self. It may have been a shattered or oppressed self, but still it existed. On the contrary, Canadians were very different among themselves, in terms of origin, religion, and race. Eventually when the independence came, the sense of a national self was yet to be found. Kroetsch calls the Canadian literature haunted because "Canadians cannot agree what their metannarative is." (In Edwards, 2008: 125) Edwards gives the answer to the question why Canadians are haunted:

Canada is a country in which most of the citizens (with the important
exception of the native population) are from elsewhere. (...) It is a nation
divided by its colonial ties to the British Commonwealth and the
infiltration of American cultural imperialism. It is a nation divided
between being a colony and a colonising power. It is a country separated
along linguistic grounds, between the French, English and the many
languages of the First Nations.

(Edwards, 2008: 125)

What postcolonialism does to a nation is to gradually destroy the unity that once existed, break its spirit and make it doubt its values and the sense of worthiness. Similarly to the invasion of land, culture can be and is invaded by the coloniser. It is used as a tool for shaping the colonised youth according to its liking, leading to the 'production' of cultural hybrids. Eventually, the colonised begin to ignore or despise their own culture, yearning to be accepted as part of the conloniser's. In her lectures later published as *Strange Things: The malevolent North in Canadian Literature* Atwood comments:

Canadian literature as a whole tends to be, to the English literary mind,
what Canadian geography itself used to be: an unexplored and uninteresting
wasteland, punctuated by a few rocks, bogs and stumps. Note that I do not
speak of the Scotts, Welsh, or Irish, nor of the ordinary reader; however, for
a certain kind of Englishperson, Canada - lacking the exoticism of Africa,
the strange sauna of Australia, or the romance of India - still tends to occupy
the bottom rung of the status ladder of ex-British colonies.

(Atwood, 1995: 2)

Edwards (2008) reminds us of what Said established, that societies tend to represent other societies and cultures as "inferior, savage, demonic, exotic and in general, culturally different" in order to create superior images of themselves. (21)

Atwood reminds us that things may not always be what they seem to be. Canada has always been considered a vast, cold, uninteresting landscape and as those qualities were also assigned to its people and culture. Not only considered less exotic or

appealing, Canadians are not likely to produce understanding or sympathy for their troubles like, for instance, Indians or South Africans. They did not suffer, they hold no right to tell sad stories. Not being exotic, Canada was also not considered strange and did not acquire the label of 'Other', like the other colonies did. Despite not being the 'Other', Canadians were also not considered to be quite the same as 'them' or 'the norm', either. More importantly, they themselves did not know who or what they were supposed to be. Not a prior self to go back to, they practically had to make themselves up. And who will do that better than a writer?

Nevertheless, Atwood insists on abandoning the role of the victim and assuming some of the responsibility. For Canadians were not only victims, they were also the perpetrators of imperialism and discrimination towards others. Therefore, she insists on pleading guilty in order to make peace with oneself. She invites all of us to start from ourselves and deal with that 'inner victim' but also with the 'inner coloniser'. She states, "We sometimes forget, in our obsession with colonialism and imperialism, that Canada itself has been guilty of these stances towards others, both inside the country and outside it; (...) Looking back over the period, I see that I was writing and talking a little less about the Canadian scene and a little more about the global one." (Atwood, 1982: 282)

When discussing power relations, be it in the light of postcolonialism or gender equality, Atwood's stand is that power is an unavoidable aspect of our lives, deeply ingrained in the foundations of our society. She argues that power is so deeply rooted in our environment, that in fact it became our environment. She also warns that the public and private domains have become so intertwined, that one can no longer escape power relations even in their own privates lives. In trying to escape the pervasive force of oppressing power, Atwood's protagonists try to escape - to another town, country, even continent - but all efforts are futile. The power hegemony has become a global force and this fact makes Atwood's novels all the more relevant. In the end, one is forced to fight battles on all levels, to the very top of the ladder, but the struggle must begin from the very bottom - from within oneself.

> Power is our environment. We live surrounded by it; it pervades
> everything we see and do, invisible and soundless, like air. We
> would like to have a private life that is sealed off from the public

life and different from it, where there are no rulers and no ruled,

no hierarchies, no politicians, only equals, free people. But because

our system is a closed one and our culture is one based and

fed on power this is impossible, or at least very difficult. So many

things we do in what we sadly think of as our personal lives are simply

duplications of the external world of power games, power struggles.

(Atwood, 1973: 7)

Where there is power, there is politics. Although she rejects to declare herself to be a member of any political current, she does influence the public opinion with her texts, which being deeply honest and explorative, are inescapably political and ideological. According to Atwood, politics is all about having freedom and power. In an interview with Jo Barnes she claims, "People have power because we think they have power, and that's all politics is. And politics also has to do with what kind of conversations you have with people, and what you feel free to say to someone, what you don't feel free to say." (see Howells, 2008: 44)

As objects of colonialism and sexism, Atwood's protagonists must fight back by reclaiming their territories - their own bodies and minds. They must first come to understand the old codes encrypted by the coloniser. Upon decoding their shattered selves, they embark on 'creative victimhood' and create new codes and thereby new history. In this context postcolonial theory overlaps with the feminist theory since they both argue for freedom from oppressive power hegemonies and establishment of independent authorial voices.

5.5.2. Atwood and the Feminist Theory

The relationship Margaret Atwood has with feminism is a complex one. She herself was never part of any such movement and never declared or considered herself to be a feminist. However, her works deal with the women's issue in most part, featuring female protagonists and that in itself is a reason enough to consult the feminist theory in

their analysis. Furthermore, feminists themselves consider her to be ideologically close to their stands and throughout the years her name was being associated with the movement itself. In her essay *On Being a Woman Writer* (collected in *Second Words*) she argues that she is a writer who has been more adopted by the women's movements than a particular member herself.

She began writing when the second wave of women's movement was not visible (though her first novel coincided with its public rise) (Sletteddahl MacPherson, 2010: 23) After all, it is difficult to determine her association or ideological similarity with the movement when the notion 'feminism' is not very clear to begin with. Atwood herself expressed confusion at the term, "If you are a woman and a writer, does that combination of gender and vocation automatically make you a feminist and what does that mean exactly?" (Atwood in Slettedahl MacPherson, 2010: 26) One must have in mind that there is not one feminism, as a compact movement or group of thinkers or as a clear-cut theory. There are many 'feminisms', such as: proto-feminism, cultural feminism, postfeminism and feminist backlash and, according to Brooks Bouson (1993), all of these can be identified in Atwood's novels. The reason for the plurality of terms and approaches lies in the fact that from its onset feminism has developed in different directions. Today it is generally thought that they are three waves of feminism, which differ significantly among themselves. Theorists of feminism and its supporters differ in terms of defining gender and sex and also when it comes to assigning blame or suggesting solutions. What they all agree on is that women worldwide deserve equality and that equality is what they do not have.

It cannot be disputed that society has evolved greatly since the time she wrote this novel, but it is beyond contestation that the question of gender discrimination is still a burning one. Sexism is an ongoing problem yet to be tackled in Third-World countries, but it has not been fully eradicated in the West either. Advanced societies must invest a great deal of effort to maintain the achieved progress in this area lest they should slip into the old ways of masculine hegemony. Feminists insist that the issue of gender equality has not yet been resolved and as proof they point to the multitude of texts, among them literary ones, that indeed do support their stands. One must wonder if women would be campaigning asking for their rights if they already had them? And, is it the same to beg or fight for your right and to simply use it?

Atwood's protagonists do not seem like feminists at the first glance. On the contrary, they behave like 'real women' are supposed to. They worry about their looks, have ambivalent attitudes towards their bodies, often have eating disorders, expect or are expected to marry and have children. There is nothing to indicate that anything is wrong with them. Suddenly, some event triggers their transformation that leads them to reject all the patterns of living they have been inculcated with as females and they begin an exploration of their true selves. Reconnecting with their 'inner' selves, with their cores or souls, they come across as savage, animal-like or even demonic. They start to react instinctively, leaving behind all the learnt formulas of 'normal interaction'. The perfect example for this is the protagonist of *Surfacing*. She abandons her human persona and for seven days, during her transformation, behaves like an animal, trying to establish the connection with her subconscious self. Similarly, Marianne from *The Edible Woman* ran away with her teenage lover, which seems like a completely irrational decision, which put her potential marriage in jeopardy. Seemingly, these women's irrational behaviour was unexpected and unaccountable, but in fact it was a consequence of bottled up frustration, confusion and the feelings of inadequacy.

However, many decisions her characters make cannot be considered feminist. Atwood often creates two female figures that represent two diametrically different standpoints and observes them interacting. Their dialogues could be considered Atwood's own reflections on feminism, expressing advantages and disadvantages. We as readers have the opportunity to see what endings these heroines finally obtain. "Indeed, the majority of criticism on Atwood's oeuvre is decidedly feminist, which means that critics must grapple with the fact that so many of her characters spout antifeminist statements - whilst clearly being entrapped in a patriarchal framework that cries out for a feminist interpretation." (Sletteddahl MacPherson 2010: 23)

Although she wants her characters to find, if not happiness, then peace, Atwood does not allow her protagonists to plead innocent, demanding them to take some of the blame for their destinies and makes them work hard for that ending. What Atwood wants from her protagonists is that they give themselves their own definition, written in their own words. Although she forms her characters through a complex network of relations - with their families, men, other women, and through them with the whole society - she is nonetheless most interested in the relationships they have with

themselves. Atwood believes one cannot simply know oneself, but that one must get to know oneself. Living in a frantic society, teeming with contents and products to be consumed and devoured, our attention is dispersed outward. For that reason, she sends her characters away from home, on trips, or long walks where they can have a quiet meeting with themselves.

Although not a member of any feminist movement, Atwood has numbered some of the contributions it has made to literature, "the expansion of territory available to writers, both in character and in language, a sharp-eyed examination of the way power works in gender relations, and the exposure of much of this as socially constructed and a vigorous exploration of many hitherto concealed areas of experience." (Slettedahhl MacPherson, 2010: 24)

When it comes to Atwood's attitude toward the struggle between the sexes, she writes, "Women deserve equality under the law, but it does not mean that women and men are the same." (Atwood in Sletteddahl MacPherson, 2010: 23) It certainly sounds as the ideal state of affairs and it is what her novels teach us - to accept and respect the differences.

As it was already mentioned, Atwood's protagonists, while undergoing their transformations, appear unconventional to others and for that reason they have been labelled 'bad women' by some of the critics. Commenting on such labelling, Atwood says, "female bad characters can also act as key to the doors we need to open, and as mirrors in which we can see more than just a pretty face." (Atwood, 2005: 182) However, a question arises: What does 'bad women' actually mean? Her novels show that this 'bad' is simply a bad choice of words for 'unconventional', 'free' or 'different'. It appears that women who refuse to fit the patterns of approved behaviour still wear unflattering labels, if not scarlet letters, then adjectives such as 'bad' or 'fallen'.

One of the issues Atwood is setting her focus on is motherhood. In most of her novels there are no children, but there is a great deal of talk about them. Some of her protagonists are expecting a baby or want to become pregnant or have had abortions, but they are all facing the decision which hauntingly hovers above their heads. Under pressure of the environment and deaf to their inner voices, Atwood's characters doubt their own normality when they realise they do not want marriage or children. Atwood considers the decision of becoming or not becoming a mother one of the essential

decisions in a woman's life and by portraying all kinds of scenarios, she demonstrates various outcomes. However, she wants women to think about what they really want and make conscious decisions not just act out of fear or pressure. Her protagonists mostly let motherhood happen or not happen to them, without much planning. Although she does not judge and leaves all the options open, Atwood insists on being responsible for one's own decisions. When we closely analyse women in her novels, we notice that some are mothers, some are not, some have gone through abortions - but they all have one thing in common – none have happy families. Indeed, if they did become mothers, they were left to be single mothers, with the exception of *Surfacing,* where the protagonist decides to be with Joe again and conceive a baby, but we do not know what happens further on. The conclusion is that Atwood does not believe much in marriage or men. If we resort to looking into her life for some clues, it would lead us nowhere, for she has been happily married for a long time. Another reasonable argument is that she simply does not think marriage and children should be some kind of a recipe or norm for a happy life, something to have at all costs, because in spite of our wishes and efforts, life does not always turn out to be what we expected it to be. Sometimes it has some other role prepared for us. It could be said that Atwood's agenda, among other things, is to show women there are other meanings than the prescribed one. Although they might be considered socially inadequate, they will, on the other hand, experience the sense of wholeness and tranquility unknown to them before.

Writing about her characters, Atwood also writes about the conditions in society that shaped them to become what they are. She claims that her heroine's choices and lives are pretty much the same as at the end of the book: "a career going nowhere, or marriage as an exit from it. But these were the options for a young woman, even a young educated woman in Canada in the early sixties." (Atwood, 1980: 8) Although not much of their lives change, her heroines do change themselves. If they do not achieve a happy ending, it is because such a thing was not possible at that time for women who wanted more from life. What does change is that, although still under restraints, they now realise that and awareness is the first step towards change or even revolution. Answering the question of what has changed since the sixties, Atwood writes, "It would be a mistake to assume that everything has changed. The goals of the feminist movement have not been achieved, and those who claim we are living in a post-feminist

era are either sadly mistaken or tired of thinking about the whole subject." (Atwood, 1980: 8)

5.5.3. Atwood and the Postmodern Theory

When Margaret Atwood's novels are looked into from the perspective of postmodernism, the first element to be analysed are their subjects. In postmodernism the subject becomes decentered. Postmodern theory proclaims change as its agenda, nevertheless, feminist theorists have doubts about its concepts suggesting that these changes are "nothing but the paranoid reactions on the part of male thinkers to the concrete chances brought about by women's massive reawakening". (Jardine, 1981) There are also debates on the nature of the subject, Irigaray for instance writes, "We can assume that any theory of the subject has always been appropriated by the 'masculine'." (1985: 133) It is evident that there is much contention between postmodern and feminist theories and so far numerous discrepancies have been articulated.

When it comes to the ways postmodern theory can be applied to the novels of Margaret Atwood, the focus drifts to the notion of historiographic metafiction. This literary device was defined by Hutcheon and it has become one of the main pillars of literary postmodernism. This approach mirrors the contradictions typical of the movement. It uses history in order to create a realistic background which then subverts by means of metafiction. Atwood resorts to using historiographic metafiction in order to absorb the reader into the story but then exposes her own constructions as fiction. Her novels *Surfacing* and *The Blind Assassin* are thought to be remarkable examples of this tool at work. Historiographic metafiction and its examples will be discussed in greater detail in the analysis of *Surfacing*.

Moreover, Atwood's characters are typical postmodern characters, who do not achieve any greatness or happy endings but do go through a personal transformation necessary for them to move on. Atwood, similarly to other postmodern authors, behaves like a parent to her heroines, expecting them to grown throughout the novel. She gives them little clues or hints to help them along the way, but the responsibility is on them.

She models the narration according to postmodern narrative models, hiding the full picture not just from the readers but from the characters and narrators as well. The narrator and at the same time the protagonist in *Surfacing e*xemplifies this. She is unaware of her story until the very end. She is not just confused about the future, she is utterly oblivious to the past as well. Creating convincing images of her marriage, wedding and childbirth, she convinces not just the readers but also herself in her fictitious story. Her narration is an excellent example of an unreliable narrator and of historiographic metafiction as well. Furthermore, unaware of her real self, lost between the past and the present, she is an example of a fragmented subject, one of postmodernist structures. There is yet another characteristic of Atwood's protagonists that makes them postmodern figures - they are marginalised. Being female, being artists, being divorced or single mothers or being childless, heroines in Atwood's novels lack power and are subject to marginalisation, discrimination, oppression and abuse.

These aspects of Atwood's work will be further discussed in the chapters dedicated to her novels.

6. *THE ROBBER BRIDE*

6.1. Analysis of Female Protagonists

Characters of Tony, Roz and Charis from this novel represent three very different women who in normal life circumstances would most probably never become friends, but faced with the same threat - a monsterlike, maneater Zenia - they realise they need each other's support to build up their lives again.

These three women, who differ greatly in terms of their lifestyles and backgrounds and character traits but all the same share the features all women have in common, features that are instilled in the upbringing. Although intelligent and rather modern in their opinions, they fall victim to habit, jealousy and lack of self-respect, which make them an easy prey for powerful and confident Zenia.

The story begins with accounts of their college lives, where they, not having much in common, avoided each other. However, as the story progresses and each of the characters shares their own story with us, we realise that Zenia approached them in order to make friends and after obtaining their trusts she would run off with their husbands. Feeling betrayed by the so-called friend and angry at themselves, their paths cross again and their transformations begin. All three of them are bewildered and cannot think of a reason why Zenia would do such things to them. Sharing their stories, they realise she told them three different stories about her past and origin and that they do not know who she is or where she came from. What they have in common is that they were charmed by Zenia and they all helped her in different ways. Tony lent her money on various occasions and wrote a term paper Zenia later used to blackmail her with. Her infatuation with Zenia was so powerful that it made her ignore her moral codes and become accomplice in cheating. Charis took Zenia in her home, fed her, prepared vegetable juices for her, trying to cure her alleged cancer. Roz hired her as an editor in her magazine and taught her business. Thus, all three of them took on the role of caregivers of Zenia and found it hard to refuse any of her requests, no matter how unreasonable they may have been. Furthermore, they were completely oblivious to her

real self, which seems obvious to readers from the start. They simply ignored any red lights that should have made them react. Under the spell of Zenia's charm, they felt special to be chosen by her as friends and at the same time relieved not to be the target of her anger. "Tony was relieved, because Zenia's contempt was a work of art. It was so nearly absolute; it was a great privilege to find yourself excluded from it. You felt reprieved, you felt vindicated, you felt grateful." (Atwood, 1995b: 135) They ignored each other's warnings about Zenia, each of them wanted to prove she was better than the others, that she could deal with the monster. Their accounts of Zenia give the impression she is a witch or a supernatural being, with special powers. After having faked her death and appeared again, Zenia's character does take on mythological features and seems even more intimidating than before. At the sight of Zenia, which they mistook for a ghost, Roz, Charis and Tony for a moment believe she immortal. Speaking of powerful male and female characters, Atwood notes, "Powerful, or at any rate active, heroes and villains are seen as the fulfillment of a human ideal; whereas powerful women are usually given a supernatural power." (Atwood, 1982: 223) Her powers are all the more emphasised with her physical appearance. Her striking beauty makes her a fantasy of both men and women. It is important to note that the protagonists' rage at her is bigger when they felt discarded by her. They do not despise Zenia just because she stole their men, but because they were not special to her as they wished to be. None of them saw the other two as potential friends before Zenia brought them together in the unusual way.

> The three of them have lunch once a month. They've come to depend
> on it. They don't have much in common except the catastrophe that
> brought them together, if Zenia can be called a catastrophe; but over time
> they've developed loyalty to one another, an esprit de corps. Tony has
> come to like these women; she's come to consider them close friends, or
> the next thing to it. They have gallantry, they have battle scars, they've
> been through fire; and each of them knows about the others, by now, that
> nobody else does.
>
> (Atwood, 1995b: 31)

Nevertheless, they all wanted to be friends with Zenia. What is more, they wanted to be Zenia. Tired of her unfulfilling life and heartbroken, Roz wishes she could be Zenia, even for five minutes. "Either way, she would like to be someone else. But not just anyone. Sometimes - for a day at least, or even an hour, or if nothing else was available then five minutes would do - sometimes she would like to be Zenia." (Atwood, 1995b: 443)

> Zenia is the incarnation of how plainer, more oblong women wish to
> look, and therefore to be: it's a belief that such things can be arranged
> from the outside in. She is thought also to be brilliant and she gets top
> marks – though she doesn't exert herself, she hardly ever attends a lecture,
> so how does she do it? Brilliant and fearsome. Wolfish, feral beyond
> the pale.
>
> (Atwood, 1995b: 149)

Zenia is the embodiment of a perfect woman - who men would like to be with, and who women want to be like. She is a symbol of the 'Other' woman, the invisible, ever-present threat to every woman. She is their worst nightmare come true. She made all three of them feel inadequate, powerless and craving for her attention. It is important to note that the character of Zenia is not relevant in itself but it serves as mirror for the other three. The truth about who she is or even what her real name is remains a mystery even at the end. The fact that only her version of the story remains unavailable suggests that she is just a materialisation of a fantasy, of a wish or fear. The readers can only access Zenia through the other three characters and judge her according to their confessions. Nevertheless, their ambivalent feelings towards her reveal their desires and struggles. She is labelled as a witch or a monster and is the object of their envy. "Not very satisfying, because if Zenia were dead, she wouldn't know it. Better to think of her ugly. Roz takes Zenia's face, pulls down on it as if it's putty. Some nice jowls, a double chin, a permanent scowl. Blacken a few teeth, like children's drawings of witches. Better." (Atwood, 1995b: 326) Mythical descriptions they give of her and the fact that her story is not accessible to readers at any point in the novel enable her character to acquire a special status. Although she is portrayed as a negative character, Zenia in fact was honest to all three of them. If they had paid more attention to what she was saying to

them, they would have seen her real face. Throughout the novel we can see she is not very keen on pretending. She is very straightforward and asks for what she wants. Having seduced their husbands, she obtains the title of a maneater and emerges as very sexual unlike all three of the heroines. However, her real intentions have nothing to do with those men, for who she feel no love. They are merely means to an end or simple casualties. In her talks with Roz, Tony and Charis after her fake death, we can see she does not consider her acts all that serious. Although she relishes her powers, she does not try to humiliate them out of fun. Shocked by her words, they are even more enraged, witnessing their entire lives crumbling before their very eyes. Although they take it as an attack, Zenia believes she was only telling the truth. She directly warns them about their misconceptions regarding their husbands. She tells Roz and Charis what hideous descriptions they gave of them.

> 'Billy didn't love you,' she says. 'Wake up! You were a free meal-ticket.
> He was eating off you even though he had money of his own; he was
> peddling hash, but I guess that one went right past you. He thought you
> were a cow, if you must know. He thought you were so stupid, you'd give
> birth to an idiot. He thought you were a stunned cunt, to be exact.'

> (Atwood, 1995b: 480)

Nevertheless, they still try to pick up the broken pieces of their illusions and bring them back together. They feel their lives were all lies. They feel manipulated, but they are also disappointed in themselves. They did not have enough strength to carry on their lives, they could not let go of the false memories they had constructed in their minds. These women spent so much time mourning the loss of their husbands, who were not worthy of their love. It is crucial how they consciously carry on lying to themselves even after they realise their husbands are not coming back. They need their fantasies in order to carry on. After all, it is much easier to blame another woman for your misfortune than to blame it on yourself. Furthermore, men in the novel are portrayed very negatively - as weak, two-faced and selfish - which leads to the question: Why were these women in love with them to begin with? The realisation about the true colours of their husbands makes destinies of these women even more tragic, not for

losing them, but for not having opportunities to be truly loved. However, it must be said that while Roz and Charis remain alone at the end, Tony is the only one who keeps her husband and does seem to have love. This difference requires further analysis. Her husband, West, was not impervious to Zenia's powers, however. He also succumbed and left Tony for her. He moved in with Zenia under a pretense that she was ill and needed care. After some, time he returned, having become too boring for her. Crushed Tony took him back without blinking, acting as his caretaker again. That experience made him realise how much Tony cares for him and he decided not to betray her again. He was given a second chance, which he used well. However, Tony and West were best friends before they became lovers and his feelings for Tony were real. On the other hand, Billy and Mitch have always had only their interests at heart and did not know what love was. It needs to be stressed that Tony and Wests's relationship always seemed more like a friendship than love, at least from his side. She consciously accepted the fact he would never love her the way she loved him. It was one of many compromises all three of them made for the sake of love. Despite all other qualities they had and roles they successfully fulfilled, what these women all desperately wanted was to be loved. Their problems with men are rooted in their bad family relations. Namely, all of them had the missing role of fathers and bad relationships with their mothers. They were taught that love had to be earned. They were blamed for their parents' failures, ignored or abused. Being lonely and miserable, they had to reinvent themselves. They had to change and adapt if they wanted to survive and find a place for themselves. As a consequence of sexual abuse she experienced as a girl by her uncle, Charis was split into two and consequently, left her old self, Karen, behind. Her new self was stronger and able to leave her body when she was molested. Tony, who was inadequate to her mother, always corrected and deprived of tenderness, invented her twin, who had the name Tnomerf Ynot, her own name spelt backwards. Furthermore, she constructed her own language by saying or writing words backwards, which she secretly used throughout her life. It enabled her to disengage from her life by creating a parallel universe of some kind in which she was a fierce female warrior, the queen of the Barbarians. Dissatisfied with her real self and reality she resorts to imagining the one she would like to be if she had the courage. Similarly, finding out that her real name was not Rosalind Greenwood but Roz Grunwald, Roz went through a crisis of identity

herself. Carrying a burden of being labelled a displaced person, she went through confusion depression and. However, she was determined to carve out a place for herself in society. Roz observed other girls and realised she could not compete with their beauty and femininity but that she could be the loud one, the mean one, the "joker". She assigned a role to herself, something to be best at. Nevertheless, she was never able to get rid of the feeling of being an immigrant, of being a foreigner. Similarly, Tony felt like a foreigner, for she was a foreigner to her mother, who was English and insisted that Tony should speak like her although she could not. Tony had a shallow relationship with her mother who spent most of her time complaining about marrying during the war and criticising Tony and her father. She carefully prepared her departure and left a note to Tony, assuring her she would later come to take her with her, which she never did. Thus, we realise Tony was abandoned by her mother and what is more, lied to. She was left with futile hope and the need to fool herself. Furthermore, this event caused her to feel responsible for her parents' divorce and misfortune, which she would desperately try to make up for. When it comes to Charis, her mother would punish her physically and make her believe that was completely normal. Charis was made into a victim by her own mother and later she adopted this pattern of victimisation in all other relationships. As for Roz, she had a strong mother figure, who made her into an obedient servant and offered no tenderness. What is more, all three of them lacked a father figure. While Charis had no father, Roz's was absent for years and Tony's barely ever spoke to her. Later, he even blamed her for his ruined life. Not having a strong father figure or a male role model, they failed in choosing their husbands. It comes as a no surprise that the novel's heroines had problems in marriages when none of them had experienced what a happy family meant. Atwood considers family to be a foundation in life and in almost all her novels (e.g. *Lady Oracle, Cat's Eye, Surfacing)* she places stress on the relationships of main characters with their parents. These accounts serve as a good starting point for analysis of their personalities. One of the main reasons why they did not find real love is that they did not have an opportunity to see what unconditional love feels like. Unfortunately, the biggest and the most natural love of all, love between a child and its mother was denied to them. Furthermore, their parents' attitudes toward them, their insults and accusations lead them to believe they were unworthy of love. That conviction is what they had to struggle with throughout the novel. Nevertheless, it

is peculiar that despite the fact that they were deprived of parental love and care, Tony, Charis and Roz all developed maternal instincts. The best example to clarify this point is their relationships with men. All three of them treated their husbands like children. They are extremely protective and nurturing, providing them with a home, food and security. It is an interesting fact that all three men live in their wives' houses, since the three of them, wanting to settle down, have secured homes for themselves. And finally, they have provided them with emotional support, diminishing their own success and glorifying their characters. It is obvious that these women are independent and completely selfless, yet they were not enough, or maybe they were too much? Too good? The problems in their relationships surface again with Zenia's appearance. She acts as a voice of reason of each of them, telling them the truth they do not wish to hear. By catering to their fantasies and acting helpless, Zenia enabled these men to feel need or to be more precise, to feel superior. Although they wished to be pampered, they also wanted to feel powerful and that was what Zenia gave them and these three women did not. They were too absorbed in the role of caregivers and mothers that they forgot to be just women. Worse than children, they treated their men as captives - captives of their love. They knew they would stay because they were helpless without them. "She can't help thinking of him as a captive, because his very existence here depends on her. He is hers to do with as she will, as much hers as if he were a traveller from another planet, trapped on Earth in this dome of artificial interplanetary air that is her house." (Atwood, 1995b: 236) We arrive at the conclusion that they were not only victims since they did exercise some power and control and enjoyed it. By caring for them, these women made their men objects and deprived them of agency. Too weak to fight, they simply ran away. They ran after a fantasy, an illusion of power and pleasure that Zenia represented. This is another example of how Atwood refuses to portray life as black or white. Also, she implies that nobody is completely innocent, that the oppressed becomes the oppressor. Moreover, she urges her characters to seek out some other definition of themselves rather than the one of a victim. She insists that victimisation depends on one's attitude to life and cannot be always be ascribed to others or life circumstances. Therefore, we reach the observation that power struggles in relationships are unavoidable and that establishing a partnership of equals may be a difficult goal to achieve. Although romantic relationships should not be based on power, it could be

inferred from this novel that besides giving love, one frequently desires to exercise power over the object of one's affection. The possibility to do so creates the felling of control and security, assuring us that our partner will stay by our side because he simply has no other choice. It is worth paying attention to the protagonists' accounts of their feelings, which reveal the thin line between love and its surrogates - habit, need and desire. This brings us again to the fact that at the end Tony is the only one with the husband. While her feelings for West are real and he is the first and only person she was very close to, Roz and Charis, on the other hand, jumped into their relationships for the wrong reasons. Charis simply could not say no. She did not want to be selfish about her body and had the compulsive need to cater to others. Despite the fact that she had unresolved issues with her sexuality, she would plunge into relationships with various men only because it was expected of women. It is worth mentioning that she never established a relationship of close intimacy with Billy and was not comfortable to speak to him openly. Roz, on the other hand, fell in love with Mitch's looks and allowed herself to be manipulated into marriage. Only much later did she realise what his real intentions were and by then it was too late. She was vexed to marry by her mother because all of her friends had done it by then. However, it is ironical that Tony is the only childless one. Atwood makes the reader think that you cannot have it all. There are no happy families in her novels. She tends to portray single mothers or childless women and makes the reader put all the fragmented pieces of their lives together and realise what choices brought them to their destinies. What is more, Atwood suggests that nothing is perfect and that acceptance is the key to a peaceful and meaningful existence. Writing about abortions, divorce and single-parenting, she lays all the options for women out in the open and wants them to consider them well. She is aware that times change and that women have more options than they had back in her day. However, she believes women still do not explore and think through their choices well enough. The other reason for wrong choices is social pressure and intolerance. Characters of Roz and Charis are prime examples of decisions brought without much consideration simply because marrying in your twenties and having a child is what 'you should do'.

The problem with Charis's sexuality was already mentioned, but the other two protagonists have similar issues, as well. Namely, Roz does not feel comfortable in her overweight body although she is trying to leave the impression she does. She observes

her husband preparing for meeting with other women while her desires remain unfulfilled. Although good for comfort, she realises, her body is not a target of his interest anymore. So, she accepts to give up this role and tries to settle with all the other roles she is good at - being a boss, a friend, a mother. As regards Tony, her interaction with West mainly consists of small talk and preparing food for him. Tony mentions sexuality only in relation to Zenia. While she is aware that West and her have an intellectual connection, she observantly notes from their first encounter that Zenia and West's relationship is one based on sexual desire. Therefore, all three of them nurture other sides of their personalities at the expense of their sexual selves. It is clear that although they think of themselves as intelligent and emancipated, these women are completely blind to restraints they imposed on themselves. For this reason, their hatred towards Zenia is so intense, since she operates on a level completely beyond their comprehension.

6.1.1. Analysis of Tony

Tony seems as the most reasonable and rational character in the novel. She carefully constructed her life according to her peculiar interest in war and her rather introverted personality. Due to her very tiny body and unfriendly, shy demeanour, Tony was considered peculiar by others, even her own parents. Being a typical loner at college, she gradually developed friendship and intimacy with West, who was the only person she could be around. Their friendship grew into a relationship and then marriage after Zenia left him without an explanation. Tony nursed and comforted him all through his emotional hell and subsequently they got married. The beginning of their marriage labelled the entire course of it. Tony as the protector and the provider of love and West as the helpless one, as the receiver. Indeed, although their relationship seems quite harmonious and stable, Tony was always alert, waiting for Zenia to strike again, to come back for what she thought was hers. Although West and Zenia were involved when Tony met them, she somehow thought Zenia did not deserve West, after she treated him the way she did. She invested so much in him to let Zenia claim him back.

Tony's first encounter with Zenia was the moment of great disillusion because Tony was becoming aware of her feeling for West. When she cast her eyes on Zenia, she felt for the first time like all three of time felt each time they were in presence of Zenia - completely irrelevant. "Very beautiful people have that effect, she thinks: they obliterate you. In the presence of Zenia she feels more than small and absurd: she feels non-existent." (Atwood, 1995b: 142) By some miraculous game of faith, that would later turn out to be Zenia's sharp manipulation, the two of them became close friends. As a matter of fact, they became so close that Tony shared her entire life-story with Zenia, who in turn told her one of her numerous well-crafted lies. After the initial bonding and Tony's growing affection for her new best friend, Zenia started asking Tony for favours. At first it was money and then the request to write a term paper on her behalf. Completely intoxicated with the newly discovered intimacy with popular and fierce Zenia, Tony complied. This decision would later backfire when Zenia threatened to use the paper as proof of cheating that could ruin Tony's academic future. In return for her silence, Zenia blackmailed Tony for more money. In this way Tony became the first victim of Zenia. Not only did she give her money and write a term paper for her, but also she was lured into revealing the most intimate facts about her life. Nevertheless, the real ordeal for Tony started when one day Zenia knocked at her door and manipulated her way into their lives once more. After a few lies and bit of charm, West rushed off to Zenia again and Tony was left heart-broken and tricked again. Even though she is a strong and rational person, Tony afterwards felt no desire to live and did not leave her house for days. That was when Roz stepped in and helped her get her life back on track. Tony had enough strength to survive her emotional turmoil, but she would not have done it had it not been for Roz. Shortly after she recovered, West came asking for forgiveness. Despite some readers' expectations, Tony took him in and resumed her role of his caregiver. It is important to mention that only many years after his return Tony asks him why he came back and he honestly replies that Zenia was bored with him. Hence, from the very start Tony is the one who cares more and she is seen to get hurt. This turn of events is foreshadowed when West tells her that she is his best friend. Although finding out the right reason of his return hurt, Tony got used to getting less. She accepted her role and was not willing to give her up. Although Tony seems as a strong woman, being independent and professionally accomplished, she could not bear

to lose the one person she ever really cared about. Despite the fact that at the end she is the only married one, Tony has no children or friends besides Roz and Charis. Although a successful scholar, she still remains the short insecure girl left by her mother. During her college days, we see Tony as a recluse who keeps her mother's urn on the shelf. She spent most of her time alone reading and did not find the topics 'popular' girls discussed at all amusing. "Tony herself did not go out on dates; she did not have anybody to go with. She did not mind this; in any case, she was happier in the company of people who had died a long time ago. That way there was no painful suspense, no disappointment. Nothing to lose." (Atwood, 1995b: 131) Before West she could not imagine dating as she did not feel comfortable with opening up to others. However, when West miraculously managed to sneak his way into, she would not let him go. Completely blind to his flaws and instability, Tony idealised West and perceived him as some kind of knight. Although she is the one pleasing him, she is constantly trying to interpret his actions as acts of love and sacrifice. "When Tony's been wiped out too often at pool, West will suggest a game of ping-pong, though it's a foregone conclusion that he'll get creamed. He's always been very considerate that way. It's a form of chivalry. Which is a measure of how much, right now, Tony stands to lose." (Atwood, 1995b: 125) Her love for him is so intense that she constantly dreads her happiness being ruined.

In order to piece together Tony's identity, the reader must carefully analyse all the fragments the narrator puts before us. The account of her childhood provides explanations for her feelings of inadequacy and not being worthy of love. Namely, her interaction with her dissatisfied, self-obsessed mother reveals her conviction that love needs to be earned and her efforts to obtain it. "She still believes that the dutiful completion of pre-set tasks will cause her to be loved. Although in some dim corner of herself she knows this hasn't worked yet and most likely never will." (Atwood, 1995b: 158) By making cups of tea and adhering to all of her mother's requests, Tony tried to make herself more loveable. Despite all her efforts, her mother always found something to correct, starting from Tony's accent. No matter how hard she tried, Tony could not be English enough to make herself acceptable to her mother. She and her father spoke the same language but were estranged all the same. Tony found herself foreign to her own parents. "Tony is a foreigner, to her own mother; and to her father also, because, although she talks the same way he does, she is - and he has made this clear - not a boy.

Like a foreigner, she listens carefully, interpreting. like a foreigner she keeps an eye out on for sudden hostile gestures. Like a foreigner she makes mistakes." (Atwood, 1995b: 164) After years of complaining and pitying herself for marrying Tony's father and being a 'war bride', Tony's mother left one day, leaving her a note. Somehow Tony had always known that day would come and each single day she feared it. The note explained why Tony could not come along and it had a promise that she would return for her. "All of this was her own fault somehow. She hasn't made enough cups of tea, she's misread the signals. She has let go of the string or the rope or the chain or whatever it is that's been attaching her mother to this house, holding her in place, and like an escaped sailboat or a balloon her mother has come loose." (Atwood, 1995b: 170) After all her hopes of her mother's return had vanished and she was tricked for the first time, Tony became a victim of her father's anger. He blamed her for her mother's decision to leave and cursed her for ruining his life. "If it weren't for Tony he never would have married her mother, and if it weren't for him, Tony never would have been born. Tony had been the catastrophe in his life. It was for Tony he had sacrificed - what exactly? Even he didn't seem to know. But all the same, didn't she owe him something?" (Atwood, 1995b: 177) By then she had blamed herself so much that she had no other choice but to forgive herself. She gathered strength and decided to ignore her father's drunken outbursts of violence and misery.

It was discussed above that West and Tony's relationship is not what a romance is usually thought to be and that it is not a relationship of mutual giving and receiving, but it is also noteworthy that her protective attitude toward him is motherlike. Namely, Tony perceives West as a helpless, naive being crushed by Zenia twice and could not handle it again. "West must be kept out as much as possible. He must be insulated. He's already been damaged enough. For kind and susceptible souls like West's, the real world, especially the real world of women, is far too harsh a place." (Atwood, 1995b: 125) Tony is determined to protect him from Zenia and does not blame him for choosing Zenia over her. It appears that she sees him as unable to think for himself and justifies his actions by ascribing them to Zenia's 'superpowers'. It is obvious that Tony is unable to face the truth when it comes to West and that she leaves all her rationality behind. "Z.--A. Hotel. Ext.1409. It's as if Zenia has already been here, leaving a taunting signature; but the handwriting is West's. How sweet, she thinks; he just left it

there for anyone to see, he doesn't even know enough to flush it down the toilet." (Atwood, 1995b: 44) Aware that her love for West transforms her into a different person, Tony admits he is her weakness. In Zenia's presence Tony succumbs to being envious and judgmental and finds herself needing the superficial girls, like Roz, for comfort.

> She pictures the girls in the Common room, and what they think of
> obsessions: and what they would think of Zenia, come to that. They
> would think she was full of it, and also a slut, with her buttons undone
> like that. They would disapprove of her slutty hair. Usually Tony finds
> her judgments on other women catty and superficial, but right now she
> finds them comforting.
>
> (Atwood, 1995b: 145)

Tony's only interest in the war with Zenia is West. She admits that she would deal with her more easily if she was like Roz and Charis, if she had nothing, to be more precise nobody to lose. "What do they know about the hard dark choices? Neither of them is going to be a whole lot of help in the coming struggle. But then, they have nothing to lose. Nothing, or nobody. Tony does." (Atwood, 1995b: 39) Thus, the love for West and the jealousy of Zenia transform Tony into a motherly caregiver on one side and a fearless warrior on the other. The fear of being abandoned again activates the side of her she always knew existed, the strong and confident side of her she considered her twin. Left to her own devices, Tony created her own twin that had all the characteristics she wished she had but did not - Tnomerf Ynot. "But when she was little her twin was merely an invention, the incarnation of her sense that part of her was missing. Although she was a twin, Tnomerf Ynot was a good deal taller than Tony herself, taller, stronger, more daring." (Atwood, 1995b: 155) From that moment on she had the habit to think of herself as a person with two faces, or a woman who was hiding her evil twin. In times of need she would take on the persona of her twin and reflect on what to do. Her habit to write backwards developed into a language of her own that she kept a secret. This is another example of duplicity and fragmented common in both postmodernism and Atwood's novels.

The question of motherhood is the one always raised when it comes to women. Unlike Charis and Roz, Tony does not have children and we never learn why. Although she is a great aunt to Augusta and the twins, we never catch Tony thinking about children. Nevertheless, she does have a maternal instinct that she fulfills by nurturing West, but also Roz and Charis. Namely, Tony considers herself a little mad and much tougher than her friends. Specialising in war, she frequently works on developing battle strategies and pictures herself as a warrior princess. Moreover, Roz and Charis think of her as the reliable one who they can count on. When she was remembering her suicide ideas, Charis knew it was Tony who she would call to save her. Furthermore, when she thinks about her students, Tony realises she perceives them as her children. "She has to make a conscious effort to stop herself from calling her students 'my boys'. If she doesn't watch it, she'll turn into a hearty, jocular den mother; or worse, a knowing, whimsical old biddy. She'll start winking and pinching cheeks." (Atwood, 1995b: 26) Hence, it is apparent that Tony in fact has a maternal instinct, so a question why she is the only one without children imposes itself. My argument is that being the only one who has a husband, Tony is deprived of maternity. As I have already mentioned, Atwood's characters are not perfectly happy and it is her intention to demonstrate that life requires some sacrifice. Through their friendship the protagonists learn this and find comfort for what they are missing. While each of them is incomplete, together they have it all.

In spite of her desire for retaliation after Zenia's death Tony realises that she feels some gratitude for her for some strange reason. Zenia showed her who she wanted to be, she encouraged her to connect with Tnomerf Ynot, she knew was somewhere inside her and she became whole for the first time. "Tony looks at her, looks into her blue-black eyes and sees her own reflection: herself, as she would like to be. Tnomerf Ynot. Herself turned inside out." (Atwood, 1995b: 188)

6.1.2. Analysis of Charis

Charis is the most fragile protagonist in the novel. Having been a victim of child abuse and rape, she internalised the feelings of guilt and continued to hold subordinate positions in all her relationships. Similarly to Roz and Tony, she also feels displaced, but her case of split identity is the most severe one. In order to escape reality and emotional stress due to the daily abuse she was experiencing, Charis abandoned her Karen persona and embraced a new, stronger version of herself, Charis.

While she was a child, Karen was first exposed to physical violence by her mentally ill mother. She was taught to hide her bruises and not speak of her mother's outbursts as if it was something irrelevant or normal. Not only was she abused by her mother, but she was also taught that love hurts. "She didn't want to put on shorts because of the backs of her legs. They were a secret between her and her mother. She wasn't supposed to tell, about the broom handle or the pancake flipper, or there would be trouble. (...) Her legs are still hurting, but that isn't sickness, it's nothing because her mother says it's nothing." (Atwood, 1995b: 269, 272) Consequently, she chose aggressive and selfish men who would also use and abuse her. Although she is a very spiritual and gentle person, Charis was constantly struggling with feelings of unworthiness and inadequacy. The only period of her life when she was safe and loved was when she was living with her grand-mother, while her mother was being treated in the hospital. However, after the grandmother's death, Charis was adopted by her aunt Vi and uncle Vern. Shortly after, her uncle began to abuse her sexually all the while threatening her not to tell her aunt. His pedophilic appetite grew and got out of hand. "She sits on Uncle Vern's knee and he pulls her higher up onto his lap and encircles her with one of his red arms. With the other hand he strokes her leg. He often does this, she's used to it; but this time he moves his hand up higher, between her legs. (...) Soon one finger isn't enough for him." (Atwood, 1995b: 291, 292) Nevertheless, when she tried to tell her aunt what was happening, she refused to believe her calling her a liar. "Don't ever say such an evil thing about your uncle! He loves you like a daughter! Do you want to destroy him?" (Atwood, 1995b: 293) The enraged reaction of her aunt left Charis no other choice but to comply with her uncle's requests, still hoping that it is just

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an act of love. "It hurts but Karen knows that people who love you can do painful things to you, and she tries to believe that he does love her. He says he does. 'Your old uncle loves you', he tells her, scraping his face against hers." (Atwood, 1995b: 292) However, on the night she was raped by him for the first time, Charis felt so disgusted and filthy that she could never get rid of that horrible feeling. Unable to bear the psychological horror of her tragedy, her prior self, Karen, underwent a transformation that gave birth to Charis. By creating her double, her stronger twin, Charis, was able to disengage mentally while she was experiencing abuse. Her double identity was more than a friend to her, it enabled her to survive. "Then he falls on top of Karen and puts his shabby hand over her mouth, and splits her in two. He splits her in two right up in the middle and her skin comes open like the dry skin of a cocoon, and Charis flies out. Her new body is like a feather, light as air. There's no pain in at all." (Atwood, 1995b: 294)

Although it would be logical that Charis, as the other self, was more daring, even aggressive, similar to Tony's twin, Charis still managed to keep Karen's innocence and love for every living creature. She is a vegetarian, environmentalist and very spiritual. She believes in destiny, fortune-telling and karma. She dresses in bright colours and is a yoga instructor. Everything about her has an air of the East, the Oriental, the ancient. Despite being a white Canadian, Charis also feels like a foreigner. Namely, she feels estranged from her own body that she is still trying to cleanse through diet and exercise. A consequence of the rape is her subdued sexuality and impossibility the enjoy sex. However, not wanting to seem 'uptight' or selfish about her body, she engages in romantic and sexual relations she finds not the least pleasing. "Billy wasn't the first man she'd slept with, of course. She'd slept with several, because you were supposed to and she didn't want to be considered uptight, or selfish about her body." (Atwood, 1995b: 235) Being taught to be a victim, Charis continues to be subordinated and tries to please all the others. Keeping others' interest at heart, she volunteered in some organisations and one day her job was to provide help to Billy. After she took him in her house, he began to bully her, treating her like a house-keeper. Trying to be servile, Charis thought it was expected from her to provide him with sex as well. Having everything he needed for free, Billy stayed with Charis, always complaining about something until one day he left with Zenia. Charis's biggest problem is not the fact that Billy left her to become a single-mother, it is her feeling obliged to others and

her fear that she might seem uptight or conceited if she says no. Chairs treated her body in the same way, as if it was a public property for everyone to use and do what they like. She admits that the best part about Billy was that he did not mention or care about her lack of sexual desire. She assumed that it was because he loved her while the truth is that he simply did not care.

> The good part about Billy was that this thing about her, this
> abnormality (she knew it must be one, because she'd listened to other
> women talking) didn't bother him. In fact, he appeared to expect it. (...)
> He loved her the way she was. Without anything being said, he simply
> assumed, as she did, that what she felt about it didn't matter. Both of
> them were agreed on that. They both wanted the same thing: for Billy
> to be happy.
>
> (Atwood, 1995b: 235)

Unlike Roz who suffers due to her status of an immigrant, Charis longs to be somebody else, something other but white. Although she listens to her employer, Shanita, complaining about the daily treatment she gets for being coloured, Charis would still prefer it to being so obviously white. It might be argued that her desire is caused by her identity crisis and the constant wish to escape her body. Furthermore, being taught to feel guilty, it is possible that Charis bears the guilt of the white race and its deeds. Not knowing what nationality Shanita is exactly, Charis envies her on her possibility to be anything and anyone. It also puts Charis in the position of the white coloniser who stole the land from the natives, which puts her at unease. However, it is important to note that although Charis is white and Canadian, she is still Shanita's employee, which suggests that the power hegemonies are starting to change, with decolonisation well on its way. The characters of Charis and Shanita and the episodes in their store are Atwood's way of addressing the social climate of the early nineties, which included the question of immigration and postcolonial life.

Charis's first encounter with Zenia was at her yoga class where Zenia showed up with a black eye, looking sick and weak. Her sad story about cancer and an abusive man awoke Charis's compassion. Shortly after, Zenia moved in and became another person in need Charis was tending to. Pressured from both sides to get rid of the other, Charis

tried her best to make sure nobody was missing anything and to maintain some dose of her calm. She prepared vegetable juices for Zenia from her own garden, cooked and cleaned and did stretches with her, feeling responsible for her healing process. The moment Charis could see that Zenia was getting better and could leave soon, she would get some terrifying symptoms and they were back at the beginning. Zenia's presence was ruining Charis's relationship with Billy, who could not handle not being the only object of Charis's care. However, it was obvious that neither of them felt grateful to her. What is more, Zenia was not able to hide her real face for too long. The moment she heard about Charis's pregnancy, she showed her real self. "The house is going to be one whole hell of a lot smaller with a screaming brat in it. You could've waited till I was dead." (Atwood, 1995b: 310) Shocked by her mean reaction, Charis nonetheless carried on with the same routine. For some reason she came to depend on Zenia. Tony could see her twin in Zenia's eyes, but Charis needed some part of her, too. She saw Zenia as the embodiment of sexuality she was stifling in herself for so long. "When she makes love to Billy she doesn't think about being Karen or Charis either. She thinks about being Zenia." (Atwood, 1995b: 300) Similarly to when she created Charis, she managed to implement a part of Zenia within herself. At one point, when she felt whole and strong again, she knew she did not need Zenia anymore. "She is torn: she wants Zenia to go, but she doesn't want her to die. She would like to cure her and then never see her again. They don't have all that much in common, and now that she has part of Zenia inside herself, the only part necessary to her, she would rather not have the actual Zenia, fleshly Zenia around." (Atwood, 1995b: 302) Although Zenia shamelessly used her, lied to her and left with Billy without any explanation, she was honest to Charis in some respects. She tried to open her eyes and make her see the real Billy – a man who was taking advantage of her and keeping her in a state of illusion. Despite being too brutal and painful, Zenia's words gave Charis a chance to undergo her last transformation, the one that would finally lead to her to her real self. Even though she did not have any news of Billy for years, Charis was still hoping that he might return. On top of that, she was still holding on to the illusion that he loved her. Prone to imagination and embellishing life, Charis wanted her daughter to think that her father was a hero, who died tragically, instead of telling the truth about his cowardly escape. "Charis decides to tell August - when she is big enough - that her father died bravely fighting in the

Vietnam War. It's the sort of thing she got told herself, and possibly just as accurate."
(Atwood, 1995b: 321) Even at a mature age Charis still tended to escape reality when it
became too harsh. Although she managed to make a home for herself and her daughter
and raise her well, she still did not feel strong enough to face some facts. The truth of
Billy's character was one of them. Her last encounter with Zenia forced Charis to face
the demons from her past she was trying to keep away for so long. "She has exorcised
their fragments, she has burned sweetgrass, she has purified all the rooms, and the birth
of August was an exorcism in itself. But she could not get rid of Billy, no matter what
she tried, because his story was unfinished." Motherhood is one of the essential aspects
of Charis's life. Being a single-mother and not doing very well financially, motherhood
proved to be a challenge for her. Nevertheless, due to her efforts and sacrifice Augusta
was a happy, loved child. Charis was determined to be a mother she herself never had
and was certain that both Karen and Charis would be involved in parenting. She felt
safer knowing that in some way Augusta had two mothers. Despite all her efforts,
Charis was never able to completely resolve her feeling of inadequacy. Her daughter
who never seemed to be fully satisfied, enhanced her feeling of discomfot Charis
experienced as a mother.

> Her daughter is a hard girl. Hard to please, or hard for Charis to please.
> Maybe it's because she has no father. Or not no father: an invisible father,
> a father like a dotted outline, which had to be coloured in for her by
> Charis, who didn't have all that much to go on herself, so it's no wonder
> his features remained a little indistinct. Charis wonders whether it would
> have been better for her daughter to have a father. She wouldn't know,
> because she never had one herself. Maybe Augusta would go easier on
> Charis if she had two parents she could find inadequate and not just one.

<div align="center">(Atwood, 1995b: 45)</div>

As a new generation of ambitious and assertive girls, Augusta knew very well what she
did not want or like and she would constantly find flaws in Charis, starting from her
looks, the design of her apartment and her food. "Augusta doesn't want an old washed-
out mother. Washed-out is her phrase. 'I like myself the way I am,' Charis tells her; but

she wonders if that's altogether true." (Atwood, 1995b: 49) Although she kept telling herself she is satisfied with who she is, Charis actually had problems with her identity. The moment she learnt to accept what she can and dismiss what she cannot, Charis managed to establish a better relationship with her daughter as well.

It should be noted, however, that at the end. Chris did not resolve all of her issues. Her touch with sexuality is still lost and her problem with avoidance of most food lingers. Nevertheless, she has learnt to recognise her problems and not force herself into things she does not feel comfortable with, starting from sex. She simply came to terms with the fact that she was not able to enjoy that kind of intimacy. "She stays away from men, because men and sex are too difficult for her, they are too snarled up with rage and shame and hatred and loss, with the taste of vomit and the smell of rancid meat, and with the small golden hairs on Billy's vanished arms and with hunger." (Atwood, 1995b: 321) For the first time in her life, she will try to please herself.

6.1.3. Analysis of Roz

Roz seems the strongest protagonist in the novel, mostly due to her economic power and social status. However, despite her wealth, she remains equally, if not more, vulnerable when it comes to relationships with men. Due to her Jewish origin she had to change her name during the war, so she also has a double identity. Amazingly, she is being transformed from a self-confident, awe-inspiring woman into an insecure, weak middle-aged one. She has to overcome the motherly attitude she nurtures towards everyone, including her husband Mitch. Under the influence of her parents, she subconsciously follows the same pattern of marriage and makes herself into a martyr.

Roz's marriage with her opportunistic husband Mitch was based on her infatuation with his looks and his desire to succeed in the business world. Naive and besotted with him, Roz was an easy prey for the manipulative Mitch. Alongside her infatuation, Roz was also under the pressure to get married, since at 22 she was already old for marriage at that time. Her mother would throw inquisitive glances her way, mentioning her friends who were already married. "She remembers the time she first

went out with Mitch. She was old, she was almost twenty-two, she was over the hill. A lot of the girls she'd known in high school and then in university were already married, so why wasn't she? It was a question that looked out at her from her mother's increasingly baffled eyes." (Atwood, 1995b: 345) Poor Roz could not even imagine that Mitch's intentions were anything but honest. In fact, Mitch had devised a whole plan of seduction, with the final goal to persuade her to marry him. To that end, he even avoided kissing her in public so as to leave the impression of a respectful man with serious intentions. "He held out on me, he wore me down. He knew exactly what he was doing. Probably had a little side dish for himself tucked away in some typing pool so he wouldn't get gangrene of the male member. But he pulled it off, he married me. He got the brass ring." (Atwood, 1995b: 352) Although she was the one with power, Mitch quickly managed to impose himself as the one in charge, the one who would determine the rules of their relationship. Soon, Mitch began having affairs that at first came as a shock to Roz, but soon she began to take them for granted. She understood men needed to and were supposed to have some vice, and to her, infidelity seemed not so bad. In time, Roz learned the rules of the game and began to play the role of a Saint who accepted and forgave Mitch his sins. His romances became part of her daily life as he became careless and left obvious traces. "The other women are just trivial adventures, he will imply; she's the one he comes home to. Then he will throw himself into her as into a warm bath, as into a deep feather bed, and exhaust himself and sink again into connubial torpor. Until the next time." (Atwood, 1995b: 337) Eventually, Roz perfected her role of the martyr and even began to enjoy it. She could foresee his every move and knew both of their roles by heart. "He will explain, she will be hurt; he will pretend to repent, she will pretend to believe him. They face each other, two card sharps, two poker players." (Atwood, 1995b: 424) She really believed that, despite all of his innumerate affairs, she was the only one he loved. Their well-rehearsed theatre performances lasted until he met Zenia and decided to leave Roz. Immediately she knew she was out of her depth and was stepping into an unknown territory. Never before had Roz felt so humiliated. Even when he wanted to come back, after Zenia had left him, he offered no apology nor mentioned a single word about Roz, it was, as always, all about him.

'I want to come back', he tells her, gazing around the high, wide living

room, the spacious domain that Roz has made, that was once his to share.

Not will you let me come back? Not I want you back. Nothing to do with

Roz, no mention of her at all. It's the room he's claiming, the territory. (...)

There is no her, as far as he's concerned; she might as well not be here.

Whatever he's doing is to himself. She never felt so non-existent in

her life

(Atwood, 1995b: 427)

Roz was too comfortable playing the role of a career woman and a mother that she forgot to be a woman as a sexual being. She was at ease when she was doing business - confident and in control. However, she did not manage to live up to that success in her private life. She treated Mitch like another child, cleaning up after him, consoling the women he used and threw away like trash.

It's amazing the way Mitch can just write these women off. Sink his

teeth into them, split them out, and Roz is expected to clean up the

mess. Fire of his loins and then wipe, like a blackboard, and after that

he can barely remember their names. Roz is the one who remembers.

Their names, and everything else about them.

(Atwood, 1995b: 335)

It seems incomprehensible that such a successful woman would tolerate a disrespectful husband such as Mitch. It occurred to Roz that she might be copying the example of her parents. Even though she despised her mother's playing the martyr and constantly accusing her father, Roz realised she was playing the same game - the saint and sinner. Indeed, she relished his mistakes, emphasising her own impeccable moral and tolerance. Furthermore, although it did not appear so at the beginning, Roz chose the husband who was the most similar to her father, a gambler and a cheater. Despite all his flaws, her father was the one she adored and could always find some excuse for. Consequently, Roz continued doing the same with Mitch - loving him and forgiving him.

Maybe Roz married Mitch because, although she thought at that time

Mitch was very different from her father, she sensed he was the same

underneath. He would cheat on her the way her father had cheated on her mother, and she would keep forgiving him and taking him back just the way her mother had. She would rescue him, over and over. She would play the saint and he the sinner.

<div align="right">(Atwood, 1995b: 431)</div>

Roz's problem with Zenia began when she hired her as a journalist in her magazine. Gradually, Zenia proved indispensible and Roz whole-heartedly helped her up the rungs. Meanwhile, Zenia began an affair with Mitch and managed to enchant him to the extent that he left his wife and children without giving it a second thought. Although she was warned about Zenia by Tony and Charis, Roz was certain she could deal with her, she trusted her own judgment that was telling her that Zenia had changed. Also, she wanted to prove she was stronger and more skillful than Tony and Charis.

She must have thought she was some kind of a lion-tamer, some kind of a bullfighter; that she could succeed where her friends have failed. Why not? (...) She must have thought she could handle Zenia. She'd once Had pretty much the same attitude towards Mitch, come to think of it. (...) She gives Roz a long look, straight out of her deep indigo eyes, and Roz is touched. She, Roz - she alone - has been chosen, to understand. And she does, she does.

<div align="right">(Atwood, 1995b: 399, 410)</div>

When Roz thought of Mitch, she was mad at herself for still loving him. Furthermore, Roz's struggle with her looks is predominantly related to Mitch and Zenia. She wanted to be able to relax and not care about her ageing face or overweight body but she could not because it would have meant letting the two of them win. She still cared about how Mitch saw her, which was why she was never able to be herself around him. "Screw you, Mitch, she says to the mirror. If it weren't for him she could relax, she could be middle-aged. But if he were still around, she'd be still trying to please him. The key word is trying." (Atwood, 1995b: 82) With regard to Zenia, what Roz feels about her is sheer jealousy. She prefers to picture her ugly than dead and Roz is the one who comments her artificial look the most.

Roz's struggle with food and her body is an incessant one. She is lost in a vicious circle of overeating and dieting. She is obsessed with food - either overindulging in it or thinking about it. Her opinion about herself varies from being overweight to not being fat at all. "She used to do all kinds of diets. Grapefruit ones, bran added to everything, all-protein. She used to wax and wine like the moon, trying to shake the twenty pounds that came on when the twins were born. (...) It's not as if she's fat, anyway. She's just solid. A good peasant body, from when the women had to pull the ploughs." (Atwood, 1995b: 89) Sletteddahl-MacPherson notes that when she hires a private detective to follow Zenia, Roz wants her to find out what Zenia eats for breakfast. (2010: 66) Also, when she thinks about the women Mitch is sexually involved with, "her imagery is actually associated with food: they are 'cotton-candy' " (MacPherson 2010: 66) In the domain of private life she allowed her looks to influence her feelings of worthiness. Roz uses food as a compensation for the lack of love in her life. When she is depressed or upset, she resorts to comfort food. "She gets lonely, why not admit it? She gets hugely, cavernously lonely, and then she eats. Eats and drinks and smokes, filling up her inner spaces. As best as she can." (Atwood, 1995b: 102) She is aware that she is no longer sexually attractive to Mitch, who observes her body as a safe, maternal harbor, whereas she wants to make herself desirable. Roz knew very well that some other body was the now the object of his attention.

Roz was also left to become a single-mother, the only difference being that her children knew their father. Although she does not have financial troubles like Charis, Roz does not feel that she is a good mother either. On the contrary, as she watches her twins, she realises how foreign she must be to them, and is shocked by their obscene vocabulary. She knows that they live in completely different worlds and that there are miles setting them apart. "She must seem so archaic to them. So obsolete, so foreign. She spent the first half of her life feeling less and less like an immigrant, and now she's spending the second half of her life feeling more and more like one. A refuge from the land of middle age, stranded in the country of the young." (Atwood, 1995b: 86) Trying to compensate for the absence of their father, Roz lost her authority as a parent and is a little frightened of her own children, who she does not know well at all. With Larry she is even more at a loss. He seems so distant to her, so unfathomable. She does not know how to handle him and is trying her best to avoid him. Even when she finds drugs in his

room, she is incapable of confronting him about it. "She did find a packet once, a little plastic envelope with what looked like baking powder in it, and she decided not to know what it was, because what could she do? You don't tell your twenty-two-year-old son that you just happened to be going through his pants pockets. Not anymore." (Atwood, 1995b: 92) Her maternal instinct is obvious in her attitude towards her two friends also. Namely, she helps them both to set up houses of their own, with guidance and financial support. Although Tony is the reliable one to be called in times of emergency, Charis admits Roz is the one she would ask for comfort and a hug.

The motif of displacement is recurrent in the novel and can be found in Roz's character as well. While for years she thought her name was Rosalind Greenwood after the war she was told her real name was Roz Grunwald and that she was Jewish. As she was not aware of her real identity or origin for so long, Roz had problems adapting to her new life and the label of a 'DP' - a displaced person. The label she suddenly acquired meant that there was something she should be ashamed of. "She finds herself in a foreign country. She's an immigrant, a displaced person. Her father's ship has come in, but she's just off the boat. Or maybe it's something else; maybe it's the money. Roz's money is plentiful, but it needs to be aged, like good wine or cheese. It's too brash, too shiny, too exclamatory. It's too brazen." (Atwood, 1995b: 338) After the initial impulse to withdraw from social interactions, Roz realised she had to assign a role to herself - something to be the best at. Eventually, she realised she was the joker. She became determined to be the funniest, the meanest, the one with the sharpest tongue.

> Roz can see she will never be prettier, daintier, sexier, or harder to
> impress than these girls are. She decides instead to be smarter, funnier
> and richer and once she has managed that they can kiss her fanny. She
> takes to making faces: she resorts to the old rudeness of Huron Street, to
> get attention. Soon she had bulldozed a place for herself in the group:
> she is the joker.
>
> (Atwood, 1995b: 394)

Indeed, the joker became her mask she wore so well that it became her other nature. In times of trouble Roz was accustomed to put on her joker mask and pretend to be just fine. She even recognised the same trait in her twins. What is more, Roz also feels as a

foreigner to herself - being uncomfortable in her body and with her age. Like Tony and Charis, she is also a fragmented subject, having two names, two nationalities and two completely different personas – a private and a public one. Struggling with becoming middle-aged and still trying to keep up with the idea of her godlike, handsome husband, Roz forgot who she was supposed to be. Trying to find the new look and keep up-to-date, she was at risk of becoming ridiculous. Unfortunately, all of her attempts to change and define herself still revolve around Mitch. "She doesn't know what got into her. Trying for a girlish look, maybe; trying to go back in time, to create the perfect pre-teen bedroom she once longed for but never had. (...) he treated her like a hotel, she needed to throw everything out that was there when he was; she needed to reassert herself. Though surely this isn't herself!" (Atwood, 1995b: 81)

Surprisingly perhaps, Roz's wealth has proved to be a disadvantage in many respects. First of all, it alienated her from others, depriving her of emotional support. "Why was it? Why was Roz's pain second-rate? It took her a while to figure it out; it was her money. Surely, they thought, anyone with as much money as Roz couldn't possibly be suffering." (Atwood, 1995b: 395) Contrary to the common belief that wealthy people do not have problems, Roz was undergoing serious emotional turmoils, which almost cost her her life. Unable to cope with the fact that Mitch had committed suicide, Roz began to take sleeping pills, which one day she mixed with alcohol. She thought it was her responsibility to protect him and prevent the tragedy from happening. She could not forgive herself not taking him back. Fortunately, her near-death experience served as a wake-up call and Roz came to terms with herself, counting her blessings. "They are so wonderful! She gazes at them with ferocious love. Zenia, she thinks, you bitch! Maybe you had everything else, but you never had such a blessing. You never had daughters." (Atwood, 1995b: 87)

6.2. Elements of Feminism

I argue here that Atwood used the character of Zenia as an embodiment of a radical feminist that may seem utterly selfish and evil to some, not so negative to others, but definitely provokes some reaction and thought. Although she put all three characters through ordeals, Zenia made them reconsider their lives and find meaning within themselves. Moreover, she brought the three of them together into a lifetime friendship. One must wonder what their lives would look like had it not been for Zenia. Mitch and Billy would be gone either way, so they would be alone in their misfortunes. Since she is constantly being linked to feminism, Atwood found a way to comment on it in her novels. Besides her characters who express different views on the feminist movement, she has also created a character that acts as its mouthpiece. If we consider the ending, we will notice that, as it is expected in case of villains, Zenia dies. Although she died under suspicious circumstances, Zenia's death could not have been avoided since she was ill of cancer. The three 'good' heroines continue their lives, with a new awareness and meaning. The novel did not betray readers reading for moral messages since Atwood opted for an ending typical of realism or fairy-tales. Although until the very end the plot seems like a female war, all three female characters are alive, while Mitch is dead and Billy is missing. It does suggest that the three women were not Zenia's targets after all. Sletteddahl-MacPherson observes, "Moreover, while the women are, in a way, both hunted and haunted by Zenia, they survive; it is the men that falter." (2010: 67) She adds that Zenia is a "difficult character whose identity is posited as both fantastic and real, and critics disagree over her final "positive" or "negative" role." (Sletteddahl-MacPherson, 2010: 67) Although it was mentioned that Tony is reluctant to engage in the feminist cause for her lack of courage, her secret adoration and encouragement of Zenia could be interpreted as Tony's hidden or repressed support of feminism.

> Though part of what Tony feels is admiration. despite her disapproval,
> her dismay, all her past anguish, there's a part of her that has wanted to
> cheer Zenia on, even to encourage her. To make her into a saga. To
> participate in her daring, her contempt for almost everything, her rapacity,

her lawlessness. It's like the time her mother disappeared downhill on

the toboggan, No!No!On! On!

(Atwood, 1995b: 208)

Indeed, after Zenia's death all three of them contemplate their lives from that moment on and Tony gets an idea to write a book on female commanders. "Maybe Tony will write something about Dame Giraude, sometime. A study of female military commanders. Iron Hands, Velvet Gloves, she could call it. But there isn't much material." (Atwood, 1995b: 520) Furthermore, thinking about the possibility of a new war, she reflects on what could women do to collect some points for feminism. "It's not all bad though - the suicide rate will fall. It always does during wars. And maybe women soldiers will get a crack at front-line combat, strike a blow for feminism. Though I doubt it. They'll probably just be doing bandages as usual." (Atwood, 1995b: 33) All Tony's references to feminism express her disbelief in any real change. Whenever she gets a feminist idea, she dismisses it as unlikely to happen. Her choice of the field of study made Tony a threat to male scholars, who think a woman cannot be an expert on serious subjects such as war and that she should study something more in the scope of women's interests. Tony's subject field is not approved by women, since they feel betrayed by her. It can be inferred that any choice that strays away from the approved 'gender framework' will be met with judgment by both sexes.

Male historians think she's invading their territory, and should leave

their spears, arrows, catapults, lances, swords, guns, planes and bombs

alone. They think she should be writing social history, such as who ate

when, or *Life in the Feudal Family*. Female historians, of whom, there

are not many, think the same thing but for different reasons. They think

she ought to be studying birth; not death, and certainly not battle plans.

Not routs and debacles, not carnages, not slaughters. They think she's letting

women down.

(Atwood, 1995b: 24)

This passage suggests that even in the academic circles it was believed that women should deal with aspects of life related to home, family and daily routine, while domains of power, such as politics or war, were still considered predominantly male territories. Birth and maternity are always associated with women, being considered their main task. Tony implies that male historians do not feel threatened by her because she is so 'tiny' but that if she had an Amazon body, they would be. If she were six feet and built like a blockhouse; if she had hips. Then she'd be threatening, then she'd be an Amazon. It's the incongruity that grants her permission." (Atwood, 1995b: 24) This is an example how body is always associated with women and is thought to be the site of female power. Being physically weaker, women were assigned less power altogether. "If she weren't so tiny, though, she'd never get away with it. The reference to the Amazon women and hips hints at the idea of women warriors but also of fertility, both of which presume power. The female ability to give birth is the ultimate symbol of power for it is only available to the female gender. When it comes to Tony's attitude on being a woman, she considers it very difficult and dangerous so she tries to keep West out of the women's world at all costs. Moreover, Atwood makes a remark on the popular current of the time - feminist deconstruction - with the description of graffiti in the ladies' bathroom at the history department,

> Herstory Not History and Hersterectomy: FEMINIST DECONSTRUCTION
> SUCKS. The subtext of this, as Tony well knows, is that there's a move
> afoot to have McClung Hall declared a historic building and turned over to
> Women's Studies. HISTORIC NOT HERSTORIC, someone has added off to
> the side. Omens of a coming tussle Tony hopes to avoid. (original capitals)

> (Atwood, 1995b: 27)

This inscription functions as historiographic metafiction, giving a vivid account of the social climate of the beginning of the nineties. With the feminist movement well-established by that time, projects such as Women's Studies departments are slowly spreading, casting a veil of incredulity on all historical foundations. However, from this account we see that the feminist project still had its opposition, even among academic circles and that for that reason Tony does not engage in the movement, although some

of her attitudes are essentially feminist. One is for certain, feminist agenda represented a threat to the established social hierarchy on all levels. It is noteworthy that although she declared herself a non-feminist on various occasions, Atwood rarely gives a voice to male characters. They are available only through accounts of female characters or narrators. Despite her apparent lack of interest in male figures and unflattering accounts of a few male characters, Atwood does not think that renders her a feminist. She believes her choice of women as the subject of her writing is not enough to make her a feminist author. In fact, she sees any ideology as potentially limiting to her art. Furthermore, the feminist cause features in the novel also as a reference to Roz's support groups. Namely, as a well-off business woman, Roz is very actively engaged in supporting women-related causes, such as Battered Women, Rape Victims, Homeless Moms and Abandoned Grannies. (Atwood, 1995b: 103) It shows that many organisations aimed at helping women and promoting their rights were active at the time. The three protagonists' talks reveal the society's obsession with looks and the cult of body. By mentioning cosmetic surgery on a few occasions, we can conclude that by then it has become quite a common trend. " 'You could get a leg implant', says Roz. 'A leg enhancement. Well, why not? They're doing everything else.' " (Atwood, 1995b: 31). Even Charis and Tony, who consider themselves spiritual and intellectual respectively, fall victim to the beauty mania and complain about their physical appearance. Comforting each other, the three women develop a half-jocular manner of speaking about their strong and weak sides or to be precise, body parts. But again we have the implied author who intervenes by saying that kind of talk became a normal routine for them, a part of who they are. They became used to their own imperfections and dissatisfactions.

> 'You're not short, ' Roz told her. 'You're petite. Listen, for a waist like that,
> I'd kill'. 'But I'm the same thickness all the way down,' says Tony. 'So, what
> we need is a blender,' says Roz. 'We'll put in your waist and my thighs, and
> we'll split the difference. Fine by you?' If they had been younger, such
> conversations might have pointed to serious dissatisfactions with their own
> bodies, serious longings. By this time they're just repertoire. More or less.
>
> (Atwood, 1995b: 29)

When it comes to Roz, on the basis of her support of various women's groups she could be considered a profeminist. However, it does not take long for readers to realise that her engagement is rather shallow since she does not apply feminist stances in her own private life. Although she is a successful, independent woman, Roz was not able to choose an adequate life partner and consequently allowed herself to become victimised. Her marriage is a simple illusion, just another name for her supporting yet another child. She is a typical example of women who practice the 'turn the blind eye' method, hoping that ignoring will make the problem disappear. What is more, she is convinced that men simply cannot help having affairs, which it is in their nature. She even compares infidelity with vice, such as alcohol, implying that it is a form of addiction and that they cannot fight it.

> She had an idea that something was up. She thought she knew what,
> but she didn't know who. She told herself she didn't much care; she was
> past that. As long as it didn't disrupt, as long as it didn't interfere, as long
> as she could come out of it with not many ribs broken. Some men needed
> their little escapades. It kept them toned up. As an addiction it was preferable
> to alcohol or golf, and Mitch's things - things, she called them, to
> distinguish them from people - never lasted long.
>
> (Atwood, 1995b: 333)

This kind of attitude justifies and perpetuates the myth of men's inborn promiscuity and contributes to emotional exploitation and humiliation of women. In addition, this stand actually portrays men as weak beings without any power of will whatsoever. It suggests that men are powerless in front of female bodies. Hence, this stand is sexist towards both genders, not just women. In light of this, it is clear that Roz's interest in feminist activism is only a matter of trend or simply a desire to belong to a group.

> Roz loved the consciousness-raising groups, she loved the free-ranging
> talk. It was like catching up on all the sisters she'd never had, it was like
> having a great big family in which the members, for once, had something
> in common; it was like being allowed, finally, into all groups and cliques
> she'd never quite been able to crash before. No more meany-mouth, no

more my-hubby-is better-than-your-hubby, no more beating about the bush!
You could say anything.

<div align="right">(Atwood, 1995b: 394)</div>

As Sletteddahl-MacPherson notes, feminism for Roz is "an outgrown phase, signified by overalls and body hair and replaced, albeit comfortably, with sleek, shoulder-padded business women." (2010: 67) Her first association to feminism is feminists in overalls and she believes that all feminists hate men. "According to the feminists, the ones in overalls, in the early years, the only good man was a dead man, or better still none at all." (Atwood, 1995b: 441) Roz's character serves as proof of a wide-spread phenomenon of fashionable activism - supporting a cause because it has become popular or a matter of prestige. Despite all her donations, Roz did not benefit from feminism in any meaningful way. Her character could also be understood as Atwood's criticism of some feminist activists or the way it has been promoted in the media.

Roz's inability to do deal with problems in the emotional arena demonstrates that success in one field does not necessarily mean happiness. Her paradoxical personality points out the complexity of modern women's lives. With all the new responsibilities and power they have gained in the workplace, it appears that women have lost a great deal in the home field. Confronted with independent and ambitious women, many men feel that their masculinity is threatened or contested. That insecurity may often lead to two scenarios: aggression and violence towards women as compensation for the threatened ego or women diminishing their own accomplishments or even playing stupid so as to let the men dominate. The second scenario is present in all three characters' lives, starting from Roz. "Being a woman with power doesn't mean Roz has to thread less softly around Mitch. She has to tread more softly, she has to diminish herself, pretend she's smaller than she is, apologise for her success, because everything she does is magnified." (Atwood, 1995b: 396) Although Roz helped Mitch advance professionally and enter elite circles, which in fact was his primary intention, she is aware that giving does not make you loved, on the contrary, it breeds hatred.

To give is a blessing, or so her father used to say. (...) To give is
basically a drag these days, because it doesn't get you anything, it won't
even buy you a scratch-free car, and for what? Because those you give to

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hate you. They hate you because they have to ask, and they hate you

for being able to give. Or else, they're professionals and they despise you

for believing them, for feeling sorry for them for being such, a gullible

dork.

<div align="right">(Atwood, 1995b: 108)</div>

This paragraph especially applies to Roz's relationship with Zenia. Even though Roz helped her by hiring her and supporting her professionally, Zenia hated her and wanted to teach her a lesson about possession by stealing Mitch. " ' Women like you make me sick, ' says Zenia angrily. 'You've always owned things. But you didn't own him, you know. He wasn't your God-given property! You think you had rights in him? Nobody has any right except what they can get.' " (Atwood, 1995b: 495) During her therapy sessions, it occurs to Roz that she is at a loss why all women wish each other to find men if they are so bad for them. She realises that good men are a rarity, what is more, she wonders if anybody even knows what a 'good man' means anymore.

With regard to Charis, she is the least powerful character in the novel. Without career ambitions, with financial struggles and an alternative lifestyle she cannot be compared to Roz or even Tony. However, she is the model of an average woman of today. A single-mother, struggling to make ends meet and support her child, she still manages to make an honest, independent living and that single fact is empowering. Furthermore, despite her financial limitations, she took in two complete strangers and gave them shelter. Ironically, she was helping the people who least deserved it and had no moral compass whatsoever. In fact, Billy who did nothing could not bear to hear her imply that he does not contribute or hear her mention all the work she has to do to put food on the table. "What can she tell him then? I have to work or else we don't eat? That doesn't go over too well: he thinks it's a criticism of him because he doesn't have a job, and then he sulks. He prefers to believe that she's like a lily of the field; that she neither toils, nor spins; that bacon and coffee are simply produced by her, like leaves from a tree." (Atwood, 1995b: 244) Alongside diminishing her own contributions, Charis is also exposed to violence. As a victim of child abuse, she is accustomed to this pattern and keeps reasserting herself as a victim. In spite of the fact that she does not enjoy sex, Charis keeps practicing it in order to satisfy the men. What is more, she feels it is somehow her duty to allow them to treat her as a means to sexual pleasure. In case of

Billy, she even tolerated aggressive sex that caused her physical pain only because he would say 'I love you' during the intercourse. "His urgency confused her. God I love you, God I love you, he would say at these times. Sometimes he did things that hurt - slapping her, pinching. Sometimes it hurt anyway, but since she didn't mention this how was he supposed to know about it?" (Atwood, 1995b: 234)

Another issue related to feminism present in this novel is the cult of the female body. Namely, all three heroines have major issues regarding their bodies. Tony's height, Roz's weight, Charis's eating disorders all point to the increasing importance of body shape as well as the increasing dissatisfaction with oneself. Strict beauty standards, perfect bodies from the covers of magazines and the abundance of dieting products put women under an immense pressure to shape up. By naming the restaurant where Tony, Roz and Charis meet "Toxique" Atwood wants to stress that instead of a cure food has become the poison of the modern world. Furthermore, body issues imply more serious internal struggles and suffering. By using the character of Mitch, she is making a reference to the classification of female bodies man make. Although they all need a domestic, safe and comforting body such as Roz's, the one that radiates with maternal tenderness, they also crave for and fantasise about a young, firm, attractive one that symbolises youth and energy.

> In Mitch's cosmology Roz's body represents possessions, solidity, the
> domestic virtues, hearth and home, long usage, mother-of-his-children.
> The den. Whereas whatever other body may currently be occupying his
> field of vision will have other nouns attracted to it: adventure, youth,
> freedom, the unknown, sex without strings. When the pendulum swings
> back – when that other body starts representing complications, decisions,
> demand, sulkiness, and weepy scenes - then it will be Roz's turn again.
> This has been the pattern.
>
> (Atwood, 1995b: 335)

If we take Zenia's orphaned background into account, it might clarify her selfish pursuit of her own interests and loathing toward those who offer her help. It is indeed her unique way of growing up that what made her resilient to acts of affection but provided her with unfaltering strength of character. Not having any strings attached and no role

models, Zenia was able to be who ever she wanted to be. "There's one thing about being an orphan, though,' says Zenia thoughtfully. (...) 'You don't have to live up to anyone else's good opinion of you.' (...) 'You can be whoever you like.' " (Atwood, 1995b: 188) According to Sletteddahl-MacPherson, Zenia is the only one who "consistently uses the rhetoric of feminism" but unfortunately "only to her own ends: personal power". (2010: 67) Throughout the novel she was trying to make Charis, Tony and Roz open their eyes and not let themselves be fooled. She despises men and uses them as a means to her ends. " 'I've watched him, he's a greedy shit, they're all rapists at heart. You're innocent, Karen. Believe me, there's only one thing any man ever wants from a woman, and that's sex. How much you can get them to pay for it is the important thing.' " (Atwood, 1995b: 258) In the eyes of Tony, Charis and Roz, Zenia is a monster, maneater, a supernatural being. However, Gubar and Gilbert provide a different definition of a monster woman, "The monster woman is the woman who refuses to be selfless, acts on her own initiative, who has a story to tell - in short, a woman who rejects the submissive role patriarchy has reserved for her." (1979: 34) This account of a monster woman completely corresponds to the feminist vision of a woman. Thus, the three protagonists' fear of Zenia, of the monster woman, could also be interpreted as their fear of feminism or defining themselves in the feminist framework. Furthermore, it is also relevant that Gubar and Gilbert see the monster woman as duplicitous and as a woman who has a story to tell. "Because she has something to tell there is always the possibility that she may choose not to tell or to tell a different story." (In Moi, 2002: 57) I have already stated that duplicity is an essential motif in *The Robber Bride* and the basis for construction of all three heroines, but it should not be omitted that Zenia has more personalities and more stories to tell than the three of them. She told a different story about her past and origin to each of the characters and the truth is not revealed even upon her death. Nevertheless, evading definition, Zenia remains a multiple personality. In addition, Zenia is a journalist - she writes stories, although nobody hears her own. In the plethora of her lies and fantasies, however, there is some truth to be found. Similarly to women novelists or poets, Zenia is also portrayed as a monster - because she sets out to create her own story. Gilbert and Gubar add that the vision of the ideal woman and the 'eternal feminine' in literature, contrary to the 'monster woman', has always assumed being a "passive, docile and above all selfless creature." This definition perfectly

reflects the behavior of Tony, Roz and Charis, while it is the complete opposite of Zenia's. (1979 : 25)

At the end of the novel, the narrator concludes that the world revolves around all-consuming men's fantasies. She claims that it is impossible to avoid catering to male fantasies even when we think we are making our own choices. The power of these fantasies lies in the fact that women have internalised male perceptions of them. In addition to fighting men, women are struggling with 'the man inside themselves'. Consequently, women are self-critical and critical of other women by applying the sexist male rhetoric.

Male fantasies, male fantasies, is everything run by male fantasies?
Up on a pedestal or down on your knees, it's all a male fantasy: that you
are strong enough to take what they dish out, or else too weak to do
anything about it. Even pretending you aren't catering to male fantasies is
 a male fantasy: pretending you're unseen, pretending you have a life of
your own, that you can wash your feet and comb your hair unconscious
of the ever-present watcher peering through the keyhole in your head if
nowhere else. You are a woman with a man inside watching a woman.
You are your own voyeur.

(Atwood, 1995b: 441, 442)

According to Simone de Beauvoir, "one is not born a woman, but rather becomes one". (In Butler, 2007: 11) It implies that gender is constructed, not given. The question which many theorists asked in reaction to her definition is whether it means that gender is a matter of choice. However, Beauvoir stresses that "one becomes a woman, but always under a cultural compulsion to become one" (In Butler, 2007: 11) *The Robber Bride* is an example of social pressures women are exposed to. They are trying to define themselves against the strict dogmas of womanhood and femininity. In addition, it points out how they themselves perpetuate victimisation of women. While Beauvoir designates women as the Other, Luce Irigaray argues that the feminine is excluded altogether by saying "both subject and the Other are masculine mainstays of a closed phallogocentric signifying economy that achieves its totalising goal through the exclusion of the feminine altogether." (In Butler, 2007: 13) Moreover, Irigaray

considers gender to be the "linguistic index of the political opposition between the sexes." (In Butler, 2007: 27) According to her, there are no two genders, only one - the feminine, whereas the masculine is the general. Feminism places significant stress on its rhetoric as well as the rhetoric of sexism due to the fact that rhetoric not only reflects gender, but also defines it. Judith Butler states that gender is performative, meaning that it constitutes the identity it is purported to be. She claims, "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results." (2007: 43) In the light of her concept, *The Robber Bride* gains even more significance for it exposes the processes of women finding and defining their identities in different ways.

Another social dimension Atwood commented on in the novel is the behaviour of the new generations. By portraying twins, Augusta and Larry, Atwood gave her impressions of the new youth of the late eighties, early nineties. Again more interested in the female soul, she shapes the characters of Charis's and Roz's daughters as strong, confident and unbelievably liberated. Through their relationships with their mothers, we see them as too adult and tough for their age. Their actions are shocking to their mothers, who feel like inadequate parents. Loved and protected by them much better than they themselves were as children, these girls seem better prepared for real life than their mothers were. Although in general positive, their transformation seems a little intimidating and worrying. As consumers of popular culture, which was on the rise, the twins acquired a sexist language they do not recognise as such. "What puzzles her is how so many of their insults can be so - well, so sexist. Bitch and slut are among their mildest; she wonders if they'd let a boy call them that. When they think she's not listening, they can get much more obscene, or what she thinks of as obscene. Cunt gum. Such a thing could never have been thought of, when she was growing up. And they're only fifteen!" (Atwood, 1995b: 85) Gubar and Gilbert ask questions they consider crucial for the further development of feminist literary criticism - questions with regard to whose language and vocabulary women use. After centuries of being spoken of and spoken to and listening only to the masculine voice, what language do women use once they start speaking? Do they imitate men or speak in a language of their own. "Since his is the chief voice she hears, does the Queen try to sound like the King, imitating his tone, his inflections, his phrasing, his point of view? Or does she 'talk back' to him in

her own vocabulary, her own timbre, insisting on her own viewpoint?" (Gubar&Gilbert, 1979: 46) Hence, it is clear that despite the seeming liberation of the women of the new generation, the ones who were teenagers in the nineties, they are still well-hidden, lingering sexist messages, as well as those quite apparent but accepted as common and harmless, such as 'bitch'. Observing them at the end of the novel, Tony admires their courage and freedom but wonders if there could also be the bad sides to this new liberation.

> None of them is what you would call - self-effacing - all three would be
> at home on horses, riding astride, hair flying, scouring the plains, giving
> no quarter. Tony isn't sure how they've come by their confidence, their
> straight-ahead level gazes, their humorous but remorseless mouths. They
> have none of their timidity, that used to be so built in, for women. She
> hopes they will gallop through the world in style, more style than she
> herself has been to scrape together. They have her blessing; but from a
> distance, because close up Augusta is faintly chilling - she's so intent on
> success - and the twins have become gigantic: gigantic and also careless.
> Tony is slightly afraid of them. They might step on her by mistake

(Atwood, 1995b: 452)

It could be said that the concerns Tony expresses about the twins and Augusta are Atwood's concerns about the accomplishments of the feminist movement. Although she admits there has been much progress in reaching equality, she wonders if there are also some potential drawbacks that will follow

6.3. Elements of Postmodernism

Although there are critics who hold that postmodernism is not the most adequate for the development of issues related to feminism or women in general, this novel and Margaret Atwood's entire opus prove otherwise.

First of all, *The Robber Bride's* fragmented structure is typical of postmodernism. This movement avoids providing whole stories but instead requires from readers to gather pieces and construct their own versions. The novel features three characters who have their stories told by a third-person narrator, who switches the storytelling from present to past and then back to present. Zenia's story, however, remains covered with a veil of mystery and can only be guessed. Speaking on the subject of Zenia's nature, Somacarrera notes, "Zenia is the archetypal nomad, migrating from one story to another, operating on the borders between the real and the supernatural, so that all three protagonists see very different versions of Zenia, and we as readers can never decide how to interpret this shape-shifting figure with her multiple identities." (Somacarrera, 2008: 93) Apart from the fragmented structure, subjects are also fragmented and decentered. As Somacarrera points out, Atwood's novels exemplify "an interesting movement from the modernist notion of the "self" to the postmodernist concept of destabilised "subject"." (2008: 91) Namely, on the journey to self-acceptance all characters must undergo transformations. Put in Lyotard's terms, in the condition of postmodernity the self is no longer a metanarrative, but just one of the ways of representing experience. (In Gubrium & Holstein, 1994: 686) Thus, the self is never fully accessible or even homogenous. Despite its multi-faceted contradictions, postmodernism does manage to convey the message of the necessity of searching. Besides fragmented subjects, there is also the motif of duplicity, which contributes to the complexity of characters as well as the plot. "(...) postmodernism is almost always double-voiced in its attempts to historicise and contextualise the enunciative situation of its art." (Hutcheon, 2004: 44) Hutcheon links the double-voicedness of postmodernism with Black American Culture known for its "double consciousness" (W.E.B. Du Bois, 1973:3) and some types of feminism which argue the same relationship between female and male culture. (2004: 44) Hence, its numerous references to doubles, twins and the character of Zenia functioning as what Carl Jung would call the Shadow figure, prove to be in fact adequate for the reconsideration of feminism. The story offers many questions and doubts but leaves us with few ready answers. "The point is not that the world is meaningless, but that any meaning that exists is of our own creation." (Hutcheon, 2004: 43) As a postmodernist multilayered novel, it provides plenty of space for different interpretations. The heroines themselves are postmodernist - complex and confused,

prone to self-deception. They do not achieve happy endings since there are no miraculous solutions, but they do obtain self-knowledge and acceptance. Postmodernism focuses on ordinary people with every-day problems. Eleonora Rao analyses Atwood's novels through the lens of postmodernism. She claims that Atwood treats identity as a process rather than product and "in doing so challenges notions of unity and subjectivity." (In Sletteddahl-MacPherson, 2010: 115)

This novel is an example of fluid borders and transgression between genres since it includes elements of gothic fairytale. Postmodernism itself is characterised by mixtures of genres and modified genres that cannot be clearly distinguished. "The important contemporary debate about the margins and the boundaries of social and artistic conventions is also the result of a typically postmodern transgressing of previously accepted limits: those of particular arts, of genres, or art itself." (Hutcheon, 2004: 9) Alongside the narrative about daily lives and struggles of middle-aged women Tony, Roz and Charis, the line of story that deals with Zenia and their reflections on her resembles a fairy tale with gothic elements. It links mythological associations with the battle against the evil embodied in Zenia. All three characters otherwise reasonable start believing in Zenia's immortality and ghost that haunts them. Their anxiety verges on paranoia when they hire detectives or stalk Zenia on their own. Tony even devises a plan to liquidate her. Here the reference to this genre also assumes intertextuality. Intertextuality means continuous referencing between texts and simultaneously makes the idea of originality impossible. According to Barthes and Riffaterre "intertextuality replaces the challenged author-text relationship with the one between reader and text, one that situates the locus of textual meaning within the history of discourse itself. A literary work can actually no longer be considered original: if it were, it could have no meaning for its reader." (In Hutcheon, 2004: 126)

Another postmodern device included in *The Robber Bride* is parody. "Parody is a perfect postmodern form, in some senses, for it paradoxically both incorporates and challenges that which it parodies." (Hutcheon, 2004: 11) Namely, the character if Zenia is a parody of a feminist and her lines open feminism to revision and reconsideration. Other characters' attitudes toward her are actually parodies of reactions of ordinary women to feminism as a social, political and literary current.

While the novel provides many references to the social and political climate of the nineties, predominantly the feminist culture, it is on the other hand metafictional, providing proof of its fictional character, such as the implied author's comments. This kind of structure is typical of historiographic metafiction. "Fiction does not mirror reality; nor does it reproduce it. It cannot. There is no pretense of simplistic mimesis in historiographic metafiction. Instead, fiction is offered as another of the discourses by which we construct our versions of reality, and both the construction and the need for it are what are foregrounded in the postmodernist novel." (Huctheon, 2004: 40)

The relationship of postmodernism with history has often been debated. By means of metafiction, postmodern theory does not negate history or ridicule it, instead it revives it as a construct. Being contradictory, postmodernism challenges all structures including history. It does not allow it the exclusive right to truth, since like fiction, it is also a linguistic construct. "What postmodernism does, as its very name suggests, is confront and contest any modernist discarding or recuperating of the past in the name of the future. It suggests no search for transcendent timeless meaning, but rather a re-evaluation of and a dialogue with the past in the light of the present." (Hutcheon, 2004: 19)

6.4. Elements of Postcolonialism

The theory of postcolonialism can be applied in the analysis of this novel with regard to the state of being displaced and foreign and the feelings of guilt and haunting.

Namely, all of the characters experience the feelings of displacement and not belonging. They all go through the crisis of identity, not just personal, but also national. Through Roz's Jewish origin Atwood exposes the remaining antisemitism lurking through all social strata. Roz's accounts of her childhood express her impression that her origin was something shameful that deserved social stigma. She was called names, bullied and avoided. The label DP (displaced person) reflects the social climate toward difference. A simple change of name changed Roz's life completely. Despite her wealth, she felt there was something unclean about her, about their past. The power of

discrimination can be inferred from her testimony that "she spent the first half of her life feeling less and less like an immigrant, and now she's speeding the second half feeling more and more like one." (Atwood, 1995b: 86) Although postcolonial theory does not directly refer to anti-semitism, it does deal with oppression, discrimination and the crisis of identity that all could be applied in Roz's case. Furthermore, the novel deals with the general feeling of displacement, not just one related to ethnicity or origin. In fact it studies the social mechanisms and human behaviour that alienate people from each other and teach them to inflict pain and suffering on themselves and each other. Moreover, the novel is also a study of female hunger for possession and power that can be linked to imperialistic nature. Although considered a feminist novel, *The Robber Bride* suggests that power in hands of women can be just as dangerous as in hands of men. "At the heart of *The Robber Bride* lies an examination of the power of women, both as objects of desire, and as desiring subjects. In Atwood's novel, the devouring female is multiple: she is Zenia, the maneater who devours and then abandons three men; she is also Tony, Roz and Charis, the devoted women to whom these hapless men have been attached." (Sletteddahl-MacPherson, 2010: 65) Zenia's power and hunger finally lead to two deaths. The other three heroines are also marked as 'hungry' of possession and control. Their desires focus primarily on possessing and controlling their men. They even think of their men as captives and treat them more like children then lovers. In all their relationships the imbalance of power is strikingly obvious. Although they might not be particularly powerful in themselves, the three women made their men depend on them, creating relations of inequality. even though it cannot be said that these men are 'oppressed' in the real meaning of the term, they certainly do feel controlled. Indeed, Tony, Charis and Roz's need for power is actually more the need to be in control. Once they feel they are losing it, they undergo crisis of identity. "Female power is not benevolent, Atwood suggests, in her comic reworking of Gothic fairy tale in which women's hunger is powerful and possessive. Clearly the evil-good woman binary opposition does not hold in *The Robber Bride* (Sletteddahl-MacPherson, 2010: 68)

And finally the novel features gothic elements of ghosts and haunting which imply the need for redemption. The subconscious guilt of the past crimes against the coloured and colonized can be seen in the relationship between Charis and Shanita. Charis envies Shanita's unspecified but multicultural origin although it is obvious it

causes her daily trouble. Even though Charis does not know Shanita's exact origin, she prefers it to being just white. This attitude reveals Charis's and Canada's crisis of national identity. Like Atwood herself stated, Canada has been going through national and cultural identity crises, being lost between the United Kingdom and the United States. Margaret E. Turner analyses Canadian identity by means of gothic discourse in her study *Imagining Culture: New World Narrative and the Writing of Canada*. She "invokes the expression 'Here be monsters', a phrase used on the maps of the early Canadian explorers, as an intriguing response to the question that the critic Northrop Frye sees as being at the heart of Canadian writing, 'Where is here?' " (Edwards, 2008: 125) Furthermore, it might be argued that Charis does not feel comfortable with being white due to the barbaric crimes the white race committed in the past.

> In postcolonial writing, this unpaid debt often refers back to the
> imperial dominance and territorial appropriation that forces the voice of
> the colonized into the unconscious of the imperial subject and thus haunts
> the colonizer across generations, time and space. In postcolonial
> context, these shared ghosts are often figures of history and power,
> reminding us of Jacques Derrida's comment that 'haunting belongs to the
> structure of every hegemony.'
>
> (Edwards, 2008: 121)

It is not by accident that this role is assigned to Charis, the one who is the most spiritual and most concerned about general well-being. The idea of Zenia's ghost haunting the three heroines is also indicative of some evil committed in the past. Therefore, the heroines are sent on the journey through their pasts in order to earn their redemption. According to Newman gothic traits of transgression, conflict, fear and anxiety can have the political ramifications within postcolonial writing. This is particularly true in case of postcolonial gothic representations of haunting. (Edwards, 2008: 121) Derrida also makes a connection between haunted characters, narrators and authors on one side and power hegemonies, history and past on the other. According to him "hegemonic power is structured around a series of ghosts, so that the hierarchies of power that structure our lives are themselves ghostly. In postcolonial writing, then, the body politic is sometimes represented as being haunted by history. By extension, the characters, narrators and

authors of a text might be forced to wrestle with a host of phantoms from the past." (In Edwards, 2008: 121, 122)

Conclusion

    Nevertheless, in spite of all their desire for retaliation, there are small parts of them that wanted Zenia to succeed and cheered her on. Zenia released the beast they all keep leashed inside themselves. Although all three of them realise they could never be like her, at the end they all feel some gratitude towards her, knowing that she was trying to make a statement on behalf of all women. Indeed, Zenia herself and 'other Zenias' were teaching men a lesson by establishing control over their own sexualities.

> Zenias of the world have studied this situation and turned it to their
> own advantage; they haven't let themselves be moulded into male
> fantasies, they've done it themselves. They've slipped sideways into
> dreams; the dreams of women, too, because women are fantasies for
> other women, just as they are for men. But fantasies of different kind.

(Atwood, 1995b: 442)

Although a mystery, the story of Zenia will continue to exist, shaping many women into storytellers. "From the kitchen she hears laughter, and the clatter of dishes. Charis is setting out the food. Roz is telling a story. That's what they will do, increasingly in their lives: tell stories. Tonight their stories will be about Zenia." (Atwood, 1995b: 528)

7. *SURFACING*

7.1. Analysis of the Unnamed Protagonist

Surfacing is a novel that almost entirely focuses on the inner world of the nameless protagonist. Namely, in the guise of a detective story, it follows the protagonist's search for the truth and redemption through a haze of false memories and self-deception. At first glance, a simplistic plot hides numerous layers of meaning, referencing, allusions and symbols. Although primarily based on the story of personal pain and emotional rebirth, *Surfacing* also reflects on the issues of feminism, environmentalism, imperialism and cultural colonialism. It is arguably the most personal of Atwood's novels, since it communicates some of her biggest concerns about the world of today. She is very outspoken in her illustrative condemnations of American imperialist behaviour outside their country as well as the cultural colonisation of Canada, which is similarly to the protagonist, undergoing transformation of its own. Atwood's overall disappointment in the human race has never been this striking as in *Surfacing*. Besides a significant portion of feminist and postcolonial themes, the novel is structurally a postmodernist one - starting from the postmodernist theme of self-searching and the quest for truth, to the motifs of sin and redemption. Furthermore, literary devices such as parody, historiographic metafiction and pastiche are also present in the text.

The novel opens with the unnamed female protagonist embarking on a trip to the island where she believes she can find her father. The substantial part of the plot and her inner monologues are related to the search of her father and the memories of her childhood. Her physical search is just an excuse for her emotional and spiritual journey from self-deceit to madness and finally, to a new beginning. Her exploration of the island takes on the shape of a true detective investigation with her analysing everything she could consider a trace. Upon her arrival on the island, her grief for the loss of her parents is obvious although she harbours mixed feelings towards them. Her recollections reveal the Canadian society of her youth to be narrow-minded and

conservative, with very little freedom and unequal rights for women. The social conditions she depicts at the beginning of the novel have contributed to her tragedy, she is desperately trying to hide not just from everyone else, but also from herself. Speaking about her parents, she discovers not just sadness but also anger. She is mad at her parents for having aged, for having changed and thereby deprived her of the feeling of stability. Due to the struggles she had experienced, she needed them to be the one constant in her life, something she can rely on. Her grief also reveals the fear of transience and of death.

> I envy people whose parents died when they were young, that's easier
> to remember, they stay unchanged. I was sure mine would anyway.
> I could leave and return much later and everything would be the same.
> I thought of them as living in some other time, going about their own
> concerns closed safe behind a wall as translucent as jello, mammoths
> frozen in a glacier. All I would have to do was come back when I was
> ready but I kept putting it off, there would be too many explanations.
>
> (Atwood, 2003b: 3)

With the deaths of her parents she was left to herself. Apart from the anger, the protagonist is also struggling with the sense of guilt she cannot explain and is therefore trying to assign to others. Moreover, she ascribes her own mental states to others, referring to her father as "crazy, mad". Hence, her state of mind from the beginning of the novel can be summarised with the feelings of guilt, anger, but also shame. The feeling of shame she also explains by being embarrassed by her father's insanity.

From the very onset we can observe her detachedness from reality and her distorted perception. She calls a woman she has known for two months her best friend and admits that she does not like anyone more than her and her husband, David. "She's my best friend, my woman friend: I've known her for two months. (...) I like them, I trust them, I can't think of anyone else I like better, but right now I wish they weren't here." (Atwood, 2003b: 4, 11) Her relationship with her boyfriend, Joe, is very cold and for her it seems insubstantial. As the plot progresses, the relationships between all the characters reveal alarming shallowness, masochism, aggression and promiscuity. The

poor quality of communication is strikingly obvious, as well as the incessant silent war between the sexes.

The protagonist, who is also the narrator of story, mentions her former husband and a child she allegedly left to him. According to her accounts, her husband forced her to have a child, "a copy of himself", and just used her as "an incubator". When she gave birth, he stopped caring for her since she fulfilled her purpose to bear a child. Her testimony seems convincing and at this point the reader does not have any reason to suspect its validity. Nevertheless, the protagonist herself does not seem upset by these recollections and shows no regret for abandoning her child. On the contrary, she refers to it as not hers in order to justify herself. "But I couldn't have brought the child here, I never identified it as mine. I didn't name it before it was born even, the way you're supposed to. It was my husband's, he imposed it on me, all the time it was growing in me I felt like an incubator." (Atwood, 2003b: 28) What is important to point out is her need to hide the alleged divorce from the island's community. However, so as to make her story plausible, she still wears her wedding ring.

The story about her divorce and child switches to her telling why she was never able to confess the truth to her parents. She feels guilty for lying to them but strongly claims that they would not understand. She regrets the emotional distance that exists between them that made it impossible for her to be honest. In addition, she blames the generation gap making their worlds irreconcilably different and hampering any attempt at communication. By asserting their innocence, she also claims that some kinds of knowledge were simply inaccessible at that time.

> They never knew, about that or why I left. Their own innocence, the
> reason I couldn't tell them; perilous innocence, closing them in glass,
> their artificial garden, greenhouse. They didn't teach us about evil, they
> didn't understand about it, how could I describe it to them? They were
> from another age, prehistoric, when everyone married and had a family,
> children growing in the yard like sunflowers: remote as Eskimoes or
> mastodons.
>
> (Atwood, 2003b: 138)

Furthermore, she blames herself for not being able to give them grandchildren they expected. These contemplations imply her guilt for not fulfilling her role of the mother, but it appears to be more the desire to please her parents than to realise herself. In reviewing her life, she feels she has failed her parents somehow. "perhaps they expected grandchildren, visiting here. He would have wanted a dynasty, like Paul's houses and descendants proliferating around him. The fence is a reproach, it points to my failure." (Atwood, 2003b: 28) During her search she is determined to find some traces that would guide her through her endeavour. She expects to find a note, a drawing, some sign left to her by her parents - their last message to her. In her attempts to find those tokens, she comes across many souvenirs of her childhood that propel more memories. Among them is a memory of her brother drowning, although she was not even born when that event took place. Although he almost died, her brother survived in the end. That account will haunt her during her quest, as a disguised memory. Her conviction that babies can see through their mothers' stomach, even before they are born, is in fact her fear that her unborn baby was able to see and feel what was happening to it during the abortion."It was before I was born but I can remember it as clearly as if I saw it, and perhaps I did see it: I believe that an unborn baby has its eyes open and can look out through the walls of the mother's stomach, like a frog in a jar." (Atwood, 2003b: 26)

Her relationship with Joe, which seems secondary to her quest, brings up questions about the nature of love and the meaning of marriage. When she is asked by Joe whether she wants to marry him, the protagonist reveals her deeply ingrained fear of commitment and previous emotional wounds. Apart from being frightened by his question, she is also confused because she no longer understands the meaning of some words, such as love or marriage.

> 'Do you love me, that's all,' he said. 'That's the only thing that matters.'
> It was the language again, I couldn't use it because it wasn't mine. He
> must have known what he meant but it was an imprecise word; the
> Eskimoes had fifty-two names for snow because it was important to
> them, there ought to be as many for love. (....) At some point my neck
> must have closed over, pond freezing or a wound, shutting me into my
> head; since then everything had been glancing off me, it was like being

in a vase, or the village where I could see them but not hear them

because I couldn't understand what was being said.

(Atwood, 2003b: 100)

The protagonist is confused by why he first did not ask her if she loved him as she had prepared an answer for that, but the marriage proposal came as a shock. Her thoughts dwell on the good and bad sides of Joe, rationally dissecting his personality in an attempt to reach some emotions. "I sum him up, dividing him into categories: he's good in bed, better than the one before; he's moody, but he's not much bother, we split the rent and he doesn't talk much, that's an advantage." (Atwood, 2003b: 36) Despite her desire to love she cannot find even the traces of it. "I didn't feel awful: I realised I didn't feel much of anything, I hadn't for a long time. Perhaps I'd been like that all my life, just as some babies are born deaf or without a sense of touch; but if that was true I wouldn't have noticed the absence." (Atwood, 2003b: 100) Instead of giving him an answer, she confesses she was already married and that it was a bad experience she does not wish to repeat. Her answers express complete disillusionment and confusion and it appears it is becoming increasingly difficult for her to live under the accepted patterns of social behaviour.

Determined to find an answer to the question how to handle marriage, she engages in conversations with her "bestfriend", Anna. By the phrasing of her question it is apparent she sees marriage as a constraint and something that must be endured However, when she realises that Anna and David's marriage is a in fact a master-slave relationship, she feels disappointed, as she truly wanted to believe marriage could still be possible for some. Apart from insulting and cheating Anna, David also forces her to wear make up all the time so that she could look girlish. " 'He doesn't like to see me without it'. (...) 'He wants me to look like a young chick all the time, if I don't, he gets mad. (...) He'll get me for it,' she said fatalistically." (Atwood, 2003b: 38, 117) Observing the interaction of four of them, which is on one hand superficial and on the other intrusive and aggressive, she comes to the conclusion that she and David are the same - people with inborn defects that deny them the possibility to love. "David is like me, I thought, we are the ones that don't know how to love, there is something essential missing in us, we were born that way. Madame at the store with one hand, atrophy of

the heart." (Atwood, 2003b: 131)

The protagonist's flashbacks switch from her childhood on the island to accounts of her married life. She remembers her wedding and wonders about the point of signing that certificate. She provides vivid depictions of her childbirth, remembering the smell of antiseptic, while her legs were up in a metal frame with "technicians, mechanics, butchers, students" practicing on her body. She reveals her disgust with childbirth and remembers the way her child was ripped out of her "with a fork like a pickle out of a pickle jar." (Atwood, 2003b: 74) However, when during the search through the woods she stumbles upon a dead heron left hanging like a reminder of man's savage superiority, her real memories are driven toward the surface. Her carefully constructed world of illusions and false memories collapses when once again she lives through her brother's drowning in her head and realises it is not her brother who is dying, but her unborn baby.

> (...) at first I thought it was my drowned brother, hair floating around the
> face, image I'd kept from before I was born; but it couldn't be him, he had
> not drowned after all, he was elsewhere. Then I recognise it: it wasn't even
> my brother I'd been remembering, that had been a disguise. Whatever it is,
> part of myself or a separate creature, I killed it. It wasn't a child but it could
> have been one, I didn't allow it.
>
> (Atwood, 2003b: 137)

Thus, it is clear that her search for her missing father was, in fact, a search for the truth. All the accounts of her married life, including the wedding and the childbirth, are results of her deceptive mind that needed to protect her sanity from a tragically painful event. She admits she did what she could to be able to bear the crime she had committed and move on. "I couldn't accept it, that mutilation, ruin I've made. I needed a different version. I pieced it together the best way I could, flattening it, scrapbook, collage, pasting over the wrong parts." (Atwood, 2003b: 138) But it proves impossible for her to move on without facing her acts and confessing her sin. For the first time in the novel she had her real memories and feels her true feelings. Previously she was not certain whether the emotions she was feeling were indeed hers. "I have to be careful about my memories, I have to be sure they're my own and not memories of other people telling

me what I felt, how I acted, what I said: if the events are wrong the feelings I remember about them will be wrong too, I'll start inventing them and there will be no way of correcting it, the ones who could help are gone." (Atwood, 2003b: 67) Her act of confession is the first step towards the chance of a new beginning. She has to undergo a dramatic transformation which will endanger her sanity and lead to her discarding the human community altogether. The primary cause of her utter disgust with humanity is the unbearable pain she was inflicted by her lover and teacher, who forced her to get an abortion. Namely, despite her conviction that he loved her, her lover was married and already had children of its own and therefore had no intention of marrying her. Due to her innocence and gullibility, she became a victim of his middle-aged life crisis and attempts to prove his self-worth. In spite of her implanted memories of him confessing his love to her, the truth was he said it only once, when she was trying to kill herself in the bathroom. Even then his declaration of love was unconvincing. "He did say he loved me though, that part was true; I didn't make it up. It was the night I locked myself in and turned on the water in the bathtub and he cried on the other side of the door. When I gave up and came out he showed me snapshots of his wife and children, his reasons, his suffered and mounted family, they had names, he said I should be mature." (Atwood, 2003b: 143) He was not even by her side when she was going through the trauma of abortion. What is more, at that time abortion was illegal and could only be done by pseudo-doctors under horrific conditions. "Not even a hospital, not even the sanction of legality official procedures. A house, it was shabby, front room with magazines. (...) Pretense of the non-nurse, her armpits acid, face powdered with solicitude. Stumble along the hall, from flower to flower, her criminal hand on my elbow, other arm against the wall. Ring on my finger. It was all real enough, it was enough reality forever." (Atwood, 2003b: 138) However, worse than the physical and psychological pain she was undergoing was the fact that she became a killer - was made into a killer. "I could have said no, but I didn't; that made me one of them too, a killer. After the slaughter, the murder, he couldn't believe I didn't want to see him anymore." (Atwood, 2003b: 139)

Once she gained back her authentic memories, the protagonist's reactions prior to the revelation have more sense in retrospect. Besides the killing of her child disguised as the drowning of her brother, the motif of the dead heron is more meaningful put in the context of the unravelled truth behind it. The dead heron was in fact one of the signs

she was asking for from her parents as help in the quest. It served as a reminder of the horrors humans are capable of committing. It is her own injustice and other acts of meaningless violence that contribute to her decision to abandon the "normal" human ways of life. "The trouble some people have with being German, I thought, I have being human. In a way it was stupid to be more disturbed by a dead bird than by those other things (...) but for wars and riots there was always an explanation, people wrote books about them saying why they happened: the death of the heron was causeless, undiluted." (Atwood, 2003b: 125) The first phase of her transformation was to escape from people and try to establish the contact with nature and spirits. She lived outdoors completely naked, ate only herbs and bugs. She behaved like an animal because she really wanted to become one, since she considered animals to be more noble than humans. The next step was to discard human language, for it obviously did not serve its purpose. Words began to lose their meanings, she started having problems in communicating with people and was gradually losing touch with reality. Instead, she wanted to communicate with her parents, she knew she would be able to, in her new language. She needed to get their forgiveness and the final goodbye. Here madness emerges as a means of survival, she preferred it to death and those seemed to be the only options she had. "Crazy people can come back, from wherever they go to take refuge, but dead people can't, they're prohibited." (Atwood, 2003b: 97) Hence, she plunged into madness that she sees as the key to rebirth. I would like to stress here that her withdrawal from the dogma of the human community was not rash and random as it may seem. Namely, she rationally realised that the transformation and sin redemption could not be realised in everyday, normal life, with its numerous distractions that enable one to move on only by ignoring problems, not by resolving them. She is aware that she will have to return to that kind of life, but only after she has gone through her ritual. "It's too late, I no longer have a name. I tried for all those years to be civilised, but I'm not and I'm through pretending. (...) It's true, I am by myself; this is what I wanted, to stay here alone. From any rational point of view I am absurd; but there are no longer any rational points of view." (Atwood, 2003b: 163) Her disgust with the human race was interpreted as hatred towards men but as she herself defined it, it is the hatred of Americans. It is noteworthy that the notion Americans refers to a certain pattern of behaviour and does not apply only to one country, although the criticised behaviour emerges from there. By

Americans she means shallow, aggressive, imperialistic, all-consuming people, who exploit everything on their way. She thinks of them as of loud and violent holiday-makers who kill for joy and leave traces of their atrocities as trophies. Being American is described as a condition, a virus spreading at an enormous speed, sparing no one.

> It doesn't matter what country they are from, my head said, they're still Americans, they're what's in store for us, what we are turning into. They spread themselves like a virus, they get into the brain and take over the cells and the cells change from inside and the ones that have the disease can't tell the difference. Like the late show sci-fi movies, creatures from outer space, body snatches injecting themselves into you dispossessing your brain, their eyes blank eggshells behind the dark glasses.
>
> (Atwood, 2003b: 123)

The protagonist sees them as butchers who took away her child from her and blames them for all the evil in the world in general. The intensity of her contempt is mirrored by her comparison of Americans with Hitler. This imposes the question of the nature of evil and in the protagonist's eyes evil is defined as the failure of reason. The novel sheds light on the fact that evil horrors are not just a matter of history but are still ongoing in what we like to think of as "modern" society. "All possible horrors were measured against him. But Hitler was gone and the thing remained; whatever it was, even then, moving away from them as they smirked and waved goodbye, I was asking Are Americans worse than Hitler. It was like cutting up a tapeworm, the pieces grew." (Atwood, 2003b: 123)

7.2. Elements of Postcolonialism

Furthermore, she thinks of them as of colonisers of Canadian culture, which is gradually turning into the culture of its coloniser. This introduces another theme, that of cultural colonisation. The protagonist is Atwood's messenger, delivering her concerns about the future prospects for Canadian culture, which is being annihilated by blind reproduction of American popular culture and consumerism. The motif of Canadian national and cultural identities is one of the permanent motifs in all Atwood's works. Hence, her contempt of "Americans" is not just the resistance against the coloniser but also a kind of lament for the absence of creativity, unity and courage among Canadians. In Somacarrera's view, postcolonialism in *Surfacing* is reflected in the protagonist's decision to throw off and proceed beyond the colonised consciousness and her will to survive. (Somacarrera, 2008: 179) Thus, the condition of postcoloniality is present not just in the reconsideration of the American-Canadian relationship but also on the psychological and emotional levels. The disputed territories are not just Canadian borders, but also the female body and mind that are being reclaimed by the protagonist as her own. Said comments on the need for reinscription by saying, "To achieve recognition is to rechart and then occupy the place in imperial forms reserved for subordination, to occupy it self-consciously, fighting for it on the same territory once ruled by a consciousness that assumed the subordination of a designated inferior Other. Hence, reinscription." (2003: 253) Although it is widely believed that colonisation is not being practiced any more, we should not omit the fact that it may just have changed its approach. As Byron and Punter (2004) suggest, the desire of postcolonialism to distance the once colonised nation from the past and horrors of history is exactly what exposes it to the possibility of its return.

Many postcolonial critics underline the power of language in establishing cultural dominance. The phenomenon of hybridisation is one of the key elements of national and cultural identities of postcolonial countries, brought about by the need or desire of the formerly colonised to imitate the colonisers so as to become part of 'cultural elite' or in this case of the popular culture. Derrida insists in *Writing and Difference* that writing does not just passively record social 'realities' but that it, in fact,

precedes them and gives them meaning. (Edwards, 2008: 18) Therefore, as Edwards suggests, "as a corrective, postcolonial writers seek to analyse language in its relation to political history and political power by being sensitive to difference."

7.3. Criticism of Conservatism, Patriarchy
and the Treatment of Women

Another issue that contributed to the protagonist's suffering was the impossibility to share her tragedy with her parents. Her fear to face them after the abortion depicts the Canadian society of the seventies as conservative and narrow-minded. It suggests that sexuality was still a big taboo and not considered adequate as a topic of conversation between parents and children. The poor communication in her case resulted in the emotional distance between the character and her parents and made her reluctant to seek their support when she needed it the most. In order to avoid letting her parents down, she constructed her whole life as a lie and eventually started believing in it herself. The superficial relationship between them is best reflected by the talk between the protagonist and her dying mother, when she informs her that she will not attend her funeral simply because she does not like funerals. Furthermore, in order to find out more about her mother, she reads the dairy she was keeping for years and finds nothing of interest, except notes on weather conditions. Secretly, she was hoping to find some account of her mother's feelings about her or some message she had left for her, but there was nothing. Freud elaborates on the experience of losing the loved ones in *The Ego and the Id* and states that ego tends to incorporate the lost one in its own structure by assuming the attributes of the other and "sustaining" the other through magical acts of imitation. (Freud in Butler, 2007: 178) According to Butler's interpretation, one overcomes the loss of his loved one through a specific act of identification. The heroine of *Surfacing* is trying to gain insight into her parents' personalities after their deaths and to incorporate this knowledge into the creation of her new self. In fact, she wants to establish her new life on the basis of knowledge and truth about her parents. She cannot accept the fact of their absence and is determined to find

new ways of communication with the dead. With the presence of David, Anna and Jo in the lake house, she is evoking her childhood memories and it appears to her that she has reversed the time and they are all together again. "Except for the bikini and the colour of her hair she could be me at sixteen, sulking on the dock, resentful at being away from the city and the boyfriend I'd proven my normality by obtaining. (...) Joe and David, when distance has disguised their faces and their awkwardness, might be my brother and my father. The only place for me is that of my mother." (Atwood, 2003b: 46) The relationship she had with her parents is important not only for the analysis of her personality but also because it is indicative of society, as a whole. Other characters' relationships with their parents confirm this hypothesis. While David calls his parents "pigs", Anna calls theirs "nothing people" and Joe never mentions his. (Atwood, 2003b: 11) The true nature of this problem is evident when the narrator labels this abnormality as common and even expected. "They all disowned their parents long ago, the way you are supposed to." (Atwood, 2003b: 11)

However, the theme of conservatism and lateral thinking is further developed in the novel through the account of the treatment of women. The protagonist's recollections of her time spent on the island as a child testify about numerous restraints imposed on women in their daily lives. The most striking, however, is the fact that all women were called "Madam", as if there was no need for them to have a first name. The lack of freedom was especially promoted by the church and as she recalls the rules they expected women to obey. "The old priest is definitely gone, he disapproved of slacks, women had to wear long concealing skirts and dark stockings and keep their arms covered in church. Shorts were against the law, and many of them lived all their lives beside the lake without learning to swim because they were ashamed to put on bathing suits." (Atwood, 2003b: 19) The society's patriarchal attitudes are exposed in the conversation between the protagonist and her neighbour Paul. In fear of judgment, she lies about being married. More importantly, it is not just the social disapproval or judgment that women were facing, it is the lack of options that made their lives rather limited. This novel deals with one of them - the difficulties of family planning. With not much on their disposal and the lack of sexual education, women could choose between the harmful pill and the risky and traumatic abortion. At that time the pill was still a new invention and was quite unhealthy, which was not known until much later, however

women themselves noticed serious side-effects, such as blood clots or problems with vision. " 'I got a blood clot in my leg, what did you get?' 'I couldn't see,' I said. 'Things were blurry. They said it would clear up after a couple of months but it didn't.' It was like having vaseline on my eyes but I didn't say that." (Atwood, 2003b: 73) Nevertheless, since the pill seemed miraculous to men, allowing them to be carefree without experiencing any consequences themselves, many women were pressured to continue taking pills, despite the health problems they were causing. That is the case with Anna and David and she even expresses fear of his reaction if she stopped taking them. If women opted for avoiding pills they had to rely on luck. The narrator concludes that risk is always involved, in both, love and sex and this accounts for her emotional numbness and fear of becoming involved again. "Love without fear, sex without risk, that's what they wanted to be true. (...) Love is taking precautions. Did you take any precautions, they say, not before but after. Sex used to smell like rubber gloves and now it does again, no more handy green plastic packages, moon-shaped so that the woman can pretend she's still natural, cyclical, instead of a chemical slot machine." (Atwood, 2003b: 74) Atwood describes all the emotional horrors experienced during and after the abortion, in an attempt to show it as a traumatic, life-changing event. She reminds us that most often women are left to their own devices when a situation like this occurs and they have to bear the burden of deciding by themselves. One of the common lines women are told by their careless partners and is used in this novel as well is that a fetus is not a person. In addition, In *Surfacing* the protagonist's lover calls it an animal. "He said I should do it, he made me do it; he talked about it as though it was legal, simple, like getting a wart removed. He said it wasn't a person, only an animal." (Atwood, 2003b: 139) His treatment of her condition and of the unborn child contributed greatly to her decision to go insane and to her developing hatred towards humans or the "Americans". She gives realistic, terrifying descriptions of the whole procedure, comparing it to murder and having a part of you ripped off. She pictures her baby being thrown into the sewer and floating in the lake and for that reason confuses it with the drowning of her brother. "That was wrong, I never saw it. They scraped it into a bucket and threw it whatever they throw them, it was travelling through the sewers by the time I woke, back to the sea." (Atwood, 2003b: 138) The precarious position of women is suggested by Anna and David's marriage that is, in fact, a case of misogyny and sadism.

The character of David is a prime example of an abusive, aggressive sociopath, incapable of establishing an honest meaningful relationship with anyone. He does not have any respect for his wife or any other woman whatsoever, which he proves by making sexist remarks and references to their bodies. According to his own admission, he is a womaniser and considers polygamy to be normal and justified. He even makes sexual advances to the protagonist, who is supposedly his wife's bestfriend. On top of that, he makes inappropriate allusions in front of her boyfriend Joe. " 'It turns me on when she bends over,' David says. 'She's got a neat ass. I'm really into the whole ass thing. Joe, don't you think she's got a neat ass.' " (Atwood, 2003b: 82) His chauvinistic treatment of women culminates when he forces his wife to do a striptease in front of the camera while he is taping her. Exposed to embarrassment and his humiliating comments, Anna finally runs away from him and jumps into the lake. In his view, female sexuality is something to be shared, as public property and if women refuse to behave according to his criteria, he considers them hysteric, crazy feminists. " 'What's humiliating about your body, darling?' David said caressingly. 'We all love it, you ashamed of it? That's pretty stingy of you, you should share your wealth: not that you don't. (...)Now just take it off like a good girl, or I'll have to take it off for you.' " (Atwood, 2003b: 129) He tends to express his frustration through violence and enjoys hurting women. Anna confesses to the protagonist how he practices aggressive sex and likes to inflict pain on her. " 'He watches me all the time, he waits for excuses. Then either he won't screw at all or he slams it in so hard it hurts. (...) Sometimes I think he'd like me to die. I have dreams about it.' " (Atwood, 2003b: 117) It is evident that David builds his own superiority on the pain and weakness of women. He often makes condescending comments about the feminist movement, describing feminists as lunatics "preaching random castration, they got off on that, they're roving the streets in savage bands armed with garden shears." (Atwood, 2003b: 105) However, when he is confronted by the protagonist, who determinedly refuses his advances, we can see the weakness of his true character. He begins a justifying confession, placing all the blame on his wife, who he calls "dumb" and "devious". (Atwood, 2003b: 131) David shows complete disrespect and lack of any affection towards her by saying he only married her for her "boobs" and elaborating on how "stupid" she is by saying "she moves her lips when she watches TV even." (Atwood, 2003b: 132) Ironically, he considers himself

modern, open-minded and a supporter of Women's Liberation Movement. Besides the abuse and maltreatment of women, the novel also deals with the women's weakness and reluctance to stand up for themselves. Perhaps the biggest disappointment for the protagonist was to see her "bestfreind" joining forces with David in calling her "inhuman" and saying that either she hates men or would like to be one. (Atwood, 2003b: 148) She felt defeated when after all the confessions, Anna went back to David, thereby accepting and approving his demeaning treatment of her. The character of Anna is Atwood's way of asking questions about why women stand violence and humiliation and her way of warning the society that it is high time to make it stop. Furthermore, both, the traumatic representation of abortion and Anna's approval of her husband's abusive treatment of her, have educational implications and serve as excellent awareness-raising methods. Apart from criticising male abuse and disrespect of women, Atwood also exposes silent condoning embodied in Joe. Although he was present when the scenes in question were taking place, he did nothing to prevent David. The character of the protagonist's lover is also relevant for the analysis of the treatment of women. He committed three severe offences when he embarked on a romantic affair with her. Firstly, he started a relationship with his considerably younger student, which is immoral and unethical. Secondly, he was already married and had children, which made it obvious that his intentions were not serious and that he was not a decent person. And finally, he forced her to have an abortion, urging her to be mature and take responsibility. "(...) he couldn't believe I didn't want to see him anymore; it bewildered him, he resented me for it, he expected gratitude because he arranged it for me, fixed me so I was as good as new; others, he said, wouldn't have bothered." (Atwood, 2003b: 139) In essence, he expected her to think about his family and be mature while he himself was not able to do so. Finally, he did not have the decency to accompany her to have the procedure done, using his children's birthday as an excuse. Irresponsible male behaviour of this kind is what feminists are trying to counter as the consequences to women's lives are numerous and often fatal. This kind of treatment of the female body has given rise to the stereotype of irresponsible womanising men and provoked contempt of many women. Furthermore, painful experiences that some women experience early in life prevent them from developing trust and having mature relationships later in life. Additionally, many of them experience various emotional and

psychological problems and disorders, such as emotional numbness, as was the case with the protagonist of this novel.

It was already said that Atwood prefers female characters with artistic inclinations and that is also the case with the unnamed protagonist of *Surfacing*. Namely, she wanted to become an artist but was discouraged by her teacher how was also her lover. He claimed it would be a waste of time because: "For a while I was going to be a real artist; he thought that was cute but misguided, he said I should study something I'd be able to use because there have never been any important women artists. (...) But he was right, there never have been any." (Atwood, 2003b: 46) Under his discouraging influence, she decided to give up her dream and choose design and eventually ended up doing fabric patterns. This is Atwood's way of exemplifying the prejudices women artists had to face in her day. In addition, she chooses an artist for the narrator of this story because of the artists' sharp perception and detailed and convincing accounts. She is aware that some layers of meaning and emotion are only available through the language of art. Atwood often writes about struggling artists or their need to compromise their art due to life circumstances. It is her manner of saying that art is often not practical and requires a great deal of sacrifice.

7.4. The Struggle with Language and Meaning

Much of the novel the protagonist struggles with language and meaning. Having had a destructive relationship which caused her suffering and loss, she lost faith in love and marriage. For her those words had no meaning anymore. When Joe discusses them with her, she is completely confused and tries to prepare some answers in advance. These notions produce no other associations but those of pain and therefore she ignores them altogether. Finally, she realises that she has trouble understanding human language and decides to communicate in some other way. She sees language as a means of inflicting pain and wants to escape from it, as well as from the entire human community and its ways. It is well-known that all ideologies have their own rhetoric and that language is a carrier of very powerful messages. In this novel language is associated

with sexism produced by David but also with the Americanisation of Canada. Defined on the basis of the Saussurian model, language is a social contract, which implies that everything produced and received through language is "already loaded with meaning inherent in the conceptual patterns of the speaker's culture." (Hutcheon, 2004: 25) Although language should be the best means of human communication, this novel shows that it can also cause confusion and feelings of alienation. Understanding human behaviour less and less, the protagonist realises that she cannot perform her ritual of transformation and redemption by means of human language, but by some other way of communication. In the human community the protagonist had to keep silent contrary to her needs. She never shared her story about losing the child with her parents, with who she cannot speak any more. That has brought about her anxious search for some message or sign from the two of them. Furthermore, she never confronted her former lover about what he had put her through and she had no other way of letting out her rage and frustration. Consequently, she had to dive into insanity and engage in a ritual of spiritual cleansing. Due to patriarchal attitudes, she is unable to be honest with the entire community that would label her with a scarlet letter and is instead forced to lie, which additionally ruins already poor quality of communication. The protagonist obviously was not able to make friends through language. Her intimate conversations with Anna proved pointless and backfired. What is more, she clearly could not find common language with Joe, who showed dissatisfaction with everything she was trying to say. Moreover, since the plot is set in the French-speaking part of Canada, the problems in communication are obvious from the beginning of the novel, when the locals do not know English or simply refuse to speak it. For Kristeva, maternal body itself is a language, the one with subversive and disruptive power that challenges the dominant paternal law. She describes the maternal body as a set of meanings prior to culture itself, that is, she sees maternity as a precultural reality. (In Butler, 2007: 108, 109) In that light, we can interpret the *Surfacing* protagonist's desire to stop pretending to be civilised and live according to her instincts, discarding the verbal language as a victory of the maternal body, instinct and language. She wants to conceive another child and is afraid of them taking it from her again. Thus, her escape from society is linked to her maternal instinct. In addition, in *The Laugh of the Medusa* Hélène Cixous argues that to proclaim woman as the source of life, power and energy is to give rise to a new,

feminine language that incessantly subverts patriarchal binary oppositions and logocentrism which aim to silence women. (Moi, 2002: 103) Thus, it could be argued that the new, different language the protagonist of this novel is searching for is, in fact, the female/feminine language.

7.5. The Search for an Identity and Elements of Postmodernism

The structure of the novel is based around the real and false memories of the fragmented subject. The protagonist is suffering from the loss of identity that she is trying to regain through a physical and psychological search. However, her journey is faced with many impediments, including her difficulty to distinguish between real and deceptive memories. Her struggle against herself and her own defense mechanisms brings her on the verge of paranoia. Her recollections originate from her childhood and mix with the illusions of happy marriage and childbirth she devised in order to fight the pain. The protagonist is a typical postmodern heroine who resists unity and wholeness and is therefore difficult to pin down. In *Mapping Canadian Cultural Space* Daniel Schaub notes that instead of "defining the self in relation to vast physical landscape" *Surfacing* defines landscape as "internalised geographies of the self" (2010: 35) She is simultaneously the narrator of the story, emerging in the role of an unreliable first-person narrator. The narration seems rather convincing at the beginning of the novel as there are no indications that her memories are false. Only when certain memories begin to appear aggressively in form of haunting reminders, does it become clear that her truthfulness should be taken with some reserve. For Hutcheon, narrators in postmodern fiction become "either disconcertingly multiple and hard to locate or resolutely provisional and limited - often undermining their own seeming omniscience." (2004: 11) The second part of the novel demands revision of the first part, putting all accounts in a different perspective. The haunting effect of memories is further intensified with the use of symbolism, such as the dead heron, frog looking from inside a bottle and the drowning of her brother. The genre of detective novel is used as a pastiche, with the aim to emphasise the element of quest in the process of spiritual awakening. Postmodernism,

with its multiple contradictions and plenty of space for asking questions which may render various answers is the perfect framework for the ethical issues in *Surfacing*. With its concept of pluralism it allows for different approaches but it always places the stress on the search itself. It deals with global problems of humanity, which it dismantles and analyses by using the life of a single individual and it therefore emerges as an excellent framework for the study of identity construction. Writers of postmodernism choose ordinary people for their characters, suggesting that they are interested in the general human condition. Through the analysis of individuals, they comment on the overall social climate of a certain era. One of the postmodernist contradictions is the question of the relationship of art and life, or to be more precise, fiction and reality. Contrary to other literary theories, postmodernism rejects mimesis and gives fiction a new definition. Namely, fiction ceases to be a simple mirror of reality but is now acknowledged as one of its constructs. It helps us to grasp and define our realities without the need to compete with life. On the subject of postmodern theory and its contributions to contemporary literature, Larry McCaffery notes, "It (postmodern theory) has thus become a kind of model for the contemporary writer, being self-conscious about its literary heritage and about the limits of mimesis, but yet managing to reconnect its readers to the world outside the page." (1982: 264) In the light of the new definition, authors reflect on the questions of veracity and illusiveness of life and fiction in their works. They even break the narration with comments of such content. While trying to convince us in the truthfulness of their constructions on one hand, on the other they are breaking all the illusions with reminders that the story is just fictional. Although such interruptions may seem ill-timed or unnecessary to many readers, they became a vital part of the postmodernist approach, simply known as metafiction. Having said that, it is clear that many postmodernist novels, including *Surfacing*, are not light reading and demand full focus, reading between the lines and rereading. Only one element changes the whole structure in postmodernism and for that reason it never lays claims on the ideal of truth. As there is no truth in postmodernism, there is also no lie, those are simply not the categories this theory operates in. With regard to final messages or morals, *Surfacing* is an excellent examples in this matter. A recurrent message is the one about the need for search, the need for doubting everything including oneself and the need to find courage to deserve another chance. However, there are no quick,

magical solutions and no happy endings in the usual sense of the word. Despite the overwhelming loss that all postmodern heroes experience, there is also a feeling of acquired experience and self-knowledge. However, Somacarrera defines Atwood's view of the self as "distinctly modernist" since "the dive into the wreck of her fragmented self results in a spiritual awakening and a feeling of wholeness." (2008: 91) Later she adds that although earlier seen as modernist, "overlapping feminism, postmodernism and postcolonialism of *Surfacing* are apparent when viewed through the lens of her later works." (Somacarrera, 2008: 179) In her *Poetics of Postmodernism,* which is considered a mandatory reading on this subject, Hutcheon explains the role of postmodernism in political consciousness-raising, which in her opinion, is the first and necessary step to any significant change. "The theory and practice of postmodern art has shown ways of making the different, the off-center, into the vehicle for aesthetic and even political consciousness-raising." (Hutcheon, 2004: 73)

7.6. The Exploration of Faith, Religion and Purpose

The analysis of this novel must include strong symbolism and Biblical references. Starting from the protagonist's journey and her transformation, there are various allusions to death, resurrection and rebirth. Firstly, the protagonist decides to abandon the human community and begin a new life by adopting animal lifestyle. Her desire to undergo such radical transformation is propelled by the need to confess and redeem her sin. To that end, she renounces all the benefits of living like a human with the conviction that animals are more decent beings. The motif of her sin is of particular interest for it seems that it does not represent only her personal sin of abortion but also that similarly to Jesus she accepts the responsibility for all human sinfulness and hopes for forgiveness by depriving herself of the comfort of food and shelter. If this hypothesis is correct, then it implies that Atwood portrayed Jesus in the female body, which could be seen as a radical feminist move. Furthermore, as many critics have already noted, her ritual lasts for seven days, which is, according to biblical references, the amount of time God spent on creating the world. Although the number in question

may have been a mere coincidence, it is also quite possible and even probable that Atwood was suggesting that a woman was trying to create a new world, the one prompted and redeemed by female suffering. According to Sletteddahl-MacPherson, Christian symbolism is sustained throughout the novel alongside myth and legend "so that no world view is prioritised" and it is not accidental that the main character is supposed to leave the island on the seventh day. (2010: 34) In addition, she makes references to death, resurrection and rebirth by saying, "they think I should be filled with death, I should be in mourning. But nothing has died, everything is alive, everything is waiting to become alive." (Atwood, 2003b: 153) She may be referring to her dead parents, dead unborn child and also figuratively to her spiritual death and rebirth. Moreover, she alludes to having supernatural powers and being able to reach the gods. In this state she is able to communicate with her dead parents, who are her spiritual guides through the process of transformation. It is essential, however, that she acquires the new language so that she could grasp the other dimension of being. "They were my guides, she had saved them for me, pictographs, I had to read their new meaning with the help of the power. The gods, their likeness: to see them in their true shape is fatal. While you are human; but after the transformation they could be reached. First I had to immerse myself in the other language." (Atwood, 2003b: 152) After she has punished herself for all the sins, the protagonist embarks on a new life, emerging as spiritually reborn. She feels that her unborn baby has given her its forgiveness and that she deserves to give herself another chance. The new beginning is symbolically marked by her attempt to conceive another child with Joe.

Besides the biblical allusions, the novel also dwells on the issue of religion and faith. The protagonist is trying to find her own answers to these questions and tells about the faith she once had but lost somewhere underway. She links the questions of religion with her upbringing and blames her parents for making her believe that God does not exist. She comes to the conclusion that by killing God, her parents proclaimed themselves Gods, at least in her eyes. Thus, she blames them for the lack of foundation and emotional stability she could find nowhere else but in them and for then depriving her of them. "If you tell your children God doesn't exist they will be forced to believe you are the god, but what happens when they find out you are human after all, you have to grow old and die?" (Atwood, 2003b: 98) She recalls how as a girl she wanted to

believe and learn about religion like other children in her surroundings but was quickly discouraged by her scientifically-inclined atheist father. Hence, it can be argued that when she is trying to communicate with her parents and ask them for a sign, that she is actually praying to God.

7.7. Self-victimisation and Cultural Colonisation of Canada

Atwood's favourite motif of victimisation is two-fold in *Surfacing*. Alongside the obvious victimization of women in a patriarchal society, she again describes the victimisation of Canada through blind copying of American culture. She puts the story of women's limited choices in life and colonising ambitions towards female bodies in the focus of this novel by demonstrating how women are used to being victims and are taught to allow their bodies to be used and abused. From including the story about the alleged irrelevance of female artists to summarising the options of birth control to harmful pills and risky abortions, Atwood vividly depicts the social background in Canada of the early seventies, when she was a struggling artist. She writes about the male dominance and application of hegemonic power by means of rhetoric exemplified by David's offensive sexual remarks and complete lack of respect for a woman's body. However, typically for Atwood, the characters are not portrayed only as victims and are required to take on some portion of the responsibility and blame. That is the case with the main character of *Surfacing*, who faces her crimes and punishment after feeling sorry for herself and running away for so long. Atwood does not allow her to use her suffering as an excuse to avoid life, "I would always be able to say what I'd just finished saying: I've tried and I failed, I'm inoculated, exempt, classified as wounded. It wasn't that I didn't suffer, I was conscientious about that, that's what qualified me." (Atwood, 2003b: 81) She and Anna, although victims of male abuse, are also guilty of granting power to men. Atwood's view on power is that the only power others have is the one we give them. The protagonist and her friend Anna are guilty of granting the wrong men access to their bodies and of adhering to their versions of reality. Atwood is aware that everyone must fight for the right to define themselves in their own terms. Larkin writes

that readers must decide for themselves whether the protagonist is mad, a 'creative non-victim' or whether she is trying to escape from confronting reality again. (Larkin in Sletteddahl-MacPherson, 2010: 35) Howells (2008) claims that she wishes to be inhuman as that is the only way to plead innocent since being human inevitably means being guilty. (18) On the subject of victimisation and taking back control of one's life, which she considers the main themes in this novel, Atwood says,

> What I'm really into in that book is the great Canadian victim complex.
> If you define yourself as innocent then nothing is ever your fault - it is
> always somebody else doing it to you, and until you stop defining yourself
> as a victim that will always be true. It will always be somebody else's fault
> and you will always be the object of that rather than somebody who has any
> choice or takes any responsibility for their life. And that is not only the
> Canadian stance towards the world, but the usual female one. "Look what
> a mess I am and it's their fault." And Canadians do that, too. Look at poor
> innocent us, we are morally better than they. We do not burn people in
> Vietnam, and those bastards are coming in and taking away our country.
> Well the real truth of the matter is that Canadians are selling it.

> (Atwood in Gibson, 1973 : 22,23)

When it comes to the victimisation of Canada, it is closely linked to its cultural colonisation by Americans. Atwood witnesses Canadian loss of cultural and national identity they previously barely managed to establish. Yet, now the Canadian cultural space is being gradually conquered by the products of mass-culture and consumer mentality. The seriousness of the situation is stressed when the protagonist mistakenly identifies Canadians as Americans, making it obvious that blind replication began to give results. "(...) the pervasive menace, the Americans. They exist, they're advancing, they must be dealt with, but possibly they can be watched and predicted and stopped without being copied." (Atwood, 2003b: 183) The common ground between the two nations is certainly the language which has also become increasingly difficult to identify as Canadian or American English. She places significant importance on language as a carrier of cultural and consequently ideological and politician influence. Apart from

cultural symbols, Canadians have acquired the pattern of behaviour - careless, irresponsible and imposing. "If you look like them and talk like them and think like them then you are them, I was saying, you speak their language, a language is everything you do." (Atwood, 2003b: 123)

Conclusion

In the end the protagonist opts to give herself and Joe another chance after concluding that he is not "American", that he is "half-formed" and can be saved. Indeed, Joe is portrayed as neutral, blank space to be fulfilled, to be given meaning. "But he isn't American, I can see that now; he isn't anything, he is only half-formed, and for that reason I can trust him." (Atwood, 2003b: 186) She chooses to take a leap of faith when it comes to love and marriage, having realised that trust is "letting go". In her case "letting go" involves being able to trust others again but also leaving her parents behind after forgiving them and being forgiven by them. "From now on I'll have to live in the usual way, defining them by their absence." (Atwood, 2003b: 183) Her ritual therapy proves as beneficial as she is capable of putting her trust in another human being again. By this act she gives her own definition of love and marriage and more importantly, these notions become meaningful at last. She regains the capacity to communicate with humans again and is ready to return to the daily life of contents and distractions. What is more, she is aware that a union such as marriage demands sacrifice and is ready to bear it. "To trust is to let go. I tense toward, towards the demands and questions, though my feet do not move yet." (Atwood, 2003b: 186)

8. ANITA DESAI'S AUTHORSHIP

Anita Desai is a female author who reflects on the peculiarities of life for women in India, from a unique Indo-Anglian perspective. She spent one part of her life in India, while most of her academic career she spent in the West, teaching in Massachusetts. The English language and the years she spent away from home provide her with a special distance and therefore objectivity, with which she can analyse the social climate and customs of India. On the other hand, her own hybrid cultural background allows her to depict the collision of two inherently irreconcilable traditions - the Indian one and the English/American one. Being a foreigner in America, she understands and succeeds in conveying the feeling of a lost identity and alienation. In interviews she describes writing as an exploration, a search for truth. She considers it to be a creative process that engages one's imagination. Her themes reveal her fascination with the meaning of existence:

> Writing to me is a process of discovering the truth - the truth
> that is mine - tenth of the iceberg that lies submerged beneath the
> one tenth visible portion we call reality. Writing is my way of plunging
> to the depths and exploring this underlying truth. All my writing is an
> effort to discover, to underline and convey the true significance of
> things.
>
> (Desai in Saminathan, 2010: 10)

Desai is known for her double perspective - being an Indian native and having the objectivity of a foreigner. The distance she acquired towards the issues of her homeland Desai owes not just to the fact that she writes in English, but also to being half-German. In interviews, Desai reveals that the perspective of her mother, a foreigner in India, is what allows her to take an objective approach. (see Griffiths, 1996) Although she spoke German and Hindu as mother tongues, Desai learned English at school and has used it ever since as her literary language. She started writing in English at the age of seven and published her first story at the age of nine. When she explains her reasons for writing in English, Desai insists that her decision was not a conscious

one: "I can state definitely that I did not choose English in a deliberate and conscious act and I'd say perhaps it was the language that chose me and I started writing stories in English at the age of seven, and have been doing so for thirty years now without stopping to think why." (Desai in Tandon, 2008: 9) Although she moved to the U.S.A., her work first became noticed in England, while it took some time for the American readers to relate to the peculiarities of life in the Third-world.

Although Desai is predominantly referred to as the author of psychological novels, with the focus on the female psyche, her texts may also be seen as studies of social phenomena in a postcolonial, still fundamentally patriarchal society. During her career she has been mostly credited with creating realistic, complex and spiritual heroines and praised for evoking the feelings of confusion, frustration and loneliness. If we look into the work of other female Indian novelists, we notice a distinction between the general pattern of their heroines and the heroines of Anita Desai. Namely, the female protagonists she gives life to resemble their Western counterparts, for instance, the characters of Doris Lessing: "Like the sensitive heroines of Doris Lessing, Desai's heroines too have psychological problems and are, in fact, regarded as abnormal by the people who come in contact with them. These female characters show much affinity to their counterparts in the Western novels." (Pandey, 2010: 20) The common elements that they share are related to their psychological profiles and the emotional troubles they face. Critics agree that most Indian female authors write about women who are existentially threatened and financially deprived and therefore their struggles largely differ from the problems of women in developed societies. Thus, their emotional or psychological issues remain in the background, outweighed by the troubles of daily life and the art of making do. Interestingly enough, Desai usually writes about women free of material woes, which leaves them with time to contemplate the meaning of life, the point of their existence and who they really are. However, she does make a few invaluable exceptions that remind us of the precariousness that life in India inevitably involves.

Desai's familiarity with both ways of living, and the advantages and limitations of each, enable her to simultaneously criticise both worlds for their treatment of women. Although she writes about life in her homeland, by featuring characters who have completely adapted to the Western ways, Desai makes a reference to their practices she

considers harmful, not just for women, but for the whole society. By contrasting heroines of fundamentally different characters and beliefs, Desai, in fact, makes parallels and distinctions between the USA and India, the West and the Orient, the coloniser and the colonised.

According to Saminathan (2010), Desai's later novels (since she moved to the U.S.A.) could be labelled as "diasporic fiction", which gives her the benefit of the "view from the outside". (2) Her fiction has been interpreted within various theoretical frameworks, but this thesis approaches her work from the perspectives of feminism, postcolonialism and postmodernism, as they seem the most relevant for both the subject she focuses on and the topic of this dissertation.

8.1. Desai and Feminism

Desai's decision to opt for the portrayal of female characters unavoidably calls for a feminist interpretation. Similarly to Morrison and Atwood, Desai has never proclaimed herself to be a feminist, although she fiercely criticises the structures and attitudes that limit and endanger their existence. Similarly to Atwood, she does not assign too much importance to theories and ideologies, which she considers limiting to creativity:

> I think theories of the novel are held by those of an academic or
> critical turn of mind, not the creative. A writer does not create a
> novel by observing a given set of theories...he follows flashes of
> individual visions, and relies on a kind of instinct that tells him...
> not any theories.
>
> (Desai in Saminathan, 2010: 17, 18)

Moreover, she gives little space to male characters, who seem necessary only to put together the background the female protagonists live in. Nevertheless, it should be noted that her criticism is not directed at particular men, or men as such, but at the abstract notions, structures and customs that have marked them the top of the hierarchy

and allocated the power to them. Underlying the power hierarchies at all levels of Indian society is the basic distinction between the two genders and the division of labour. The power imbalance can be identified in all social structures, starting from the family.

> Desai has created a virtual storyboard of feminism by capturing
> for posterity, the emotional upheavals of women, encompassing the
> varied strains of feminine sensibility. Her characters embody the
> bland absurdity of life. Her women willfully choose the sterner options
> and the darker alleys in abject rejection with little choice whatsoever,
> bringing to life a 'tragic vision'.
>
> (Reedy & Rath, 2013: 1)

However, it is relevant to mention that the complexity of Desai's relationship with feminism is also reflected by the fact that while in the earlier years her texts were considered to be pioneering works of feminism in India, today she is criticised by the feminists for portraying women as helpless or servile. Desai counters there accusations by claiming she only represents the true state of things and that creating figures of Indian women as fierce feminists would mean severing all ties with reality, while she is, after all, interested in truth:

> Women think I am doing a disservice to the feminist movement
> by writing about women who have no control over their lives.
> But I was trying, as every writer tries to do, even in fiction, to get at
> the truth, write the truth. It would have been really fanciful, if I had
> made Bim and Tara modern-day feminists.
>
> (Desai in Tandon, 2008: 9)

Referring to the feminist movement in India, Desai comments that there it is still a rather new idea and acknowledges that the younger female readers have troubles understanding reactions or motivation of her heroines, who come across as weak to them. Thus, Desai observes that women have changed, but adds that they are completely oblivious to the history of oppressed women who fought for equality and resisted victimisation in their own ways:

The feminist movement in India is very new and a younger generation

of readers in India tends to be rather impatient of my books and to

think of them as books about completely helpless women, hopeless

women. They find it somewhat unreal that the women don't fight

back, but they don't seem to realise how very new this movement is.

(Desai in Jussawalla & Dassenbrock, 1992: 166)

As regards women's political engagement and social awakening, there is a fundamental difference in relation to the feminist causes in the developed countries. First to mention the rights of women and fight for them in India were actually men. Even more interesting is the fact that among them a great deal of supporters of women's rights were actually the colonisers themselves - the English: "The chief difference between Western and Indian feminist movements lies in the fact that whereas in the West women came to the forefront for demanding a better deal for them; in India, leaders of the Indian Renaissance and English gentry took up the cause of women's liberation." (Pandey, 2010: 16, 17) Furthermore, another key figure in establishing women's rights was Mahathma Gandhi. He included women in his famous Satgagrah Movement[5] and encouraged men to support their cause. According to Pandey (2010), under Gandhi's influence, men in India responded quickly and positively in taking up this cause and gradually women themselves started organising associations and demanding their rights. Nevertheless, it is a fact that women in India accepted feminist ideas much later than their western counterparts. According to critics, the answer to this lies in their lack of awareness. Only with the increased influence from the West, did Indian women get a chance to experience some other kind of life. Prior to the colonisation they were completely blind to their own miserable condition: "It was only with the advent of the Indian Renaissance, the new education, political struggles and the ever-increasing Western impact that they began to show some signs of awakening." (Pandey, 2010: 18)

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[5] loosely translated as "insistence on truth" or " holding onto truth"; philosophy and practice within the so-called civil resistance

8.3. Desai and Postcolonialism

When a novel by an author from a postcolonial context is interpreted by means of feminist theory, questions about the treatment of postcolonial subjects within this framework emerge. There is a plethora of predominantly female authors and critics who argue that feminism does not offer reliable and unbiased methods of analysis to deal with this subject in an objective and honourable way. "Even within the feminist project, then, there is no guarantee that the perspective of the Third-World woman will be represented or honoured. There is even the danger that the mechanism of 'othering' that characterises colonial hegemonic discourse will become instrumental in the project of producing the individual and individualist feminist self against its other." (Bahri, 2004: 205) However, these concerns remain when it comes to the treatment these subjects receive in theories of postcolonial nature, since there is a possibility that the gender issue will be overshadowed by the issue of national identity. Thus, it seems that the ground for research the most adequate for texts about and by women from postcolonial regions is the one that combines the feminist and the posctolonial perspectives.

The postcolonial influence in Desai's novels is detectable in the elements of otherness, present in her characters' identities and their self-image. In the light of general confusion, they experience crises of identity and a general sense of alienation. Fighting invisible and sometimes unfathomable opponents, Desai's heroines are not just socially awkward, but in some cases also suffer from mental illnesses, such as depression or hallucinations. One of the most prominent remnants of the colonisation in the Indian society are feelings of alienation and anxiety, typical of Western societies. Anxiety is generally defined as a product of the hectic lifestyle that is conducive to developing various mental illnesses. In addition, prolonged anxiety leads to accumulated stress, frustration and moodiness. A case in point is Aruna in *Fasting, Feasting*, who is impossible to please, always seeking perfection. Her desire to correct all the imperfections and achieve nirvana creates a vicious circle of dissatisfaction. Aruna lives according to the patterns of Western societies, leading a life from a magazine, trying to fulfill somebody else's vision of happiness. Eventually, superficiality of material wealth proves insufficient for a truly contented existence and

these women finally appear equally miserable as those whose lives are limited by the conservative beliefs of their families. Both scenarios involve acceptance of imposed values. When it comes to alienation, Desai's heroines are in conflict with their surroundings and thus prefer isolation. They feel they have to explore their own purpose and choose to do so in seclusion. What is more, they often experience self-alienation, as they lose touch with who they really are. Desai's heroines are profound and intelligent and often seek refuge in some hobbies that provide them with the privacy they need. They usually see the company of others as intrusion and try to find ways to keep them at a safe distance. This is characteristic of Bim and Uma, who feel uncomfortable even in the presence of their closest relatives and indulge in the rare moments of privacy they are most often denied. However, their awkward social behaviour can be understood as a consequence of living lives they did not opt for and serving others. Bim and Uma are both victims of their family members, who treat them as househelp and offer no sympathy. They both suffer from alienation, which has become a common motif in contemporary literature. "Alienation, a main concern of modernism, is an urban phenomenon: and at odds with the Indian belief in religion, the social life-style of a joint family, and the absence of the concept of privacy. Alienation is linked with the growth of individualism and with Western thinking." (Jain, 1997: 66) Moreover, Murchland (1971) identifies the whole twentieth century as the 'Age of Alienation' and the 'Age of Anxiety'. (28) Many Indian critics and sociologists attribute the appearance of anxiety to the cultural impact of the West. Shukla (2013) comments on the phenomenon of anxiety in India and describes it as a state of "being modern in a traditional society" (111) and considers this to be the main area of Desai's exploration. By contrast, she defines another Desai's motif, 'troubled sensibility', as a "typical Indian phenomenon." (111) When Desai's themes and motifs are explored, it is obvious that her philosophy is of existentialist kind.

What makes Indian women and other Third-world women different from the women in other parts of the world is their condition of being caught between the patriarchy of their conservative traditions and the imperialist mentality of the colonising culture. This clash of lifestyles and perspectives makes it impossible for women to construct their identity within a stable framework and they are thus prone to feelings of confusion and frustration. Although a glimpse of the Western culture brings them the

idea of a different world, they are still forbidden to enter it. Irrespective of which definition they opt for, they are on the margins of society. Spivak dedicates the central position in her criticism to the issue of the Third-world woman: "Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject constitution and object formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shutting which is displaced figuration of the 'third-world woman' caught between tradition and modernisation." (2010: 102)

When the influences of postcolonialism are to be identified in Desai's novels, one should not omit to mention her use of the English language, another cultural feature of the coloniser. What is more, language was not just one of the identifiers of the ruler, it was also used as a tool for oppression and forceful assimilation. Namely, a language does not just function as a means of communication, it is also a carrier of cultural codes and it reflects the values and beliefs of a nation. Hence, by expanding their territorial reign, the colonisers were also spreading their cultural identity. Nevertheless, language occupies a special place in the processes of decolonisation and retaliation as well. Today, immigrants of Indian origin, as well as those from African countries, spread their own culture in European countries they inhabit. Simultaneously, they adapt the English language and other official languages to their cultural needs and consequently, alter it or create new variants. For those who are bilingual, as most Indians are, the choice of language always makes a statement. Thus, Desai's decision to write in English contributes to the message of her texts by stressing the cultural hybridity Indians are exposed to. Although writing English certainly makes a work accessible to a wider audience, that is not the only reason for this decision. Namely, it also allows her to makes parallels between the two worlds she considers her home. Her intention is not to portray one as completely wretched and the other as a utopia, but on the contrary, to expose the limitations of both and to break some of the myths many still believe in. Her worlds are very realistic as she captures all their complexity and contradictions.

Bakhtin's theory of discourse interprets the impact of language in such a manner that it renders all definitions that portray it as a mere semantic tool invalid. Namely, Bakhtin assigns language with the power of constructing and conveying ideologies. Many theorists share the idea that language cannot be ideologically neutral. What is more, Bakhtin links the discourses of a novel with the discourses of social life and

"world-views" that underlie them:

> Every language in the novel is a point of view, a socio-ideological
> conceptual system of real social groups and their embodied
> representations...any point of view on the world fundamental to the
> novel must be a concrete, socially embodied point of view, not an
> abstract, purely semantic position; it must consequently, have its own
> language with which it is organically united. A novel is constructed not
> on abstract differences in meaning nor on merely narrative collisions,
> but on concrete social speech diversity.
>
> (Bakhtin, 1981: 411, 412)

8.3. Desai and Postmodernism

Postmodernist elements of Desai's work are mostly related to the form of her novels. Desai favours simplistic plots and focuses on the inner state of her characters rather than external events. Similarly to Ishiguro, she explores the emotional arena and uses literary devices and constructs as means of reaching those layers. Her narration is most often third person and she interrupts it with authorial comments that reveal more than the characters themselves are aware of or reveal what they are trying to hide. As she is interested in the emotions of her heroines, Desai gives thorough descriptions of their behaviour, health, gestures and body language that give away the true state of their psyche. In both, *Fasting, Feasting* and *Clear Light of Day,* Desai mentions the grey hair of Uma and Bim, which reveals the burden they carry on their young backs, or she writes about Uma's poor eyesight and trembling hands, the consequences of overwork. Bande argues that a person's abnormal behaviour is a reflection of his or hers conflicts and complexes which constitute "the inner person". According to Bande, if the "inner person" is suppressed, it leads to disorders and sickness. To her mind, the only way to a healthy personality is listening to one's inner self. (In Shukla 2013: 166) She also makes very successful parodies, of both Indian and Western customs, which she brings to life through somewhat comical illustrations of characters' behaviour. The character of Uma's

mother is an obvious parody of a big-headed, uneducated housewife interested only in keeping up appearances for the sake of public opinion. Aruna herself is also a comical portrayal of a different kind of snobbish women, keen following modern trends. Her physical appearance and manner of speaking are reminiscent of shallow American housewives, whose only obligation is to think of ways of spending money. As for the treatment of history, Desai does not elaborate on social or historical circumstances for their own sake, but only as a means of setting her plot in a historical frame and explaining what led to the current state of affairs. Furthermore, whenever postmodern theory is discussed, the question of the relation of reality and fiction or reality and art must be brought up. Similarly to postmodern artists, Desai's female characters favour other worlds or even construct worlds of their own, the ones they find more humane and bearable. They seek refuge in worlds of fantasy, art or even madness as a way of securing that necessary distance between the external world and their inner self. Finally, what makes these characters substantially different from their surroundings is their decision not to acknowledge the external world of reality as the only legitimate version of truth or life. Thus, the postmodern framework suits their needs perfectly, as it insists on the plurality of worlds and realities. Postmodern theorists, including Brian McHale, argue that it is impossible to live in just one reality or to achieve a coherent identity. Hence, this interpretation renders the idea of split selves not just possible, but utterly unavoidable. "All around us - on advertisement hoardings, book shelves, record covers, television screens - these miniature escape fantasies present themselves. This, it seems, is how we are destined to live, as split personalities in which the private life is disturbed by the promise of escape routes to another reality." (McHale, 1987: 37) Alongside positing that besides the "shared reality of everyday life" there are innumerable worlds of "private or peripheral realities", McHale poses a very relevant question about their respective statuses, that is, makes us wonder why the first is considered a norm, while all others are marginal:

> The subuniverses are integrated within a more or less all-embracing
> "symbolic universe" whose unity is guaranteed by such high-powered
> conceptual machinery of "universe-maintenance" as mythology, theology,
> philosophy, and science. Well below the threshold of conceptualisation,
> however, lies the shared social reality of everyday life. While this shared

reality constitutes the common ground of interaction among the members
of society, these same members also experience a multiplicity of private
or peripheral realities: dreaming, play, fiction, and so on. But these other
realities are felt to be marginal: it is the shared reality that is "paramount".

(McHale, 1987: 37)

8.4. Desai's Female Characters

Although Desai is attributed with the tendency to give pessimistic accounts of women's destinies, her stories are not black and white, the same as her characters are not one-dimensional, or simply good or bad, happy or utterly miserable. She does not fall in the trap of giving moral lectures or clear-cut solutions, as most of her characters do not go through life-changing epiphanies. With regard to interpersonal relations, Desai does not insist on resolving all the conflicts and although she does offer acceptance and forgiveness as the key, many of her protagonists remain inside their vicious circles of depression and frustration, simply because they in some way enjoy it. Indeed, Desai's heroines are, in my opinion, prone to taking extreme stands, enormous pride and pleasure in bearing sacrifices. They wish to see themselves as tragic heroines, like from those ancient Greek tragedies, so they engage in self-pitying and accusing others.

Anita Desai's characters possess an overwhelming sense of their
own existence, fallibility with special focus on loneliness, alienation
and pessimism. She turns a new leaf probing the deeper recess of
human psyche to fathom the baffling mysteries and chaos clouding the
minds of her various women characters.

(Reedy & Rath, 2013: 2)

In an interview, Desai clarifies her choice of heroines, stating why she prefers personalities that do not fall into the category of average:

I am interested in characters who are not average but have retreated

or been driven into some extremity of despair and so turned against

general current. It is easy to flow with the current: it makes no demands,

it costs no effort. But those who cannot follow it, whose heart cries out,

'the great no', who fight the current and struggle against it, they know what

the demands are and what it costs to meet them.

<div align="right">(In Dalmia, 1979: 168)</div>

Some critics are not compassionate toward her heroines, but on the contrary, consider them neurotic, almost demonic. They interpret their psychological problems as consequences of their refusal to accept reality. Thus, there are critics who consider them responsible for their misfortune and who like their own society consider them simply inadequate:

Characters in the novels of Mrs. Anita Desai are generally neurotic

females, highly sensitive but sequestered in a surrounding as a

consequence of their failure or unwillingness to adjust to the reality.

They often differ in their opinion from others and embark on a long

voyage of contemplation in order to find the meaning of their existence.

<div align="right">(Gopal, 1995: 7)</div>

8.5. Issues Related to Women in Desai's Novels

When it comes to the social aspects she writes about, Desai is not interested in the community, as it is the case with Morrison. Desai is personally more interested in the smallest social unit, that is, family. Believing that all problems arise within the family and are related to one's upbringing, Desai does not dwell on topics such as politics or institutions, but awards the biggest influence and power to parents. Indeed, Desai does not analyse concepts of romantic love or relationships between lovers, her focus is based on the relationships with parents and between siblings. She does not write

about any other kind of marriage but the arranged one and there are no feelings of jealousy, no affairs, no abortions in her novels. Nonetheless, there is plenty of talk about the dowry, the relationship with the husband's family, choosing a potential groom and the exile of widows and spinsters. The concepts of dowry and joint family appear in work of almost all Indian female authors, as those notions shape their realities to a great extent. The joint family is not only significant in itself, but it alters the definition of marriage, as well. Namely, a bride is not just choosing a husband she will spend the rest of her life with, she also has to accept his entire family, since they become her family as well. A life within a joint family involves complex relations and power hierarchies, based on gender and age. The bride is expected to comply with the rules of her new home and take on the duties assigned to her. This kind of life excludes privacy altogether, not just for the individual, but also for married couples. However, since the Indian marriage is not based on the feelings of passion or infatuation, the concept of privacy also loses its significance. When dowry is concerned, it has long been a source of maltreatment of the bride, for it determined the attitude of the family toward their new member. In spite of the fact that dowry has been banned by law, it is still practiced in some parts of India and in *Fasting, Feasting* Desai is determined to show its harmful and humiliating aspects. Another reason why Desai and other Indian women do not write about romance is that in reality Indian women are preoccupied with financial dependency and other existential problems. It seems that relatively comfortable lives of the women in developed countries allow them to think and worry about their love lives. Nevertheless, Desai counters another stereotype common in India - woman as housebound - and writes about women who nurture career ambitions and long for financial independence. Both novels analysed in this dissertation include discussions about the advantages and disadvantages of women who earn their living and deal with ways the society treats them. These novels undoubtedly show that working women are still looked down upon in India as a kind of social pathology, especially if they are unmarried. Contemporary critics argue that the Indian society keeps a surveillant gaze over who and under what circumstances has children. Although all women are expected to bear children, as it is considered to be their primary duty, they are not allowed to do so outside marriage. Thus, it is socially unacceptable for unmarried women to have children as it is frowned upon for the married ones not to have them. This kind of

treatment could be interpreted as both discrimination and oppression as it is the worst example of invasion of privacy and control. Even in this respect India is a society of contradictions, for it rarely enables women to use the rights they are guaranteed by the law. "For many in the West, gender roles in Indian society is a paradox: on the one hand, devotion to a Mother Goddess, the election of a woman Prime Minister; and on the other hand, numerous limits on women's autonomy and empowerment." (Shukla, 2013: 108) Pandey (2010) observes that even in the ancient times and writings we can notice the ambiguity of the relation toward women. Taking Sita as an example, Pandey points out that in *Ramayana* her identity is constructed on the grounds of the relationship she has with her husband, Rama: "She is repeatedly glorified as 'Mata Sita', but as a wife she becomes a puppet in the hands of her husband." (Pandey, 2010: 3) These accounts put the position of a woman in India in a special perspective: it seems that seen as an individual or a an abstract idea, the woman is glorified in all her power and beauty, nevertheless, treated in relation to her husband, or as part of a joint family, she loses not just her divine powers and charms, but her civil rights as well. Another group of women that are marginalised in this limiting environment are widows. They have Desai's deepest sympathies and she writes about them empathically, portraying them as silent women from the shadow. Their marginalisation is mirrored in her novels, where they occupy places of passers-by or distant relatives everyone is trying to avoid. They are carriers of social stigma and what is more, are even labelled as insane. These women on the margins of society are sentenced to lives of loneliness since they do not belong anywhere. Many critics state that Indian literature before Anita Desai did not deal with these social 'outcasts' and forbidden topics, such as family abuse, at the level of human psyche. In that respect, Desai is a kind of a pioneer in Indo-Anglian literature. According to her words, "literature should deal with the most enduring matters". (In Saminathan, 2010: 36) Saminthan adds that "the most enduring matters" involve "obsessions, eccentricities, tremors and traumas." (2010: 36). Many consider that it was Desai who made Indo-Anglian novel accessible and relatable to the English or American readers. Saminthan (2010) opines that development of Indian fiction is linked to the switch of focus from the external world to the inner world of characters, precisely what Desai did in her novels:

It is only with the arrival of Anita Desai that such long neglected
themes were given an emotionally poetic treatment. She took them
in sophisticated poetic cut-outs. Thus by shifting the realms of the
human psyche, she brought the Indo-Anglian novel into the main
stream of European and American fiction. The gradual growth of
fiction in India is made by the gradual shifting of focus from the
external world to the inner world of the individual.

(Saminathan 2010: 20)

What Desai shares with Morrison and Atwood and many other female writers is her interest in relationships between women, in her case predominantly relationships between women in a family - mother-daughter, sisters, grandmother-granddaughter. However, she does not write about female friendship as they (Atwood and Morrison) do since Indian tradition favours familial relationships. In this respect Desai's heroines differ greatly from the female protagonists of the former two authors, who dedicate a great deal of attention to female friendships. Nevertheless, Desai also insists on female solidarity, which seems invaluable in Indian society, bearing in mind that in a joint family women spend most of their time in each other's company. She gives commentaries on rather adverse relationships between women in joint families, who fighting for better positions inside the family tend to compete with each other and often terrorise the new bride. Shukla (2013) blames the lack of support for women's misfortunes that makes them endure abusive relationships. Namely, according to her, for fear of being discarded, women in India do not speak about terrors they are exposed to:

The absence of a protective support system composed of family,
friends and neighbours increases women's social isolation. It also
intensifies their dependency on the abusive relationship. In addition,
many women are forbidden by their husbands to contact friends and
family or to develop friendship. They may be denied access to postage,
money, telephones and transportation

(Shukla, 2013: 108)

The abuse of brides in the new family is a theme well-explored in *Fasting, Feasting*, where Desai focuses on the relations between the bride and the husband's mother, revealing cruel treatments of bride by the husband's family that is not just condoned by him, but also unpunished by law and quickly forgotten altogether.

9. *Fasting, Feasting*

Fasting, Feasting is a novel about family dynamics in a hybrid cultural environment that is today modern India. The story about family life in a small town reveals advantages and drawbacks of modernisation brought with the colonisers. Despite the opportunities and comfort that the acquisition of Western patterns provided, they still remain deeply traditional, even backward in numerous social aspects. Life in a multilayered environment, such as, India carries many limitations and duties that members of each class, or caste, must respect. Social interaction is also very systematical and obliges people to socialise only with those who are their social rank. Aside from origin, one is also expected to earn appreciation by obediently fulfilling one's duties and adhering to social norms. This society features discrimination and stereotyping on the basis of both, class and gender, both of which could not be chosen or changed. The extent of inequality is one of the major markers of this society and the biggest threat is that there is almost no awareness of the damaging effects it produces. A burning issue in India is the fact that gender or class discrimination are not even recognised or acknowledged as unjust. The core of the problem lies in the centuries long tradition of strictly defined gender roles and labour division. With the proscribed duties, women are also imposed numerous limitations, such as the deprivation of education and career.

9.1. The Position and Concerns of Women in India

Women in India are certainly among the most oppressed groups, since they are under constant surveillant gaze of their families, communities and general public. Although life in a postcolonial climate differs greatly from the one prior to the colonisation, there still remain deeply ingrained stereotypes of what a woman's life should be like. "In India, since ages, a woman's role in life was strictly

compartmentalised; she was a daughter, a wife or a mother. In all these roles she had to adhere to certain appointed norms; she had no separate identity as a human being." (Pandey, 2010: 41) Even those women who are fortunate to have been born in well-off families have to struggle between their own desires and the need to please their families. Esha Dey reaches a conclusion that a woman's destiny is determined by biology and continues by illustrating the position of women as "the metaphysical nothingness of woman". (1986) In spite of the bigger percentage of women who nowadays attend school and colleges, education is still largely seen as a predominantly male occupation. Even those women who obtain university degrees are not expected to have careers of their own and are not considered realised without marrying and having children. The issue of education is covered to a great extent in this novel, as Desai considers it a significant step in acquiring independence and self-respect. Despite the significant efforts that have been taken to secure equality before the law, many authors and critics argue that in practice women remain marginalised and dependent. "The social institutions such as systems of descent, family, marriage and religious traditions determine women's roles and their position in society regardless of what is guaranteed to them in the Constitution." (Rosenwasser, 1989: 83) "What is possible for women in theory is seldom within their reach in fact."[6]

The particular condition of all postcolonial societies results in general confusion when it comes to attitudes and values and often leads to paradoxical practices. In relation to the coloniser, some take a rebellious stand as they blind-sightedly cling to their traditional customs, while others adopt everything that would make them similar to the Westerners, in an attempt to earn their respect and protection. As it is often the case, blind replication in terms of culture leads to nonsensical or even comical results or in many cases, characters. A good example is the character of Uma's father, who maintains an outward appearance of modern views, but in fact, remains deeply conservative, hypocritical and big-headed. Cultural practices of Indian society reflect the attitudes towards the former oppressors and themselves and range from hatred toward them to self-hatred, but mostly reveal chaos and confusion.

Marriage is one of the institutions that managed to resist the influence of the West throughout centuries and presents a complex ritual of searching for adequate

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[6] Indian Council Status Report (in Rosenwasser, 1989)

partners. In many respects it resembles a merger of companies since the benefits to both families an essential factor in this decision. Indian wedding rituals are indeed elaborate and unique and until recently they included a practice of the dowry. It is a custom which obliges the bride's family to secure material gifts or a monetary sum that they give away to the groom's family, together with the bride. It is a custom with a long tradition that acted as a foundation for establishing a treatment of the bride in her new family. Depending on the value of her dowry, the bride in question would be appreciated or molested. Fortunately, this practice has been declared illegal, but is, nevertheless, still part of the ceremony in some regions of India. According to the Laws of Manu[7], women are not to be allowed "independence of action" and are supposed to be controlled and protected by men in their families – first by the father, then husband and by the son when widowed. (Jia, 2002: 5)

The concept of joint families is also one of the special features of Indian society that is completely foreign to most other parts of the world. It is still the predominant social entity and it reveals a complex network of family relations that affects other aspects of social life as well. This kind of climate nurtures the connections between male members of family and reserves all the privileges for them. Women are those who are brought up with the awareness that they do not pertain to the families they were born in but have to wait for their real ones - their husband's families. Due to the fact that they do not stay in their homes, they are treated differently from their male siblings. Instead of being prepared for life like men are, daughters are prepared for marriage. Marriage is observed as the primary event in their lives and families dedicate more attention to arranging their daughters' marriage than to educating them. Once they are in their new families, brides have to fight for their position and that struggle includes common conflicts with other women in the household. Madhu Kishwar (1986) observes the tradition of living with the husband's family as another advantage of males, which allows them to maintain their supremacy. Reduced to housework, women dedicate all their time and effort to interpersonal relations and fighting for attention and affection of the males of the household. Rosenwasser elaborates on the reasons why a joint Indian family is one of "unequal patriarchal relationships": "patriarchy, a male dominance

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[7] Manu (Manusmrti - "the wise one") – a treatise (200 BC - 200 AD) covering all aspects of life of a Hindi. Acquired the status of a sacred text and according to Hindu tradition, the Manu smrti records the words of Brahma

system, patrilocality, a bride's living at her husband's male headed joint family home; and patrilineal descent, ancestry and wealth continued from father to son – all of which confirm and perpetuate the Indian woman's inferior status." (1989: 84) Living first under their parents' surveillance and then being under control of the in-laws, women in India almost never experience independence or privacy. Life in big families excludes time reserved for one's private thoughts or hobbies, as all activities are monitored. One's personal habits or inclinations have to be incorporated in the daily life of the family in such a manner that they do not jeopardise the overall dynamic. "A position of woman seems to be very strange. Like a pendulum she is swinging between the contrasting forces of acceptance and rejection, flexibility and rigidity, fantasy and reality and revolt and compromise." (Sandhu in Pandey, 2010: 46)

9.2. Analysis of Female Characters

The three main female characters in the novel illustrate different ways of dealing with the peculiarities of Indian society. These women adopt different attitudes with which they attempt either to assimilate themselves according to or to rebel against the dominant standards of behaviour. Pandey comments on the desire of Indian women to emancipate themselves and voice their opinions, like other women worldwide have already done: "In common with women all over the world, Indian woman is also voicing her desire to be emancipated, to get rid of the unjust restrictions imposed on her and the pervasive discriminations against her. She is seeking the right to be regarded as a whole human being, not simply as an adjunct to her male relatives." (Pandey, 2010: 41)

All three of them are met with the challenges of education and marriage arranged for them according to the wishes of their parents. While Uma and Anamika abide by the commands of their parents, Aruna manages to impose her own will and discard everything she considers out-dated or primitive. However, despite their very diverse characters and approaches to life, all of them fail to reach true happiness and a peace of mind.

9.2.1. Analysis of Uma

Uma's character is representative of the obedient daughters of the family who bear psychological abuse from their parents and siblings and eventually hold the status of servants rather than of equal family members. She does not undergo any character transformation, as her life circumstances, as well as her own awareness, do not change significantly in the course of the novel. Unlike Atwood's and Morrison's protagonists, who go through life-changing experiences and alter their state of mind, Uma remains equally subordinated and powerless throughout the novel. The impossibility of change makes her story more tragic and absurd since she does not have the privilege of free will as others do have. However, another important element is her cowardice. Her life circumstances do not differ greatly from Sula's and are far better than Pecola's, but she does not dare to take control by some radical act, like Sula confronted Eva for the right of decision-making. Although she had the example of her younger sister, who managed to secure a life she had always dreamed of, Uma did not learn the rules of life on time. The biggest tragedy of her life is not in any particular event, but in the infinite passivity, boredom and subjugation she faced daily. In addition, she could not find any comfort in knowing that her choices were her own or that she fought for her ideals, because she did not have the courage to do so. The story about her life does not have a proper end because it also does not have a proper beginning, it starts and finishes with serving her domineering parents and mourning over her own misfortune.

Uma's life is not a story about growing up or maturing, it is a story about growing old. Suddenly, from the story of her school days, we are taken to the story about her grey hair and myopic eyes. The accounts of her physical appearance illustrate the level of emotional burden she carries on her back. Despite the maltreatment of her family, Uma shows little emotion. She rarely complains and never refuses to obey any orders. Even when she does protest, it is more like talking to herself than arguing. She spends her days serving her self-righteous parents and taking insults from them. Her answer to her restricted life conditions is depression, which creates a desire for escape or even death. In time, she develops nervous ticks and her hands shake when she is under stress. She is awkward in social situations since she did not have many

opportunities to socialise with people outside her home. Lacking confidence and any feeling of self-respect, Uma can be characterised as a very unhappy person. Being under the impact of the patronising parents, especially her mother, she did not develop an identity of her own and failed to realise herself in all aspects of life.

When the narrator reflects on Uma's childhood, we see that she did have interests and passions. Namely, she simply loved attending school and could not wait for the summer holiday to end, so that she could resume classes. For her, school meant joy, while time spent at home brought mostly negative feelings.

> There were the wretched weekends of her home, which seemed a
> denial, a negation of life as it ought to be, sombre and splendid,
> and then the endless summer vacation when the heat reduced even
> the pointless existence to further vacuity. She picked with impatience
> for the fifteenth of July when school would re-open and a new term
> begin. She hurried to buy the new books, gloated over their freshness,
> wrapped them in brown paper covers to keep them clean, eager for
> the day when they would be put to use.
>
> (Desai, 2000: 21)

Despite loving school, Uma had very poor grades to the point that she would have to retake almost all exams. In spite of all her effort and hard work, she could not pass her exams, which made her feel inferior to other girls.

> True, there was one uncomfortable fact that could not be denied: in
> spite of her raging enthusiasm, she was an abject scholar. Why? It
> was so unfair. The nuns clucked and shook their hands and sent for
> Mama, wrote notes to Papa, and every year, after the exams, said
> sorrowfully that they would have to hold her back - she had managed to
> fail every single test: in English, Hindi, history, geography, arithmetic,
> drawing and even domestic science! There was not a thing Uma put her
> hand to that did not turn to failure.
>
> (Desai, 2000: 21)

Her failures annoyed her parents, but it seemed they were not worried, since her mother had other plans for her. Uma's school was a Catholic school run by nuns, where the girls also received education in religion. This is another example of the hybrid culture in India. While some fully converted to Christianity, others still held reservations or considered this kind of upbringing dangerous. Uma's mother always spoke negatively about Uma's education and expressed concerns about the corruptive influence of nuns on the girls. She was fiercely against all modern ideas as well as anything different. When Uma spent time with white Christian women, her mother saw these gatherings as their attempt to convert Uma and spoke of them as something alien and mysterious. " 'See what these nuns do,' she raged to Papa. " 'What ideas they fill in the girls' heads! I always said don't send them to a convent school. Keep them at home. I said - but who listened? And, now!' " (Desai, 2000: 29)

Desai marks the birth of Uma and Aruna's brother as a turning point for both sisters. The reaction they had upon his arrival was what their general outlook on life became. While Aruna realised that her position in the family was threatened and decided to fight for herself, Uma felt completely confused and irrelevant. "Uma never overcame her awe of that extraordinary event, really far more memorable than the birth itself. As for Aruna, it could be said to have started a lifetime of bridling, of determined self-assertion." (Desai, 2000: 17) It should be stressed, however, that Arun's birth altered Uma's life a great deal more than Aruna's since, as the oldest of siblings, Uma was expected to assume some part of the care of her brother. Since her mother's pregnancy was difficult and was imposed on her by the father, she had no strength or will to take care of him herself, so Uma was forced to act as his mother, although still practically a child herself. In spite of Uma's pleas and begging, the mother was adamant not to let her to go school anymore. She used Uma's failing grades as an excuse and reminded her of the work she was supposed to be doing around the house. "You will be happier at home. You won't need to do any lessons. You are a big girl now. We are trying to arrange a marriage for you. 'Not now,' she added, seeing the panic on Uma's face. 'But soon. Till then, you can help me look after Arun. And also learn to run the house.' " (Desai, 2000: 22) She added that the care of Arun would be a good preparation for her own marriage that was to be arranged soon. She was clear when she said that the care of Arun was special and could not be equated with the care Aruna and Uma were

given, so a paid help could not be considered appropriate. " 'You know we can't leave the baby to the servant,' she said severely. 'He needs proper attention.' When Uma pointed out that ayah had looked after her and Aruna as babies. Mama's expression made it clear it was quite a different matter now, and she repeated threateningly: 'Proper attention.' " (Desai, 2000: 30) Uma's desperation for not going to school anymore was so intense that one day she ran away from home and made a hysterical scene in front of Mother Agnes. This outburst shows the severity of her devastation and is one of the rare occasions when she expressed her real feelings and tried to rebel. "Nor had she simply fainted - she was writhing, frothing a little at the mouth and moaning, banging her head on one side, then the other. When Mother Agnes tried to lift her, she began to roll so violently that Mother Agnes had to go to the door and call for help." (Desai, 2000: 29) However, the reaction of her parents was so dreadful that it frustrated all her subsequent urges to confront them. It should be noted that every time Uma expressed initiative to engage herself in some social groups or activities, she was met with a fierce reaction from her parents, mostly her mother. On one occasion she went out to a restaurant with a cousin and after a lovely night, probably the best of her life, she was yelled at and humiliated by her mother. It seemed she wanted to punish her for having a good time away from them. "What could she be thinking of, suggesting dinner in a restaurant? She has never been to one in her life; how can she think of starting now when her hair is already grey." (Desai, 2000: 49) Furthermore, Uma's bonding with their distant cousin, the widow Mira-masi, was also looked down on by her opinionated mother. Mira-masi was one of the rare people who actually paid some attention to Uma and took some time to actually teach her something. I would like to stress that Uma's acquaintances, such as doctor Dutt, were actually very fond of her and enjoyed her company. Doctor Dutt took notice of Uma's caretaking skills and offered her a job at her hospital. It was the first real opportunity for Uma to gain independence and a sense of worthiness. For the first time she actually thought about what having a career means and what it would be like. "A career. Leaving home. These troubling secret possibilities entered Uma's mind - as Mama would have pointed out had she known - whenever Uma was idle. They were like seed dropped on the stony, arid land that Uma inhabited. Sometimes, miraculously, they sprouted forth the idea - run away, escape. But Uma could not visualise escape in the form of a career. What was a career? She had no idea." (Desai, 2000: 131) However,

this idea was met with her parents' strong disapproval, as they did not see why their daughter would work for somebody else. Although they used excuses, such as that they took care of her and she did not have the need to work, they actually did not want to lose a free servant. "It was Mama who spoke however. As usual, for Papa. Very clearly and decisively. 'Our daughter does not need to go out to work, Dr Dutt,' she said. 'As long as we are here to provide for her, she will never need to go to work.' " (Desai, 2000: 143) What is even more shocking is the way Uma's mother confronted doctor Dutt, without giving it a second thought. This proves that while the father prides himself on his role of the head of the household, Uma's mother is the one who actually pulls all the strings in the house regarding the lives of their daughters. After Arun's birth, the father dedicated all of his attention to the upbringing of his only son. Handing over of his authority to the mother was caused by his lack of interest in his daughters. After the unpleasant discussion with doctor Dutt, Uma's mother tried to reconcile with her by treating her like a baby. "Mama came up the steps and linked arms with Uma, giving her an affectionate little squeeze. 'And so my madcap wanted to run away and leave her Mama? What will my madcap do next?' " (Desai, 2000: 144) This demonstrates the lack of any consistent parenting and the mother's skillful manipulation of gullible Uma. When she realised that force may not be the right solution, she resorted to sweet-talking. Alongside her cowardice, the reason why Uma never tried to start an independent life is the feeling of guilt. Although she despised her parents most of the time, she gradually internalised the feeling of responsibility for them.

One of the most distressing scenes in the novel is when the father does not allow Uma to see the eye specialist that could solve her health problem because it is very expensive. His preoccupation with money is his main worry and although he pays for Arun's education in the USA, somehow he thinks that any penny spent on Uma is a waste. His frenzy is so pervasive that Uma fears making a simple phone call and does so secretly. "Costs money! Costs money! He kept shouting long after. 'Never earned anything in her life, made me spend and spend on her dowry and her wedding. Oh, yes, spend till I'm ruined, till I'm a pauper.' " (Desai, 2000: 146) However, despite his constant complains about how much money they spend on her, the father does not allow her to work and become independent financially. This brings us to the conclusion that Uma's parents are impossible to please, since they take pleasure in mortifying her.

Whatever she does, she knows that the reaction will be the same - the one of disapproval. What is more, the parents frequently engage in long lamentations over their destinies and pity themselves for the burden they have to bear, the burden in shape of Uma.

Although she first looked at it as an unfair decision, Uma actually did take good care of her brother. She became very attached to him, and the two of them seem to be the only genuine people in the family. They developed good communication and have compassion for one another. When Arun's letters from America arrive, only Uma notices that unhappiness lies behind his words. Although his father shows obsessive care, he is incapable to give Arun what he actually needs - love and comfort. Uma, on the other hand, understands Arun's woes, having experienced her own. Similarly, Arun notices changes on Uma, her premature ageing and health problems and feels honest grief. Unfortunately, they both have to deal with inadequate lives prepared for them and lament for the lost dreams. While Uma longs for education and independence, Arun feels lost in the foreign world without any friends. The burden of opportunities proves to be too much for him. However, being a son, he was chosen to live life according to the visions of his father. It is his duty to make the father proud and make a good name for himself. Although the education of his daughters is irrelevant, the father invests all his hopes and resources into Arun.

When the time comes for Uma to get married, her parents handle it like she is an object to be sold. They advertise her in a local paper and even pay a professional photograph to modify her looks in the photos. When they realise she would hardly find a good match, they lower the criteria significantly, just to get it over with. The lack of care and interest results in them losing their dowry to a family of imposters. Since they had not checked the family of the potential groom, they were tricked and humiliated. Needless to say, Uma was blamed for this omission of theirs. " 'Yes, that is why the Goyals are able to do such things, because of parents being in too much of a hurry. If parents will not take time to make proper enquiries, what terrible fates their daughters may have! Be grateful that Uma was no married into a family that could have burnt her to death in order to procure another dowry!' " (Desai, 2000: 83) The process of search excluded Uma completely, as she did not have any say in the matter. After the first scandalous attempt, they chose a middle-aged man who showed no interest in Uma

whatsoever. The parents however, were not suspicious and hurried with getting the wedding under way. Uma was horrified during the whole ceremony. After the wedding, she was taken to another city, where she was left alone the whole day and maltreated by the groom's family. When she arrived, there was no welcome, but work waiting to be done and nosy women in the house, who rummaged through her clothes and jewellery. They behaved as if she was not present, commenting on her looks and garment.

> They spoke to each other, making remarks about her complexion,
> her hair, her jewellery, the size of her hands and feet. Some lifted her
> hand and examined the ring, the bangles, the henna pattern. Then one
> sister marched to trunk. 'Open it,' she said. Uma got up and knelt
> beside it to unlock it. She found her hands shaking again. They came
> up close, pressing against her, in order to reach into the trunk and go
> through its contents. They addressed each other only, making comments
> on her saris, her jewellery, the bottle of Evening in Paris perfume
> Aruna had given to her, but saying nothing to her.
>
> (Desai, 2000: 92)

Kishwar (1986) attributes this lack of privacy and examination of dowry to the strategy of the females of a family to make the bride accept the subordinate position. Although Uma thought that was a terrible destiny, it was even worse when one day her father came to take her back home. When he discovered that Uma's husband was already married, he had a nervous breakdown and after distressing scenes, it was decided that there would be no more attempts to marry Uma. Nonetheless, the two lost dowries would come up in conversations most often than not.

When Uma's failures at school and in getting married were combined with the cruel treatment from her parents, the stress of everyday life became almost intolerable for her. She was showing signs of damaged mental and physical health and was suffering from severe depression. After a few hysteric outbursts, she no longer felt panic, but a strong desire to disappear, instead. When they were sailing the river, she fell in and almost drowned. However, what she felt in the water was not fear, and what she felt when she was saved was not happiness. On the contrary, the idea of nothingness soothed her and she wanted to let go. "It was not fear she felt, or danger. Or, rather,

these were only what edged something much darker, wilder, more thrilling, a kind of exaltation - it was exactly what she had always wanted, she realised." (Desai, 2000: 111) Uma is undoubtedly different from her entire family and is peculiar in many ways. Mira-masi tells her that she is chosen by the Lord to be his servant and that she should not marry. When she accompanies Mira-masi to one of her pilgrimages, Uma experiences a strange seizure and is thought by the other pilgrims to have been possessed by some force. The peculiar occurrence earns her the respect of the pilgrims and she remembers it as a rare instance when she was able to be herself and feel free. " 'You are the Lord's child. The Lord has chosen you. You bear his mark.' (...) 'She is possessed. The Lord has taken possession of her.' " (Desai, 2000: 59, 60)

Uma is a woman caught between tradition and modernisation. She is at a loss when it comes to shaping her identity and establishing functional relationships with her family. Although she does wonder what it would be like to be an independent career woman and secretly longs for the freedom of choice, she lacks courage and determination to take her life in her own hands. Taught by her parents to be obedient and servile, she loses any feeling of self-respect and gradually renounces her life. In a social climate where due to the adoption of many Western customs more opportunities were available, choices for women were still rather narrow. Simone de Beauvoir attributes the confusion of young girls to the confines of patriarchy: "(she) does not accept the destiny assigned to her by nature and by society and yet she does not repudiate it completely. Thus she is 'divided against herself.' " (Beauvoir in Pandey, 2010: 36) Thapan describes the position of these women as ambivalent: "Simultaneously a part of the tradition, rituals and customary practices, and yet she experiences the more contemporary world through both the education she receives, the diverse images and texts presented by the visual and print media and the peer culture she is part of." (2009: 28) Despite not having many talents or skills, Uma is a warm-hearted, genuine person who feels content with very little. The rare moments when she experienced happiness show her love of life. A simple look at her Christmas cards or being in company of friendly people gave her joy. Even though she was a failure at school, Uma had incredible will and could have been successful if she had been given some attention by her parents. However, being focused on their son and believing that women have no reason to be employed, Uma's father treated her as if she did not exist.

There is no account of a genuine conversation between the two of them. The only time he actually speaks to her is when he gives orders. On the other hand, her mother's main preoccupation was to get Uma married and when she failed that task, she was just a one big disappointment. To the socially-conscious mother, Uma is completely inappropriate, not being able to fulfill her female role of a wife and a mother. She calls her names and considers her the source of humiliation that gives the family a bad name. Deprived of a close relationship with her mother and any true guidance, Uma did not have a female figure to relate to. It is clear that she is completely unaware of herself sexually or of herself as a woman altogether. Lacking a stable identity of any kind, she is like a sexless being that is not living but simply existing. Uma does not experience even a hint of sexuality as she never consummated her marriage and had no emotional relations with men whatsoever. There are no accounts of her curiosity or desire as the only time references to sex are made in the novel is when the mother is pregnant for the third time and the girls conclude that it requires their parents to do some things they are disgusted with and forbidden even to think about. Although she fails many assignments given to her by the parents and society, the biggest tragedy of Uma's life is failing herself. While thinking about all the ways she let the others down, Uma forgot to give herself a chance for revealing who she was and who she could have become.

One of the rare pleasures that Uma can indulge in on rare occasions is Christmas cards. She collects them and enjoys looking at them, alone in her room. Nevertheless, no doors are to be shut in their house, so if Uma does so, she knows she will be interrogated about her actions. "She knows that when she shuts the door MamaPapa immediately become suspicious. But she defies them to come and open it. She stands waiting for them to shout or knock. Minutes pass and she can picture their faces, their expressions, twitching with annoyance, with curiosity, then settling into stiff disapproval." (Desai, 2000: 134) The lack of privacy is a huge issue for Uma, who came to enjoy her loneliness. However, her mother finds this hobby of hers inappropriate and manages to ruin her joy.

9.2.2. Analysis of Aruna

While Uma is obedient and docile, Aruna is self-centered, ambitious and cruel. Having realised that she would have to fight for what she wants, she committedly worked on realising her agenda. Since the earliest childhood Aruna enjoyed teasing Uma, who was inferior in most respects. She made fun of her school grades and her looks. She was the pretty one and the smart one, while Uma was a burden for the family. Aruna offered no compassion to Uma after her failed marriage. What she thoughtF was that Uma was a disgrace for the entire family. When Aruna was supposed to marry, Uma's unmarried state was an obstacle. While no suitors even looked at Uma, all of them expressed interest in Aruna. Uma again had to deal with being a failure. "There were so many marriage proposals for Aruna that Uma's unmarried state was not only an embarrassment but an obstruction. Here was Aruna visibly ripening on the branch, asking to be plucked: no one had to teach her to make samosas or help her to dress for an occasion. Instinctively, she knew." (Desai, 2000: 85) Even though she was the one who got all the attention and was living the life she chose, Aruna had no understanding for her sister. She even made a scene and asked her parents to lock Uma up and not allow her to be at the wedding because she was afraid Uma might embarrass her in front of the family of her future husband. She screamed and called Uma insane, which eventually led to Uma herself pleading to be locked up. "She listened to Aruna's voice lashing at her, flailing her with accusations. She had spoilt the party, the cocktail party. What would Arvind's family think of them, of Aruna who had a sister who was an idiot, a hysteric? She should be put away, locked up. Aruna sobbed. 'I should be locked up', Uma moaned, along with her. 'Lock me up, mama, lock me up!' " (Desai, 2000: 102) It is clear that Aruna was prepared to sacrifice everything and everyone in order to fulfill her dreams. She did not manage to build an emotional connection with her sister, which later proved as a general pattern, since she did not seem caring to her children either. When she would come to visit her parents, which was very seldom, Aruna would keep Uma in charge of taking care of her children, treating her like a help in the house. The only help she provided back was giving unsolicited advice about makeup, which actually gave her a chance to critise Uma again. She made unfavourable remarks about

her hair and her clothes, implying that she looked like a servant. She boasted about her own wardrobe, commenting on the latest trends in the city. Her interests proved as very shallow as she was satisfied with leading a comfortable life in a high-end society. "When Aruna casually asked her to bathe them she did not dare place them in the basin of water provided, she was sure she would let them slip out of her fingers and drown. So she just wiped them with a damp towel and handed them back, pretending they were bathed. Aruna did not notice. She was out most of the time, visiting her girlfriends, showing them her Bombay acquisitions." (Desai, 2000: 104)

When time for Aruna's marriage came, she took control of the choice. After significant consideration she chose a groom who was by far the best in all respects. "No one was at all surprised but everyone was gratified when Aruna brought off the marriage that Uma had dismally failed to make. As was to be expected, she took her time, showed a reluctance to decide, played choosy, but soon enough made the wisest, most expedient choice - the handsomest, the richest, the most exciting of the suitors who presented themselves." (Desai, 2000: 100) It is obvious that for Aruna or the parents marriage does not have anything to do with love. Contrary to the Western ideas of romance, Indian concept of marriage is based on entirely different foundations – those of tradition and interests of the whole community. However, according to feminist theories, marriage is no longer seen as a natural step in a romantic relationship, but is defined as a social institution that aims at imposing constraints on women: "Feminist theories maintain that marriage can no longer be viewed as the logical culmination of man and woman relationship but as a social institution sanctified to serve the perpetuation of woman's enslavement." (Pandey, 2010: 95) After the wedding, Aruna embraced the life she had always dreamt about. She moved to a big city on the coast and with her perfect husband in a perfect apartment began her perfect life. She soon adopted the urban lifestyle and did not feel the need to invite her family to visit. As if she was embarrassed of her roots, she avoided visiting them as well. On the rare occasions when they would meet, Aruna felt the need to criticise their ways and inform them about all the changes she had made in her habits. Becoming part of the upper-class society, Aruna resented the connection with her not so distinguished family.

And Aruna was whisked away to a life she had said would be 'fantastic'
and was. Arvind had a job in Mombay and bought a flat in a housing block
in Juhu, facing the beach, and Aruna said it was 'like a dream'. These were
the words that Aruna used in her letters. They were not words anyone in
their town used, either because nothing in their town merited them. But
such words, such use of them did seem to raise Aruna to another level –
distant and airy as Uma imagined must be her flat overlooking the sea.

(Desai, 2000: 103)

She would not miss an opportunity to make a remark about the condition of the old
house or the way they were dressed. "Aruna slammed her make-up kit shut. 'Yes, this is
what women in Bombay use. They don't walk around looking like washerwomen unless
they are washerwomen,' she told Uma." (Desai, 2000: 104) Despite the alleged
happiness she had, Aruna seemed rather anxious and stressed. She could not bear
anything that did not fit her image of perfection. She even expressed her dissatisfaction
by trying to correct her nearly perfect husband. In spite of achieving all of her goals,
Aruna could not settle and enjoy. She had the constant need to correct and improve,
which prevented her to see how emotionally hollow she was. Her dissatisfaction caught
Uma's eye, who felt genuinely sorry for her. Despite the appearances, Uma realised
Aruna was not living blissfully. "Seeing Aruna vexed to the point of tears because the
cook's pudding had sunk and spread instead of remaining upright and solid, or because
Arvind had come to dinner in his bedroom slippers, or Papa was wearing a t-shirt with a
hole under one arm, Uma felt pity for her: was this the realm of ease and comfort for
which Aruna had always pined and that some might say she had attained? Certainly it
brought her no pleasure." (Desai, 2000: 109) It can be concluded that both girls
remained exactly the same as when they were children. Uma was insecure and
subordinate, while Aruna was greedy and impossible to please. Aruna's personality is
like that of a coloniser, greedy and determined to establish and maintain the power
hierarchy. She uses the inferiority of her sister to portray herself as superior. She mocks
Uma and emphasises her weaknesses in order to stress her perfection. Although Uma
lacks confidence and courage to live a life she finds suitable, Aruna on the other hand
lacks sympathy and compassion. When we analyse her attitude towards the members of

her family, her children, husband and Uma, we notice that the only emotions she expresses are those of frustration and anger. The way she leaves her children to Uma and goes to spend time with her friends implies only love of herself. She defines success and happiness in terms of wealth, beauty and social status, which reflects her emotional shallowness. The two sisters are the complete opposites and together make the perfect balance, since one has what the other lacks.

9.2.3. Analysis of Anamika

Anamika is an example of how even perfection in a female could not be enough for a happy life. The embodiment of physical perfection and intelligence, Anamika was the daughter everyone wished they had. No other girl could compete with her loveliness and kindness. A gentle, loving person, she was loved by everyone. She performed excellently at school and even obtained a scholarship for Oxford. That privilege meant a great honour, even for men, let alone girls, in India. Desai deliberately includes men in the sentence about Anamika's scholarship to underline the fact that education was considered to be a male preoccupation. Apart from not being considered smart enough for higher levels of education, girls were discouraged from further schooling also because professional careers were not deemed adequate for them, since women's main obligation was marriage. In the light of this belief, Anamika's parents decided that she should not pursue further education and used the Oxford scholarship as evidence of her capacities.

> In fact, she did so brilliantly in her school exams that she won a
> scholarship to Oxford. To Oxford, where only the most favoured and
> privileged sons could ever hope to go! Naturally, her parents would not
> countenance her actually going abroad to study - just when she was at
> the age to marry - everyone understood and agreed, and so the letter of
> acceptance from Oxford was locked in a steel cupboard in that flat on
> Marine Drive in Bombay, and whenever visitors came, it would be
> taken out and shown around with pride. (Desai, 2000: 69)

They were aware that when the suitors came, the scholarship would enhance Anamika's value. The parents decided it was time for her to marry, without consulting her about it. Since she was obedient as Uma, she did not question their decision. Consequently, she gave up the possibility of a career that could have been remarkable, because her desire to please her parents prevailed. When the groom was chosen, everyone was surprised by the air of superiority he gave away. He was her equal with regard to education and medals and he was very well aware of it. He was the only person impervious to Anamika's charm and even the children realised that she was stepping into a life that would not be at all wonderful.

> He was so much older than Anamika, so grim-faced and conscious
> of his own superiority to everyone else present: those very degrees and
> medals had made him insufferably proud and kept everyone at a distance.
> The children saw that straight away: there would be no bridegroom jokes
> played at his wedding, no little gifts and bribes from him to them. In fact,
> he barely noticed them; he barely seemed to notice Anamika. The children
> saw that too - that she was marrying the one person who was totally
> impervious to Anamika's beauty and grace and distinction. He was too
> occupied with maintaining his superiority.
>
> (Desai, 2000: 70)

However, despite those obvious signs, Anamika's parents did not react and a period of suffering for Anamika began. Shortly after, Anamika was reputed to have had a miscarriage. There was a rumour that she was beaten and suffered a miscarriage due to the beatings. Consequently, Anamika was no longer perfect, she had a flaw. Reportedly, her status in the husband's family deteriorated subsequently and nobody could see Anamika at any family gathering. While everyone inferred that she was in danger, her parents assured them she was absolutely safe and happy. "And Anamika - Anamika was with her husband and in-laws, they had not given her permission to come. 'They can't let her out of the first sight for even one day, they love her so much.' Lila Aunty assured them." (Desai, 2000: 89) After the miscarriage, Uma and Aruna expected Anamika to return home and considered it the right thing, whereas their mother criticised them in shock. To her mind, there is no bigger humiliation for a woman than

to be sent back to her parents. While Uma worried about Anamika, her mother expressed concerns about the public opinion. " 'You are so silly, Uma,' Mama snapped as she was waving. 'How can she be happy if she is sent home? What will people say? What will they think?' " (Desai, 2000: 71) This demonstrates the high level of snobbism that was mistaken for social etiquette. The fear of being labelled in one's community prevented people from protecting themselves and their loved ones. The custom to turn a blind eye was a common practice and it ruined lives of many women. The lack of protection from the legal system and lack of family support resulted in numerous women losing their lives as victims of violence in the family or as result of suicide. For fear of not becoming the cause of shame for their families, many young girls prefer to die rather than to be sent home. This social practice treats women as if they were goods that could be returned if found faulty. It makes their first months in the new family significantly difficult to handle. Besides getting acquainted with new people and the routine, they have to worry about each step they make so as not to be sent back home. Anamika could not establish a close bond with her husband since he was self-obsessed and did not have any genuine interest in her. He already had a bond he cared about, the one with his mother. They both jealously kept that relationship and treated Anamika as a complete outsider. Allegedly, it was his mother who hated and tormented Anamika but her son did nothing to stop her. "They were to find that this was how it was - it was the relationship central to his life, leaving room for no other. Anamika was simply an interloper; someone brought in because it was the custom and because she would by marrying him, enhance his superiority to other men. So they had to tolerate her." (Desai, 2000: 70) Rossenwasser marks women as outsiders "who have to be socialised and incorporated into the family matrix." (1989: 84) She opines that belief that joint family is an outdated concept in the modern times is just illusory since India society is "structurally oriented towards jointness, the innermost core of which is the father-son relationship." (1989: 84) One of the problems of the joint family is jealousy between women. When a bride comes into her new family, she often clashes with her mother-in-law. Both women defend their rights and territories, seeking attention from men in the household, since all the power is vested in them. Nevertheless, as Kishwar (1986) posits, the harassment by the mother and sisters of the husband is overly emphasised as they are the ones most in contact with the bride. She insists that they would not use

harassment as a "means of role subordination" if they did not have "tacit or explicit approval of the powerful male members of the family." (1986: 11) When the news of Anamika's suicide came, there was a rumour that she was actually killed by her husband and his mother. Although it was said she set fire to herself, neighbours claimed she was murdered. "What some of the neighbours said was that she herself possibly in collusion with her son dragged Anamika out on the veranda at that hour when it was still dark - possibly before four o'clock - and they had tied her up in a nylon sari, pored the kerosene over her and set her on fire." (Desai, 2000: 151) This outcome is an extreme scenario that may arise from conflicts in a family where young wives have no rights or protection. Marangdy George notes that the domestic domain is a site where "massive negotiations between often competeing ideological pressures are undertaken." (1996: 16) It is crucial to underline that had Anamika's parents taken her home after they heard the rumours about the beatings, she would have been alive. Not only did they deprive her of independent life and a career, they eventually contributed to her losing her life. Anamika was a victim of family abuse, both physical and psychological but she was also a victim of her first family's neglect. Upon hearing the tragic news, her parents accepted it and called it faith. It is not just shocking, but it is also appalling that they could lie to others and themselves in such a way and call their inactivity and carelessness faith. According to Kishwar (1986), this reaction from Anamika's parents is not unorthodox since, she claims, most parents would rather see their daughters dead than sent back home or divorced. Anamika's story is even more tragic because it was unjust and imposed on her by those who are supposed to love her the most. The choice of the husband having been her parents' choice was also their responsibility and thus their reaction to her death is completely outrageous. This demonstrates how intertwined the private and public domains in India are. Not just that all actions become public but people's decisions actually came to depend solely on the public opinion.

Conclusion

The novel provides many accounts of boasting or fearing social condemnation. It is especially attributed to the mothers of a house, who base their entire lives according to the parameters of social acceptability. Shoma Chatterji (1988) reminds us that the general response to wife-abuse is "blame the victim" or "she must deserve it" attitude, which are wide-spread all over the world, irrespective of the race or class or social status. Uma and Aruna's mother prides herself on bearing a son and claims that it gives her the right to walk with her head up since it is such a great honour. "More than ever now, she was Papa's helmet, his consort. He had not only made her his wife, he had made her the mother of his son. What honour, what status. Mama's chin lifted a little into the air, she looked around her to make sure everyone saw and noticed. She might have been wearing a medal." (Desai, 2000: 31) Also, she takes pleasure in accompanying her husband to social events and complains about it being a difficult job. Although she considers herself in charge of all the housework, she actually does almost nothing. It is Uma and the house help who do all the work.

> Uma flounces off, her grey hair frazzled, her myopic eyes glaring
> behind her spectacles, muttering under her breath. The parents,
> momentarily agitated upon their swing by the sudden invasion of ideas –
> sweets – settle back to their slow, rhythmic swinging. They look out upon
> the shimmering heat of the afternoons if the tray with tea, with sweets,
> with fritters will materialise and come swimming out of it - to their rescue.
> With increasing impatience, they swing and swing.
>
> (Desai, 2000: 5)

The food rituals are vital in their home and there are many descriptions of food being prepared and served in the novel. Depending on the occasion the choices of food vary. However, the choice of food is here also used as an indicator of a person's status. While the opulent food was prepared for the special occasions, such as visits from the potential suitors, the mother protested when similar food was put before cousin Rama. The way food is consumed also reveals the status of family members, as the father is the

only one who is given a bowl with water to wash his hands after a meal. "The finger bowl is placed before Papa. He dips his fingertips in and wipes them on the napkin. He is the only one in the family who is given a napkin and a finger bowl; they are emblems of his status." (Desai, 2000: 24) Even the mundane things such as food hide elaborate power hierarchies within an Indian family.

One of the most important events in an Indian family is undoubtedly the birth of a son. It is considered the biggest honour and only when they get a son, do men feel realised. Uma's father illustrates this phenomenon and his reaction to Arun's birth reveals his fascination with that idea. Even though it was a difficult, risky pregnancy she did not want, Uma's mother was forced to go through with it by her husband. Still hoping for a son, he insisted that she keeps the baby. "Mama was frantic to have it terminated. She had never been more ill, and would go through hellfire, she wept, just to stop the nausea that tormented her. But Papa set his jaws. They had two daughters, yes quite grown-up as anyone could see, but there was no son. Would any man give up the chance of a son?" (Desai, 2000: 16) After the months of moaning and complaining, Arun was born. The father's infatuation with him was so extreme that it was clear to girls that things would have to change. While Uma backed down and made space for the newborn, Aruna was determined to fight for what she wants. Nevertheless, it made them both feel as if they did not exist anymore. "Then he hurried his daughters away, almost before he had really looked at his son. In fact, he had looked away, as if that puny physical presence were irrelevant to the moment, and might even disappoint." (Desai, 2000: 17) The decision that the baby be born was made by the father even though it meant putting his wife at risk and through intense pain. It clearly indicates who decided on all the major issues, leaving the wife to tend to girls' 'irrelevant' lives. From that point on the father almost did not take any part in their lives, except when financial matters were at stake. Since she was given some power and authority, the mother decided to use them and eventually abused them. Her parenting method was not to allow anything she does not understand. Being very opinionated, she does not flinch from speaking her mind on various subjects, such as love. Her attitude shows she has no belief in love and considers marriage to be something of a business deal. "Was this love? Uma wondered disgustedly, was this romance? Then she sighed, knowing such concepts had never occurred to Mama: she did not read, and she did not go to the cinema. When her friends

or neighbours gossiped about a 'love marriage' they had heard of, she lifted her upper lip a little but, to convey her scorn. Love marriage indeed, she knew better." (Desai, 2000: 31) Furthermore, she is extremely wary of anything that resembles modern ideas and resents anything that comes from Christians or the church, as she sees them as potentially corruptive. Not having had an education herself, the mother sees no advantages to it and discourages the girls from it. Not only does she see education as a waste of time, but she is also worried it would instill the girls with 'modern ideas'. " 'I don't want to hear all these modern ideas. Is it what you learnt from the nuns at the convent?' She glared at Uma." (Desai, 2000: 71) Uma's mother is the best example of women who willingly accept and perpetuate inequality and gender discrimination. Firstly, she teaches her daughters that getting married is the only recipe for happiness and a decent life. Furthermore, she prevents Uma from creating a positive self-image and instead makes her into a submissive, weak person, without an identity. The biggest danger, however, is that she does not realise how detrimental her actions are. What is more, she even recollects the examples of inequality from her childhood and considers them funny. "Mama said, 'In my day, girls in the family were not given sweets, nuts, good things to eat. If something special had been bought in the market, like sweets or nuts, it was given to the boys in the family. But ours was not such an orthodox home that our mother and aunts did not lip us something on the sly.' She laughed, remembering that - sweets, sly." (Desai, 2000: 6) The attitudes of Indian society toward women's emancipation is mirrored by Uma's father reactions to doctor Dutt, who is a successful, unmarried woman. He considers her an odd nuisance and does not want her to exert any influence on Uma. However, he is used to putting on a face of tolerance and politeness when he must perform on social occasions, so he decides to tolerate her for the sake of her father's reputation. "He did not say anything - Dr Dutt's father had been the Chief Justice at one time, it was a distinguished family, and if the daughter was still unmarried at fifty, and a working woman as well, it was an aberration he had to tolerate. In fact, Papa was quite capable of putting on a progressive, Westernised front when called upon to do so - in public, not within his family, of course." (Desai, 2000: 141) He even admits that there are attitudes he shares in public and those he has to keep to himself since being aware of their extremely patriarchal nature and the fact that they would not be welcome in the higher, pro-Western circles. However, he still considers

himself modern enough and takes pride in accepting traditions such as cricket and abandoning vegetarian diet. Modernity of his attitudes can only be considered in terms of trivial practices but when it comes to essential values, he remains fundamentally patriarchal. Although he does not pay any attention to his daughters' education, he forces Arun to study abroad, in an attempt to live through him and that way achieve goals he himself could not. He prides himself in his education and the title of attorney, always reminding Arun how difficult it was to educate oneself in his time. He sees his son as an extension of himself, whereas he sees no such connection with his female offspring. "If one word could sum up Arun's childhood - or at least Uma's abiding impression of it - that word was 'education'. Although this was not what loomed large in the lives of his sisters - who were, after all, being raised for marriage, by Mama, competently enough, or at least as well as she could manage considering the material at hand." (Desai, 2000:118)

The analysis of three main female characters leads us to the conclusion that despite their different characters and approaches to life, all three of them are essentially victims. Although Anamika is the only actual casualty, Uma is made a prisoner in her own home. Her life is the one of death in life since her free will was taken away from her so long ago. She went through a range of different mental and emotional states and finally reached the one of complete numbness. She is patiently waiting for the death to give her peace. While she seems to be leading an absolutely perfect life, the one she has always dreamed of, Aruna is also miserable. Although she tells herself that she should be happy or that she is happy, her neurotic behaviour reveals her frustration. Aruna seems uncomfortable in her own skin and although she has always fought for herself, she failed to get to know her true self first. She played it safe, chose the richest, the best-looking husband and opted for a life from a magazine, but it becomes obvious that that the image of perfection does not bring her satisfaction. While Uma was subordinated to the point that she no longer had her own identity, Aruna, on the other hand, was so obsessed with getting what everybody else wanted that she lost her identity underway. At the end, both sisters are unhappy and foreigners to themselves and each other. Neither of them tried to build a close relationship with the other and eventually they lost a chance to grow through their relationship. Although they are undoubtedly the victims of their upbringing and indirectly of the entire society, they also missed opportunities to

make changes themselves and due to that they also carry some responsibility. What is more, they do not provoke only sympathy in readers, but also some level of criticism for not reacting. Although she is a fierce critic of patriarchy, such as, the one in cases of Uma and Anamika, Desai, however, shows that blind replication of Western models can also backfire. Aruna's life proves this point - she is a prototype of a girl in the western world, who knows how to achieve her goals and is inclined toward material stability in life. This kind of lifestyle gives rise to snobbism, self-obsession and identification with one's physical appearance. Frequently, a life with no obligations and too much free time leads to depression, which could also be associated wither behaviour. The illustrations of the three women's lives point out the confusion caused by the hybrid culture and values present in the Indian society. In the light of that, Desai tries to warn about the dangerous of both extremes and underlines that women must take responsibility for their own lives.

10. *CLEAR LIGHT OF DAY*

This novel is a compelling, melancholic story about love between siblings and the difficulties of living in a dysfunctional family. It reveals the long-lasting effects of a miserable childhood and neglect that are reflected in the psychological woes of the protagonists. It is also an account of choices and limitations women experienced in a traditional and old-fashioned community in India. Through characters of sisters, Bim and Tara, Desai explores the destinies of women who opted for fulfilling traditional gender roles and also of those women who tried to contravene the established patterns. Bim and Tara, being at the opposite poles when it comes to the definition of woman, exemplify rebellion and acceptance, respectively.

This Desai's piece is a typical postmodern form. Her storytelling becomes the place where past and present converge, creating memories that seem equally alive and convincing as the present-day events. Her plot consists of very little action, as her characters almost do not move from their homes. The only actions they undertake are psychological and emotional explorations they embark on, in search of their inner selves. On the surface, a monotonous plot is supported by powerful scenes of emotional pain and mental strain. Besides, the struggles they have with each other and other family members, Bim and Tara first of all have to deal with their own sense of guilt, shame and frustration.

The story begins with the account of a reunion between the sisters, which then takes the narration back into the past, in the time of their childhood. This transition is triggered by their talks and recollections brought about by their house's apparent timelessness. Despite the love the sisters share, their meetings have become very tense and tiring for both of them. Their life choices, being so irreconcilably different, seem to impose judgment on the other one. Although the closest of kin, they both perceive an insurmountable gap separating them spiritually. The emotional detachedness they feel toward each other makes them refer to the past, in search for answers. Bim and Tara are both determined to find the exact moment that made that void in their relationship. Once they find the answers and realise that the past makes them similar by giving them a context in common, they can progress from the emotional standstill they have both

reached. After finding the answers they were in need of, they move the narrative process into the present day, the time of comfort and redemption.

Their family is a perfect example of dysfunctionality in the light of parents' self-obsession and egoism. In their children's lives the parents are no more than a shadow of existence, a pair of shapes that are named mother and father. While from their mother they mostly get criticism and orders to be silent, what they receive from the father is his absence. "Their father's visits to their part of the house ceased, too. Once again he went through the day without addressing a word to them on his way out or into it. They knew him only as the master of the entrance and exit." (Desai, 2001: 53) Thus, very early in their lives, the children are met with lack, negation and subordination. They are very well aware of the hierarchy and of their positions in it. What gives their mother the biggest happiness is them behaving as if they did not exist, providing her with peace and quiet. When she started experiencing health problems, she became more moody and difficult to please. And when they welcomed the fourth sibling, Baba, they did not realise how drastically their lives were about to change. Although right after the birth Baba showed signs of poor health and made virtually no movement nor sound, only after some time did they stop believing in the possibility of his normal development. Although they were not informed on anything, children sensed that the daily routine in their house would have to change and that hard times were ahead. Unable to cope with Baba's condition and her own deteriorating health, their mother hired a distant-cousin, Mira-masi, to come live with them and take care of the children. The way she informed them about the news gave her intolerance away. " 'She is coming to look after you children,' their mother told them. 'You have become too much for me - you are all noisy and naughty. She will discipline you. And look after your brother, I don't know what is wrong with him - he should be walking by now and doing things for himself. She will keep him in her room and look after him. And you will have to learn to be quiet.' " (Desai, 2001: 104) When it comes to the father, he was a figure they saw at the door, entering or leaving home every day. They considered him a very important, serious person, taking care of all the work adults do, somebody they must not glance at, let alone speak to.

The childhood of Bim and Tara was coloured by the memories they shared with Mira-masi. She was the adult they could be close to, talk to, complain to and ask for

comfort. Although she was a complete stranger, Mira-masi very quickly earned their love. She was so loved by them that it seemed there was not enough of her to go around. She provided Bim with serious talks she needed and Tara with love and tenderness she thrived on. Only later did they realise how essential Mira-masi was in their lives, how much she gave, never asking for anything in return. In retrospection, Bim came to the conclusion that they gave no privacy to her, depriving her of all her spare time and occupying all her life with their innumerable requests. Mira-masi's significance is reflected by the fact that she is credited with making their childhood bearable.

However, despite the joy that Mira-masi brought to their home, all three siblings felt that there was something peculiar about their family, something dark and evasive that was suffocating them. They felt some daily dreariness that absorbed their youthful energy and produced misery. Gradually, they all developed the desire to escape - a neurotic yearning for some other world and some other life, where they could be themselves and free. All three of them devised plans of their own to flee and forget about that feeling of vacuity they were haunted by.

The analysis of the two female protagonists, Bim and Tara, is based on their desire to run away or forget, while later trying to face the ghosts from the past and move on with their lives, at least spiritually.

10.1. Analysis of Bim

Bim is a contradictory personality, distraught by the imbalance of her ambitions and actual achievements. Although she is a person with a very rich and complex inner world, her outward demeanour and daily routine leave the impression of a limited and melancholic existence. Even though she does maintain an independent life, she has to struggle to provide for herself and her mentally handicapped brother. Despite all of her efforts, she loses the battle with transience and degeneration as she has to witness the decaying of her house, estate and memories. The essence of her paradoxical character is revealed in the contradictory nature of her stands on one hand and her life choices on the other. Being the embodiment of an independent, self-sufficient female intellectual,

Bim could be taken for a feminist. Indeed, many of her actions and statements resonate with a feminist dialectic. By contrast, despite all of her seeming self-absorption and rigidness, Bim is the only sibling who actually makes a personal sacrifice for the benefit of another person. Although she might come across as dismissive and intolerant, Bim is, in fact, the one who is misunderstood and neglected.

Bim is not a typical female character of Desai's novels. As a matter of fact, she stands as a complete opposite of her prototype of emotionally and psychologically troubled women who live in the worlds devised by their own imagination instead in reality. As many scholars have noticed, Desai's female characters usually come from higher class backgrounds and face troubles of emotional kind rather than existential. In the absence of financial difficulties typical in lower caste families, there heroines deal with issues related to interpersonal relations or most commonly, explore their own spiritual existence. Unlike the protagonists who lead a sheltered life secured by their families or husbands, such as Maya in *Cry, the Peacock* or Nanda Kaul in *Fire on the Mountain*, Bim has little time to dwell on her psychological issues. She is the complete opposite of her sister, Tara, who perfectly fits Desai's pattern.

In her childhood Bim was a very clever and ambitious girl, whose capacities were proved at school, where she excelled in all subjects but also imposed herself as a leader. School was the place where she flourished and could be free of the strain of their miserable family life. She absorbed strength and energy from this place where she was loved and admired by all.

> At school Bim became different person - active, involved,
> purposeful. A born organiser, she was patrol leader of the Bluebirds
> when still a small pig-tailed junior, later of the Girl Guides, then
> captain of the netball team, class prefect, even - gloriously, in her
> final year at school – Head Girl. A bright, slapdash student, she spent
> little time at her studies but did almost as well as those dim, besplactacled
> daughters of frustrated failures who drove their children frantically,
> bitterly, to beat everyone else in the exams and to spend all their
> waking hours poring myopically over their schoolbooks.

(Desai, 2001: 122, 123)

As her confidence grew, so did her ambitions and passion toward history. Like her brother, Raja, Bim enjoyed books, and was an avid reader of historical texts. Owing to her insightfulness, Bim quickly realised their home was not a normal one, as there was always that strange sensation of some disaster about to strike. She and her siblings all started daydreaming about other lands and other life waiting to be found one day. They started spending their days in that peculiar state of anticipation and imagination, somewhere between dreams and reality. "They did not realise now that this unsatisfactoriness was not based only on their parents' continual absence, their seemingly total disinterest in their children, their absorption in each other. The secret, hopeless suffering of their mother was somehow at the root of this subdued greyness, this silent desperation that pervaded the house. Also the disappointment that Baba's very life and existence were to them, his hopeless future, their anxiety over them." (Desai, 2001: 130) Eventually, that day of change came for Tara and Raja, but Bim never saw her day coming. While Tara left with her husband, Bakul, to become his companion on his diplomatic journeys all over the world, Raja finally succeeded in obtaining his life - long dream - to become part of Hyder Ali's family and live a life similar to his own. While Tara was able to travel the world and meet people from various cultures and learn about history and politics first-hand, Bim could only fantasise on the basis of her readings. Although she spent her entire life in education, first as a student, then as a teacher and scholar, she never had a chance to acquire any practical knowledge or meet the world outside her own narrow circle. While Raja enjoyed the wealth he acquired though marriage and could realise himself in the role of a respectable businessman and member of society, Bim had to pay him the rent for the house they grew up in and once shared. While Tara and Raja got their opportunities to escape the collapse of their family life and home, Bim had to stay and witness it happening. What is more, she had to pick up the remaining pieces and glue them together in an attempt to give them meaning. While the two of them had to freedom the escape, Bim had the responsibility to stay.

All Bim's plans and ambitions were shattered when after the death of their father she realised she had to take on the role of the head of the household. Despite the fact that none of them felt emotional absence of their parents, they did feel the lack of financial stability, as the father was the only provider in the house. With his absence, the

siblings were faced with the struggles of the daily life, unpaid bills, running the business and the house mortgage. As the only healthy man in the house, Raja was supposed to replace his father as the provider for the family. However, due to his illness, he was first unable to perform his duties. Nevertheless, upon his recovery, Raja proved to be impossible to rely on due to his obsession with Hyder Ali and his family. His selfish infatuation and ambition led him to first neglect and then completely abandon his family. He showed no love nor compassion toward his sister Bim, who had to deal with the innumerable problems. Bim was left to deal with the sick Baba, old and prone to alcohol Mira-masi and duties related to the family business she knew nothing of. The stress she was undergoing made her realise that despite all of her education she was still almost incapable of living an independent life. Even though she had always yearned for independence, Bim concluded she knew nothing of the difficulties of the every-day life. For the first time, she was facing a harsh reality, the one that was lurking all that time behind that unpleasant sensation they had all felt. The disaster was there, the change came about, and it was Bim herself that would feel its consequences the most dramatically. One day she was a young girl planning her future, the next she was the head of the household, the provider and the one who brought all the major decisions, nursed Baba, Raja and Mira-masi and had to think about Tara's getting married.

Although Bim thought her role was only temporary, Raja never accepted his tasks and she just slipped into that other life where she was no longer the priority, where privacy and spare time were luxuries she could not afford. The new duties and unpredictable situations that needed her assistance prevented her from dedicating herself to her studies. Raja was deaf to her pleas, urging him to assist her and allow her to focus on her work. In addition, he even protested about the condition of the house, criticising Bim's housekeeping skills.

> 'Can't you do something about this house, Bim? It grows dirtier and
> shabbier every day - like the house of the dead. Are we all dead?
> Don't you care anymore? Don't you care about anything?' and paced
> up and down, glowering, and Bim refused to pay attention to such
> pretty complaints. But she knew it was not the dust or the untidiness
> of the place that was upsetting Raja, she knew he had begun to think

beyond his illness, beyond his body, to the outer world and was restless

to set out into it.

(Desai, 2001: 95)

His behaviour infuriated Bim and she could no longer recognise her brother, who she once shared all her secrets and interests with. In spite of all the books they read together and all the stories they told together and all the dreams they had together, Raja's blind greediness and extreme idealism made him impervious to his sister's needs. " 'Delhi is being destroyed. The whole country is split up and everyone's become a refugee. Our friends have been driven away, perhaps killed. And you ask me to worry about a few cheques and files in father's office.' " (Desai, 2001: 67) Bim's life became devoted to the care of her disabled brother and the aged Mira-masi. Being the only one who took care of them and the entire household, Bim soon came to see she was losing the battle with time that was bringing only more challenges and less support. Although Mira-masi had been the foundation of their childhoods, she became addicted to alcohol that soothed her health and mental problems. She became very difficult to be around to, resembling more a ghost than a person, carrying an aura of death and misfortune. She was seldom conscious, showing signs of delirium and hallucination. Bim interpreted her condition as a painful recollection of her wasted life, spent in serving others with receiving almost no gratitude or respect in return. Her extreme reactions, hallucinations and dreams reveal the injustice and maltreatment she was exposed to. Her death proves to be equally painful as was her life. Watching her fight with the demons from the past and awaiting the peace in death, Bim sees a different woman from the one she has known her entire life. Only at her deathbed does Bim see how limited and burdened Mira-masi's existence was. Bim comes to realise that Mira-masi was denied a chance to have a life of her own, to start a family or even have spare time for herself. After serving the family of her deceased fiancé, Mira-masi was sent to replace Bim and her siblings' mother. It was extremely painful for Bim to witness this woman, she saw as a mother, approaching death, which seemed a blessing to her. Besides compassion and sadness, what these emotional scenes awoke in Bim was guilt. All of them being absorbed in their own desires, dreams and visions of the future, paid no attention to the feelings of this woman, who let herself be consumed by their needs and demands.

> She becomes identified in her mind as well as Bim's and our,
>
> with the bridal cow, the quintessential mother for Indians, drowned
>
> in the well, tumbling down to the drink that nourishes and annihilates.
>
> Significantly, Bim, too, will be haunted by thoughts of drowning in
>
> the well when she finds herself inwardly chaffing at her role as
>
> the sustainer of the family. And in her own need for solitude, Bim
>
> will also come to recognise Aunt Mira's need. 'Perhaps that was what
>
> aunt Mira had needed...they had never allowed her to be alone, never
>
> stopped pursuing her…for a minute.'

<div align="right">(Juneja, 1987: 73)</div>

What she also felt was impatience and unease. Bim was aware of all the other problems waiting to be tackled and Mira-masi's condition seemed to be an obstacle, keeping her away from her life in the present. She was Bim's first experience with the unfairness of life and limitations on women, she would later come across herself.

The character of Mira-masi testifies about the cruel treatment of widows in Indian society. These women have no right to a second chance and are sentenced to a life of loneliness and miserable existence. It is a frequent case that they are treated as servants by the family of their deceased husband. Mira-masi is one of such unfortunate women who lose the right of the freedom of choice. After the death of her husband, while they were still children, Mira-masi was exploited and molested by his family. When her physical health began deteriorating, due to the harsh living conditions, Mira-masi became a burden to the family, which desperately sought a way to dispose of her. In the light of those circumstances, Mira-masi, a distant cousin of the children's mother, came to their family. Since she empathised with their loneliness and sense of alienation, they soon became inseparable and healed each other's wounds.

The character of Baba is the disturbance factor in the novel, the element which represents that final drop that makes their family life completely dysfunctional, making their mother renounce all her parental duties. He was the elephant in the room, the taboo of their home, the responsibility nobody wanted to take over. The only person who showed unconditional love to him and provided him with the care he needed was Mira-masi. However, after her death Baba somehow became Bim's responsibility. While Raja was occupied with his plans to enter higher circles of society and Tara was fantasising

about marriage and children, Bim was the only reasonable person Baba could rely on. Her days onward became strained with urging him to do some simple chores or just go out of the house. Bim invested great effort in trying to make him 'normal', but to no avail. Baba was impervious to change, as the time passed, he was the only constant in their lives, something they could always count on to stay exactly the same. He spent his days listening to the same record over and over again, in some kind of religious trance . His resilient irrationality and irritatingly identical daily routine were the most difficult challenges for Bim to overcome. In her efforts to tackle the problems one by one and maintain at least an impression of order and control, Bim reached an impasse she could not overcome - Baba. Baba was a mystery she could not identify, a problem she could not solve, a duty she could not tick of her list. There were only the options she had at her disposal - to accept him as he is, which meant a great deal of effort and patience or to abandon him completely, like her siblings did. The moment she decided to opt for the first option, Bim was perhaps not aware that she resigned her life, at least the life she dreamed of having.

The storyline that deals with the present day is centered on Tara's visit to her old home and her talks with Bim that make both sisters reconsider and reevaluate their past decisions. Reminiscing about their childhood and the turning point of their father's death, they are attempting to discover the sequence of events and decisions that has brought them to their current selves. Feelings of inadequacy, guilt and shame torment them both and lead to misunderstandings and tension between them. For Bim, Tara's visits represent the unpleasant time of lamenting over her destiny and the decision to take on the entire responsibility of Baba and the house on herself. What is more, bigger than the pain of that regret is the sadness of remembering that she was left alone, left behind by the two people she loved the most. Although Tara invests enormous effort to tread softly around Bim, her excessive kindness seems to additionally provoke Bim's moodiness. Tara's stories about the foreign lands she has been to and her detachedness from the problems of an average Indian together with her sheltered existence remind Bim of the weight of her sacrifice that confined her to what she dreaded the most - a spiritually limited existence. Bim cannot but feel judgmental towards Tara, who she considers incapable of living independently. In addition to feeling sorry for herself, Bim is also experiencing embarrassment for allowing herself to be so passive, house-bound

and eventually for losing the battle with transience.

'Oh, I never go anywhere. It must seem strange to you and Bakul
who have travelled so much - to come back and find people like
Baba and me who have never travelled at all. And if we still had
Mira-masi with us, wouldn't that complete the picture? This faded old
picture in its petrified frame?' (...) 'Mira-masi swinging secretly from
her brandy bottle. Baba winding up his gramophone. And Raja, if
Raja were here, playing Lord Byron on his death-bed, I, reading to him.
That is what you might have come back to, Tara. How would you
have liked that?'

(Desai, 2001: 5)

Their memories depict the nature of the relationship the sisters had growing up and reveal the always present sense of alienation between them. The true nature of their characters could be seen in their attitudes towards school, games they played and each other in their childhood. While Bim enjoyed spending time with Raja, who she could relate to, she paid almost no real attention to Tara. Bim thought her little sister was silly and too girlish, only worrying about her hair and looks. While it was true that Bim was the smart one, it was also quite obvious that Tara was the pretty one. Although Bim always thought of herself as intelligent and brave, Tara saw her as cruel. She suffered for being left out, mocked and laughed at by Bim and Raja. On one occasion, when Bim and Raja were amidst their fantasising about the prosperous future they would be leading one day, they gave a chance to Tara to say what she would like to become. While their dreams included grand intellectual accomplishments, Tara's wish was simply to become a mother. Her honest, deepest desire was met with their disgust and rejection. It was one of the most painful childhood events Tara remembers, but at the same time the proof that children are aware of their earnest desires better than the adults are later in life, when they have to compromise. Their desires and interests demonstrate the extent to which the sisters differ and anticipate the roles they would later most probably have taken, the one of a wife and a mother and the one of a career woman. However, in the light of the unpredictable life circumstances, Bim was forced to change her plans and become a career-woman, but a caregiver as well.

It could be debated that Bim's life is not entirely wasted and that she is not underaccomplished, since she does hold a university degree and has a job she really enjoys. Nevertheless, her ambitions were much bigger than simply being educated and employed. She is a passionate historian, in love with her field of study, and could have undoubtedly achieved success of wider proportions. Furthermore, her dissatisfaction with her life is not based only on her work and academic life, but also on her social life, her spare time and her home. One of the strongest traits of her character is her restless spirit and hunger for knowledge and new experiences, the yearning she could not satisfy in the confines of her home. Similarly to Raja, she has dreamt of faraway lands and freedom, she has never been able to experience. What is more, although caregiving is thought to be a duty of every woman, be it the care of her children, aged parents or ailing relatives, it is something commonly associated with women. Since women are the childbearers and the one involved in the care of the newborn in the first couple of months, qualities such as compassion, understanding and care have been brought into relation with women. Hence, this is why women have been judged adequate for professions such as teaching or nursing. However, Bim was not a typical female, never imagining her wedding or having children. While, caretaking could easily be associated with Tara, who did express such yearning, it simply seemed at odds with Bim's character. In a discussion with Tara, Bim wondered why women wanted to marry so young and did so without first completing their education. She thought that independence was essential in every woman's life and that there were plenty of other things one could oneself devote to except marriage. Eventually, Tara got her opportunity to become a mother and realise herself in the role she had always seen fit and it was Bim who enabled her to. In order for Tara to become a wife and a mother, and Raja to marry Hyder Ali's daughter and become a successful businessman, Bim had not only to sacrifice her role of freedom and independence but also to take on two roles she has never wanted to perform, the one of the head of the household and the one of a caregiver. " 'That, and the rent to be paid on the house, and five, six, seven people to be fed every day, and Tara to be married off, and Baba to be taken care of for the rest of his life, and you to be got well again - and I don't know what else.' " (Desai, 2001: 67)

Bim's attitude towards marriage is seen in her relationships with others but also in her behaviour towards doctor Biswass and his advances. Although he seemed like an

honest, decent man, genuinely interested in her, Bim was completely blind to his efforts. Despite the fact that at that time she was going through a particularly painful and stressful time, taking care of two sick people, Bim showed no weakness. She tried to remain reserved towards him, in spite of his attempts to help her. Even though it could have been easy for her to accept his offer of marriage and be the first one to escape from the sinking ship, Bim decided to stay. It should be a subject of further analysis whether she decided to stay out of love and care for her family or simply because she did not have feelings toward him. I argue the position that her decision was based on both reasons equally. On one hand, it was a selfless decision she brought due to firm moral beliefs, not just love of her siblings. After all, Bim is a deeply rational character. The resilience of her ethics and strength make her into some kind of a martyr, prepared to bear the sacrifice for the sake of her beliefs and justice. On the other hand, it was general disinterest in marriage and also the absence of emotional connection with doctor Biswass. In addition, it was also the desire to oppose and contradict his impression of her and his interpretation of her family situation. Despite his remarks that her family are using her and that she is a victim of their selfishness and self-absorption, Bim refused to believe his version. Only later was she to realise that he was right. Her pride came in the way of judgment and cost her an opportunity to become the woman she always wanted to become.

> 'Now I understand why you do not wish to marry. You have dedicated
> your life to others - to your sick brother and your aged aunt and your
> little brother who will be dependent on you all his life. You have
> sacrificed your own life for them.' (...) She even hissed slightly in her rage
> and frustration – at being so misunderstood, so totally misread, then gulped
> a little with laughter at such grotesque misunderstanding, and her tangled
> emotions twisted her face and shook her, shook the thought of Biswas out
> of her. Later, she never acknowledged, even to herself, that this ridiculous
> scene had ever taken place.
>
> (Desai, 2001: 97)

Although Bim appears to be morally impeccable, the only victim of the three of them and the only dissatisfied one, her decision to define herself in that light needs more

elaborate consideration. Firstly, the decision was only hers, it was not forced upon her by some higher authority. Neither of her siblings was in the position to impose this responsibility on her. Although neither of them took part in the care of Baba, they also did not explicitly make her accept it. Even though leaving Baba and the house behind would seem as a completely egoistical and immoral act, it was exactly what Tara and Raja did, so why was Bim not able to? Who was holding her back? What was holding her back? It was her own vision of moral and decency that prevented her from following their actions. Hence, besides the life circumstances, it was Bim's own psychological and moral stands that did not allow her to live the life she had imagined. It could be concluded that the accomplishments of one's dreams requires not just will and determination but also a portion of inconsideration for others. Nevertheless, at times Bim seems to be enjoying her misfortune as it gives her right to moral superiority and labels her as the victim or the martyr. Whenever she regrets wasting the opportunity to do something, to be somewhere else, she can find comfort in the fact that she was the only one who stayed. However, her desire to be always right, to be in control and to do the right thing is what prevented her from following her dreams.

Alongside her regrets for not realising her full potentials and obtaining the free existence she desperately needed, Bim is troubled with the resentment she feels for Raja. In spite of the fact that Tara also left her for the sake of her own happiness, Bim shows no obvious resentment towards her. What she feels is more embarrassment for being forced to reveal her weaknesses, and shortcomings to her. Bim feels she has lost the battle with the forces of time and nature and that the results of that battle are obvious in the condition of their family home and Baba's unimproved condition. However, what she feels and openly shows for Raja is sheer, undiluted anger. While Bim has always thought Tara was the little, weak sister that should be taken care of, she, on the other hand expected Raja to take care of them all, or if nothing else, then to at least help her in doing so. Bim's decision to let Tara marry Bakul was also a rational one. She thought Bakul would take over the care of Tara, leaving her with less to think of herself. In a way, Bim never considered Tara capable enough or reliable enough to be counted on. Again, her decision to allow this marriage is two-fold. While it can be interpreted as a gracious gesture, it also might be seen as helping herself. Nevertheless, speaking of Raja, Bim expected much more. Not only did she feel betrayed and discarded, she also

felt humiliated. Namely, the biggest cause of Bim's rage and her decision not to talk with Raja ever again is his letter, in which he promises not to increase the rent of their home, since he became its new owner. What hurt Bim the most was not the fact that he asked for money, without thinking how she would manage to earn it, it was also not the fact that the house had been his home once and that sick Baba was also his brother, it was the fact that he gave their relationship a definition of a landlord-tenant rapport.

'Whenever I begin to wish to see Raja again or wish he would
come and see us, then I take out that letter and read that again. Oh,
I can tell you, I could write him such an answer, he wouldn't forget it
many years either!' She gave a short laugh and ended it with a kind of
choke, saying 'You should come to Hyderabad with you for his daughter's
wedding. How can I? How can I enter his house - my landlord's house?
I, such a poor tenant? Because of me, he can't raise the rent or sell the
house and make a profit - imagine that. The sacrifice.'

(Desai, 2001: 28)

His actions were a way of demonstrating his superiority, of claiming his success, a way of renouncing their blood bond. Bim's hatred of Raja can also be interpreted as both jealousy and envy since Raja was the one Bim identified with and whose success was appealing to her. Since she had never aspired to become a wife or a mother, Bim was not jealous of Tara's life, but Raja's social status and freedom of financial woes were tempting to her. In addition, Bim was also jealous because she was deprived of Raja's love. Before his love for his wife, Bim was the one who received the most of Raja's attention. Her emotional state is similar to that of a discarded wife, or a mistress left behind. Moreover, it should be taken into consideration that Bim never established a more intimate relationship in her life than the one she had had with Raja. He was the only person she both loved and admired.

Although Bim saw that his ambitions were the priority much earlier, she now had solid, written proof of his ruthlessness and self-content. His decision to favour Hyder-Ali's family over his own reveals his deep insecurities and the desire to distance himself from his origin. Raja's admiration of Hyder Ali acquired proportions of worship

as he ascribed him almost godlike characteristics. According to Bim, his ambitions even extended on to his children: " 'Hyder Ali Sahib was hid ideal and it's the ideal he's still pursuing, poor Raja. To gratify his own boyhood desire, he now forces children to fulfill their own ungratified desires?' " (Desai, 2001: 146) His respect of him became complete identification with Hyder Ali's values and attitudes. This infatuation was first rooted in his love of books and poetry, and gradually it encompassed everything related to Hyder Ali in any way, including his daughter and his religion. It should be noted that the family of Hyder Ali was not different just in terms of their material wealth and social status, but was also of another religious affiliation. After India obtained its independence, it still was not a region of peace and equality. Instead of the violence they were imposed on from outside, the people of India became exposed to the violence they themselves created from within. India was hit by communal riots between Hindus and Muslims, which were, according to scholars, sparked by the partition of India into a Muslim Pakistan. Thus, Raja's devotion to Hyder Ali did not have only emotional but also political repercussions. It also caused him to reconsider his upbringing, his values and religion. In order to gain Hyder Ali's acceptance, he so longed for, Raja had to renounce his beliefs, his roots and his family altogether. However, Bim who did not pay attention to the transformation he had undergone. She did not realise that she had lost her brother long before he actually went. The moment he wished to become somebody else was the moment he alienated himself from his family, that is, Bim.

10.2. Elements of Postcolonialism

Raja's character is an excellent example of a phenomenon common in Indian culture, due its subdued position of a colony - cultural hybridisation. Namely, a vast number of Indians indentified themselves with the coloniser and their culture in order to be accepted or so as to become successful. Abandoning and erasing their cultural heritage, they would embrace the oppressor's culture for the sake of their goals. Some of them, however, truly believed in the inborn superiority and enlightenment of the British. By the same token, they considered themselves inferior and unworthy unless

they underwent a transformation. This desire for the cultural transformation gave birth to unusual forms - in language, art and in life - hybrids. Although Raja did not identify with the colonisers, he did want to transform himself culturally and he did discard his previous beliefs and tradition. Furthermore, his motifs are the same - ambition and absence of self-esteem. To my mind, Raja's way of addressing Bim in his letter brings to mind the coloniser-colonised relationship. Firstly, Bim is expected to pay him for the house, although he is trying to come across as the noble benefactor for not raising the rent. Secondly, his style emphasises his superior position of the (land)lord, the one with the power and the one she depends on. Similarly to the coloniser, Raja is trying to establish control from a distance, without any care or knowledge what is happening inside "his" house and with his "tenants". The only thing he is interested in is to make profit from them and to do so from a safe distance. However, what is especially infuriating to Bim is his pretension, his artificial politeness. He, after all, does not want to come across as a villain as keeping a good opinion of himself has always been his primary concern. What Raja wants is to behave as a villain but to be considered noble and dignified. Juneja (1987) discusses Desai as a writer of postcolonialism, "Anita Desai's position as a postcolonial writer, then, is clear: she has opted to remain within history, despite its ravages and cruelties. She has shown in novel after novel her moral disapproval of a stance that refuses to shoulder responsibility for the past and present and chooses to withdraw from a painful present reality into a romantic or mythicised past." (1987: 76) Desai cannot evade being identified within the postcolonial framework since in the core of her interest are females defined as direct or consequential victims of the struggle between the traditional patriarchy and Western modernity, left as a remnant of colonialism. Her characters have to overcome their double otherness - their femaleness and their non-whiteness. Judging themselves and being judged according to a double set of standards, the conservative one of their surroundings and their internal ones, seeking other types of fulfillment than just marriage or motherhood. In *The Location of Culture* Homi Bhabha elaborates on the peculiarities of identity construction in works of postcolonial literature: "In the postcolonial text the problem of identity returns as a persistent questioning of the frame, the space of representation, where the image - missing person, invisible eye, Oriental stereotype - is confronted with its difference, its Other." (2003: 46) Bhabha makes an interesting comparison between

Kristeva's idea of 'demassification of difference' and Fanon's 'occult instability' by arguing that their perspectives represent attempts at "redefining the symbolic process through which the social imaginary - nation, culture or community - becomes the subject of discourse, and the object of psychic identification." (2003: 153) Bhabha reveals another common feature of postcolonial and feminist criticism and that is the fact that they have devised their own temporalities with which they challenge history and its notions of past and present. "These feminist and postcolonial temporalities force us to rethink the sign of history within those languages, political or literary, which designate the people 'as one'. They challenge us to think the question of community and communication without the moment of transcendence: how do we understand such forms of social contradiction?" (Bhabha, 2003: 153)

10.3. Elements of Feminism

Speaking of feminism, Bim's character fits the feminist pattern in many aspects. First, her desire for independence and professional ambition are usually associated with feminism, especially in traditional societies, where female independence was not common or desirable. Furthermore, he desire to maintain a free existence could not be achieved through a union such as marriage and she therefore longed for no such constraints. On top of that, even her physical appearance and casual behaviour untypical of women in India are reminiscent of feminist rebellion. Bim paid no attention to her hair growing grey at an young age and was never interested in clothes or looks altogether. She even took pride in the fact that her hair was already grey since, according to her, it suggested seriousness of character.

> He sucked at his cigarette, regarding her, his eyes openly admiring
> her. Suddenly he took the cigarette from his lips and exclaimed. 'Bim,
> why do you have grey hair already? You're much too young for that!'
> 'Yes,' she said flatly, even a little proudly, perhaps. 'It's grey. I didn't

know.' (...) 'I'm the head of the family now, am I? You think so, so I must be.'

<div align="right">(Desai, 2001: 80)</div>

Although she was generally dissatisfied and lonely, Bim acquired a special kind of aura around her, the one of strength and endurance. Her life circumstances and challenges gave her suffering but also rewarded her with the spiritual strength and confidence only rare people could pride themselves on. Her inner self even gave power and importance to her physical appearance. For the first time, Tara found Bim attractive. Bim was respected and looked upon in all circles of their community. She smoked, talked freely and directly, walked and sat like a man. Tara noticed that her sister enjoyed a special status and was not judged like a woman would be, but was feared like a man.

> Tara was pricked with the realisation that although it was her
> who was the pretty sister, had always been, so that in their youth
> the young men had come flocking about her like inquisitive, hopeful,
> sanguine bees in search of some nectar that they sniffed in the air, it
> was Bim who was attractive. Bim, who when young, had been too
> tall and square - shouldered to be thought pretty, now that she was
> grey - and a good deal grey, observed Tara - had arrived at an age when
> she could be called handsome. All the men seem to acknowledge this and to
> respond. (...) Tara did not smoke and no one offered her a light. Or it   was
> just that Tara, having married, had rescinded the right, while Bim,
> who had not married, had not rescinded?

<div align="right">(Desai, 2001: 36)</div>

When it comes to clothing, Bim once dressed as a boy and played in her brother's clothes in secret, feeling that she was committing a crime of sorts. Nonetheless, she relished in the freedom of motion and the sense of empowerment it gave her. For the first time she had a glimpse of what it was like to be male. Although it was only clothes, Bim saw it as far more - as a symbol of freedom and power.

> Now they thrust their hands into their pockets and felt even
>
> more superior - what a sense of possession, of confidence it gave one
>
> to have pockets, to shove ones fists into them, as if in simply owning
>
> pockets one owned riches, owned independence. If she had pockets, if
>
> she had cigarettes, then it was only natural to swagger, to feel rich, and
>
> superior and powerful. Crowing with delight, she flashed a look at Tara to
>
> see if she shared her exhilaration and whispered 'Let's go out for a walk,
>
> Tara.'

(Desai, 2001: 132)

Owing to her harsh life and sacrifice, Bim became a sort of a sexless being, neither a man, nor a woman, but simply Bim. Despite the sacrifice she had to bear, she actually decided to bear, it appears that Bim did acquire at least a portion of the freedom she yearned to have. It was not a freedom acquired from running away, but the freedom obtained from deciding to stay - the freedom earned by the act of sacrifice itself.

Bim also comments on the changes that have occurred in India in the recent times. She speaks about the lifestyle and needs of 'modern' women and believes that they need time and space reserved for themselves only, secluded from the demands of their families.

> 'Women like change, you know', said Bim. 'The wives wanted the
>
> new life, they wanted to be modern women. I think they wanted to
>
> move into their own separate homes in New Delhi, and cut their hair
>
> short and give card parties, or open boutiques or learn modelling. They
>
> can't stand our sort of Old Delhi life - the way that the Misras vegetate here
>
> in the bosom of the family. So they spend as much time as they can away.'

(Desai, 2001: 151)

Besides her love of history, Bim is passionate about teaching and uses it to convey not just the knowledge of history but also the practical knowledge of life. She is fond of her female students, who she strongly encourages to obtain independence and rely on themselves. Bim enjoys her role of the experienced, wise counsellor of the young. Nonetheless, it is precisely this role of hers that makes her feel unaccomplished and

embarrassed each time she realises that all her effort was not enough and that she cannot prevent the decay of their home and cannot advance from the status quo. The source of her desperation is her realisation that she is not enough, that that she could never be enough simply because, as a woman, she is inevitably restrained and burdened. She places the blame for this on her family and the whole society that shapes and educates women in a manner that they remain incapable to live independently but are, paradoxically, often forced to do so. An unfortunate turn of events renders Bim not just the sole responsible for her life but also responsible for the lives of her siblings. Thus, in order to prepare other women for the reality of life in a harsh world, Bim tries to raise the awareness of girls she was teaching.

> 'Because one's parents never considered the future, never made
> provisions for it, one is left to feel a fool - to make a fool of oneself,'
> she stormed on. 'Why must I appeal to Bakul, to Raja for help? Yet that
> is what I am doing, going down on my knees to them. How my students
> would laugh at me. I'm always trying to teach them, train them to be
> different from what we were at their age - to be a different kind of
> woman from you or me - and if they knew how badly handicapped I
> still am, how I myself haven't been able to manage on my own - they'd
> laugh, wouldn't they? They'd despise me.'
>
> (Desai, 2001: 155)

Bim's love of and compassion towards women is apparent in the attitude she has toward Misra sisters. Although she does show understanding for the unfortune they underwent and the embarrassment they face, Bim criticises their desperation and opinion that there is no meaning to life outside marriage. Misra sisters, having been sent back home by their husbands, brought embarrassment to their families and had nothing to hope for in life but to age lonely. However, besides their struggle with being thrown away, they became the sole providers for their families, cursed with two spendthrift brothers. While they had to earn them a living, doing jobs they did not enjoy, their brothers showed no support or interest related to family matters. However, besides their overall shameful and meaningless existence, the brothers still exercised power over them. Furthermore, Misra sisters, although background characters, serve as another counterpoint for Bim. It

is interesting that they lead rather similar lives to Bim, living in the same community and providing for their families by teaching. Nevertheless, what renders them so different is their attitude toward their life circumstances and the vision of what a happy existence should entail. While Bim longs for more freedom and career progress, Misra sisters remain deeply obsessed with marriage. Their obsession with their misfortune is reflected in their comments on the importance of an early marriage. Despite the education they received, they still hold that girls should marry at sixteen or seventeen. Compared with their stands, Bim comes across as even more extreme in her modern views on womanhood. " 'They are only sixteen and seventeen,' she said plaintively. 'Time to marry - better to marry - time, time,' they cried and Tara rubbed her mosquito-bitten toe in the grass in pained embarrassment, and Bim, overhearing them, lifted her eyebrows in horror and turned to Mulk, the younger brother who was silent, for sympathy." (Desai, 2001: 37)

One of the painful topics for Bim is motherhood. Although she does not mention any desire to have children, she also never renounces it in the way she renounces marriage. Despite the fact that she does not have children, Bim does play a role of a caregiver, and not just to Baba, but also in relation to Raja and Tara. "Through Bim, Desi is able to affirm nurturing as an essential feminine attribute while simultaneously freeing the feminine role from stereotypical associations of dependence, weakness and passivity." (Juneja, 1987: 85) However, she believes that others judge her decision or feel sorry for her, including Tara. It is one of the issues that create an emotional impasse between the sisters. In addition, Bim gives her love and devotion to her animals and claims that their relationship is like the one of parents and children.

> 'I know what you are thinking', she sad. 'You're thinking how old
> spinsters go ga-ga over their pets because they haven't children.
> Children are the real thing.' (...) 'You think animals take place of babies
> for us love-starved spinsters,' Bim said with a certain satisfaction and
> lowered the rumpled cat to the gravel to walk as they came up to the house.
> 'But you're wrong,' she said, striding across the sun-slashed drive. 'You
> can't possibly feel for them what I do about these wretched animals of mine.'

> (Desai, 2001: 7)

It is worth mentioning that the role of a mother has a different status in India from that in the West. In India motherhood is considered to be sublime, a god-like power of creating life. The elevated nature of motherhood is illustrated in Indian traditional literature, myths and epics. "In Hindu faith 'mother' is regarded as divine. God is said to be like a good mother. Mother is celebrated as a source of all, the beginning of all belongings." (Pandey, 2010: 117) However, Pandey (2010) underscores that Indian society is very rigid when it comes to the rules of motherhood. While a child is regarded as a blessing, it is so only within the framework of marriage. On the other hand, the society is cruel and unforgiving to unmarried mothers. Moreover, according to Pandey (2010), Indian soceity also denies support and understanding to women who fail to fulfill their roles of mothers: "Thus bareness is as terrible a curse for married woman as premarital pregnancy for an unmarried one." (Pandey, 2010: 102)

It was already mentioned that Bim differs to a great extent from other characters in Desai's novels. She is based on the model of female characters in novels by Western authors. She achieves independence, economically and in terms of thought and behaviour. Unlike most Desai's female protagonists, Bim's struggle does not stem from her problems with herself, but from the existential difficulties in the real world. Although she regrets not having the opportunity to feel the freedom of a different life, a life in a different place, she manages to secure existence for herself and her disabled brother by the ongoing battle with the world and with herself. She exists in a specific time dimension, a place between then, now and what could have been. She has to say goodbye to who she once was, who she could have been and go through today by collecting the pieces of those two.

10.4. Analysis of Tara

Tara is the embodiment of what a feminine woman is thought to be like, starting from her appearance, attitudes and goals in life. She has been the outcast of the family, the little one nobody took seriously. Although she was mocked by her older siblings, Tara's general fragility provoked in people a desire to provide her with safety and comfort. Even though her relationship with Bim has always been a strained one, during her visit they both learn about the other what they have never noticed before. Despite the fact that Tara had the opportunity to escape and live the life she dreamt of, she reveals herself not to be as satisfied at it might be expected. As the novel progresses, the reader realises that Tara is troubled with the feeling of guilt for abandoning her sister and brother.

From the beginning of her visit it is obvious that Tara finds the unaltered state of their family home and Baba's behaviour extremely unpleasant and frustrating. The general havoc she comes across, intensified by Baba's helplessness make her lose her temper with him in an outburst of emotions. Her urge to bring about some change and redeem herself also reveals the insurmountable gap between the lifestyle of her new family and that of her old one, that is, Bim and Baba. She admits that her husband and daughters have trained her to cherish order and strive for improvement and perfection.

> She hated her probing, her questioning with which she was
> punishing him. Punishing him for what? For his birth - and for what
> he was not responsible. Yet it was wrong to leave things as they
> were – Bakul would say so, and her girls, too. It was all quite lunatic.
> Yet there was no alternative, no solution. Surely they would see there
> was none.
>
> (Desai, 2001: 14)

Bakul wanted Tara to have always a full agenda and go through the day by fulfilling her obligations. As she observes Bim and Baba's routine, their reactions and criticism come to her mind. This makes her feel fortunate and blessed that she had the chance to distance herself. On the other hand, only now does she completely acknowledge the fact

that she let her sister down and denied her a chance to experience freedom. Childhood recollections remind Tara how she once thought Brim was ruthless and selfish. She remembers how Bim lured her into cutting off her long, luxuriant hair, leaving her looking almost like a boy. Tara's misery had no cure and she thought she would never forgive Bim her actions. She regretted her gullibility and believed Bim was jealous of her looks. "Tara was sure she would never forgive Bim her cruelty. Bim's big-sisterliness would always be linked with that ruthless and cynical chopping of her long hair, Tara felt." (Desai, 2001: 111) However, seeing Bim now struggle with keeping the smallest amount of order and seeing her proudly bearing her sacrifice, Tara was sorry for her and ashamed of herself. As she was trying to understand herself for the first time, she also tried to observe her sister objectively. She was no longer the older sister, the superior one, the one who was always in control. For the first time Tara noticed Bim's weakness, her fragility and her imperfections.

> She had always thought Bim so competent, so capable. Everyone
> had thought that - Aunt Mira, the teachers at school, even Raja. But
> Bim seemed to stampede through the house like a disheveled storm,
> creating more havoc than order. Tara would be ashamed to run a house
> like this. Bakul would have been horrified as she did. Then how had
> Bim acquired her fine reputation? Or had her old capability, her old
> competence begun to crumble now and go to seed? Tara saw how little
> she had really observed - either as a child or as a grown woman. She had
> seen Bim through the lenses of her own self, as she had wanted to see her.
> And now, when she tried to be objective, when shewas old enough, grown
> enough and removed enough to study her objectively, she found
> she could not - her vision was strew, obscured ad screened by too
> much of the past.
>
> (Desai, 2001: 148)

Tara's feminine side was quite apparent since her childhood and it was made her so foreign to Bim. Their relationship was one of misunderstandings and misinterpreted reactions. While Tara desperately tried to earn Bim's attention and approval, Bim was obsessed with earning Raja's. Nevertheless, although Bim saw nothing in common between them, she never lost out of sight the fact that Tara was her closest family.

Furthermore, it did not occur to Bim once that Tara was to blame for her choice. While she was enraged with Raja, she harboured no negative feelings toward Tara. The biggest difference between them, however, is their orientation in life, not their character traits. While Bim regrets not having more freedom and professional opportunities, Tara saw no other meaning to life but family. " 'Why?' repeated Bim indignantly. 'Why, because they might find marriage isn't enough to last them the whole of their lives,' she said darkly, mysteriously. 'What else could there be?' countered Tara." (Desai, 2001: 106) According to Juneja (1987), Tara secretly empathises with the Misra girls because they share the common lack of education and career ambitions. She argues that for Tara marriage is a necessary rite to adulthood. Furthermore, Juneja opines that marriage is crucial for Tara's identity construction: "Where self-definition and self-direction are lacking, marriage alone can confer identity and impose direction to life." (1987: 73) The only role in which Tara sought fulfillment was motherhood. She has never been interested in having a career, which was not a surprise since studying and the social life in school proved to be a complete nightmare for her.

> To Bim, school and its teachers and lessons were a challenge to
> her natural intelligence and mental curiosity that she was glad to meet.
> Tara, on the other hand, wilted when confronted by a challenge, shrank
> back into a knot of horrified stupor and tended to gaze dully at the teachers
> when asked a question, making them wonder if she were not somewhere
> retarded (in the staff room, over tea, they said "There is a brother, I've
> heard, who is..." and tapped their heads significantly.) (...) Bim, observing
> her out of the corner of her eye while she played a wild impromptu
> game of basketball with the bigger girls, carefully avoided having
> anything to do with her antisocial misery: it was contagious.

(Desai, 2001: 123, 125)

Furthermore, Tara's femininity is noticeable also in her attitude towards men. She holds her husband in deep respect and compliments him with her humble admiration and docile agreement with every decision or comment he makes. We learn from Bakul that it is this trait of Tara's that captured him and kept him content in marriage. Namely, she

provided him with the superiority and righteousness he craved for. "So he sat down again beside Tara and picked up her hand and squeezed lightly. To Tara he could speak in a different tone. From Tara he got a different response. He smiled at her fondly, like an indulgent father. She smiled gratefully - she had not an indulgent father, after all." (Desai, 2001: 71) When he looks at Bim, he feels the respect he also felt for her all those years ago, when she was a young girl fighting life courageously. He finds in her the qualities Tara never had, and he never managed to instill in her, the qualities that he saw fit for a wife of his to have. He admires her rationality, courage and level-headedness, characters he has always found respectable. On the other hand, he finds her too confident, too outspoken for a woman. The qualities he respects in her also render him insecure by challenging his deeply-ingrained convictions. Talks with Bim make Bakul cherish Tara's simplicity and meekness more. Once again, he feels safe and nurtured in the warmth of her unquestionable affection.

> He wondered, placing one leg over the other reflectively, as he had
> sometimes wondered when he had just entered the foreign service and was
> in a position to look around for a suitable wife, if Bim were not, for all her
> plainness and brusqueness, the superior of the two sisters, if she had not
> those qualities - decision, firmness, resolve - that he admired and tried to
> instill in his wife who lacked them so deplorably. If only Bim had not that
> rather coarse laugh and way of sitting with her lags up...now Tara would
> never...and if her nose were not so large unlike Tara's which was small...
> and Tara was gentler, more tender...He sighed a bit, shifting his bottom on
> the broken rattan seat of the chair. Things were as they were and had to be
> made the most of, he always said.
>
> (Desai, 2001: 19)

Tara's married life is complex and cannot be labelled as either happy or unhappy. Although it is the only life she could have imagined and it saved her from witnessing the collapse of what once was her family, Tara is subjected to subordination and disrespect in her marriage. First of all, her husband is a rigid man who believes in conservative family roles, which involves a strict division of labour and power. Bakul considered himself a saviour who enabled Tara to escape the suffocating atmosphere of

her family home and lead a cosmopolitan lifestyle. Therefore, he expected her to show appreciation of him and his gesture. Although he chose her for her humble nature he could easily control, Bakul wanted to have a wife he could boast with, a wife worthy of him. Thus, trained Tara in discipline, etiquette and taught her to keep herself always occupied. The list of obligations she had to dedicate her attention to never gave Tara spare time to think about her life. "And gradually he had trained her and made her into an active, organised woman who looked up her engagement book every morning, made plans and programs for the day ahead and then walked her way through them to retire to her room at night, tired with the triumphant tiredness of the virtuous and the dutiful." (Desai, 2001: 21) Only when she comes to her old home, does she have an opportunity to reconsider her actions and get in touch with herself. Once her memories emerge, Tara experiences guilt and but also doubt about choice. Her husband noticed the change in her behaviour and reacted by trying to distance her away from her family once again. While he did not want Tara to think too much about her life, about their life, he again used the argument that her family affects her negatively. " 'And you won't let me help you. I thought I had taught you a different life, a different way of living, taught you to execute your will. Be strong. Face challenges. Be decisive. But no, the day you enter your old home, you are as weak-willed and helpless and defeatist as ever.' " (Desai, 2001: 17) Once she confronts him, refusing to accompany him to a gathering, Bakul fiercely criticises her change and directly reminds her of who is in charge. " 'Of course you will come,' Bakul said quite sharply, going towards the bathroom with an immense towel he had picked up. 'There's no question about that.' (Desai, 2001: 11) It is evident that Tara is afraid of Bakul and not of just him, but shockingly, of their daughters, as well. As she witnesses the disorder in Bim's home, she imagines their reproachful looks reminding her that they do not allow such ludicrous behaviour. Her unusual associations regarding her daughters suggest that Tara did not achieve equality even in relation to her children. Not only does her family treat her as inferior, but she also considers herself as such. The dynamic of her family life is the one of rehearsed performances under the watchful eye of master Bakul. The more her thoughts are revealed, the more we realise that her superficially perfect life actually hides a great deal of strain on one hand and guilt on the other. "She herself had been taught, by her husband and by her daughters, to answer questions, to make statements, to be frank and to be precise. They would have

none of these silences and shadows. Here things were left unsaid and undone. It was what they called 'Old Delhi decadence.' " (Desai, 2001: 13)

Although Tara's marriage is not in any way perfect as she had hoped, what Tara does enjoy and live for is motherhood. Although she did not seem good at many things Bim excelled at, she was a great mother. She saw her childhood wish come true and dedicated her life to raising her two daughters. Even though they resemble Bakul character-wise and also exercise power over her, Tara considers them a project she succeeded in. Being a type of woman who is oriented towards social relationships with people, Tara constructs her identity through relationships with others, in her case predominantly through the relationship she has with her daughters. She absorbs her confidence, satisfaction and sense of self from the knowledge that she is a good mother to daughters she can pride herself on. "When her daughters arrive, Tara is relaxed, subtly at ease, even content. When Tara proudly offers her daughters to Bim, as if they were the 'fruit she had raise', Desai evokes for us the image of the rooted tree, secure and nurturing." (Juneja, 1987: 84) However, this kind of women are in danger of becoming depressed or lost once their influence in their children's lives is decreased. Having no other base to establish their identity on, they find themselves wandering curelessly in search of some replacement or conversely, insist on imposing their authorities on their children, even to their detriment. It is obvious that despite Tara's seeming happiness, her foundation is unstable and she is in need of a redefinition of her inner self. To my mind, the fact that her daughters are almost grown-up and ready to live independent lives is what makes Tara find a way to make amends with Bim and convince her to make peace with Raja. Seeing her role of a mother diminishing, she is forced to devise another identity. However, instead of creating a new one, Tara seeks to restore her previous one - herself as part of her first family, herself as Bim and Raja's sister. In order to fulfill her task, Tara has to explore the past and connect it to its present-day consequences. Tara's visit to Bim brings confusion to her life as it gives rise to the questions of her true identity. Although she was once part of this dysfunctional routine, Tara now finds it insufferable and reacts similarly to her husband and daughters. "Whenever she saw a tangle, an emotional tangle of this kind, rise up before her, she wanted only to turn and flee into that neat, sanitary, disinfected land in which she lived with Bakul, with its set of rules and regulations, its neatness and orderliness.

And seemliness too - seemliness." (Desai, 2001: 28) For so many years she has behaved according to the approved pattern that she is not certain whether it has become her nature or it was imposed on her. Her feelings toward her old home are ambiguous. While she feels natural in that environment, its irregularities frustrate her. The memories of her past self put her present life in a new perspective. It is interesting that it did not occur to Tara that her marriage was a way of escape before this visit. However, the time she spends close to her sister and her stressful daily life makes her see her marriage as an easy way out. In a conversation with Bim, Tara shares this realisation.

> 'Of course now I do see,' Tara went on at last, 'that I must have used
> him as an instrument of escape. The completest escape I could have
> made - right out of the contrary.' She laughed a small artificial laugh.
> 'Did you think that all out? Did you think like that?' 'No, Tara readily
> admitted. I only felt it. The thoughts - the words - came later. Have only
> come now!' she exclaimed in surprise.

(Desai, 2001: 157)

It seems that this visit is conducive to clarifying Tara's identity to herself. It gives her an opportunity to understand not just Bim, who she once thought cruel, but also the motivation behind her own actions.

A bone of contention between Tara and Bim during the visit is Tara's insistence that Bim should find a way to forgive Raja and attend the wedding of his daughter. Her desire is met with Bim's determined refusal. It appears that her need to achieve the reconciliation between Bim and Raja actually exposes obsession with forgiveness she herself desperately needs.

The reunion of the sisters is at first burdened with Bim's embarrassment and Tara's guilt. Their poor communication reveals deep contemplations they both lead with themselves and their past selves. As the novel progresses Bim's negative emotions fade, but Tara remains troubled with self-reproach. Repeatedly she attempts to show her regret and make amends, but neither Bim nor Bakul give her an opportunity to do so. Her efforts remain pointless since her sister and husband do not take her seriously.

> Tara opened her mouth to say something more - now that she had
> brought it out in the open, even if only under cover of darkness she
> wanted to pursue it to its end. She wanted to ask for forgiveness
> and understanding, not simply forgetfulness and incomprehension.
> But neither Bim nor Bakul were interested. They were talking about the
> Misra family.
>
> (Desai, 2001: 150)

It still appears to her that they lead important conversations behind her back, trying to protect her. Indeed, Bim seems genuinely surprised by Tara's feeling of guilt as she does not hold her responsible in any way. What is more, she still wants to keep her away from the all-pervasive harshness of life. As the visit progresses towards the end, we notice that the relationship of sisters becomes more natural and close as they allow themselves to leave regret and guilt behind. The years they had spent separated made them more similar than they thought they could ever be. Although at first glance completely different, they reach the conclusion that the experience of uncommon childhood is what makes them not just similar, but what makes them one.

> But Tara would not accept that. 'We're not really', she said. 'We may
> seem to be, but we have everything in common. That makes us one. No
> one else knows all we share. Bim and I.' (...) She saw in Tara's desperation
> a reflection of her own despairs. They were not so unlike. They were more
> alike than any other two people could be. They had to be, their hands were
> so deep in the same water, their faces reflected it together. 'Nothing's over,
> she argued. 'Ever', she accepted.
>
> (Desai, 2001: 162, 174)

Conclusion

Clear Light of Day is a novel that deals with the position of women in India and does so in a way that it explores the destinies of extremely diverse characters, with different backgrounds, goals and beliefs. It also illustrates the relationships among them,

thereby comparing and contrasting the particularities of their life choices. The conclusions the novel arrives at are undoubtedly feminist, postcolonial and postmodernist in their nature. The issues related to the lives of women living in a postcolonial era are well-depicted in a postmodernist literary form.

By foregrounding the plot of a predominantly psychological and emotional nature, Desai manages to show a great deal by saying little. Seemingly, a limited plot, in terms of action, in fact reveals a multitude of psychological changes within the characters. In spite of their apparent passivity and spatial limitations, Bim and Tara manage to silently revise their entire lives, from childhood to the present moment and find remedies for their qualms, regret, frustration and disappointment.

Even though on the surface there seems to be very little substantial communication taking place between them and they give impressions of being absorbed in deeply intimate explorations of themselves, Bim and Tara actually help each other in their quests. Even though their problems are of different nature and they themselves are so different that they struggle to understand each other's motivation, they help each other and thereby themselves by providing each other with the context they can define themselves in - being a part of their sisterhood. The peace they find in knowing that they do have support and love provides them with meaning. In their search of the truth about who they are, they return to their common past. By making references between the dimensions of past and present, they create realities of their own. Through that comparative examination they shed new light not just on the present day, but also on their past selves. A perfect example is Tara's realisation that Bim is not who she has always considered her to be. Contemplating this, she acknowledges that Bim has perhaps never been that version of herself that Tara constructed. Hence, Tara concludes that it has all been just an illusion, that Bim she knew was only a reflection of Tara's childhood beliefs, imagination and desires. Therefore, Desai questions the veracity of reality by exposing it as susceptible to illusions and self-deceit. Her revision of history and reliability of reality is one of essential postmodernist preoccupations. Theorists of the postmodern movement, after all, consider their task to be questioning and challenging all structures and concepts, thereby providing new frameworks for their definitions. They place the reality of fiction on a par with the reality of life, claiming that both are constructed and therefore prone to fallacy. A question frequently posited in

postmodern theory is the question whether postmodern art is mimetic or not. Bearing in mind that postmodern art creates reality of its own and denies supremacy to the reality of life, it has been widely considered that it does not employ mimesis. However, Brian McHale, among others, disagrees, arguing that postmodern art is after all mimetic, but that its mimesis is of a different kind: "postmodernist fiction turns out to be mimetic after all, but this imitation of reality is accomplished not so much at the level of its content, which is often manifestly un- or anti-realistic, as at the level of form." (1987: 38). He adds that the in the basis of postmodernist ontological concerns is ultimately the relationship of life and death: "It also incorporates one feature common to all cultures, all ontological landscapes, namely the ultimate ontological boundary between life and death." (McHale, 1987: 38)

Speaking of the illusoriness of life, one has to think of the true nature of emotional relationships one nurtures in life. *Clear Light of Day* researches the complex network of emotions and relationships within a family and centers on the dynamics of relations between siblings. It reveals that puzzling nature of each human is impenetrable even to his dearest, the ones who have known him from the earliest childhood, but that love still does not have to depend on truth or reason, but simply on acceptance and sacrifice. Julio Cortazar writes about the "excentration" that persists between us and the futileness of our efforts to overcome it and create a sense of unity and homogeneity. "And all the same one lives convinced his friends are there, that contact does exist, that agreements or disagreements are profound and lasting. How we all hate each other, without being aware that endearment is the current form of that hatred, and how the reason behind profound hatred is this "excentration", the unbridgeable space between me and you, between this and that. All endearment is an ontological clawing." (Cortazar, 1967: 385)

At the level of content, *Clear Light of Day* is centered on the analysis of female identities constructed within a postcolonial context. The comparison of female characters leads to the conclusion that women must bear sacrifices and that they cannot evade the definition or duties of caretaking.

The novel presents us with a woman who seems to be leading a life she has always desired and a woman who is caught between a role of a career woman she has always yearned for and a role of being the head of a household and the caretaker of her

mentally disabled brother. Finally, in the background lies a story about a woman who had only one role and that role was imposed on her by those who were supposed to be her family and keep her best interests at heart - Mira-masi. Thus, we have a woman who was able to decide, a woman who sacrificed herself for others but managed to realise part of her dreams and a woman who did not enjoy freedom of any kind - not the freedom of decision, not a freedom of privacy. Nevertheless, as the novel progresses, we realise that all of them had to bear sacrifice of some kind and that neither had the life they hoped for. Moreover, being women, they were all expected to provide care for others - their siblings, husband, children or husband's family. A glimpse of Bim's life suggests that women are not only troubled by oppression and inequality but also by abandonment. While Tara has no right to free decision-making, Bim was expected to carry the burdened of all the decisions. Thus, the parallel analysis of their lives renders a conclusion illustrative of Anita Desai's opinions on the position of women in a postmodern, postcolonial context.

Nevertheless, at the heart of the novel is the relationship of Tara and Bim and it is precisely this relationship that leads to a hopeful ending. Even though the state of affairs does not change at all, as we see no solution to Bim's financial woes nor do we witness a change of power relations in Tara's marriage, what does change are their attitudes toward themselves, each other and life on the whole. The ending highlights the importance of sisterhood, both literal and metaphorical, placing the novel once again in a feminist perspective. If there should be only one message in this complex text, then it would certainly be the message of the importance of love and forgiveness in a family. Leaving their troubles behind, they find a new love - a love for themselves and for each other.

But it was dark and shadowy, shaded by the bamboo screen at the
door, the damp rush mats at the windows, the old heavy curtains and the
spotted, peeling walls, and in their shade she saw how she loved him, loved
Raja and Tara and all of them who had lived, in this house with her. There
could be no love more deep and full and wide than this one,
she knew. No other love had started so far back in time and had had
so much time in which to grow and spread. They were really all parts
of her, inseparable, so many aspects of her as she was of them, so that

the anger or the disappointment she felt in them was only the anger
and disappointment she felt in herself.

<div align="right">(Desai, 2001: 165)</div>

11. A REVIEW OF AUTHORS AND CHARACTERS

This chapter will provide a summary and comparison of the three authors and their heroines analysed in this dissertation.

11.1. The Three Authors and Theoretical Frameworks

The three women authors that are the subject of this dissertation have many similarities in relation to their literary experiences, topics they write about, style and attitudes. Firstly, they have all experienced the prejudices women authors are faced with in the world of literature, literary criticism and theory and publishing. Furthermore, they share an interest in the positions of marginalisation and oppression since they themselves did not belong to the privileged groups in their societies. Namely, besides the stereotypes they were exposed to on the basis of their gender, all three of them were also affected by political oppression that did not allow them access to power. Moreover, they have lived and created from the perspective of political subordination, either from a postcolonial context (Desai and Atwood) or from the master-slave perspective and racial segregation (Morrison). Furthermore, the choice of theoretical perspectives is also another common feature in their work. Their novels have been analysed from numerous theoretical frameworks but postcolonialism, feminism and postmodernism are most commonly menitoned in relation to them.

11.1.1. The Feminist Theory

Although feminism is usually referred to when women's issue is dealt with, all three of them have an ambivalent relationship with this concept. While none of them

declares herself as a feminist and does not openly support this political movement, their work is often labelled as feminist by critics. This is due to their deep research of the peculiarities of female experience and determination to expose the mechanisms that exploit women and erase their presence at all levels. Nevertheless, their attitude is never biased and unjustified as they maintain a realistic and sometimes even critical relationship with their heroines, seeking to provide a convincing portrayal of the condition of being a woman. Although they do sympathise with their female protagonists, these authors do not defend them blindly, on the contrary, they insist that some part of responsibility undeniably belongs to them. Besides illustrating the social conditions and circumstances that limit their choices, Atwood, Morrison and Desai agree that there are moments when characters make mistakes themselves. However, another shared belief among them is the fact that they identify the family, community and education system as culprits for the lack of awareness that these heroines and their surroundings demonstrate.

11.1.2. The Postcolonial Theory

When it comes to the theory of postcolonialism, although its influence is obvious in the case of Anita Desai, postcolonial context also underlies Atwood's work. Despite the fact that Canada cannot be equated with the former colonies such as India or certain African countries, it still experienced subordination, primarily in cultural context. Moreover, due to the supremacy of the British influence, Canada was hit by the loss of national and cultural identities. This national lack of self-esteem, especially in terms of their artistic potential, allowed British literature to dominate Canadian cultural scene until recently. One of Atwood's goals was to establish and promote Canadian literature and Canadian literary theory. Colonial images frequently feature in her novels, making allusions to the awe-inspiring British authority, which she contrasts with Canadian bleakness and fear of self-actualisation. Moreover, Atwood's concerns regarding the colonial and postcolonial relations also emerge in her portrayal of Canadian-American relations. In this Canadian postcolonial period America appears as

yet another coloniser, although a coloniser of a different kind. In spite of Canada's official independence, Canadians yet again experience cultural assimilation as they fall victims to the consumer mentality and popular culture. Atwood seems all the more critical of this kind of disguised imperialism, as well as of American popular culture she sees as dehumanised, pervasive and extremely destructive. She expresses concern that Canadians again seem to be losing their sense of identity since it is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish between them and the cruel and careless "Americans".

When Toni Morrison is concerned, although she does not write about territories that are formally called postcolonial, the social space her heroines occupy reflects the power hegemonies and oppressive mechanisms typical of postcolonial contexts. Even when she does not refer to the experiences of slavery, the social dynamic of Morrison's communities implies that today's state of affairs must be looked into with history in mind.

What all three authors share is that they see a woman's body as a place of invasion, exploitation and oppression carried out by men, their communities and society as a whole. In this respect they find postcolonialism suitable for expressing unjustice done to the female gender.

11.1.3. The Postmodern Theory

When postmodernist features of their work are concerned, they adopt a postmodernist approach towards their characters, the narrative process and the conclusions they reach toward the end of the novel. Namely, they give their characters roles of travellers, wanderers and explorers who are meant to discover the deepest and the most frightening truths about themselves. On the journeys through their psyches, the dreadful arenas of the past and history, the protagonists must come to terms with who they are and accept part of the blame for their destinies. It is important to mention that none of them reach a happy ending of the kind that is found in realism, for instance, as the major issues they are surrounded with remain part of their daily life. Nevertheless, although epiphany is more a characteristic of modernism than postmodernism, these

heroines do reach some kind of enlightenment, as they acknowledge the peacefulness that comes from acceptance. However, even though these novels do not achieve a cheerful ending, they hint that there could be some piece of light at the end after all. In the end, heroines manage to find comfort in themselves and each other, that is, in female friendship or sisterhood. Although they still do not accept the current state of affairs in the world, they do accept themselves as they are and the people they love. With regard to narration, they most commonly choose the third-person narration that shifts through time, giving a complete image of the events and connecting causes with their consequences. The narrative processes they create consist of fragments, at times revealing and at times hiding away the truth from the readers and characters themselves. They manage to tell great stories with simple plots and virtually no action, only through portrayals of emotional and psychological struggles of often contradictory and deeply introvert heroines. In accordance with the fragmented narration they also depict fragmented identities, since the protagonists they choose often go through some kind of memory loss or repression and have to collect the pieces of themselves that are missing. Alongside the process of identity construction, they also undertake a task of history deconstruction. By offering their versions of history and by taking on the roles of those silenced in history and by history, they construct new historical perspectives and fulfill the voids made by censorship and intentionally leaving out female protagonists and their experiences.

11.2. Common Themes

Since these authors deal with the subject of the female experience, there are common themes that feature in the novels of all three of them. These topics are related to the peculiarities of living as a woman and primarily focus on the female sexuality, which often proves to be burdensome for them, marriage, family relations, relationships with other women and their position within the community or in society as a whole. The comparative analysis reveals numerous similarities but also significant discrepancies that could be assigned to racial, religious and class differences. Nevertheless, this kind of analysis provides us with the insight into characteristics and experiences that all these

women share despite the particularities of their environment. It is also significant to mention that there are more common elements and attitudes in the works of Margaret Atwood and Toni Morrison, as it could be expected, since their heroines are placed in Western settings, although they also live in environments that are far from ideal, in political and social terms. Desai's characters are absorbed by their familial relations and strict traditional norms and thus find it impossible to establish their identities outside those fixed patterns. However, it might come as a surprise that there are significant parallels between Desai's characters and those of Atwood and Morrison despite the crucial dissimilarities of their upbringings and values. These characters reveal a plethora of dilemmas, troubles and challenges that have proved to be universal for women all over the world. Hence, this kind of analysis provides invaluable insights that exceed the literary significance and contribute to a better understanding of what is frequently called - the women's condition.

When it comes to the issue of marriage, Atwood and Morrison seem to have lost faith in this institution. Atwood usually portrays women as unmarried, divorced or single mothers. As I have already mentioned, she does not write about happy families. She believes one cannot have it all, as perfection is never achieved. In her novels she gives little space to men and most commonly represents them as weak, cunning and unreliable. In the two novels that are the subject of this dissertation men are portrayed as immoral, dishonest and prone to betrayal. Therefore, Atwood sees them as weak and thus makes them an easy prey for the seductive Zenia. In their pursuit of satisfaction they abandon the responsibilities they have as husbands and fathers. Hence, what makes these women single-mothers is their husbands' inability to resist sexual temptation. Charis and Roz are single-mothers who raise their children single-handedly and do not resort to immoral behaviour in spite of the enormous pressure they are exposed to. Atwood considers men incapable or unwilling to control their sexual urges that eventually ruin their families. In *Surfacing* the protagonist's lover forced her to have an abortion, which later on haunts her and destroys her belief in the humankind. His reckless behaviour did not only ruin her life but could have also affected his own family and children. Even when Atwood allows marriage to last, it is evident that she does not think of it as idyllic or romantic. She firmly believes that it is a union of imbalanced power hierarchies and she therefore describes Tony's marriage with West as a one-way

street, where she is the giver and he the receiver. Moreover, she criticises the women's habit to turn a blind eye and live in illusions, justifying infidelity as something that all men commit because it is "in their blood" a biological need they cannot fight. She is convinced that women should discard the romantic illusions they harbour about marriage and regard it realistically as it is. No matter what their choices finally are, Atwood demands her protagonists to accept responsibility for their actions. She denies them the role of the victim, claiming that there is always a choice.

Morrison also reveals her doubts about marriage in placing her heroines in what is now commonly called "three-women households". Her hesitation to present marriage as an ideal union lies not just in her lack of trust in men but also in her belief that a nuclear family, as it is known in its Western form, is not an adequate solution for African people. Thus, she replaces the concept of nuclear family with households run by women. Furthermore, when she does write about family life, as it is the case in *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison describes it as dysfunctional, to say the least. In this novel she expresses her view of marriage through the characters of girls, Claudia, Pecola and Frieda. Although they are convinced that all men leave their wives, they still have romantic ideas about marriage and yearn to be loved. According to the standardised gender roles, they are taught to be caring in order to prepare themselves for motherhood. Claudia remembers being given a baby doll and being expected to act as its mother. In *Sula* Morrison reaffirms her doubts about marriage as Nel's seemingly stable marriage is ruined due to her husband's affair with Sula. Thus, Nel becomes one of the numerous single-mothers of her novels, left to struggle for her own and her children's existence. Morrison's heroines realise that they are capable of surviving and that they are more skillful than they have ever imagined. Unfortunately, these women come to realise their potentials only after they have been discarded. What her protagonists have in common with Atwood's is that they rise to the challenge of single-parenting and manage to preserve their sanity and resist the temptations of immorality. Moreover, they all treat their husbands as children, taking care of their needs and complimenting their egos. Nel, Tony and Roz fall into the category of wives who enjoy pampering their husbands and take pride in feeling needed. They absorb their power from the role of caregivers of their husbands, who take on the role of their captives, the captives of their love and care. The difference between these characters, however, is that while Atwood's characters

have time to dwell on why they were left, Morrison's protagonists are faced with alarming financial difficulties that leave them no time to cry over their misfortune. Thus, the economic situation undoubtedly affects the manner in which women deal with disappointment and betrayal.

Desai's heroines approach marriage under considerably different circumstances. Their whole girlhood is spent in anticipation of the day of their marriage, when they start their lives with their new families. Unlike their Western counterparts, these women's husbands are chosen for them by their families and these choices are based on completely different foundations from the concepts of romantic love and passion that in most cases lead to marriage in the West. Although spinsters are looked down upon in almost all societies, their position is certainly more marginal in India, where it is considered to be a reflection of a woman's failure. In this kind of cultural background it is practically impossible for a woman to choose not to marry and what is more, that decision is thought to be immoral and abnormal. Another difference that emerges from the comparison of Desai's novels with those of Morrison and Atwood is that in a married woman's life more problems arise in her relationship with her husband's family than between the spouses. Namely, the concept of joint family is structured in the way that women spend most of their time in each other's company, doing the "female" work, while male members of the family are busy with their important, "male" obligations, which are usually done outside the house. Jealousy and competitiveness between women in a family are quite common, since they feel the need to compete for the attention of the male members, who control all the decision-making. Another dissimilarity is in the fact that divorce is never mentioned by Desai, for it is very uncommon in India. This does not suggest that all marriages are successful but that women are taught to bear and suffer. Due to their financial and social dependence they have fewer choices compared to women in other parts of the world. It is almost impossible to compare Tara's choices with those of Roz, who owns an empire and enjoys social prestige. Hence, the problems of married women in India are taken for granted and they are expected not to question their status. Those who are in much worse position, nevertheless, are spinsters and widows, who are treated as outcasts, first by their families and then by the entire society. The concept of marriage in India is inextricably linked with the division of labour and standardised gender roles, according

to which women are expected to assume the role of nurturing femininity and renounce all other interests they might have. Desai shows that it is impossible for ambitious women in India to "have it all". The idea of having a successful career and marriage proves to be unobtainable, as the women who had aspirations in the end fail terribly. Anamika's excellence and education led her to marry into a family of villains, which finally resulted in her tragic death. Bim, who managed to realise herself professionally and become a person of authority, failed completely in the area of private life, living in a dimension between reality and memories.

When female friendship is concerned, it is one of the light motifs of Morrison's fiction. She strongly believes in the power of community, especially in the healing power of sorority. Her characters manage to find comfort for moving on in each other. *Sula* is a novel constructed around the theme of female friendship in its entirety. In it Morrison represents female friendship as an alternative for a romantic relationship or marriage. She deconstructs the age-old concept of romantic soulmates by claiming that women can find a soulmate in each other. She believes that when love and passion fade away, friendship is what remains. In this respect, Morrison's and Atwood's perspectives converge, as they both see this kind of intimacy as the best support and comfort for women. On the other hand, they both describe female friendship as complex and prone to jealousy, envy and competitiveness. They both criticise the female tendency to judge other women and their choices, especially when it comes to decision related to marriage and having children. They both show that it is often women who are the source of the biggest reproach, stereotyping and labelling. Furthermore, the both authors agree that women carry part of the blame for the injustice they experience globally. However, when it comes to Desai's novels, she does not portray any kind of friendship outside the family. Desai, like most Indian novelists, is focused on the interfamilial relations, since in India it is practically impossible to observe individuals outside their family setting. Unlike Atwood, who is primarily interested in the relationship individuals have with themselves and who often writes about solitary, isolated figures, Desai explores the identity formation within the family. As it was already mentioned, women in India are usually surrounded by other women in the family and loneliness is not a concept they are used to. Nevertheless, the worlds in Desai's novels reveal complexities and difficulties in relationships between mothers and daughters or sisters and especially

underscore the hostility of the husband's mother and sisters toward the bride. The two novels presented in this dissertation point to the absence of intimacy between blood-related members of the family, especially to the formality and aloofness between Uma and her mother and sister. It is my impression that, unlike Morrison's outspoken characters, Desai's heroines leave many things unsaid and subsequently, lead imaginary dialogues in their minds. While their inner selves are brimming with anger, emotion and desire, their lives remain passive and subdued. Out of all the three authors' female characters, Desai's are the ones who seem impervious to change and who demonstrate the biggest stagnation. Their spiritual and emotional restrictions are mirrored by the limitation of their physical movement as well. While in *Surfacing* the protagonist undertakes an exploration by travelling to the island and Sula leaves her hometown to educate herself and all three heroines in *The Robber Bride* move house, Desai's Bim and Uma rarely ever leave their home and have never been outside their homeland. Only in comparison to them, do other characters' privileges come to light. Among those privileges, besides the freedom of travel and physical movement is also the freedom to choose friends. One of the reasons why Desai's heroines are quite commonly described as "neurotic" is certainly their deprivation of close friendship and intimacy.

Female sexuality is another theme that both Atwood and Morrison explore and there are parallels that can be drawn between their perspectives. *The Robber Bride* is an exploration of the female hunger, literal and sexual. It focuses on the power of female desire and their need to establish control over their bodies. Atwood was not afraid to write about the burdens of female sexuality. She thoroughly explores the emotional repercussions of abortion, rape, sexual harassment and labelling, prostitution, damaging effects of birth control pills and other risks women are exposed to. In *Surfacing* she concludes that there is no sex without risk and that eventually women are left alone to deal with the horror of abortion or health problems that may arise as a consequence of contraception. We should keep in mind that when the novel was written and published (1972), sex was not a subject of public discussion and women had less information and choices at their disposal than they do nowadays. Nevertheless, since she abhors the victim position, Atwood creates Zenia, a maneater, as a counterbalance for the male sexual appetite and unveils the power of female sexuality. By creating Zenia, she reflects on a new kind of women, the ones who use their sexuality as a means to their

ends, those who do not allow themselves to be exploited and then thrown away. These women like Zenia emerge as a kind of female warriors in the incessant war of the genders. They represent a kind of feminists, those who are aware of their charms and use them in a trade for power. On the other hand, they could simply be called promiscuous, women who do not cherish their sexuality and give it away easily. Nonetheless, it is evident that female sexuality still remains a complex, vague area, although explored and written about thoroughly. Atwood suggests that it is incredibly difficult to establish and maintain a healthy relationship with one's sexuality since it is easy to slide into dangerous territories. Her novels reveal the pressure that surrounds the formation and expression of female sexuality, implying that, for some reason, it does seem to be a public concern. The protagonists of Toni Morrison usually exhibit two extreme patterns of behaviour when it comes to sexual behaviour. Those who are religious and pride themselves on their unblemished moral behaviour abide by the strict rules that society imposes on women. By contrast, there are those, labeled as the outcasts, who experiment with their sexuality or use it as a means of resistance. To that end, Morrison is determined to counter the stereotype of the black mother and the general opinion that black women are good only for housework and bearing children. She refuses to represent motherhood as an ideal state and dwells on its numerous difficulties, especially in case of financially unstable single-mothers. Similarly to Atwood, Morrison engages in colourful descriptions of the intercourse between spouses, as well as the feeling of the first orgasm Pauline experienced on her own by accident. She does not flinch from asking the question why these women do not experience orgasm when they have relations with their husbands and why they think of sex as yet another obligation they are supposed to fulfill during the day. Morrison takes the exploration of female sexuality even further by depicting the incestuous rape of Pecola by her father. As she tends to observe individuals as part of the community, in her novels female sexuality is always a topic of public discussion, judgment and labelling. In both novels analysed in this dissertation she illustrates the power of public condemnation and loathing, in Sula's case, and of suspicion and avoidance, in the case of Pecola. Morrison enters the unexplored terrain of adolescent sexuality and pathological sexuality, such as incest and pedophilia, and explores them in the context of a black, rural community. Furthermore, she is trying to access the ways in which girls

themselves experience their first contacts with their sexuality and sexuality of their peers. She writes about the experience when Pecola got her first period and Claudia and Frieda envied her with a newly found respect. She explores what they know about menstruation and what it represents to them. They are told that from that moment they could have babies and somehow they feel grown up. It is interesting that they all believe they have to be married in order to become pregnant. In this way Morrison indirectly criticises the lack of knowledge about a woman's body and the lack of awareness in this kind of communities, which eventually leads to tragedies, such as Pecola's. While Atwood illustrates the implications females sexuality by means of words, such as rape, abortion, pill, sex, abuse, Morrison constructs sexuality of black women through absence – the absence of words, absence of information, and absence of awareness.

What is strikingly obvious in Desai's novels is the complete absence of sexuality. Female sexuality, besides romantic love and divorce, is another issue that is omitted in her work, as it is still considered to be a taboo in the Indian society. While their entire girlhood is dedicated to the preparation for marriage, there is no talk or even contemplation about sex. Indian women seem generally more frightened about their destinies and the choice of the man they will spend the rest of their lives with since that choice is seldom their own. Except marriage, wedding and children there are no words that could be related to sex as there is no mention of abortion, contraception or sexual affairs. Therefore, it seems that the concept of arranged marriage protects Indian women from the numerous woes of their Western counterparts that are related to sexual practices. It is unimaginable for most women in India to give birth to a child outside marriage or have an abortion, as their whole lives they are taught how to be decent women and prepare for marriage. Thus, there is no fear of public condemnation for promiscuity but there is the pressure of fulfilling the family's expectations and marry well. Furthermore, married women are expected to give birth to children right away and there is little space for family planning. The public stigma, after all, exists and is reserved for those who fail to marry, widows and women who cannot give birth. It is peculiar that the Indian society judges and marginalises widows and infertile women despite the fact that their condition is not a fault of their own and is beyond their will. Hence, it can be concluded that sexuality in India is strictly linked to reproduction and that these women bear the most stringent limitations on their sexuality since there is

simply not any mention of it. When it comes to the influence of the West, acquired in the period of colonisation, Desai's novels attribute to the feelings of alienation and anxiety. These conditions are thought to be the ills of the modern world, with its consumer culture that cultivates greed and dissatisfaction. In the context of joint families, alienation seems rather impossible, but Desai's heroines show symptoms of not just alienation from others but also from themselves. Thus, the impact of the Western society is seen as negative, infecting the controlled Indian peacefulness with its restlessness.

CONCLUSION

The Authors

This chapter will provide a concise overview of the results obtained in the course of this research and presented in the previous sections of this dissertation.

The research provided answers to the questions posed in the introduction, the questions that constituted the motivation behind this work. Those results are concerned with the three main issues this dissertation looked into: female authorship, female existence in different cultural and social environments and the ways in which women authors deal with female characters as their protagonists. For the sake of clarity and coherence, I will deal with each separately.

When it comes to the phenomenon of female authorship, the three chapters that deal with the work of Desai, Morrison and Atwood and the introductory chapter on the nature and history of female writing resulted in useful and somewhat surprising discoveries. Namely, theoretical and historical resources used and the accounts of the three authors in question reveal that the presence of women in the world of literature is rather modest and overshadowed by the disproportionally dominant presence of male authors. The dissertation sought to expose the reasons for this and consequently, identified overall social conditions as well as the oversimplified, sexist image of the women's nature as the main culprits for this state of affairs. It was demonstrated that regardless of the culture, financial dependence of women along with the strict, conservative moral norms that were imposed on them since the early childhood made it virtually impossible for women not just to earn their living by writing, but even to pursue writing for the sake of art itself. Furthermore, one of the potential dangers that made the world of publishing reluctant to allow access to female authors is the possibility that they could say something that would demand change of the social foundations and eventually subvert the power hierarchy they (i.e. men) were perfectly comfortable with. Thus, the world of literature mirrored the relations existent in the "real" world, at the workplace, at home, in the street, etc. Hence, women were in the shadow, alone with their own thoughts and ideas, brimming with creative energy and

revolutionary potential. In this kind of setting it is clear that the first women who succeeded in overcoming the limitations imposed on them on the grounds of their gender had to be extremely "creative" if they wanted their writing to be more than just a leisure activity. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that these women, the first female authors who published their books, were considered to be, different adventurous or even crazy. This tendency to think of women authors as of crazy women who write hysterically within the confines of their room has survived until today. Although it is a fact that most of the first female writings were in the form of diary, women rapidly proved that their writing was imbued by much more than the daily routine. They started occupying the genre of poetry, which allowed them to relieve their frustrations but also give birth to fantasies about different worlds, ideal worlds. Even though female poets were commonly labelled as mentally unstable and their work as dark and depressing, these labels only testify about the injustice women were facing. The experiences of Atwood, Morrison and Desai point to the fact that, despite the modernisation and the gender equality legislation, women in the world of literature still struggle with numerous stereotypes regarding female writing. Therefore, all three of them, besides writing for artistic reasons, also consider their writing to be a means of social action. They believe that their works should be socially aware and inspire change. That change can be at the level of family, community, the entire society, but they predominantly insist on the mental and spiritual transformation of the individual.

Themes Explored

The analytical and comparative deduction provided insight into what themes concerned the three authors the most, that is, what issues they addressed in their writing. The themes that are in the domain of common interest are, unsurprisingly, those related to the female gender: sexuality, motherhood, marriage, family, interpersonal relationships and self-image.

Female sexuality is very much present in the novels of Margaret Atwood and Toni Morrison, who play with it and use it as a means of social experimentation and

provoking thought. To their minds, liberated or emphasised sexuality expresses rebellion and is potentially disruptive. They portray female characters, such as Zenia and Sula, who are voracious maneaters, true embodiments of the "monster-woman". These two authors link sexual liberation with social awareness and self-awareness, while they portray "the good woman" as sexually repressed, unsatisfied and unaware. Another common trait is that they refuse to see female sexuality only as a means of procreation. On the contrary, they are brave enough to write about a woman's sexual desire or even insatiable sexual appetite, as it is the case with both Zenia and Sula. Contrary to Atwood's and Morrison's open-mindedness and frankness in writing about sexuality, Desai's novels offer no accounts of it. Although she addresses marriage and childbearing, there is not a hint of sexuality. Nonetheless, Desai conveys the message about the Indian stand on female sexuality and its expression by simply not mentioning it at all. Hence, the Indian social climate as well as the personal freedoms are defined by the complete lack of sexuality in her novels. Thus, it is clear that sexuality is still a taboo in India, not being a topic of conversation even between sisters or friends. Furthermore, what is even more striking is that even when a novel is conveying a character's thoughts, there is yet again no mention of anything that could be labelled as remotely sexual. Therefore, it can be inferred that sexuality is absent from Indian literature, in this particular case from the two novels by Anita Desai, due to censorship, but also due to the fact that it is simply not given that much importance as it is the case in the Western societies. Namely, stringent sexual norms that prohibit and label sexual intercourse outside the wedlock as extremely immoral alongside the institution of arranged marriage, which is not based on romantic love or passion, make the concepts of sexual liberation and experimentation unimaginable in the Indian society. Thus, it is evident that religious and moral beliefs and upbringing define the attitude of a woman toward her own sexuality. Too often the female body has been referred to as unclean and sinful that it resulted in women having ambivalent attitudes to it themselves. This dissertation shows that female sexuality is not impacted much by class or racial elements as it is impacted by the community's beliefs. However, despite the level of the community's wealth and development, sexually liberated women are still seen as "temptresses", "monsters" and "whores", while their bodies and sexualities remain powerful subversive tools.

With respect to motherhood, all three of the authors take a rather feminist stand by illustrating characters who by their own will choose not to be mothers. Namely, the choices of their characters, such as Tony, Bim or Sula, stress that there are women who do not see motherhood as the way to realise themselves or find fulfillment. Their decisions, as well as the authors' writing about them, are brave moves that are most often met with fierce condemnation and also, quite commonly, with their marginalisation in all social circles. Ironically, it is women who most frequently judge those who did not choose motherhood as the center of their lives. To renounce it still stands as a kind of blasphemy, the most immoral and sinful of all acts. Therefore, it could be suggested that these protagonists are rebels of their own kind. Hence, by writing about these heroines, Morrison, Atwood and Desai employ another subversive element in their narratives. Moreover, they refuse to depict motherhood under the illusion of a perfect bliss. By contrast, they shed a realistic light on this phenomenon, breaking the stereotypes of spiritual elevation built around it. It is useful to consider the fact that there are no close relationships between mothers and their daughters in the six novels analysed in this dissertation. On the other hand, there are many instances of dysfunctional family life, conflicts and lack of healthy communication between them. What is more, it was the mothers who, in some cases, amounted to their daughters' emotional and psychological struggles that would haunt them their entire lives.

Marriage seems to be one of the institutions that have lost the trust of the authors and their female characters. It is referred to in some manner in all novels and the first thing that requires some consideration is the fact that there are no happy marriages. In the case of Atwood and Morrison, marriage is featured, most commonly, as a broken marriage. The reason for the end of a marriage is usually the husband's infidelity. The whole novel *The Robber Bride* is actually based on the phenomenon of sexual infidelity and betrayal that leads not just to the breakage of those marriages but also leads to a complete reconsideration of the women's lives. However, the novel is not concerned with those men or marriage as such, what it focuses on is the lives of the betrayed women after they remain alone and have to devise new frameworks of existence. Morrison also does not write about happy marriages, she writes about women who are left alone to be single parents and fight single-handedly in the word of racial and sexual discrimination and stereotyping. While Desai turns her attention to the concept of

arranged marriage, she expresses her concerns about the inequality and repression this kind of marriage involves. Namely, she writes about domestic violence women in India are often subjected to by their husbands or his family. She also implies that women in India have very poor support systems of their families and communities in such cases. Consequently, family abuse in many cases leads to fatal outcomes, as it was the case with Anamika. Nevertheless, it is worth underlining that marriage in India lies on completely different foundations than it does in the West. First of all, it is not based on the ideas of romantic love or passion but is seen as a kind of a contract, a transaction between two families that are trying to secure adequate partners for their off-spring. Thus, it is done according to the wishes of parents and their decisions rely on economic and cultural compatibility. However, despite these obvious differences, the novels by all three of the authors suggest doubts about and disappointment in the institution of marriage that does not seem to have enough consideration for the needs of women. These novels show that the concept of marriage is not compatible with the style of life in today's societies, which do not offer enough protection of the women's rights.

Family is another theme that brings the three authors together as they demand its reconsideration. Namely, with the loss of faith in happy marriages, these novels comment on the dysfunctional families. When all six novels are looked into, the conclusion is that there are no happy families. What is more, the protagonists testify about the abnormalities and tragedies that were taking place inside their families, including incestuous rape and physical and psychological violence. The novels' fragmentation is constructed by the images of broken homes and incomplete families where the most of living is done in silence and alienation. One of the light motifs of all the novels, alienation, is first established within the family and then transferred to the level of whole society. While Morrison and Atwood focus on relationships of single-mothers and their children, Desai dedicates her attention to yet another Indian phenomenon - the concept of joint family. The complexity of hierarchies and relations within such a community leads to a complete lack of privacy, free time and intimacy between spouses. Furthermore, the financial dependence of the women on the male members of the family gives rise to fights and schemes to win them over and establish superiority over other women in the household. Irrespective of the social climate, it is clear that the concept of family needs to be reconsidered, keeping in mind gender

equality. However, such an undertaking cannot be embarked on without acknowledging the existence of unequal power relations between the genders in all areas of public life.

Interpersonal relations have always been linked with women, as they are usually attributed qualities related to communication, nurturing, compassion, etc. Protagonists analysed in the course of this dissertation have problems with people from their surroundings, family, friends or the entire communities and societies. They struggle with alienation and have difficulties in balancing the needs of others with their own. They also find it increasingly difficult to respond to pressure and generally accepted patterns of behaviour and thus often choose a life of seclusion or rebellious experimentation. What is also important to stress is the absence of support and understanding between women themselves and this is what all the novels strongly criticise. The authors urge their characters to offer sympathy and friendship to one another because only women can genuinely understand the troubles of female existence. They remind us that women have acquired sexist and misogynist attitudes towards themselves and other women, as a consequence of discriminatory and stereotypical upbringings they received along with the detrimental effects of popular culture with its unrealistic and offensive concepts of beauty and femininity.

When the construction of self-image is concerned, all of the protagonists experience confusion regarding their sense of self and consequently start journeys of self-searching. As postmodernist characters, they are shaped as fragmented selves, eluding definition. Having realised that they have little knowledge about who they really are due to layers of self-deception which they prefer to reality, these women take the road that requires plunging into the harsh tunnels of both past and reality. Although their difficulties involve the imperfections of their environment and the entire society, their primary issue is the relationship they have with themselves. Thus, even though it may seem that these heroines are trying to resolve the problems in their marriage, family or friendship, what they are primarily focused on is to find a way to get closer to their true identity and achieve self-acceptance. Hence, they are not so much concerned about what others conceive of them but how they feel about themselves and the life they have chosen. While some of them are attempting to accomplish it by secluding themselves in acts of social contempt, others opt for exploring their identities through relationships with others. Regardless of the way they choose, their coming to terms with

themselves eventually requires a reconsideration of the relationships they have with their surroundings. As it is the case with postmodern characters, these women do not reach ground-breaking revelations but they do become honest to themselves and others, leaving behind the emotional burden of guilt, anger and self-deception.

The Attitude of Female Authors towards Female Characters

The research work of this dissertation has also included the analysis of the ways in which female authors, judging by the work of Desai, Morrison and Atwood construct and treat their female protagonists. Since one of the concerns of the dissertation was the nature of female authorship, one of its essential elements is what makes their style and attitude to writing special and different from that of male authors. Having looked into the areas of interest of the three mentioned authors, it was evident that they are primarily focused on the issues related to the experience of being a woman in the context of their own cultural surroundings. While the conditions of life and the level of awareness differ in their characters' backgrounds, what these writers have in common is their treatment of not just the female characters but of concepts of womanhood and femininity in general.

Namely, all three of them treat the matter of womanhood objectively and subjectively at the same time. While their approaches demonstrate compassion, sympathy and understanding, the demands they lay on their heroines point to unbiased treatment and sincerity. They are utterly honest and direct in depicting the emotional turmoil as well as sexual taboos, showing that femininity is not always innocent and delicate. Furthermore, although one of their goals is to break the stereotypes built around the notion of woman, they do not fall victim to idealisation or blaming the entire male sex. Another trait that their novels share is that they firmly believe that change should come from within and from an individual, as they do not expect the entire world to change so that their characters could avoid the painful process of transformation. What is more, they are the observers and artists of the inner worlds, inspecting delicate processes of personal awakening and transformation. Moreover, they do not provoke

reactions by exploiting cases of extreme behaviour, but actually write about the occurrences that happen on a daily basis, in any neighbourhood. What they are interested in is the psychological and emotional accommodation of an average woman in a complicated, diverse world of today.

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BIOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

Jelena D. Dostanić was born in 1988 in Belgrade, Serbia.

After completing Philological Grammar School in Belgrade she pursued her further education at the Faculty of Philology, the University of Belgrade, at the department for the English language and literature. During graduate studies she opted for the field of English literature, which had always been a source of great interest and inspiration. She completed her Master studies with a paper named *Potraga za identitetom u romanu „Ostaci dana" Kazua Išigura (The Pursuit of Identity in the Novel „Remains of the Day" by Kazuo Ishiguro.)*

Upon continuing the postgraduate studies at the same faculty, the next natural step was to seek further development in the field of English literature. During the extensive research work that was part of the two-year examination process of this program, she discovered a great passion toward the issues related to women, gender studies and literary work of female authors and critics. Alongside, she dedicated her attention to issues related to postcolonial literature and aesthetic functions of postmodernism, which eventually led to the choice of subject of this dissertation. Another filed of interest she intends to explore further is the literature created in English by non-English authors and the creative potential of the perspective of foreigners.

Besides the interest in literature, she is engaged in teaching English as a second language, specialising in the areas of English for special purposes (Business and Legal English).

Изјава о ауторству

Потписани-а _JELENA D. DOSTANIĆ_

број уписа _120191 D_

Изјављујем

да је докторска дисертација под насловом

" female characters in the Novels of Toni Morrison, Margaret Atwood and Anita Desai from the Thearetical Perspectives of Feminism, Postmodernism and Postcolonialism "

- резултат сопственог истраживачког рада,
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Име и презиме аутора _Jelena D. Dostanić_

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Студијски програм _Knjiženost (anglistika)_

Наслов рада _"Female characters in the novels of J. Winterson, M. Atwood and A. Desau from the theoretical perspective of feminism, postmodernism and Postcolonialism "_

Ментор _prof. dr Zoran Paunović_

Потписани _Jelena D. Dostanić_

изјављујем да је штампана верзија мог докторског рада истоветна електронској верзији коју сам предао/ла за објављивање на порталу **Дигиталног репозиторијума Универзитета у Београду.**

Дозвољавам да се објаве моји лични подаци везани за добијање академског звања доктора наука, као што су име и презиме, година и место рођења и датум одбране рада.

Ови лични подаци могу се објавити на мрежним страницама дигиталне библиотеке, у електронском каталогу и у публикацијама Универзитета у Београду.

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У Београду, _20.01.2015_

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Прилог 3.

Изјава о коришћењу

Овлашћујем Универзитетску библиотеку „Светозар Марковић" да у Дигитални репозиторијум Универзитета у Београду унесе моју докторску дисертацију под насловом:

„ Female characters in the Novels of Toni Morrison, Margaret Atwood and Anita Desai from the Theoretical Perspectives of Feminism, Postmodernism and Postcolonialism "

која је моје ауторско дело.

Дисертацију са свим прилозима предао/ла сам у електронском формату погодном за трајно архивирање.

Моју докторску дисертацију похрањену у Дигитални репозиторијум Универзитета у Београду могу да користе сви који поштују одредбе садржане у одабраном типу лиценце Креативне заједнице (Creative Commons) за коју сам се одлучио/ла.

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Потпис докторанда

У Београду, 20.01.2015.

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