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INSIDE OUT: EYE IMAGERY AND FEMALE IDENTITY IN
MARGARET ATWOOD'S POETRY

THESIS

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Margaret Atwood speaks about a now common and yet still predominant question of female identity. Eye images, appearing frequently, correlate with ideas of observation, perception, and reflection as the woman seeks to understand herself. Introductory material examines three female archetypes, five victim positions, and male-female worlds. Eye imagery in early poetry expresses female feelings of frustration and submission to unfair roles and expectations. Imagery in the middle poetry presents causes for male-female manipulations. In later poetry eye imagery underscores the woman's anger and desire to separate into a new self. Concluding this study is an analysis of female options. From denial and anger the poet moves to recognition of choices open to today's woman, offering a possibility of wholeness.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

An other sense tugs at us:
we have lost something,
some key . . .

that informs, holds together
this confusion, this largeness
and dissolving:

not above or behind
or within it, but one
with it: an
identity:

something too huge and simple
for us to see (2, p. 76).

Contrary to responses to some feminists who, after reading Margaret Atwood's works (11, p. 201), saw this Canadian writer as a proponent of their movement and contrary to the remarks of interviewers who still consistently question her on this subject, Atwood encourage women not to seek vindictive action to counter oppression, but to search for their own true identity (23, p. 24). As the opening epigraph shows, Atwood believes women, as well as men, have "lost something," "an / identity" which, although it is "huge and simple," must be rediscovered in order for women to survive in today's world. For this reason, she sees "feminism as part of a larger issue: human dignity" (16, p. 75). Although Margaret Atwood

believes that she is a "feminist" in the broadest sense of of the word (23, p. 24), she does not belong to the modern women's liberation movement; in fact, she predates it (11, pp. 201-202). Her achievements result not from the influence of feminists but from her own struggles to avail herself of her intelligence (16, p. 73), to be, in addition to a wife and mother, a writer and critic. Nevertheless, Atwood's poetry is not ammunition aimed at the male and his identity. Like much of Atwood's other poetry, Two-Headed Poems, her latest volume, is "mostly about women," but not "about oppression of women by men," inasmuch as it directs women to "look inward," to "find new models," and to break traditional roles (9, pp. 459-460). Atwood's speaker questions her identity:

Is this where I want to be,
is this who I want to be with,

half of a pair,
half of a custom? (8, p. 22).

John Wilson Foster elucidates this same premise of self-examination: Atwood's poetry "concerns itself with the self's inhabitation of spaces and forms and the metamorphoses entailed therein . . . life is a constant process of re-formation" (13, pp. 5-6). He explains that "Atwood succeeds" because of her "peculiar force of content. . . . Among the experiences of being an individual, a woman, and a Canadian, Atwood intuits an underlying

connection deeper than minority membership. These experiences flesh out . . . the root formula of her poetry . . . [which] sustains a wealth of individual existences--of image, motif, subject and dramatic situation" (13, p. 5). Atwood's works offer numerous possibilities for consideration: motif and dramatic situation are well-defined and well-structured; subject and image are varied and original in content and purpose. But it is Atwood's imagery which best develops her subject of female identity. Laurence Perrine defines an image as a "mental picture" and imagery as a "representation through language of the sense experience" (20, p. 45). Analyzing Margaret Atwood's imagery according to this definition discloses her beliefs about female identity. Margaret Atwood invites the woman to "open yourself like this and become whole" (8, p. 96). Much of her poetry involves a woman's attempt to discover the "inner world of self" (14, p. 2) and to break out of the man's world in order to become a whole being.

Any search for self entails choosing between the male and the female worlds. The images in "Her Song" correlate to these worlds:

Love, you must choose
 Between two immortalities:
 One of earth like trees
 Feathers of a nameless bird
 The other of a world of glass,
 Hard marble, carven word (3; 14, p. 33).

The first lines describe the woman's world of nature with its "earth lake trees / Feathers of a nameless bird," and the last lines present the man's world of reason with its "glass / Hard marble, carven word" (3; 14, p. 33). In response to an interviewer's comment that "men are knowers and women are practical doers," Atwood disagrees (16, p. 75), not with the idea that there is separation of the male and female worlds, but with the implication that women cannot think. Atwood distinguishes between these two worlds specifically in poems such as "Two Gardens" in Procedures for Underground (6, pp. 16-17), "The Islands" in The Circle Game (2, p. 68), and "The double voice" in The Journals of Susanna Moodie (4, p. 104). In her poetry Atwood often characterizes the male principle as rational, logical, but cruel and destructive, as different from the female principle, which moves beyond reason to the world of emotion and understanding. The female principle, through communion with nature, resolves "such opposites as life and death, suffering and joy, or madness and sanity into wholes" (21, p. 93). Atwood's poetry further qualifies the relationships between these two separate entities, especially through eye imagery, as males and females attempt to perceive and analyze themselves in their respective worlds. Much of The Journals of Susanna Moodie (4, pp. 80-116) and of the "Circe/Mud Poems" sequence in You Are Happy (8, pp. 45-70) illustrates the

woman's struggle to identify, define, and adapt to her world.

After recognizing and understanding the differences in male and female principles and their effect on identity, women should analyze their past and present roles. Atwood believes that it is "easy to say you're a woman" because "we all know we've got femaleness. The question is what to do with it" (16, p. 76). Being female in today's society requires a decision as to which role to pursue--traditional or modern. The poems in Power Politics (5) and the "Circe/Mud Poems" sequence in You Are Happy reexamine women's inherited roles. Circe depicts traditional woman confronting her sexuality and renouncing the roles man has created for her (13, p. 18). Atwood notes the difficulties in casting off old roles and assuming new ones, especially for female writers (11, pp. 201-202). The female in literature reflects society's traditional roles, with women often stereotyped by writers as simply good or bad with no motives (9, p. 458). Atwood further clarifies this insufficient portrayal of women through female archetypes, especially as qualified in The Journals of Susanna Moodie and the "Circe/Mud Poems" sequence. Carl Jung's theory of the "collective unconscious" defines archetypes as a "deposit of ancestral experience from untold millions of years" (18, p. 162). Atwood's imagistic use of archetypes causes the reader to recollect memories

shaped by experience, myths, and literature and evokes the emotions intended by the poet. In a review of The Circle Game, Arnold Davidson credits Margaret Atwood with acknowledging "how easily a woman can be submerged in the conventional societal concepts of what a woman should be" (10, p. 48). In Atwood's poetry women are shown fighting for survival against outdated social standards and changing role expectations. Women feel trapped behind the male's insistence on reflection; yet anger lurks behind this frustration and submission: "Don't assume it is passive / or easy, this clarity with which I give you yourself" (8, p. 26). An analysis of Atwood's eye imagery shows how this distorted perception of a woman's roles blurs into the man's world.

Correlating the archetypes listed in Survival (7, p. 199) with the modern woman's struggle, Sherrill Grace speculates that Diana, capable of freedom, and Venus, capable of mature, sexual love, combine to depict a real woman as she finds a way out of the Hecate stereotype (14, p. 5). Atwood theorizes that the Canadian heroine in literature is the Hecate figure with Venus and Diana trapped inside (7, p. 210). To illustrate, Susanna Moodie in The Journals of Susanna Moodie embodies all three traditional archetypes especially as qualified in Atwood's eye imagery; she emerges as the Hecate figure, but with renewed identity as an incarnation of the spirit

of the land (14, pp. 5-6). Susanna Moodie finds identity outside the male's roles and expectations by departing from his view of her and adapting to the wilderness. She is able to find "wolf's eyes to see / the truth" (4, p. 82). Understanding influences of past roles and archetypes enables the emerging modern woman to discover her ability to adapt to her present environment. The female depends on these inherent elements in her nature to assist her in seeking a new identity.

Besides discarding old roles and searching for new ones, women must also understand their part in the victor-victim games of male-female relationships. Atwood outlines five victim positions in Survival. First of all, in Position One, the female, by denying her victimhood, remains a victim (7, p. 36). In Position Two, the woman verifies her victim position but blames it on God, fate, or biology, offering permanent excuse with no chance of escape (7, p. 36). Women in Position Three admit their status as victim, but, by expressing anger and refusing to accept that role, they seek to understand and modify the victim-causing experiences (7, p. 37). Eye imagery discussed in this thesis examines both this position and the possible movement beyond it to Position Four, which creates a non-victim (7, p. 38). Atwood explains Position Five as one "you can be if you've never been a victim in the first place" (11, p. 199).

Many of Atwood's poems expose the sexual politics of a victimized woman (21, p. 100). To Atwood, marriage and male-female relationships are more total surrender than commitment, for a woman immersed in a man's world (21, p. 101) becomes, not a whole self, but a part of a couple (21, p. 102). Atwood portrays the woman as a "creature with glass bones and wafer / eyes" whose "pieces" "shine briefly in [the male's] empty hands" (5, p. 42). In such relationships, the woman, sensing psychological death (21, p. 103), employs protective techniques, such as refusing to feel or to communicate, as she depersonalizes her sex to survive the relationship (21, p. 104). In Power Politics Atwood explores these victor-victim games, confining the war to intimacy between men and women (21, p. 19). Her people evade each other, unable to communicate, as they try to consume, manipulate, and control (22, p. 19). Atwood's affinity for images of entrapment, encasement, and violence appears in combination with eye imagery to underline these victim positions and games of sexual warfare. Atwood's woman refuses to continue in her role of submission to the male; she no longer will be "eyes" which "lift like continents / to the sun and erode slowly" (6, p. 59). She desires to free herself from her victimization, to "break . . . all the glass cases" (2, p. 44) and let [her] eyes go bare" (6, p. 43), without the male's cooperation. Margaret Atwood's poetry offers women a

possible end to false roles and unfair games and even a new beginning through honest communication.

Carl Jung's theory exhorts this growth of self as the ultimate goal of life. Such growth of self requires "constant discipline, persistent efforts, and the highest responsibility and wisdom" (15, p. 52). Atwood's later poetry examines this process. You Are Happy is a "series of acceptances of the self in its frailty and vulnerability and a rejection of the false self created by mythologies and surface perceptions" (12, p. 86). "The essential point [in Atwood's writing] is the search for one's self, for identity with one's body, one's instincts, one's country" (19, p. 90). As with victim Position Three, this search often involves female anger, not only at male expectations but also in her recognition, not of her innocence, but of her guilt. Atwood's eye imagery with its correlation to reflection examines this guilt and confusion. Atwood's speaker, as "the discs of [his] eyes gleam / white as dull quartz" (8, p. 57), asks her male counterpart to "look at me and see your reflection" (8, p. 56). Periodically in all eye imagery, but especially in the later poetry, references to anger, violence, and confusion reinforce the woman's need to break from the male's world into her own distinct and separate identity. This separation is not always successful, but "light emerges through her [Atwood's] recognition of

darkness, and of pain, for what they are--inescapable, and also signs of life, for only the dead live without pain" (25, p. 56). In "Speeches for Dr. Frankenstein," Atwood describes this pain:

Reflection, you have stolen
everything you needed:
my joy, my ability
to suffer (1, p. 45).

Atwood's "capacity to name the maladies takes her poetry from its early passive hostility to involvement, movement and finally, identity" (24, p. 32). In You Are Happy, Atwood's speaker can declare to her male counterpart:

your eyes opening, the eyes
intricate and easily bruised
open yourself like this and become whole (8, p. 96).

In such lines Atwood offers hope to the female, and to the male, for a separate and complete identity.

In Survival, Atwood remarks that "a writer's job is to tell society not how it ought to live, but how it does live" (17, p. 7). She explicates her theory of literature: ". . . a piece of art, as well as being a creation to be enjoyed can also be . . . a mirror. The reader looks at the mirror and sees not the writer but himself, and behind his own image in the foreground, a reflection of the world he lives in" (7, p. 15). Assuming the truth of this statement, one can see that Atwood's "peculiar force" (13, p. 5) lies in her ability to reflect society and its unfair attitudes toward women. "Atwood's poetry is

filled with reflective surfaces--mirrors, eyes, glass, photographs. They suggest how we merely 'surface'--float, skate or cast reflections--through life, rarely penetrating behind or below" (13, p. 13). Eye imagery refers to the I or self and the "quest for identity," a search for "vision of self" (21, p. 92). A woman seeks this new identity after first recognizing the archetypes and roles assigned by literature and society. She observes the male and his observing of her in order to define herself. In the epigraph to Power Politics, Atwood states:

You fit into me
like a hook into an eye

a fish hook
an open eye (5, p. 1).

As a "hook [fits] into an eye," the female must be "open and vulnerable" in order to be "alive and whole"; yet, she, too, feels the pain and loss when her image blurs into the male's (14, p. 76). To see properly, she must stop the sexual warfare and games of which both partners are guilty. To end her disillusionment, she acknowledges that "visual perception limits and excludes. Inner vision alone leads to full understanding of self and everything" (14, p. 76). In Margaret Atwood's poetry eye imagery is the predominant image used among such others as maps, sun-moon, right-left, colors, glass, mirrors, and games to examine the female's inner vision and male-female relationships. One can evaluate Atwood's remarks about

the female self and relationships by tracing the details of her eye imagery--its grammatical shifts, its relation to the poem's context, and its conclusions from observation, perception, and reflection as Atwood's purposes become more explicit and her associations to female identity more clearly identified from early to middle to later poetry. Atwood's eye imagery examines the eye in its power to observe, to analyze, and to perceive, but also in its inclination to distort and to confuse. Through this stylistic device of eye imagery, the poet moves to a conceivable synthesis of divergent ideas about a modern woman's identity.

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CHAPTER II

EARLY POETRY: EYES DISTORTED

It is difficult to say where
precisely, or to say
how large or small I am:
the effect of water
on light is a distortion

but if you look long enough,
eventually
you will be able to see me (2, p. 11).

In the opening poem of Margaret Atwood's first volume of poetry, The Circle Game, a drowned speaker describes to the reader and the poet where she can be seen--drowned at the bottom of the pond. As in most of the other early poems, Atwood does not directly relate eye imagery to the theme of female identity, but an indirect comparison can be made from the drowned speaker to the submerged modern woman who also sees and is seen through distortions. As the reader and the poet distort the image of the drowned speaker, so the female distorts her perceptions of her identity in today's world. Eye imagery occurs in at least twenty poems of the early volumes, existing mostly in noun forms alone or with adjectives. For example, in "The animals in that country" Atwood says "their eyes" (1, p. 3), and in "It is dangerous to read newspapers" the eyes are "passive eyes" (1, p. 31). Usually these images

contain relatively simple meanings and describe instances of a particular moment experienced by the male or female. Truth in relationships blurs as the images in many of the early poems become distorted. The woman remains dependent in these poems on the male's observations to create her world; and so she rarely acts, but is acted upon, experiencing frustration and submission, in the two earliest volumes: The Circle Game and The Animals in That Country.

This frustration and submission reveal the woman as a victim of her stereotypical role in society. She labors at inferior professional positions, ignominiously gives birth before witnesses, and performs as a domestic servant in the household while the male acts as breadwinner, protector, and decision-maker. Women, being more closely associated with nature in traditional roles and in poems such as "More and more" (1, p. 53), are expected to be emotional and sensitive but not intelligent or ambitious. Men, on the other hand, exhibit characteristics of reason, practicality, and logic, as in "The Circle Game" (2, pp. 35-44), and men are not required to express their feelings outwardly. Society allocates the male world powers to control and manipulate nature and the female world. Atwood sees the female as a victim of this authoritative male world. To elucidate the woman's struggle in these roles, the poet envisions through

eye imagery female counterparts, somewhat vaguely in animals and more clearly in children.

In one early poem, "The animals in that country," Atwood uses eye imagery to portray the senseless highway deaths of animals, illustrating the victims' unimportance:

In this country the animals
have the faces of
animals.

Their eyes
flash once in car headlights
and are gone.

Their deaths are not elegant (1, p. 3).

In "Elegy for the giant tortoise," the speaker confines herself to meditating on the giant tortoises, but she

. . . can't quite see them,
they move to the peripheries of [her] eyes (1, p. 23).

Although the speaker cannot yet see these animals, she expresses confidence later in the poem that they will move into the range of her limited vision. In "The totems," the speaker notices animals which

crept out
through the burrows of [her] blind eyes;
they went away to a different part of the forest,
leaving their masks behind (2, p. 22).

In both of these poems Atwood acknowledges the victimization of animals, not by human hands but by human minds which consider them to be like "brittle gods"--

relics of what we have destroyed,
our holy and obsolete symbols (2, p. 23).

Eye imagery becomes much more important in descriptions of children. In the title poem of The Circle Game, children are observed by parents who "can see"

the concentration on
their faces, their eyes
fixed on the empty
moving spaces just in
front of them (2, p. 35).

The children move trancelike without joy because they act out traditional roles and expectations, "the whole point" of which is the "endless circle dance" (3, p. 51). Their eyes are "fixed" in a constant position corresponding to their meaningless game; they stare just "in front of them," paying little attention to anything except the immediate environment. Rosemary Sullivan summarizes this poetic image:

Children are playing ring-around-the-rosie in what seems a whimsical game, but as the poetic image dissolves into symbol, the game becomes a tranced ritual of exclusion; the children are circumscribing reality, laying foundations for those garrisons of the mind that structure adult perceptions (9, p. 31).

More important in this assessment than the playing of games is the inability of the eyes of both adults and children to perceive the true picture of their victimization. The speaker recognizes that little purpose exists in the children "going round and round" (2, p. 36). She wants "the circle" of the male's "word- / plays," games, and "calculated ploys" (2, p. 39) "broken" (2, p. 44).

Women, like children, stifle identity under traditional social mores and male expectations.

In a similar use of eye imagery, the poet reflects victimization of women through association with nature. Eyes distort even these images of landscape, as a woman wrongly conceives her place in society by confusing her identity with that of the male in "Journey to the Interior" (2, pp. 57-58). There the speaker agonizes over movement from the security of her domestic life to "other landscapes" (2, p. 58). A woman's world of emotion and communion with nature loses itself in a man's world of reason and logic. In this same poem the woman wonders whether she is "walking in circles again" (2, p. 57). In these early poems, the speaker observes the eye's perceptions and distortions in an atmosphere of frustration and submission.

In "The surveyors," Atwood's speaker describes the trail of destruction left by men, marking and cutting trees. The red paint which designates the felled trees contrasts sharply with the surrounding forest:

we saw too how these vivid
signals, painted assertions

were as we looked surrounded, changed
by the gradual pressure of endless
green on the eyes (1, p. 4).

Eye imagery combines with the action verbs "saw" and "looked" to explain the speaker's observations of this

victimization of nature; eyes allow the green of the forest to obliterate the red paint of the marked trees from the speaker's mind, thus eliminating the speaker's concern for the doomed trees. In "A Descent through the Carpet," the speaker at "eyelevel" compares the landscape of the harbor "outside the window" and the "patterned carpet" "inside the window" (2, p. 21). In attempting to keep these two landscapes separate, she can only remember violent and fearful aspects of both worlds, thereby victimizing herself with painful memories and inaccurate perceptions. In "Journey to the Interior," the speaker observes further distortions:

the hills
 which the eyes make flat as a wall, welded
 together, open as I move
 to let me through (2, p. 57).

Hills allow movement, but the eyes distort the hills to flat walls, literally and symbolically. Eyes misconstrue movement in landscape just as the speaker distorts the reality of her situation when she believes

it is easier for me to lose my way
 forever here, than in other landscapes (2, p. 58).

The speaker's movement, like any woman's, can be jeopardized if wrongly perceived by her vision; her identity can be lost in submission to the male world, thus producing victimization.

Another connection with eye imagery and nature or landscape more clearly symbolizes relationships between the

worlds of the male and the female. In "The Islands," two different islands are described, "one larger" and "the other smaller," but

We know they are alone
and always will be.

The lake takes care of that
and if it went,
they would be hills
and still demand
separateness
from the eye (2, p. 68).

Symbolically assigning the larger island to male identity and the smaller one to the female, one can credit the eyes with responsibly perceiving the islands through accurate vision. This poem, contrary to the distortion shown in the previous poem, affirms that both persons, like the islands, are two distinct worlds and must remain individuals, seen separately:

we find it pleasing
(it soothes our instinct for
symmetry, proportion,
for company perhaps)

that there are two
of them (2, p. 68).

Male identity must not erase female identity through the inaccurate perceptions of the eyes.

Even as references to landscape accentuate the eye's ability to perceive and to distort, other poems define further the male and female worlds as eye imagery combines with nature imagery. Although eye imagery sometimes appears also in these poems in combination with glass imagery

or the words "see" or "observe," more obvious references are made to female identity as Atwood no longer uses animals, children, or landscape as counterparts to women. In many of these poems, both male and female attempt to compel the partner to adapt to the opposite world. Atwood's eye imagery expresses the female's frustrations in her assigned roles and at the passive, destructive male attitudes that restrict her to his world. The female tries to persuade the male to adapt to her world, and she also attempts to understand his world. Still, she feels trapped by his expectations of her; his perceptions victimize her.

In the poem entitled "More and more," the speaker experiences the wish to assimilate the world, "including / you," but she lacks

leaves.
 Instead [she has] eyes
 and teeth and other non-green
 things which rule out osmosis (1, p. 53).

Foster believes the speaker wants to "sexually absorb her partner" (5, p. 12). She desires the man completely, but, since she is not a plant, this assimilation is an impossibility. Her eyes, a non-green / thing," keep her from living "like a cool plant's tricks . . . by a harmless green burning" (1, p. 53). The woman's desire to identify with the world of nature as opposed to the world of man fades as her eyes expose her human characteristics. The

female in "A fortification" desires to arm herself: "[her] opening eyes close hydraulic doors" as she attempts to barricade herself "from leaves and blood" or human feelings for the male (1, p. 16). In confusion, she realizes that, as she seeks escape from the male's world of reason, her humanity prevents her own and the male's complete transformation to the female world through nature. In "A Sibyl," the speaker describes her sibyl as something "every woman / should have" in order to protect herself from her own feelings (2, p. 49). The sibyl is

wrinkled as a pickled
 baby . . . her sightless
 eyes like eggwhites (2, p. 49).

In recognizing her humanity and inability to adapt to the world of nature, the female seeks escape in apathy through "sightless eyes"; she admits,

The thing that calls itself
 I
 right now
 doesn't care (2, p. 50).

Since the woman cannot assimilate the male or transform herself, she attempts to adapt him to her world. In "Eventual Proteus," she announces that she did not forsake her lover through all his "shifts / of structure" as the

treebark paled from [his] skin
 the leaves from [his] eyes (2, p. 31).

Because he prefers his world of reason to her world of nature, he estranges himself from her, allowing his eyes to lose their leaves so that

these days we keep
our weary distances (2, p. 31).

Jones concludes that the poem exhibits transformations (7, pp. 4-5), but, if so, they are disguised and are destructive because "this shape is final" (2, p. 32). In these poems the woman desires to change the identities of the male and female worlds, but she is unsuccessful because the male refuses to cooperate.

Atwood's eye imagery in "Attitudes towards the mainland" examines the male's attitudes which prevent possible transformation. The male cannot comprehend a transformation to the female's world. He sees only

the lake
and various drowners, letting slip
their numbed grasp on the gunwale,
their eyes' quick pictures (1, p. 9).

He knows only the facts of life and death as pictured in the eyes of the drowners; he refuses to consider other possibilities like "the earth," which "will not melt / if you stand on it" (1, p. 8). In "Progressive insanities of a pioneer," the speaker recognizes that the male must always attempt to order and control his world, although

in the end
through eyes
made ragged by his
effort

the wilderness retaliates by overtaking his civilization (1, p. 39). This time eyes symbolize nature's and the female world's tenacious spirit which refuses to succumb

to the male's demands. As a "starspangled cowboy" with "righteous eyes" the male desecrates the land he "pass[es] through" (1, p. 51). Although the main idea of this image may deal with the Canada-United States relationship, the image also fits the male-female relationship. Speaking for the destroyed land in a voice similar to the victimized woman, Atwood says,

I am the horizon
you ride towards, the thing you never lasso

I am also what surrounds you:
my brain
scattered with your
tincans, bones, empty shells,
the litter of your invasions.

I am the space you desecrate
as you pass through.

Eye imagery reflects the male's perceptions of superiority and dominance over the environment, which retaliates by refusing to be completely victimized. In "A Messenger," the speaker describes a male who must have "swallowed by mistake" "a myth":

his particular features
fading day by day
his eyes melted
first; Thursday
his flesh became translucent (2, p. 14).

In this poem Atwood's eye imagery exposes the male's vulnerability to his unrealistic expectations and inaccurate observations of the world about him. The male fails to understand his own motivations; he certainly cannot understand the female's. The female cannot make her world solid

for him, nor can he make his solid for her, because neither sees with the same eyes or perceptions.

Like the female, the male also pressures his partner to adapt to his world. Eye imagery in these poems expresses the female's frustrations at the male's expectations of her. The speaker in "The Circle Game" feels as if she is

fixed, . . . stuck
down on the outspread map
. . . of your mind's continent . . . transfixed
by your eyes'
cold blue thumbtacks (2, p. 40).

His observations freeze her into a set role as his cold attitudes and lack of understanding reflect in his eyes. In "Camera," he insists on "an organized instant" in his picture-taking (2, p. 45). She wonders:

Camera man
how can I love your glass eye? (2, p. 45).

His "glass eye" takes pictures which are inaccurate and absurd to use as a clue to a person's identity (4, p. 75). Eye imagery combines with glass imagery to express distortion which can be committed by human eyes as well as a camera's lens. This more complicated image illuminates the female's struggle to remain "fixed" in an inaccurate role prescribed for her by the unseeing male.

Since she cannot convince him to adapt to her world and he cannot conform her to his, the female tries to understand and establish the boundaries of the male's

world. In "On the Streets, Love," the speaker describes a woman who wants to own a man on a poster,

seeing
 him so trim
 edges clear as cut paper
 eyes clean (2, p. 29).

Atwood uses eye imagery to express this easily defined male figure. Comparing herself and her lover to a billboard lady and a poster man, the speaker feels that the male tries to "read [her] mind / from the inside out" (2, p. 30). This poem foreshadows Atwood's later, more openly expressed idea in Power Politics, which recognizes that male and female both expect and define superficial or superhuman roles for each other to fill. In "Pre-Amphibian," the speaker makes another attempt to define the male:

from the lucidities of day
 . . . you are something I can
 trace a line around, with eyes
 cut shapes
 from air, the element
 where we
 must calculate according to
 solidities (2, p. 63).

This poem's eyes are easily defined but changeless as their perfection perceives and also destroys. The female, in identifying the form of the male, loses herself in him. Other sight imagery explains this paradox. Shifts in identity alter easily if the identity is vague, for

I blur
 into you our breathing sinking to green millen-
[niums (2, p. 63)].

In her inability to understand his world or to alter her own, she confuses her identity with his. In their struggles to assimilate the other, both male and female lose their ability to perceive because both observe distorted images of each other. Jones clarifies: "Form permits identity, then, but necessitates separation; lack of form, preventing clear identity, yet permits intimacy; the narrator holds Proteus, but only until he takes the form of a man" (7, p. 5). In "After I fell apart," the woman also loses her grasp on herself as she waits on the male to fit her back together:

[her] brain was a
 broken doll, its heart creaked
 with wrong pendulums, its clock-
 work planets, glass eyes
 jangled on loose wires (1, p. 56).

In this poem the female's vision is transparent and empty, like glass. She acknowledges that her "consciousness"

is hard, hollow . . . sensing [the male] [is]
 [the sole
 thought balanced in [her] doll skull (1, p. 56).

Yet, she submits to the male's vision because she cannot separate into her own distinct identity. Sometimes in this frustration and submission, the female wishes to

deny
 [the male's] goldrimmed visions
 by scratching through [his] eyes (1, p. 60).

If he will not change of his own accord, she attempts to transform him, but he evades her and later

take[s] [her] fourcornered
 measure, scroll[s] [her]
 up like a map (1, p. 60).

Victimization occurs as the woman, instead of forcing the male to see, loses her own chance at vision.

Identity requires clarity of form but with accurate vision; if it is too defined by the male or the female, separation prevents a whole relationship. The poet creates:

the moment before focus, when
 these tides recede; and we
 see each other through the
 hardening scales of waking

stranded, astounded
 in a drying world

we flounder
 with sunlight steaming merciless on the shores of
 [morning (2, p. 64)].

The imagery in this one poem moves from eyes to blurring to seeing, but the possibility for identity is fleeting; this moment, like the others, is lost in obscured vision.

This early poetry includes several poems which combine the elements of eye imagery with ideas of sight and observation in order to identify possible reasons for the failures of the male and the female to assimilate each other. Failing, both must share the blame because the male's avoidance of the issues equals the female's passive submission that leads to frustration and victimization. In the poem "The gods avoid revealing themselves," the closing verse describes the male "who would not let

himself be seen" (1, p. 24); in the poem "It is dangerous to read newspapers," the "passive eyes" of the speaker

transmute
everything [she] look[s] at to the pocked
black and white of a war photo (1, p. 31).

Both the male and the female observe with guilty eyes because one of the greatest crimes a person can commit is to reject responsibility (6, p. 27); eyes are not necessarily innocent or without guilt. Eyes also become passive through stifled attempts at perceptions: "The eyes raise / tired monuments" (1, p. 61). The poet and speaker must accept and be convinced of the "causal link between [themselves] and destruction" (8, p. 45). Only by acknowledging her participation in her victim position can a woman find a new identity apart from the roles assigned by the male. A woman's inability to define the male through her observations of him and the man's inaccurate perceptions of her cause frustration. It is only

if you look long enough,
eventually
you will be able to see me (2, p. 11).

In this poem Atwood requires the participation of the reader, who must see through the smeared, blurred picture to the true identity of the speaker and also something of herself or himself and the poet. Arnold Davidson explores in "This is a Photograph of Me" the possibility in the "smeared print" with its "blurred lines" (2, p. 11) of a "triple exposure," something of the "reader's features,"

the missing, drowned speaker of the poem, and "the poet at work" (3, p. 49). As in other poems, descriptions of landscape lead to "socialscape" (3, p. 48), or the roles assigned by the male and female for each other, and later to "psychoscape" (3, p. 48) as the female attempts to define her identity outside of the submission and frustration caused by the male vision. In the final poems of both volumes Atwood employs eye imagery to emphasize the overwhelming task of discovering identity. In "A Place: Fragments," an "eye" symbolizes "outer space" and, like "bird's at the eye's edge," the male and female stand with a "clutter of twigs / across [their] eyes" (2, p. 75). Only accurate vision and much effort will present the possibility of success for their search for identity. Assuming that the "axiom" the speaker addresses is the male, the final poem of The Animals in That Country offers some hope:

Axiom: you are a sea.
Your eye-
lids curve over chaos

My hands
where they touch you, create
small inhabited islands

Soon you will be
all earth: a known
land, a country (1, p. 69).

These poems recognize the possibility of identity as both male and female have "eyes" and "eyelids"; the difficulties

lie in making accurate perceptions instead of unfair distortions.

In these early works, Atwood only asks questions about identity. There are no answers, only victims and obscurity. It is "through the tangle of each other / we hunt ourselves" (1, p. 67). Gayle Wood criticizes Atwood for asking the reader to locate dangers she has not yet defined (10, p. 30), but Atwood does clarify through eye imagery the idea that the frustrations of the traditional roles and stifled female identity cause the woman to feel turned "inside out" and trapped in her victimization by the male. In the title poem of The Circle Game, the speaker says,

your observations change me
to a spineless woman in
a cage of bones, obsolete fort
pulled inside out (2, p. 43).

The woman "wants the circle [of frustration and submission] broken" (2, p. 44); her perceptions and observations about her victimization by the male and her admission of her own guilt lead later to possible solutions to the paradoxes posed by these early verses: the eye's ability to distort as well as to perceive, to confuse as well as to observe.

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CHAPTER III

MIDDLE POETRY: EYES CONFUSED

I take this picture of myself
and with my sewing scissors
cut out the face.

Now it is more accurate:

where my eyes were,
every-
thing appears (1, p. 79).

Ann Boutelle maintains that Margaret Atwood's "concern throughout most of her writing is with psychological survival" (4, p. 270). This struggle for identity becomes apparent "when Atwood focuses on the face" (4, p. 270). In the above epigraph, the speaker determines to "cut out [her] face" and find "every- / thing" "where [her] eyes were" (1, p. 79). Atwood's attention to eyes in this middle poetry further develops the requirements of accurate vision for distinct identity.

As the woman acknowledges her feelings of entrapment and immersion in the male's world, she also recognizes the necessary split between the male and female principles. Only after Atwood's woman becomes conscious of this separateness can completion of self occur. The middle poetry progresses through this growing consciousness of self from the adjustment to environment seen in The Journals

of Susanna Moodie, to a point of examining personal experiences in Procedures for Underground, and finally to the depiction of violent and destructive male-female power struggles in Power Politics. Over forty poems in these three volumes include eye images; the poems concern themselves with the more complex aspects of male-female relationships. Content parallels a form which generally uses nouns with participles instead of with simple adjectives, like "eyes diffused" (3, p. 87), and which has references to "see" and "sight" as well as to "eyes." One example is the line "wolf's eyes to see the truth" (1, p. 82). Descriptions of the eyes include stronger, harsher images than in the early poetry. For example, this more violent language occurs when Atwood describes Susanna Moodie as the "old woman" "out of [whose] eyes come secret / What-pins, destroying . . ." (1, p. 116). Now combinations of eye and glass imagery are more prevalent. Eye imagery in the middle poetry reflects in form, content, and context the intense struggle of a woman for survival in a world of confused identities and roles. The Journals of Susanna Moodie exemplifies the woman's confusion about role and identity as she seeks to adapt to her environment. This process of dealing with one's victimization begins when the woman gains respect for her ability to understand male logic without losing her ability to offer emotional responses to experiences; she must also gain

an "awareness of role playing, and how women suffocate in narrow crevices of sexual identity" (10, p. 19). Confusion results from the woman's increasing awareness of her own responsibility for her victimization by the male. Several poems in Atwood's Procedures for Underground express her feelings of frustration, submission, and guilt as participant in victor-victim games and unreasonable roles. Atwood's woman feels trapped by the male's perceptions and observations of her, but in Power Politics she also imprisons the male in impossible role expectations as hero and rescuer. Only through defining these inadequate roles and divisions in male-female worlds can Atwood's woman find a new identity.

In her middle poetry Atwood rarely uses nouns without strong adjectives, as in "his / fused red eye" (3, p. 71) or "a single orange eye" (3, p. 42); nouns appear consistently with participles, illustrated by "eyes bewildered" (1, p. 91), "eyes closed" (3, p. 20), or "eyes diffused" (3, p. 37). Images become clearer in meaning when modified by clauses or action verbs. For instance, Atwood says "eyes are blinded" (2, p. 7) and refers to "eyes which were empty holes" (3, p. 19). Examination of eye imagery in the middle poetry compared to the early poetry reveals clearer insights into male-female relationships and a woman's search for self.

Just as in Margaret Atwood's early poetry, several poems in Procedures for Underground contain eye imagery which explains situations outside of male-female relationships. Such poems extend her earlier idea in Animals in That Country. The poems' situations deal with victims, but now Atwood progresses one step further than just naming the malady; she assesses accountability for victimization. First of all, in "Three Desk Objects," examples of slaughter, scars, and death satisfy the writer's demand for subjects. Talking to her "cool machines"--the electric typewriter, light, and clock--she questions,

What suns had to rise and set
 what eyes had to blink out
 what hands and fingers
 had to let go of their heat (3, p. 44).

Guilt is strong here; an artist's sense of responsibility is great. For Atwood these eyes symbolize the poet's feeling that even her "cool machines" "will cry out in pain" for the victim whose "eyes had to blink out" in order for the artist to have material for her poems (3, p. 44). As well as falling on artists, blame for victimhood also falls on those males who are characteristically associated with violence and destruction. In "Projected Slide of an Unknown Soldier," the poet describes a soldier whose "eyes" are "hidden" (3, p. 46). Because female nature and peace are so foreign to him, the soldier cannot comprehend an end to war or destruction. In

"Buffalo in Compound: Alberta," man also destroys nature.

There the poet states:

It was hard to see them
but we thought we saw
in the field near them, the god
of this place . . . his
fused red eye turned inward (3, p. 71).

The speaker remembers past times when buffalo were free, killed by Indians only for survival. The god's eye is "red," of blood and death, but "fused" closed for it no longer protects the buffalo, a victim of civilization. The poet mourns the vanished past as she senses its identification with the female world of nature instead of the male's world of reason and civilization. Even the speaker in "The Creatures of the Zodiac" feels guilty because she named the constellations and "now they are predictions" (3, p. 29). Atwood describes these constellations in terms of eyes: "Their whitehard eyes brittle / behind the bars" (3, p. 29). In each of these poems not only are specific victims identified and blame assessed, but the speaker also recognizes her own involvement in the victimization; she allows herself to become part of the male's world of logic and reasoning instead of the female's world of understanding and nature. Much of the middle poetry concerns this necessity of adapting the female world to its environment instead of surrendering it to the male world.

Susanna Moodie, a Canadian pioneer, illustrates the transitions made by a woman who chooses to adapt to her environment instead of remaining both frustrated in traditional roles and submissive to unfair expectations. Atwood identifies in The Journals of Susanna Moodie a potential female victim who follows her husband from Europe to the Canadian bush. Mrs. Moodie, "as immigrant, serves Atwood as a Canadian archetype" (11, p. 33), for she typifies any Canadian woman's instinctive struggle to adapt and survive. Mrs. Moodie could easily lose all identity as a victim not only of her husband's expectations but also of her environment. Instead, Mrs. Moodie recognizes her own frustrations and guilts and attempts to find a new identity. Eye imagery in The Journals of Susanna Moodie reveals how this woman struggles to conform to her environment in order to survive. These poems recreate the "assault upon the pioneer psyche" as the European civilized self-assurance of Susanna Moodie gives way to "feelings of worthlessness and self-negation" when confronted by the "unstructured space of the bush" (7, p. 9). Eye imagery portrays Susanna Moodie's progression from confusion about her past European self toward recognition of her confusing and contradictory roles and a possible new identity in a wilderness self.

Upon her arrival in Canada, Mrs. Moodie understands her need to define her new world in order to prevent

victimization. Eye imagery explores her search for a new identification as her appearance changes outwardly and her emotions change inwardly. Mrs. Moodie begins to adapt when she realizes that she must forsake her civilized past for the wilderness. Her association with the male world of reason and logic must be exchanged for the female world of emotions and nature in order for her to survive. In "Further Arrivals," Mrs. Moodie requests "wolf's eyes to see / the truth" (1, p. 82), which means to "penetrate the wilderness" (11, p. 34) and understand "the truth" about her identity in relation to the Canadian bush. "It is necessary to see behind the eyes; to see how the eyes saw, and what they saw, that made them look that way [enigmatic]" (5, p. 15). Here eye imagery correlates with mirror imagery as Susanna Moodie "refuse[s] to look in a mirror" (1, p. 82) at "an Englishwoman's frightened face" (5, p. 16) to uncover "wolf's eyes" (1, p. 82). Mrs. Moodie realizes that the mirror is useless because she must discover a new inner as well as outer self by groping "for a new language of eyes and words" (12, p. 106). Leaving the bush too early, she later returns and changes physically:

Hands grown stiff, the fingers
 brittle as twigs
 eyes bewildered after
 seven years, and almost
 blind/buds, which can see
 only the wind . . . (1, p. 91).

These images contain the words "see" and "blind," indicating that her once "bewildered eyes" have, through the harshness of nature, changed to almost "blind/buds" which see only the "wind" and elements of nature. Mrs. Moodie's appearance conforms to the wilderness, but her mind has not yet completely adjusted. Mrs. Moodie recognizes that eyes exclude as well as distort (8, p. 43). In "Departure from the bush," she "was frightened / by their [the animals'] eyes (green or / amber) glowing out from inside [her]" (1, p. 93). In order to belong, she must assimilate the world of Indians and animals instead of fearing them. This transition costs her more than physical aging and confused loyalties; she also loses her son. Atwood again uses eye imagery to portray this significant event. In "Death of a young son by drowning," Mrs. Moodie's son's "eyes" are described as "thin glass bubbles" (1, p. 94). Her son, like herself, is also on a "voyage of discovery" (1, p. 94), but he fails to survive. Mrs. Moodie acknowledges that the wilderness now has her son because through death she "planted him in this country / like a flag" (1, p. 95). Although the boy seeks discovery and finds only death, Mrs. Moodie continues her struggle to exchange her past European self for her new wilderness one, but she does recognize her sacrifices:

My arms, my eyes, my grieving
words, my disintegrated children (1, p. 103).

As Mrs. Moodie attempts to find her new self, she encounters confusion in her role and in her husband's view of her. Eye imagery expresses the frustrations in these distorted pictures of the male and female worlds. In "The Double Voice," two worlds are described:

Two voices
 took turns using my eyes:
 one had manners. . . . The other voice
 had other knowledge. . . . One saw through my
 bleared and gradually
 bleaching eyes . . . The other found a dead dog (1, p.
 [104]).

The world of nature and its opposite, that of man, all but destroy Mrs. Moodie. Atwood uses Mrs. Moodie's eyes to describe the depletion of her strengths and identity. In "The wereman," she acts unsure of her husband's identity when he is "blotted out" as he enters the forest "upheld by her sight," and she wonders what he changes into (1, p. 85). Mrs. Moodie no longer knows herself or her husband. She questions how he sees her

with the fox eye, the owl
 eye, the eightfold
 eye of the spider
 [she] can't think
 what he will see
 when he opens the door (1, p. 85).

He sees her through eyes which she knows are not really eyes of the wilderness. Mrs. Moodie, although confused about her husband's identity, recognizes his relationship to the wilderness as she watches "[her] husband, a neighbour, another man / weeding":

They deny the ground they stand on,
pretend this dirt is the future.
And they are right. If they let go
of that illusion solid to them as a shovel,

open their eyes even for a moment
to these trees, to this particular sun,
they would be surrounded, stormed, broken (1, p. 84).

These men seem incapable of understanding or adapting to the world of nature; instead they seek to control and change it. Women like Mrs. Moodie feel frustrated at men's refusal to "open their eyes"; yet, they continue to seek an identity closer to their world of nature.

Eye imagery reflects Mrs. Moodie's confusion as she, after assimilating much of the wilderness, no longer knows herself. Because she no longer recognizes her former European self, she remains unsure of her identity. Foster hypothesizes, "... it is as if there is one continuous spirit of the wilderness that assimilates the settler's European self and that merely incarnates itself in various forms" (7, p. 10). Eye imagery reveals this paradox in Mrs. Moodie as she identifies with and yet distrusts her new wilderness image. In "Thoughts from Underground," Mrs. Moodie agonizes over loving and hating the wilderness: "I said I loved it / and my mind saw double" (1, p. 111). Adaptation to the wilderness requires her total being. She must learn from nature instead of trying to control it. Mrs. Moodie recognizes that her discovery of self becomes complete through death.

In "Wish: Metamorphosis to Heraldic Emblem," she seems to be forever lost "no / eyes glowing" (1, p. 107) in death, but later in "Solipsism while Dying," "the eyes produce light" (1, p. 110). Finally, in "Resurrection," she can now proclaim,

I see
now I cannot see
earth is a blizzard in my eyes (1, p. 114).

Eye imagery follows this progression from the possibility of death with "no / eyes glowing" to eyes which in rebirth can now see. Mrs. Moodie only dies physically because her struggle for identity provides examples for other women who must learn to adjust to their environment. Atwood employs eye imagery and violent images to express this transformation of Mrs. Moodie from death to rebirth as the spirit of the land. In "A Bus along St. Claire: December," she says,

I am the old woman
sitting across from you on the bus . . . out of her
[eyes come secret
hatpins, destroying
the walls, the ceiling (1, p. 116)

In the end Mrs. Moodie is not just "native or animal" but "the landscape itself" (7, p. 10). By using her female nature instead of submitting to the male's world, Mrs. Moodie learns to adapt by recognizing her ability to transform herself to the environment.

This poetry redefines the world, not just for an historical Susanna Moodie but also for "the civilized

city dweller confronted by what is primitive and irrational in the land around her" (7, p. 11). As Canadian archetype and symbol for modern woman, Mrs. Moodie depends on emotions and instincts inherent in all females to continue life and survive by adapting. She is doubly perceptive because she learns to see rituals of the past and facts of reality (8, p. 39). Instead of trying to control and manipulate nature as the male does, the female learns to understand and adapt to her new world. Whether or not Atwood uses "we" "to mean another person or a schizophrenic version of self," both readings fit the theme of the "metamorphosing and divided self" and "concern the psychic hazards of 'settlement,' of making sense" of life and the world by "creating fulfilling relationships" (7, p. 11). The portrait of Susanna Moodie reflects all three female archetypes, but the most impressive is the "crone embodying the spirit of the land" (8, p. 5). Although not a Diana or a Venus, Mrs. Moodie shows capabilities of love and understanding and also the strength and determination to survive. Susanna Moodie's life demonstrates the way any woman can divide her personality from the male's influence in order to provide the "wisdom of double vision" (8, p. 33). Seeking "rituals and the facts of reality" (8, p. 39) by turning herself "inside out," Mrs. Moodie becomes "the spirit of the land she once hated" (8, p. 41). Through eye imagery in

The Journals of Susanna Moodie, Atwood illustrates how women, in order to grow, must be willing to act, not just to observe, and must be willing to see clearly, not just to see their own guilt, but also to see their strengths for new possibilities. Women who can identify with their environment and adapt to it by changing perceptions can gain a new identity.

In the other two volumes of middle poetry, the woman feels confused in her growing awareness of self in a changing environment. Atwood uses eye imagery to express this growing confusion of a modern woman whose roles, like those of Susanna Moodie, are outdated but have no new roles to replace them. Atwood points out dependence on the past through eye imagery as the speaker sees

a bird
lit on both branches . . . I saw
his lizard eye (3, p. 9).

"The blue jay's reptilian ancestor survives in the bird's lizard eye" (7, p. 15). Like the bird, women are influenced and controlled by past roles and archetypes. These eye images are often present with other images of violence, expressing not only the female's confusion, but also her desire for separation from past models and ancestors. The traditional archetypes and past roles, including motherhood, fail as the woman feels only emptiness as she attempts to identify her new roles. She begins to recognize the falsity of the old roles assigned

to herself and to the male, although she has no replacements yet. Presently, she cannot even fulfill the expectations of her children. Her failed intentions affect her children, who see their mother in the pond

upside down, lifesize, hair streaming
over the
slashed throat . . . in the cold and with bulging eyes
[(2, p. 41).

The traditional role of mother disappears, with violence expressed in the submerged woman's eyes, which almost explode. Her old roles destroy her when she delays action.

In order to replace her past identity with a new self, the female must search beyond herself into male-female relationships. Atwood's eye imagery explores the inadequate identity in such relationships. In "Delayed Message," the female stands looking at herself and her lover with possibly another woman "through the eyes which were empty holes" (3, p. 19). Even if the woman sees, not another lover, but her own reflection, she does not recognize it because "eyes are not alone 'holes' but with emptiness specified" (12, p. 109). Eyes represent an emptiness which the female cannot yet define. She sees old roles disappearing, with new roles blurring. In "Midwinter, Presolstice," the marriage relationship is definitely deteriorating as she dreams "of departures, meetings, / repeated weddings with a stranger," while her

gentle husband
 sits alone in the corner
 . . . guarding a paper bag
 which holds
 turnips and apples and [her] head, the eyes
 [closed (3, p. 20)].

In both instances, whether "empty" or "closed," the eyes picture the dead, defeated attitude of the woman, unhappy with her role but without resources for correction. Atwood captures this frustrating moment in two opposing voices as the speaker faces that there is "no such place" as a safe environment either internal or external, "for the world of danger is the same as the real world" (8, p. 46). In "Hypotheses: City," the speaker wants "out of this fear," but

none notice . . . (they walk
 through me, not seeing
 me
 my eyes diffused, washing
 in waves of light across the ceiling (3, p. 37)).

The worst fear in this crisis of self-identity is of this isolation, almost a death in itself, which Atwood examines through eye imagery. In "Chrysanthemums," the flowers are a gift "given to the eyes" even

as brilliant images the eyes
 are said to see
 the instant before drowning (3, p. 61).

Flowers represent other gifts which appear as bright flashes in memory as the death of the relationship approaches. These images reflect distortion and terror. There is no easy replacement as the woman faces emptiness

in place of confusion. "Self encounters the ghostliness of its others. But which self? Which other?" (12, p. 109).

As in The Journals of Susanna Moodie, the two voices noticeable in eye imagery in many of the poems are equivalent to the opposing male-female worlds. In "Two Gardens," the two worlds are described with the male worlds of reason and logic present "because I measured, placed, reached / down into the soil," while "outside the string borders" lies the female world of emotion and sensitivity, where

other things raise
themselves, brief
motions at the path's edge . . . (3, p. 16).

The male cannot comprehend this second world because, if he touches it, his "eyes go through [it]" (3, p. 17). He reacts to the female with "closed eyes / beat[ing] / against [her] fingers"; he pulls away (2, p. 34). Much of what the woman feels or experiences cannot be treated with facts and reasons. The male cannot comprehend her world, and so she feels trapped in his. In "Cyclops," the allusion to the mythological creature blinded by Odysseus provides the setting for the man on a path; the speaker describes him:

. . . with no moon, the flashlight
a single orange eye
unable to see what is beyond
the capsule of [his] dim
sight . . . (3, p. 42).

Because he must always follow traditional roles, he does not really see; he does not let "[his] eyes go bare" and become one with nature (3, p. 43). An alliance with nature

offers the female a chance at identity while the male world offers her only frustration and submission.

While understanding the necessity of a separate female world and recognizing that past roles and behavior are not satisfactory, the female must also examine the male's roles and her expectations of them. Atwood presents eye imagery in combination with glass imagery to disapprove of the woman's dependence on the male as hero or rescuer. As she recognizes his misuse of her, she begins to understand her unreal expectations of him. Eye imagery appears consistently with violent images as the woman expresses her disgust with her male's past roles as superhero or knight in shining armor. Past male archetypes in literature contribute to this faulty vision of the male by the female. In the same way that the male envisions the female as a Cinderella or Snow-White, the female expects to be rescued by a Prince Charming or Sir Launcelot. Recognizing her inadequate vision of the male allows the woman to separate from his world. In these poems, the male, as a monster of past traditions, has "six eyes glowed / red" (2, p. 2), or, as a modern superhero has been

suspended above the city

in blue tights and a red cape
[his] eyes flashing in unison (2, p. 5).

The male's eyes glow red with passion or violence and flash with anger and demands. For the female, dependence

and submission produce untrue pictures of males as gods or heroes instead of as human beings. In "Return Trips West," the speaker describes a man who watches "with scorn back over his shoulder, / his eyes phosphorescent" (3, p. 50). Males produce unreal expectations for each other and for the female. By releasing her hold on him as superior and supernatural, the female also takes away the male's role as villain in the victor-victim games. The female searcher, in her struggle for identity, allows her male gods to disintegrate and "dissect[s] her fantasized images of man" (9, p. 61).

Removing unfair roles allows both male and female a chance at whole relationships, but growth occurs slowly and with effort. Often, as the male and female recognize each other's vulnerability and humanity, they feel threatened by this new knowledge. In recognizing the male for his true self, the Atwood female says,

I don't
want to hurt
you any more
now than I have to

for

you too have your gentle
moments, you too have
eyelashes, each of your eyes
is a different colour (2, p. 17).

Although she recognizes his vulnerability and his humanity as seen in his "eyelashes" which she, too, possesses, he poses a threat, however unclear. He has eyes, but their

different colors alarm her. She sees his conforming to traditional roles and his own expectations until all hopes of self-discovery disappear where he lies

piled with
the others, [his] face and body
covered so thickly with scars
only the eyes show through (2, p. 30).

She fears identifying herself only to have him refuse to seek out himself. Confusing her, he appears to be an element of nature, but she questions his origin:

If a bird what kind/
nothing I have ever
seen in air/you fly
through earth and water casting
a red shadow

The door wakes me, this is
your jewelled reptilian
eye in darkness next to
mine, shining feathers of
hair sift over my forehead (2, p. 45).

Although he appears to be a bird, he casts "a red shadow" of possible blood and violence; his eye remains "jewelled" and "reptilian," elements incorporated out of nature into civilization and history. She believes him to be adapting to her world, but she also sees him as part of the male world " . . . midway between / [her] eyes and the nearest trees" like a "billboard" without "history" (2, pp. 26-27).

Like their hidden identities, the only love the male and female can bring to each other is hidden and protected from view. Both seek to hide their true selves, for the search for identity causes not only confusion in

new roles but also the need for protection from the other person's observations. The only love he can bring her is "in the form of / a cardboard box (empty)," but this emptiness breaks her open, for she is

like a deep sea
creature with glass bones and wafer
eyes drawn
to the surface (2, p. 42).

The male grants the woman sole existence as his reflection with "wafer eyes" and "glass bones" (12, p. 105). Glass imagery combines here with eye imagery to express the woman's vulnerability. As she attempts to redefine her world, she feels betrayed if he refuses to cooperate, for he sees her at a greater depth with more vulnerability than he allows her to see him. Although she no longer desires a hero, she sees these male figures disguised and posing a threat (9, p. 60). He is a "sun / in reverse," "blind and one-handed," and she wonders "How can I stop you" (2, p. 47). The male pretends to seek identity, but only so that he can control and manipulate the female to a greater extent. His desire to blind her new perceptions causes the woman, out of her confusion about her new understandings, to seek answers elsewhere.

Power Politics exposes the false idea that wanting dispels isolation (6, p. 84). The Atwood woman believes that a new kind of hero would be the answer for her need for a different kind of male, but the brightly armored knight

on the cover of the volume, once a symbol of bravery and rescue, now hides a "malevolent reality" behind his armor (9, p. 61). The poem describing the cover picture states:

General, you enlist
my body in your heroic
struggle to become real:
though you promised bronze rescues

you hold me by the left ankle
so that my head brushes the ground,
my eyes are blinded,
my hair fills with white ribbons (2, p. 7).

She accuses him of destroying her vision as she is held upside down with blinded eyes. Such relationships destroy all hope of identity because the individuals suppress the other's emerging self with their own. The lovers described in these poems are contemporary lovers who sometimes act as if dependent and pathetic but the next moment are parental and independent (11, p. 31). The male and female sometimes feel that their relationship is changed and renewed:

the beach
arranges us

the tent a
skin stretched over
our eyes is a new
sense (3, pp. 74-75).

Most of the time relationships in these poems end, not with "a new sense" as symbolized by their eyes, but in a continued victimization of the female by the male and her continued submission and frustration at his inadequate

perceptions. Male and female only attempt to create change; it is too easy to regress into old identities.

Although the female struggles for self-identity through separation from her male counterpart, she faces confusion and bitterness alone. She feels that she is only "pieces" "shin[ing] briefly" in the male's "empty hands" (2, p. 42). It is by exploring her unconscious and thus discovering her real psyche that this true self can be perceived. This unraveling, layer by layer, of the psyche occurs when the female admits to the buried malevolence she has helped to create, buries the protective past, and accepts the unheroic humanity, the unheroic and non-superhero male (9, pp. 60-61). The female recognizes two alternatives for her relationship with the male:

In the room we will find nothing
In the room we will find each other (2, p. 51).

And she realizes that her options are all or nothing; the female's submissive role changes to one of action. The image mentioned earlier of the male as a fish hook associated with the woman's open eye involves anger as Atwood begins to "come to terms with the distances she kept in The Circle Game" (13, p. 31). The female not only seeks a new identity in her world and recognizes the inadequacies of her perceptions of the male and his observations of her, but her frustrations at submitting to the male develop into anger in her new position. Atwood offers the

woman an alternative to continuing in old roles under false identities, for, as Atwood says in Surfacing, individual will is most important: "this above all, to refuse to be a victim" (12, p. 110). Eye imagery in the middle poetry begins to clarify the paradoxes of human perceptions which are also distortions; the later poetry offers new possibilities. Only by confronting this anger and recognizing its causes, especially in wrong male identities, can the female find her own true self.

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CHAPTER IV

LATER POETRY: EYES ANGERED

When you are this
cold you can think about
nothing but the cold, the images

hitting into your eyes
like needles, crystals, you are happy (3, p. 28).

In You Are Happy and Two-Headed Poems, Atwood explores the woman's growing consciousness of self and the anger directed at the male who confines and manipulates her. In this chapter's epigraph Atwood combines eye imagery with the violence of "hitting" to underscore the pain in the female's growing awareness of self. Although Atwood offers the hope that "you are happy," the images which hit the eyes are "cold" and "like needles." Female identity cannot be undertaken without risks--separation, divorce, madness, suicide, death, or victimization--but the poet sometimes presents the possibility of complete identity for the female and even a whole male-female relationship. References to eyes appear in these two volumes in over fifty-five poems, the majority of which examine male-female relationships. Eyes in Atwood's poetry progress in action from observing or perceiving, to analyzing and blaming, to growing and changing. Eye imagery reflects the possibilities for a woman's growing awareness of her own

individuality, achieving an understanding of her own part in role-playing and victor-victim games, and even breaking from the male's world into a new identity. Poems such as "Circe/Mud Poems" and "Songs of the Transformed" in You Are Happy not only identify role-playing, but they also expose victor-victim games and unfair roles in male-female relationships. The woman now recognizes herself as a confused and angry participant in these unsatisfactory relationships. She is ready to separate herself from the male and his confinement and entrapment of her through his inaccurate observations. Present in poems like "Tricks with Mirrors" (3, pp. 24-27) and "Eating Fire" (3, p. 82) are the underlying threads of submission, frustration, and confusion which permeated the other volume. These eye images occur in about two-thirds of these poems, not as adjectives or participles, but as subjects of sentences with strong action verbs such as "my eyes drawn back" (3, p. 41) and in combination with glass imagery as in "glass-eyed fanatic" (2, p. 71). Eye imagery illuminates the possibilities for a new and separate female identity. Through eye imagery in these last two volumes of poetry, Atwood offers some resolutions to the paradoxes of an eye's ability to distort as well as to perceive and to confuse as well as to analyze. Much of the confusion and anger a woman feels as a result of submission to the male's world lessens as the woman attempts to change, not just observe, her

situation. These volumes provide some answers to questions posed in the early and middle poetry as they develop ideas for action as well as insight into the woman's vision of self.

Eye imagery in the later poetry exemplifies the duality of the eye's vision and the need to bring unity to perception for the male and female through counterparts. These early eye images at first combine with descriptions in nature and later with relationships of persons and events or parents and children. The implications of eye imagery in each of these poems become more explicit as Atwood speaks more directly on the cost and pain of true perception. In "Spring Poem," details of spring include a reference to "frogbodies" who "string / the pond with living jelly / eyes" (3, p. 22). These eyes allude to tadpole eggs and signify rebirth, but their rejuvenation contrasts sharply with the speaker's agonizing decision to end a relationship. In "Marrying the Hangman," the speaker can only escape death if the man in prison next to her will be "official death which has eyes but no / mouth" (2, p. 49). Eye imagery helps personify death for the woman who gives up her own identity to the male in exchange for her life. In this poem both male and female attempt to attract the other to an opposite world:

He said:

the end of walls, the end of ropes, the opening of doors, a field, the wind, a house, the sun, a table, an apple.

She said:

nipple, arms, lips, wine, belly, hair, bread, thighs, eyes, eyes.

They both kept their promises (2, p. 51).

"Hers is the language of sensuality, his of death" (11, p. 105). The woman escapes a literal prison only to find herself lost in the male's "ethic of dominance, the territorial urge" (11, p. 105). Sometimes in search for identity the female trades one kind of victimization for another. In "April, Radio, Planting, Easter," the speaker compares herself to a land animal with "its body / an eye crushed by pliers" drifting on the ocean (2, p. 95). Symbolized by a "crushed" eye, the speaker feels lost and suppressed by the demands of her world; yet she realizes that she must adjust or die because "we do not walk on the earth / but in it" (2, p. 96). The opening poem of You Are Happy is "one more of Atwood's encounters with the theme of perception" (6, p. 75). In "Newsreel: Man and Firing Squad," two scenes, a botched execution and a farewell, are presented from a variety of perspectives (6, p. 75). The man whose blindfold slips is able to see his own execution. The "left eye, green and lethal" (3, p. 8) could be a "human eye, the camera lens or a rifle

sight" (6, p. 76). As the doomed man sees his own execution, so the speaker also distorts her perception of this event. As in the earlier poem "This is a Photograph of Me," (1, p. 11), several different observations make one confusing picture of many different viewpoints. Atwood explores in these poems the pain of sharing perspectives.

This desire to share self and understand different perspectives appears prevalent in several poems which examine parent-child relationships. Eye imagery underlines changing parental perceptions. In "Day Books, I," a mother speaks of the "pastel animals" in her daughter's room "with their milky noses and missing eyes" (2, p. 30). The daughter "has eaten the eyes of the lion / and is the lion" (2, p. 30). The literal implication of the child eating the eyes of the lion subordinates to the more complex figurative idea that the child possesses a close affinity with nature. Eye imagery juxtaposes the child's natural innocence and the mother's fearful and cautious perspective. The mother wants to help her daughter see, so as to prepare her for the future, but she says, "I have gone blind / but don't yet know it" (2, p. 30). She fears that her views might be inadequate for her child. In "Today," she speaks of how protecting her daughter and watching her grow produce pain:

Each of these rescues
costs me something,
a loss, a dulling
of this bluegold eye (2, p. 24).

The mother's concern for her child clouds her vision; her desire to influence her child with her own perspectives causes pain. Grandmothers also attempt to manipulate children as the speaker asks,

is this your outraged
eye, this grip
that will not give up? (2, p. 38).

The speaker accuses the grandmother of afflicting the children with outdated perspectives of an "outraged / eye." The mother does recognize an excuse for the grandmother's demanding perceptions as the older woman faces "the blurring of the ears / and eyes" (2, p. 41). Although the grandmother sees with the blurred vision of old age and the mother sees with narrowed vision, the child's innocent eyes open up new perspectives for her parent. The mother in "The Puppet of the Wolf" entertains her daughter with a puppet made as her

knuckles bunch into eyes,
eyes of opaque flesh
cunning but sightless (2, p. 99).

"Adult fears are conquered by the magic of a child's delight . . . where anything is possible, a miracle occurs: . . . two hands, wolf and piglets, join in harmonious pursuit" (10, p. 138). As the mother's hands act out the story of the wolf and the three pigs, she begins to

recognize that, like the wolf with his "sightless eyes," she, too, lacks the vision enjoyed by her child. The mother, for a moment, suppresses her desire to protect her child and produces this puppet magic as portrayed through eye imagery. She sees through the child's eyes a world of joy and innocence where "there is never / any death" (2, p. 100) instead of her own. In "Footnote to the Amnesty Report on Torture," the children of the keeper of the torture chamber are described as having "unmarked skin and flawless eyes" (2, p. 48). The keeper's children are also innocent, as revealed through eye imagery, and he desires to protect them as long as possible. In each of these poems eye imagery reveals the influence of adult perceptions on the child's sight. Parents who allow some of their child's innocence and closeness to nature to affect their own vision add new light to their perceptions.

Other poems in Two-Headed Poems and You Are Happy reconcile the paradoxes and divergent ideas of male-female relationships presented in the early and middle works. Atwood's eye imagery often combines with mirror and glass imagery to expose the faulty perceptions of both male and female. Images of violence coincide with eye imagery to reinforce the anger and pain produced by the female's separation from the male's world. Although the first part of You Are Happy presents counterparts in nature, death, and children to female identity, much like those

seen in the middle poetry, the second half of the volume examines male-female relationships directly. In the "Circe/Mud Poems" sequence, Atwood examines women's feelings of anger towards men who do not desire change or attempt to express emotion. Atwood expresses in eye imagery Circe's recognition of and her determination to separate from the male's control. "Songs of the Transformed" examines the male's manipulations of the female and their influence on the female's need for growth. In "There is Only One of Everything," the poet offers possibilities of change as the woman moves away from the male. Two-Headed Poems further develops through eye imagery the female's necessity for separation from the male.

In the latter part of You Are Happy, Atwood presents through eye imagery comments on male-female relationships without the need for counterparts in nature or death or parent-child relationships. These poems introduce ideas which are amplified by the "Circe/Mud Poems" sequence, "Songs of the Transformed," and "There is Only One of Everything." The speaker in "Spring Poems" "dream[s] of reconciliations / with those [she has] hurt / unbearably"; she also seeks for the word--"finish"--"so [she] can begin over / again" (3, p. 23). The speaker wants a new start in her relationships. In "Tricks with Mirrors," the speaker describes herself as being more than "this dead blue / oblong eye turned outwards to you" (3, p. 25). The

color and state of the eye infer coldness and unfeeling, but the eye is "turned outwards," not inwards; its shape is oblong and distinguishable for easy recognition by the male. She wants the male to acknowledge her growing consciousness of self, but "[his own] eyes" are "closed" (3, p. 24). Memory of the past of the one who "existed once" recurs, for he

exist[s]
again, my entire skin
sensitive as an eye (3, p. 11).

She cannot easily forget or change the imprints, symbolized by the eye, made by the male on her since her observations are sensitive and memories are not easily erased. The female struggles for identity against traditional roles and inadequate relationships.

In the "Circe/Mud Poems" sequence, Atwood enlarges these male-female conflicts in a mythological woman, Circe, as she contemplates her male counterpart, "blue-eyed" Odysseus (3, p. 50), and his influence and control over her and their relationship. Atwood examines through Circe the female's desire to change her identity at the cost of past memories and in spite of the pain of separation. At the same time that she wants separation of identity, she also wants completeness in a relationship with the male. Atwood qualifies the paradoxes in a female's quest of self and exemplifies through Circe's actions adaptation, not to the environment as achieved by

Susanna Moodie, but to the male's vision. In the "Circe/Mud Poems," the "fear of dominating power" and "woman's own guilt in the conspiracy is pronounced" (7, p. 61). Circe speaks to the male in order to define herself even as in the "Songs of the Transformed" the male tries to redefine her. She admits her part in the games when she tells him to "look at me and see your reflection" (3, p. 56), for she realizes that she has not allowed him to understand her true emotions but has hidden them behind a "face of steel" (3, p. 56). He is also protected, for he appears emotionless in his armor where

through two holes in the leather
discs of [his] eyes gleam
white as dulled quartz;
[he] wait[s] (3, p. 57).

Even his eyes are without feeling and recognition as both partners play games instead of seeking true identity.

Circe recognizes that their relationship without communication and growth is worthless. She admits that

. . . no one is here

but the suicides, returned
in the shapes of birds
with their razor-blue
feathers, their beaks like stabs, their eyes

red as the food of the dead (3, p. 62).

Atwood uses the birds to symbolize other mythical men who have succumbed to Circe's temptations and now must remain on the island "in the shapes of birds" as "suicides." Circe feels that, like these eyes "which radiate anger,"

the eyes of the male and female are "consuming themselves like stars, impersonal" (3, p. 62). As in Power Politics and Procedures for Underground, the female wonders, if past male roles of superman or hero are disguises, what models must she use to identify the male and herself. Atwood suggests that "both [modern woman's] fear of dominating male power and her own guilt is the conspiracy . . . Like Circe she must reject the disguises her own desires have created" (7, p. 61). Only communication can correct these uncertain and deteriorating relationships. Circe recognizes the death of everything, especially relationships which are built, not on trust and love, but on false perceptions and hidden identities. She tells Odysseus not to "stand there" with his "wet eyes" but "to accept" her because she does not

have to take
anything [he] throw[s] into [her]. [She] closes [her]-
[self over, deaf as an eye . . . which listens to
[nothing but its own pain (3, p. 63).

If Odysseus demands too much or plays games with her emotions, she can cut herself off and observe nothing but her own hurt. He believes he is also safe because his adventures are over, like "the perilous and hairy eye of the groin [Cyclops] [he was] / forced to blind," but she knows that life and relationships constantly involve struggle (3, p. 64). Paradoxically, Odysseus blinds the creature, but he, too, is blind to personal growth and to Circe's

needs. Although now all seems peaceful and contented,
 the future is a mess, . . . that snakey orange eye
 staring up from the sticky grass
 round as a target, stopped
 dead, intense as love (3, p. 66).

Circe recognizes that a future of separation and change in relationships as shown in the image of the "single orange eye" also brings pain and uncertainty. Atwood reveals this identification of the problems in male-female relationships through eye imagery; male and female identities appear near death in their struggle to survive.

The male voice in "Songs of the Transformed" underscores the male's purposes and methods of manipulating and controlling the female. These poems also examine the woman's increasing anger at the male's actions which destroy her identity. Eye imagery points to the misconceptions in male-female relationships caused by myths and past traditions and unfair roles which lead to frustration and submission instead of change and growth. In "Songs of the Transformed," the male changes the female into shapes he desires. These "transformations, shifts in identity, take place in nature without human control. But other transformations occur because people exert power and choice" (8, p. 5). "Then growth or decay of an entity," such as the past roles and myths about men and women, means "a change in form"; in these poems Atwood puts "human voices into the bodies of animals" to explain

these transformations (8, p. 4) as she symbolizes the woman's feelings about her relationship to the male. Atwood first describes manipulations made by the male on the female. In "Pig Song," the male changes the female into a "greypink vegetable with slug / eyes" which cannot see or think and because "if [he] feed[s] [her] garbage, / [she] will sing a song of garbage" (3, p. 30). He wants to stifle her identity and in anger she submits but retaliates by not communicating. In "Crow Song," his eyes are "gravel, skeptical" because he rightly wonders about the accuracies of his perceptions of the female (3, p. 33). The male misjudges the woman and her reactions towards him because of his faulty vision; he wrongly perceives himself as her manipulator and controller.

Atwood reveals the woman's desire to escape the male's power even in superficial identities. Like the hunted fox in "Song of the Fox," the woman tires of the "dear man with the accurate Mafia / eyes" who constantly observes and judges her (3, p. 40). Although she does not wrongly define him as a perpetuator of the hero or mythical image, she now sees him as judge or criminal. In "Song of the Hen's Head," death of the relationship approaches as she draws "[her] eyes" "back into their blue transparent / shells like molluscs" (3, p. 41). The female must end relationships which defy individual reality and make a woman a pawn in a man's game. In the

"Corpse Song," she has died as her "eyes / and heart are out," for she becomes an illusion to the male's eyes, and, therefore, can no longer exist (3, p. 43). She remains unsure of her changing identity, but she feels strongly about the need for movement from the male's domination. These poems shock, for their double meanings are vulgar and absolutely fascinating as they express what Atwood does not want in a search that no longer is vague because the limitations of self are realized (12, p. 31). Atwood's eye imagery reproduces this anger and its causes with concreteness and violence. As women struggle against old heroes and myths and the male's desire to victimize, they discover that separation is the best alternative. Women recognize the pain in separation but choose it over a death by confinement to the male's view.

In order to accentuate the anger a woman feels at her victimization and to emphasize the need for separation, Atwood uses violence with eye imagery in describing this struggle for identity. Numerous poems in these volumes express through eye imagery the woman's desire to break away from the male and force him to recognize her new identity. In several poems in You Are Happy Atwood combines eye and sight imagery to express the possibility for a fulfilling relationship between males and females who recognize and change distorted perceptions of each other. By acknowledging, even in anger, the falsity of

their games, rules, and past judgments of each other, they find communication and a chance for wholeness. In "There is Only One of Everything," more instances occur of sight and vision than of blindness. In "Eating Fire," the speaker says,

This is your trick or miracle,
to be consumed and rise
intact, over and over . . .

The new eyes are golden and
maniac, a bird's or lion's

Through them you see
everything, as you wished,
each object (lake, tree, woman)

transfigured with your love . . . (3, p. 82).

Now at least the male begins to see more clearly, even if his eyes do not see complete pictures. Atwood identifies his eyes with nature images and with sight changed by love. In "Four Auguries," the female believes that, although the male is clothed and still partially disguised, she can decode "the lines on [his] hand" with "the sense / of touch, light and urgent the blind must rely on" (3, p. 85). She now begins to understand the purposes behind their games; she feels comfort in this recognition of the male's vulnerability as she recognizes his similarity to a blind person. In the same poem the "hooded predator's / eyes" of an "owl" "bless" them as an "omen" for future growth in their relationship (3, p. 86). In "Head Against White," she refuses to accept reality as she pleads with

her lover who has committed suicide to "be alive" although his "face [is] closed, teeth and eyes concealed" (3, p. 87). In her grief she imagines his "eyes / crouched in the sockets, maimed and lightblue with terror" just before "he topples" from the floor which "recedes" (3, p. 88). Although she loses a chance for a new relationship as her lover dies, it is possible that in his suicide he was "pronouncing his own flesh as his eyes flared to rise up living" (3, p. 91). She almost denies his suicide because the frustrations that caused it might have resulted from his growing awareness of both of their identities.

The female's growth demands increasing responsibility from her eyes for accurate perception. In "There is Only One of Everything," the speaker absorbs all the sights and sounds around her and realizes that when her "eyes" are "closed" "language vanishes" (3, p. 92). "Book of Ancestors" expresses the possibility for a new relationship replacing all visions of heroes and myths: it is but "an instant before the sacrificed eyes / burst like feathered stars in the darkness" (3, p. 94). Eye imagery begins to reflect hope in its combinations of positive images of "stars" as well as the value of "sacrifices." History and society with old archetypes and the male's and female's "static demands," "former / demands," are gone; even as the female seeks identity, so may the male (3, p. 95). She says of him,

You are intact, you turn
towards me, your eyes opening, the eyes
intricate and easily bruised, you open

yourself to me gently, . . . to take
that risk, to offer life and remain

alive, open yourself like this and become whole (3,
[p. 96]).

No longer only analytic, the eyes are also vulnerable; they open and are able to perceive the truth about identity (6, p. 89). Those people who are willing to experience pain in their growing awareness of the necessity for separate selves might, paradoxically, find new possibilities as complete individuals in relationships.

Eye imagery in Two-Headed Poems parallels that presented in You Are Happy and further defines the female's necessity of separation from the male and her possibility for growth. Eye images here express Atwood's philosophy on female identity more clearly than in her earlier volumes. Although the woman sometimes desires the security of past male dominance, she quickly remembers the frustrations and anger in submission to that role. In "A Paper Bag," she "draws eyes around [her] eyes" to make a paper bag mask and wishes she could be a "paper head" with its "emptiness" because

it has no past
and is always entering the future
through its slots of eyes, purblind (3, pp. 13-14).

Hiding behind a mask is easier as no perceptions are necessary, but living "empty" without identity through false

"eyes" which distort her vision of herself and the male reminds the female more of death because the eyes' narrow "slots" offer little future. In "After Jaynes," the female empathizes with "the old queen's head cut off . . . bright stones with eyes" (2, p. 32). She, too, feels that her vision may fail her, causing death to her new identity. She quickly chooses not to give up or retreat. Like "The Woman Who Could Not Live Without Her Faulty Heart" with its "infra-red / third eye that remains open / while the other two are sleeping" (2, pp. 15-16), her own identity and feelings demand examination and understanding.

The female begins to struggle again for identity as she rejects old visions. Both male and female recognize that female identity might cost much more than expected, including death to a relationship through divorce. The dolls in "Five Poems for Dolls" "gaze at us / with the filmed eyes of killers" (2, p. 17). Like the dolls, the woman hates to be victimized, even by a male who would be satisfied with a relationship as lifeless as that of two dolls. In "Five Poems for Grandmothers," she fights against the "disappearance" of outlines or forms and "against the blurring of the ears / and eyes" (2, p. 40). Change in identity is absolutely necessary for the female, although, like a tourist, she feels "in hock / up to [her] eyebrows" (2, p. 61). In order to prevent

separation or divorce, the speaker attempts to invent a more positive reality for the male in the title poem of this volume:

close your eyes now see:
red sun, black sun . . . the sun
is an egg, a lemon, a pale eye (2, p. 65).

Although the female still attempts to change the male's perspectives, she no longer agrees to remain in a relationship while the male refuses to change. She condemns the "glass-eyed fanatic" or male who refuses to see (2, p. 71; 8, p. 5). Through a combination of eye and glass imagery, Atwood encourages the woman to recognize the possibility that the male may remain sightless as a "glass-eyed fanatic." As in the "Circe/Mud Poems" sequence, the female recognizes the male's disguises. He sometimes appears as a leader with the superhuman vision of "four eyes" (2, p. 67) or as a "tentacled silver eye" (2, p. 57) which has man-made, not natural, characteristics. Now the female refuses to accept the male in these disguises. Sometimes total separation is the only answer:

Well, we felt
we were almost getting somewhere
though how that place would differ
from where we've always been, we
couldn't tell you

and then this happened,
this joke or major quake, a rift . . . (2, p. 59).

Recognizing the necessity for separation does not lessen the pain and emptiness which remain:

So much for the family business.
It was too small anyway
to be, as they say, viable.

But we weren't expecting this,
the death of shoes, fingers
dissolving from our hands,
atrophy of the tongue,
the empty mirror,
the sudden change
from ice to thin air (2, p. 60).

In these poems as in the early poetry's "This is a Photograph of Me" (1, p. 11), Atwood is concerned with changed ways of seeing so that "seeing becomes authentic" (5, pp. 195-196). Atwood presents in her poetry all possibilities for the female; she does not guarantee positive results or happiness. A search for identity requires much effort from the female.

Atwood does use eye imagery to present the possibility opposite to divorce--a whole relationship. In "March, Hawk," the speaker and companion try to seek "shapes / just out of reach of the eyes" and realize that they are lost "from the places [they] can't see" (2, p. 87). Their incomplete vision at least represents an attempt at sight. True vision is rarely easy. The final poem of this volume, entitled "You Begin," concludes that sight can be begun

this way:
this is your hand,
this is your eye,
this is a fish, blue and flat
. . . almost the shape of an eye (2, p. 109).

Through eye imagery the female shows the male how to perceive, starting first with himself and then with the world

about him. As the female encourages the male to see, she recognizes that her hope for survival is in accurate vision. If the man refuses to change, she realizes she must separate from his world and seek her own no matter the cost. But, if the male agrees to change, a possibility exists for a whole relationship. Atwood presents this possibility by combining eye imagery and nature imagery to symbolize a male and female who find such identity and request it "to open," "to accept" them:

our eyes, wingspread and sharp call
filling the head/sky, this,

to immerse, to have it slide
through us, disappearance
of the skin, this is what we are looking for,
the way in (2, p. 88).

Atwood uses eye imagery to express the way into a new world of complete identities. In Two-Headed Poems Atwood summarizes ideas for the self identity she expressed earlier in You Are Happy which moves beyond self-pity "without denying compassion or the joy of living" and so finds hope (13, p. 56).

In both these later volumes, "the protagonist moves towards a new country of relationships without false hopes, promises, defenses, evasions, mythologies" (9, p. 92). Casting off old roles, poor judgments, and inaccurate perceptions and demanding separateness between the male and female worlds, the modern woman discovers new potential and growth of self. In these volumes, Atwood not only

expresses through eye imagery her anger at old roles and beliefs, but also produces positive suggestions for discovering female identity. The process is not easy because, like a poem's images, the woman's new vision "[is] hitting into [her] eyes / like needles, crystals," but she can become "happy" (3, p. 28). These poems are "directed critically at the private space that engulfs women's lives" (4, p. 459); they direct women to a new identity through separation from the male's unchanging and distorted perceptions.

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CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

You are intact, you turn
towards me, your eyes opening, the eyes
intricate and easily bruised, you open

yourself to me gently, what
they tried, we
tried but could never do
before . without blood, the killed
heart . to take
that risk, to offer life and remain

alive, open yourself like this and become whole (6,
[p. 9]).

Atwood's concern with female identity progresses from asking questions in the early poetry to identifying problems in the middle poetry to offering possibilities of change in the later poetry. In the epigraph above, Atwood summarizes some of the numerous options which the female faces--risk, pain, separation, failure, life, wholeness. Atwood's poetry presents through eye imagery the woman's desire, at whatever cost, to find her own identity apart from the male. Her poems do not secure the speaker or the reader in images of warmth or security, but they do attempt to awaken concern for accurate perceptions and observations in male-female relationships. "Like the winter cold, Atwood's poems jab the reader, prod him awake, demand his attention. Their icy anger and chilling detachment can

be disturbing, but later works arouse more warmth" (7, p. 74). Atwood's poetry moves from an underlying tone of frustration and confusion in early works to one of demands and anger in middle and later works; yet the poems sometimes offer hope as they explain the dualities found in the growth of the female self. "Mirrors, water, and reflection, games like cards and chess, maps or models, eyes and cameras make up the major duplications in Atwood's poetry although there are more subtle ones" (14, p. 170). These duplications emphasize the conflicts examined in Atwood's poetic study of female identity. "Components of the human subset of the eye code, mirrors and cameras are imaged as working in the same way" (17, p. 107).

Atwood distinguishes between the effects of a mirror and of a camera lens: "Mirrors are, in fact, quite tricky because they give a backwards reflection," whereas "a lens can be a magnifying or focusing lens, but it doesn't merely give a reflection. It gives a condensation" (10, p. 27). These other images, including her glass imagery which for Atwood implies entrapment as well as reflection, occur commonly in Atwood's poetry, although not nearly so often as eye imagery. They also reinforce the theme of female identity and the choices open to today's woman. All of these images, but especially eye imagery, signal the necessity for correct observation and perception

in order to identity self. Nevertheless, transforming self and moving from Position One, the unconscious victim, to the position of the creative victim causes pain. Because of her search for identity, the female may progress through submission, frustration, confusion, pain, separation, to growth. Atwood's eye imagery traces this progression and recognizes possible choices for women.

"Feminism" and the woman's struggle for identity "strive for true self-definition, personal growth and strength" (16, p. 20). Females have many options in this struggle; one choice is to remain a victim. Like the eyes of the children in "The Circle Game," the woman's eyes can remain "fixed on the empty / moving spaces just in / front of [her]" (2, p. 35). She can refuse to recognize her victimization through accurate vision. Sometimes the female struggles to define her world of nature and emotion as opposed to the male's world of logic and reason only to refuse then the possibility of transformation. The male and female choose to "keep / [their] weary distances" (2, p. 31). At times, in order to protect herself from change, the female hides behind false roles and identities. At other times, she perceives the male and allows him to perceive her as a perpetuator of mythical and traditional roles. In other cases, women like Susanna Moodie choose to adapt to their environment at whatever cost, without cooperation or permission from the male. Mrs. Moodie

recognizes that she needs "wolf's eyes to see / the truth" (3, p. 82). She strives for vision until finally she is able to see herself as part of the landscape; she becomes for Atwood and other women a Canadian archetype as well as an historical figure.

Often the female finds herself submerged, not just in her environment and the male's world, but also in inadequate roles and unfair expectations. One example of such a female is the mythological woman Circe. She represents greater promise than Susanna Moodie, who adapts only to the environment. Atwood transforms the Greek myth and "gives us a Circe who is wise, strong, and capable of love"; "Circe becomes a woman who gives and receives, who can meditate on her own strengths and weaknesses and who sees them also in another" (1, p. 16). Circe recognizes that failure in her relationship with Odysseus is caused by inaccurate vision. Her struggle for identity does not promise wholeness, but she understands that her part in wearing false disguises aids in causing "that snakey orange eye" of future growth to be such "a mess" (6, p. 66).

In Power Politics and Procedures for Underground, Atwood presents males and females who recognize their own guilt in relationships, but they do not understand how to change their situations. Feeling emptiness as well as confusion, both must dissect their fantasized images of each other and recognize their humanity. The woman first

realizes that shedding old roles can produce emptiness and loneliness instead of victimization. She still continues to feel

Like a deep sea
creature with glass bones and wafer
eyes drawn
to the surface, I break

open, the pieces of me
shine briefly in your empty hands (4, p. 42).

Her attempts for identity fail, for neither male nor female is yet ready to accept that vulnerability. At this point in their struggle for identity, women can choose to remain victims, to commit suicide, or to attempt an escape in madness or seclusion--or they can continue their search. Atwood's reader begins to ask: "Do women choose to be dominated? Do they have any freedom to act or are they thoroughly controlled by the myths and soap operas of a masculine world?" (12, pp. 173-174). Atwood answers that women possess "a potential source of power and vision" (10, p. 29). If the woman continues her struggle for a new identity and growth of self, another possibility exists--that of wholeness. She may discover "a new sense" in her eyes (5, p. 75). In her relationships she may either find nothing because of stifled identities or find wholeness; but she must be willing to turn herself inside out and to take the risk to "open [her]self like this and become whole" (6, p. 96). Through eye imagery

Atwood resolves these difficult choices for the female in her struggle for identity.

Atwood creates "brittle words" and needle-sharp images in "bleak, cold precise language" to express the necessity of giving of self which leaves one vulnerable and possibly lost (11, p. 64). In all Atwood's poetry, as the poet explores self, the circles grow larger and the journey becomes psychological towards "absolute schizophrenia, a total division of self, and eventual escape in the form of reintegration" (15, p. 43). The poetry speaks of dualism because a search for identity demands it. The woman must find self by releasing herself from past myths and mistaken heroes and from roles as victim in order to perceive her own true identity through enlarged vision. Once she accepts responsibility for her state, growth can occur because she is aware of the risk and her vulnerability and yet chooses to continue the journey. Atwood's task seems to be to "describe for men and women the opening that leads to wholeness" (8, p. 14). Atwood herself admits that "the ideal thing, let's think in terms of real life, the ideal thing would be a whole human being" (9, p. 26). Jones offers further interpretation:

The real has often been a wound, a wound that might heal . . . but causes pain. This: to take that risk, to offer life and remain alive, open yourself like this and become whole is the final paradox: opening, as in being wounded, is the way to become, unscarred. A fist opens into a flower (13, p. 14).

This examination of the poetry of Margaret Atwood has revealed a progression in the use of eye imagery from the early poetry, where it appears with little emphasis on male-female identity; through the more direct implications of reflection and observation in the middle poems; and, finally, in later poems, to correlations of separateness for the female through association with violent images. This progression in Atwood's imagery underscores the process of discovering the female identity, as a woman searches for self in traditional roles, discovers her identity apart from victim positions, and finally breaks away from the male-dominated society in which she feels immersed. Margaret Atwood opens the way for women to search for their own true identity, and, although in her works the poet admits life's rather grim alternatives of victimization, madness, or suicide, she does present another possibility-- a whole woman, no longer frustrated by past roles in literature and society, no longer submissive to inaccurate male visions, no longer submerged in victor-victim games, but surfacing with a new awareness, a new vision, and a new identity. Sometimes Atwood even describes a male-female relationship of wholesome quality.

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