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**Victimization and survival in Margaret
Atwood's *Surfacing*, *The Handmaid's Tale*
and *Cat's Eye***

DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE

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Prohlášení

Prohlašuji, že jsem diplomovou práci vypracovala samostatně a uvedla v ní předepsaným způsobem všechnu použitou literaturu.

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Introduction

The objective of this thesis is to focus on the themes of victimization and survival and the strategies that female characters use in order to survive in Margaret Atwood's long fiction, namely the three novels that were written in the course of years from 1972 to 1988. The strategies in question are becoming a trickster - creature of dual nature, and gaining vision - defeating metaphorical blindness.

My selection of the novels was based on three criteria.

Firstly, it is the genre of the novels. Each of the three novels chosen for this thesis are basically of various genres – a ghost story (*Surfacing*), a dystopia (*The Handmaid's Tale*) and a bildungsroman (*Cat's Eye*), which enables variable treatment of the theme and allows various outcomes of the narrators' fight against victimization, using the same strategies for survival.

Secondly, it is the clarity of the presence of the themes in the novel. Even though the victimization and survival themes appear in other novels of Atwood's, the treatment is not so clear and exemplary as in the chosen three. Also the strategies of extricating the victim role work only partially in many of the other novels; for example Grace in *Alias Grace* (1996) is an exemplary trickster but the focus is more on the unreliability of the narrator. With *Blind Assassin* (2000) comes again the problem of unreliable narrator and of fighting metaphorical blindness, but it is not clear that it was survival the narrator was after.

Thirdly, the three chosen novels, selected for this thesis were written in considerable time gap so it is possible to say that they survey the development of the victimization and survival theme in Atwood's writing.

The thesis will focus on main characters of female sex; however certain marginal characters will also be included in the account, functioning mostly as a means of contrast and comparism. The first objective is to specify what kind of victim the main character is and how she came to be this type of victim. The second objective is to

explore the strategies the main character uses that should result in her survival.

It is necessary to specify what is understood as survival. Only in the case of *The Handmaid's Tale* it is the survival in the sense of saving one's life. In other two novels, survival has "multiple levels"¹ and works as metaphor for having a chance to have a full life, for existence of a complete, full-valued human being that is not tormented and victimized; survival rather as "spiritual survival, to life as anything more than a minimally human being."²

Another key term to be used is connected with the second strategy of fighting for survival – blindness. Blindness is, similarly to survival, not meant literally but rather metaphorically. None of the female characters discussed is really blind; they are rather unable to see the true face of reality which includes being blind to their own role in the process of victimization and to the source of their oppression. They often cannot name it or identify it or they identify it wrongly. This leads to their inability to fight it effectively. The vision they gain helps them realize their situation and enables them to repudiate the victim role and to survive. Gaining vision is represented in the text via Atwood's use of various motifs – mirrors, reflective surfaces, contrast between darkness and light or using of specific objects that embody the vision itself.

In order to determine the type of victimization the main character is subject to, this thesis uses the victim model presented in Atwood's *Survival: a thematic guide to Canadian literature*, where Atwood analyzes themes existing in Canadian literature and she establishes the victimization theme to be the one of the basic ones. Here she also presents an elaborate model of four types of victims that frequent

¹ Sharon R. Wilson, "Blindness and survival in Margaret Atwood's major novels," *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 178.

² Margaret Atwood, *Survival: a thematic guide to Canadian literature* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd, 2004) 42.

Canadian writing, each of them having its specific characteristics. For this thesis, two of these types are relevant.

The descriptions and analyses of strategies the female characters use in order to survive are based on several secondary sources. The first strategy, becoming a double-faced creature, a trickster, is based on Paul Radin's monograph *Trickster* (1956), where he identifies and describes the Trickster myth that appears in the cycle of myths and legends of Winnebago Indian tribe in its earliest and purest forms.³

Atwood herself does not use the trickster concept when referring to the victim models in *Survival*; this concept was used by Sharon Wilson in *Textual Assassinations* (2003), where she claims that "Atwood's survivors are trickster creators, using their verbal „magic“ to transform their worlds."⁴ However, Wilson focuses more on Atwood's characters as the trickster narrators, narrators who are notoriously unreliable, who through words try to change their reality, which is the theory more suitable for Atwood's later novels, such as *Alias Grace*, *The Blind Assassin* or *Oryx and Crake*. I decided to give the Atwood's narrators a trickster character of a more general nature for it is possible to interpret their dual nature and split selves as a proof of possessing a trickster trait. It is also possible to interpret their becoming a trickster as a strategy to survive.

The idea and analyses of the second strategy that Atwood's female characters use in their fight for survival – gaining vision – are based on Sharon R. Wilson's essay "Blindness and survival in Margaret Atwood's major novels." This strategy is apparent in all three novels and Atwood demonstrates it via use of the motifs of sight or light. Those often work as a metaphor for understanding, for seeing one's situation clearly and therefore enabling oneself to escape the victim role and to survive. What helps characters to realize their situation are the objects

³ see Paul Radin, "Poznámka na úvod," *Trickster, mýtus o šibalovi* (Praha: Dobra, 2005) 19.

Since it was not possible to quote the original text, this thesis provides English paraphrases of the Czech translation.

⁴ Sharon Wilson, *Textual Assassinations*, quoted in Sharon Wilson, "Blindness and survival in Margaret Atwood's major novels" 176.

of vision imagery that Atwood embeds in the text; usually they are mirrors and reflective surfaces.

As this thesis focuses on several major themes in Atwood's writing, a thematic approach is used; based on existing literature on the matter and using examples from the primary texts to provide analyses.

Chapter 1

“Who gets to do what to whom:”⁵ theoretical background.

“Canadian writing, interesting?..An oxymoron.”⁶ With such words we are introduced to numerous prejudices against Canadian literature that had been formed in minds of various critics and teachers of literature in *Survival, a thematic guide to Canadian literature* (1972), a book written by Canadian writer Margaret Atwood.

Margaret Atwood, nowadays probably the glossiest name representing Canadian literature both at home and abroad, became over the years a well-known and highly regarded author that receives warm reception of both critics and wide readership all over the world. Being a prolific writer, her works show versatility in literary genres and forms and academic world has produced countless studies on various aspects of her work. In the introduction to *Survival* she makes a brief sketch of a rather unpleasant situation Canadian literature was facing in the decades following the Second World War, which included a generally spread opinion that Canadian literature offers nothing interesting, neither for the readers nor the critics.

When Atwood travelled the country in 1960s, giving poetry readings and selling her books afterwards since there often was no bookstore, she noticed spectacular absence of views on the subject of Canadian literature.⁷ Many people, including the literature teachers and critics, tended to favor the attitude of Cultural Cringe, or Colonial Mentality – believing that the Great Good Place was, culturally speaking, elsewhere.⁸ In other words – they inclined to the opinion that there actually is no Canadian literature and if yes, then it is just a “second-rate copy of real literature, written in States or England.”⁹

⁵ “Using what you’re given,” interview by Jo Brans, in *Waltzing again*, ed. Earl G.Ingersoll, (Princeton: Ontario Review Press, 2006) 87.

⁶ *Survival* 3.

⁷ see *Survival* 5.

⁸ see *Survival* 5.

⁹ *Survival* 5.

When Margaret Atwood published her *Survival*, she has already been an established author, having written a novel *Edible Woman* that was published in 1969 and collections of poetry such as *The Circle Game* (1966), for which she received Governor-General's Award for Poetry, or *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* (1970). On the grounds of Atwood's previous experience with the perception of Canadian literature as such it „came as a shock to her, and everybody else¹⁰ that *Survival*, an account of the themes occurring in Canadian literature “ignited a ferocious debate and became a runaway best-seller,”¹¹ which demonstrated not only that there really is Canadian writing to write about but that it also can be interesting and not only to “the few dedicated academic souls who had cultivated this neglected pumpkin patch over the meagre years“¹² but also to the thirty thousand people who bought *Survival* in the first year it was published.¹³

In *Survival*, Margaret Atwood approximates the major themes that occur in Canadian writing, such as the victimization of man and its relation to survival, vision of nature as a monster, victimized animals, original inhabitants, ancestral totems etc. and how these relate to the writing of Canadian authors. Atwood functions as a mere mediator and intentionally excludes herself from the account, as well as she strictly avoids using her own writing as a source of relevant examples, although she does not deny the influence these themes had on her own writing.

Atwood's *Survival* tries neither to survey, evaluate, nor provide histories or insights on Canadian literature. It tries to outline a number of key patterns that will help distinguish Canadian literature from the other literatures. Given that each key pattern occurs often enough in Canadian literature as a whole to make itself significant, we come to have the shape that is also a reflection of a national habit of mind.¹⁴

¹⁰ see *Survival* 3.

¹¹ *Survival* 3.

¹² *Survival* 4.

¹³ see *Survival* 3.

¹⁴ see *Survival* 19.

Such is the definition of what is Atwood doing in her *Thematic Guide* and how the book came to represent the major recurring themes in Canadian writing.

What is the strongest key pattern that Atwood analyzes we can deduce from the title of the book itself. Atwood claims that “every culture has a single unifying symbol at its core.”¹⁵ While for America it may be the Frontier, for England possibly the Island, for Canada it is undoubtedly Survival.¹⁶ In contrast to The Frontier with its sense of adventure and excitement or the sense of security that The Island can offer, The Survival offers just the idea of hanging on, staying alive. The survivor has no triumph or victory but the fact of his survival. And with one’s survival there is inevitably also a preoccupation with the obstacles to that.¹⁷

Earlier Canadian writing deals with external obstacles – the land, the climate. Later writing, including also Atwood’s works, tends to deal with rather internal obstacles as well as with obstacles that are harder to identify. They are no longer obstacles to physical but rather spiritual survival, to life as anything more than a minimally human being.¹⁸ Sometimes even fear of the obstacles can become an obstacle to the survival. A character that is paralyzed by terror is unable to overcome anything that is hindering him or her from surviving.¹⁹

In *Survival*, Atwood came up with the Basic Victim Positions, of which she claims that are like “scales on the piano: they are primary, but all kinds of variations on them are possible”²⁰ which can be proved not only by works of many Canadian authors, but her own just as well.

The first position is characterized by the denial of the victim experience. From various reasons an individual having suffered victimization suppresses his/her anger and pretends that certain

¹⁵ *Survival* 40.

¹⁶ see *Survival* 41.

¹⁷ see *Survival* 42.

¹⁸ see *Survival* 42.

¹⁹ see *Survival* 42.

²⁰ *Survival* 45.

visible facts do not exist.²¹ The second position seals the victim in a vicious circle. The victim acknowledges the fact of being a victim but explains it as an act of Fate, will of God, dictates of Biology or any other powerful idea against which it is impossible, or highly inconvenient to fight. The victim accepts that he/she can neither be blamed for their position nor be expected to do anything about it.²² The second victim position is also mentioned by Atwood in an interview with Graeme Gibson in the collection of interviews, *Waltzing again* (2006), where she describes the “great Canadian victim complex”²³ as the situation when the victim defines himself/herself as innocent and therefore nothing is ever their fault – it is always somebody else doing it to them.²⁴ And until they stop defining themselves as victims, it will always be true and they will never have any choice or possibility to take responsibility for their life.²⁵ As this position is one of the two most relevant for this thesis, it is possible to exclude it from the others and make it more easily recognized by naming it vicious-circle victim position, as this victim moves in vicious circle, unable to repudiate the victim role.

The third position is the first dynamic position, for the victim can move on to position four from it. This position has basically the same starting point as the second one – the victims acknowledge the fact that they are victims but they refuse to accept it as inevitable. The real cause of oppression is for the first time identified and the anger and energy are channelled into constructive action and the victims themselves come to decide about how much of their position can be changed and how much cannot.²⁶ This position is the second relevant victim position for this thesis, therefore to recognize is faster in the text, it is possible to refer to it as to liberating victim position, as this

²¹ see *Survival* 46.

²² see *Survival* 47.

²³ “Dissecting the Way a Writer Works,” interview by Graeme Gibson, in *Waltzing Again*, ed. Earl G. Ingersoll, (Princeton: Ontario Review Press, 2006) 11.

²⁴ see Graeme Gibson 13.

²⁵ see Graeme Gibson 11.

²⁶ see *Survival* 48.

position enables the character to come to terms with his/her victimizing experience and to move on to the fourth position.

Position four means to become a creative non-victim, therefore it is a position for ex-victims. Creative activity becomes possible, energy is no longer suppressed (as in position one) or used for displacement of the cause (as in position two), the ex-victim is able to accept his/her own experience for what it is.²⁷

Even though Atwood avoids mentioning her novels when defining the victim positions, the influence of the theory on her writing is indisputable. She uses all four models in her novels, some of her characters remain locked in one of the positions, others manage to escape the ordeal and evolve into a position four ex-victim. Many of “Atwood’s protagonists tell a tale of survival and resistance,”²⁸ how they fought their predicament and how they came to survive. In order to manage that, they use several strategies, or tricks.

When looking at Atwood’s female characters, we could see certain traits that link them with the Trickster myth – they themselves are often taking up a role of a Trickster in order to shake off the role of a victim and/or to fight for survival. Paul Radin describes Trickster as an entity of unstable form, often identified with various animals such as hare, raven, coyote or spider. It is a being that is both a creator and destructor, the one who tricks the others but it itself is tricked at the end.²⁹ Atwood provides her female characters with certain double-naturedness and „generic hybridity“³⁰ that approximate them to Radin’s trickster creatures from Winnebago Indian legends.

Traces of the Trickster myth strongly mark the female characters of the chosen novels; in *Surfacing*, the nameless narrator must undergo a complex internal transformation – from human into an animal and back again in order to get rid of the victim role and to fight for her

²⁷ see *Survival* 49.

²⁸ Madeleine Davies, “Margaret Atwood’s female bodies,” *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 69.

²⁹ see Radin 19.

³⁰ Coral Ann Howells, “Introduction,” *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 10.

existence. Less conspicuously affected is Offred in *The Handmaid's Tale* who has to pretend to be a devoted servant of the regime she hates and trick everybody into believing her. Her dual nature demonstrates itself when Offred splits into her past self and present self, where past self embodies her real opinions, her true beliefs. Similar transformation affects Elaine in *Cat's Eye* who too splits into her past self and present self, her past self being a carrier of her trauma.

The most typical example of a trickster survivor in Atwood's writing is Grace Marks, a real historical figure, a murderess from *Alias Grace*, who, like many others Atwood's survivor characters, "embodies contradictions, like the trickster in traditional mythologies."³¹ In *Alias Grace* the trickster myth is a very strong and significant feature, nevertheless, we can find it in specific forms in all three novels that are subject of this thesis.

Victimization and subsequent survival of Atwood's main characters is linked with Atwood's use of vision imagery. Sharon Wilson, in her essay "Blindness and Survival in Atwood's major novels" perceives "a consistent emphasis on the failure of Atwood's protagonists to see clearly – from defective sight to distorted vision and moral blindness. While symbolic blindness may be a necessary beginning for narrative quests (when the main character is a victim), regaining some vision is arguably necessary for survival."³² Therefore it is important to link vision imagery with the theme of survival; where gaining vision seems to be one of the strategies the characters use in order to survive.

In Atwood's earlier texts the focus is often on protagonist's distortion of vision, especially through mirrors and cameras.³³ This is especially true about novels such as *The Edible Woman*, *Surfacing*, *Lady Oracle* (1976), *The Handmaid's Tale* or *Cat's Eye*. In Atwood's

³¹ Coomi S. Vevaina, "Margaret Atwood and history," *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 92.

³² Coral Ann Howells, "Introduction" 5.

³³ see Sharon R. Wilson, "Blindness and survival in Margaret Atwood's major novels" 178.

most recent novels, *The Blind Assassin* and *Oryx and Crake*, vision imagery continues to be significant. In her specification, Wilson includes various vision images among which she counts “being blind or having partial or obscured vision...confusing a mirror with reality; seeing through a camera, binocular, television, or another distancing, framing agent; seeing with a magnifying lens, which may involve seeing light in the dark, developing a third eye, being an “eye-witness“ and an “I-witness“ and developing “empathetic vision.”³⁴

Vision imagery is more repressed in *Surfacing*, where it appears only sparsely and mostly at the end of the novel. However, it is the very end that is strongly connected with the survival of the main character and therefore the vision imagery is given the importance that should not be overlooked. On the other hand, *The Handmaid’s Tale* shows a more extensive connection of vision imagery with the theme of survival, where the victimized women are denied the possibility to see or being seen and they can gain the necessary vision via mirrors or reflective surfaces which substitute the lost vision for handmaids. *Cat’s Eye* presents the most complex interconnection of the survival and victim theme with the vision imagery, using several notions that combine in order to heal the narrator’s blindness that keeps her from survival.

Wilson closes the circle by linking vision imagery to survival when identifying Atwood’s narrators as “the ones who are usually blind and therefore the narrative is not only about the narrator’s personal growth and personal, national, and artistic vision, but also multiple levels of survival.”³⁵ Therefore it is possible to trace how the vision imagery is used in the process of repudiating the victim role, regaining one’s identity and starting to “write their story not in the “white ink“ of the mother’s milk, but in the blood-red ink of the body.”³⁶ White mother-milk suggests placidity, meekness, submission, while blood links with aggressivity, force, strength. This metaphor, used by Madeline Davies in her essay “Margaret Atwood’s female bodies“ can be interpreted as a

³⁴ Sharon R. Wilson, “Blindness and survival in Margaret Atwood’s major novels“ 178.

³⁵ Sharon R. Wilson, “Blindness and survival in Margaret Atwood’s major novels“ 178.

³⁶ see Madeleine Davies, “Margaret Atwood’s female bodies“ 64.

fact that the fight against victimization of Atwood's characters transformed from mere, yappyish attempts into a serious fight that may actually mean and change something.

Chapter 2

Surfacing

Surfacing was published in the same year as Margaret Atwood's *Survival* and its influence on the novel is undeniable. It explicitly works with victim theme broadly discussed in *Survival* and the conclusion of the novel, refusing to be a victim, is typical for Atwood's victim categories. It is also the earliest novel of the works this thesis would like to focus on and therefore this novel is a starting point.

Surfacing is a story of a nameless narrator who returns to her birthplace in Quebec to look for her lost father. Coming from the city to Canadian wilderness, she brings along two friends, a married couple, Anna and David, and her lover Joe. After several days in a hut right in the heart of savage surroundings, the narrator has to face the great trauma of having undergone an abortion she didn't want and to find a way how to fight effectively the victim role she had put herself in.

This chapter will deal with thematic analysis of *Surfacing* and will have two subchapters. First, victimization and the victim position of the nameless narrator will be identified and the subchapters will deal with strategies the narrator uses in order to repudiate her victim role; first with the strategy of becoming a trickster, second with the strategy of gaining vision and rejecting blindness.

2.1 Identifying the victim position and strategy of becoming a trickster in *Surfacing*

I am not one of you forever, not now, not ever³⁷

In *Survival*, Atwood mentioned that in Canadian literature, "Nature is often depicted as unanswering or actively hostile to man"³⁸ and "as a whole, Nature cannot be trusted, some dirty trick is always

³⁷ The subtitle was inspired by Fred Chappell's novel *I am one of you forever* (1985).

³⁸ Margaret Atwood, *Surfacing* (London: Virago Press, 2008) 59.

expected.³⁹ Therefore Nature is often seen as the entity that makes people its victims; it is even the killer, since “death by Nature is an event of startling frequency in Canadian literature.”⁴⁰ In *Surfacing*, Atwood, however, turns up this Nature = killer pattern. Nature is not the one who is after one’s neck, it is the civilization represented by man. The narrator remembers “survival manuals...always carry matches and you will not starve, in a snowstorm dig a hole, avoid unclassified mushrooms, your hands and feet are the most important, if they freeze you’re finished,”⁴¹ so she knows how to survive face to face with Nature. On the contrary, she adds that all that knowledge about Nature she possesses is “worthless knowledge,”⁴² she should have known the stories from “pulp magazines such as cautionary tales about maidens who give in and get punished with mongoloid infants, fractured spines, dead mothers or men stolen by their best friends”⁴³ – those “would have been more practical.”⁴⁴ The Nature she can handle just fine and even survive in it. It is the civilization, people, she has problems with and face to face whom she feels helpless.

When narrator arrives to the village she grew up in, she feels displaced. She does not feel at home, she is a stranger there, she cannot speak French properly and local people mock her accent. When she fails to find her father, she tries to find excuses to return back to the city, she assures herself that she has finished what she came for and she doesn’t want to stay there, she wants to go back to where there is electricity and distraction. She is used to it now, filling the time without it is an effort.⁴⁵ She confesses that she is different from other people, because she points out that she is used to it *now*, implying that it took her some getting used to, but still, even she has adjusted by now

³⁹ see *Survival* 59.

⁴⁰ *Survival* 66.

⁴¹ *Surfacing* 42.

⁴² *Surfacing* 42.

⁴³ *Surfacing* 42.

⁴⁴ *Surfacing* 42.

⁴⁵ see *Surfacing* 45.

and is a product of civilization that is used to privileges that civilized world of a city can offer.

However, when narrator remembers her life back in the city, she does admit that she never really fit there either, she never knew what dress to wear on a business meeting, it feels strapped to her, like an aqualung or an extra, artificial limb.⁴⁶ Her being a city person is just a theatre role for her, it hungs on her like an unnecessary, extra addition, for her true identity lies elsewhere. The more she remembers about herself, the more she acknowledges her true natural identity – she “didn’t like bathrooms, they were too hard and white”⁴⁷ and the white zero-mouthed toilets in their clean tiled cubicles were what used to bother her most about the cities.⁴⁸ When a child, her mother had to force her to behave herself, she had to explain to her why it is necessary for her to “learn to be polite; civilized.”⁴⁹ For narrator, the civilized behavior, normal for others, did not come naturally to her, she had to be forced to it and still considers it an act.

An important hint to the narrator’s true self is the book she is working on. She is supposed to provide illustrations for a collection of Fairy tales of Quebec region. When pondering editor’s too meek a selection of the fairy tales she remembers a myth local people believe in – that “when you don’t attend the church, you will change into a wolf.”⁵⁰ In other words, if you do not comply with the civilization and its manifestations, such as church, you will become an animal, a savage, a true part of the nature. The narrator mentions other fairy-tales she knows in which “they do it the other way round, the animals are human inside and they take their fur skins off as easily as getting undressed.”⁵¹ With this she hints on a dual nature of some people, on their half-human, half-animal essence that is inherent to some forms of

⁴⁶ see *Surfacing* 46.

⁴⁷ *Surfacing* 65.

⁴⁸ see *Surfacing* 111.

⁴⁹ *Surfacing* 65.

⁵⁰ *Surfacing* 50.

⁵¹ *Surfacing* 50.

a trickster creature. “A trickster is skilfull at changing his shape,”⁵² therefore he can change from a human to an animal and back again. And that is what is happening to the narrator.

The dual nature of the narrator is foreshadowed right at the beginning of the novel, when her friend, Anna, is trying to foretell her future and reads her palm. It occurs to her that the narrator must have a twin as certain lines on her palm are doubled.⁵³ It can be assumed that this duality, so far still hidden in the narrator’s subconsciousness, will manifest itself sooner or later and also that there will be a reason why she possesses it.

The narrator has not always been a trickster creature of dual nature. She was made one through a process of victimization. The narrator has a clear notion of what or who the personification of evil is - powerful human beings. When she was a child, she believed that if she could pick and keep the seeds from beans that grew in her parents’ garden, but too high and out of her reach, she could become „all-powerful.“⁵⁴ She never did reach the seeds but she concludes that it is good because anyway she would have had no idea what she would do with the power once she got it; if she’d turned out like the others with power she would have been evil.⁵⁵ For her, everyone who is powerful is also inevitably evil. And she wants to stay good, an innocent, a victim of those powerful ones.

An experience that made the narrator a trickster creature through an act of victimization is the unwanted, and therefore deeply traumatic, abortion of her child. When she is looking at the old photographs from her childhood and teenage years, she remarks “I must have been all right then; but after that I’d allowed myself to be cut in two.”⁵⁶ She sees an act of abortion as the act when she became two halves, each of them incomplete. But she is trying to escape this

⁵² see Radin, „Poznámka na úvod“ 19.

⁵³ see *Surfacing* 2.

⁵⁴ see *Surfacing* 31.

⁵⁵ see *Surfacing* 31.

⁵⁶ *Surfacing* 102.

trauma by shutting it out of her conscious memory and pretending that she once had a husband and also a living child. The true memory of having a married lover and being forced to an abortion of his child surfaces slowly, cutting her in two halves, making a dual-natured creature of her, half human, half animal. The narrator does not want to recognize the true source of her victimization – the traumatic experience, she blames the doctors who cut the child out of her.

The behavior of narrator can be interpreted as a variation on position two of Atwood's victim model that is supported also by the author in an interview with Graeme Gibson, where Atwood noted that "if you remain innocent, nothing is ever your fault and it is always the others who make victim of you."⁵⁷ The narrator knows she is a victim but she is dislocating the real cause of her suffering and tries to escape her human self that might be responsible and guilty of letting the doctors cut her in two halves, and instead she releases her animal self, the innocent self. Her human self is guilty of letting the doctors kill her baby and therefore she wants to get rid of it. The animal self did not do anything wrong, it is the creature that is helpless when facing the civilization, it is the creature that is victimized by it, and it is never responsible for the bad things that are being done to it.

The transformation of the narrator from a human into an animal is gradual. Among her friends she is the one who understands the nature and knows things; how to kill a fish for example. There is a change, however, in the narrator's mind going on, because later, she refuses to kill another fish and when talking to it, she refers to it as "murder and to dead fish as a cadaver."⁵⁸ Her animal self is getting stronger, her human self diminishing. She is losing touch with human language, she feels she couldn't use it because it wasn't hers,⁵⁹ as well as her voice wasn't hers, it came from someone dressed as her, imitating her⁶⁰ so she feels she is becoming somebody else now. She

⁵⁷ Graeme Gibson 11.

⁵⁸ see *Surfacing* 114.

⁵⁹ see *Surfacing* 100.

⁶⁰ see *Surfacing* 101.

keeps forgetting human communication, she has difficulties to remember the correct words and phrases. When she is informed about the death of her father, she must assure herself that she used the right expression for the situation – “that was what they were called, the arrangements.”⁶¹ Also her disdain for people and their imperfections grows stronger, she abhors lying because “the animals don’t lie.”⁶² Animals also do not have names, names are the manifestation of civilization and when Joe and her friends try to call her with hers, she says “too late, I no longer have a name.”⁶³ which can be interpreted as the final turning point when her animal part finally took over her still diminishing human one.

Physical appearance of narrator is transformed as well. It is the most obvious when she is standing in the lake and her body is partly in the water and partly over the surface and she “sees her reflection and her feet down through it, white as fishflesh on the sand, till finally being in the air is more painful than being in the water and she bends and pushes herself reluctantly into the lake.”⁶⁴ Her standing in the water that divides her body into two halves can be interpreted as a sign of her dual nature, her legs are those of an animal, the upper part is still human. But she dives in because it becomes unbearable to be on the air – which can be seen as a final act to complete her transformation. Later on, when she sees her legs, she mentions her “tentacled feet”⁶⁵ which may be seen as a sign of her transformation into an animal. It is also noticed by Anne, who, when seeing the narrator’s inability to behave in a human way, says “she really is inhuman;”⁶⁶ which emphasizes the fact that the narrator has managed to keep her human self at bay.

As the narrator is gradually losing her humanity, nothing now keeps her from accusing humans of victimizing everything round them.

⁶¹ *Surfacing* 151.

⁶² *Surfacing* 147.

⁶³ *Surfacing* 162.

⁶⁴ *Surfacing* 69.

⁶⁵ *Surfacing* 155.

⁶⁶ *Surfacing* 148.

First, when she still has her human part strong enough, she tends to blame the Americans. When she encounters a brutally killed heron, she is sure it were Americans who did it.⁶⁷ In her opinion only Americans would “strung it up like a lynch victim,”⁶⁸ only they would kill for pleasure. She is sure that by Americans “the innocents get slaughtered because they exist...there is nothing inside the happy killers to restrain them, no conscience or piety,”⁶⁹ by which she clearly states the existence of a force that relishes in victimizing the innocent thanks to nothing else but their mere existence.

However, later the narrator finds out that the real killers of the heron were Canadians, not Americans, and therefore the nationality cannot be a distinguishing mark between the innocent and the guilty anymore. As her transformation progresses, she admits that “it doesn’t matter what country they’re from...they spread themselves like a virus.”⁷⁰ The thing that is spreading is the Americanness, this lack of sympathy, of feeling that she ascribes to them. She even “feels a sickening complicity, sticky as a glue, blood on my hands...the trouble some people have being German...I have being human.”⁷¹ For her, being a human automatically means to be the powerful one and therefore an evil one. Also to be guilty, and therefore responsible for the bad things that are happening to her.⁷² And that is why she escapes further and further into the animal world, in her animal shape, in order to remain an innocent.

The narrator soon cannot stand anything human as the humans represent the ultimate evil, the ultimate victimizing power. When Joe tries to be intimate with her, she refuses him violently for “he was human and she didn’t want want him in her, sacrilege, he was one of

⁶⁷ see *Surfacing* 111.

⁶⁸ *Surfacing* 110.

⁶⁹ *Surfacing* 121.

⁷⁰ *Surfacing* 123.

⁷¹ see *Surfacing* 124.

⁷² see David Staines, “Margaret Atwood in her Canadian context,” *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 18.

the killers.⁷³ The narrator does not see herself as a human anymore, she contrasts with Joe, whom she regards as human and therefore an evil one. She is locked in the second victim position, the vicious-circle victim position; she does not see the way out of her misery, because she still thinks of herself as of an innocent one, the one who cannot be held responsible for anything bad.

The narrator soon realizes that she detests everybody in the human race – “men and women both. They´d had their chance but they had turned against the gods, and it was time for me to choose sides.”⁷⁴ According to her, the humans failed to choose the right side, they failed to be good and innocent, instead they decided to be the strong, powerful ones, to victimize the animals and she even wishes she could “make them vanish...evaporate them without disturbing anything else, that way there would be more room for the animals, they would be rescued,”⁷⁵ – which she would save. Animals and the animal world is the ultimate safe place where she would like to hide, by becoming one of them.

As a part of the nature, as an animal, the narrator is not able to behave in a human way anymore. When she learns about her father´s death, she cannot mourn as she is expected and she knows that her friends are avoiding her, they find her inappropriate; they think she should be filled with death, she should be mourning. But nothing has died, everything is alive, everything is waiting to become alive.⁷⁶ She starts seeing the world around her through the eyes of an animal, an innocent one and human ways are too distant. No longer does she carry that death around inside her...a cyst, a tumour.⁷⁷ Her animal transformation liberates her, it enables her to escape the guilt she feels for aborting her baby.

⁷³ see *Surfacing* 141.

⁷⁴ *Surfacing* 148.

⁷⁵ *Surfacing* 148.

⁷⁶ see *Surfacing* 153.

⁷⁷ see *Surfacing* 139.

The narrator's behavior soon becomes that of an animal. She strips off her clothes, she runs away into the wilderness, avoiding the places where humans might be and feeling uneasy in the places that are typical for humans. When she gets out of the cabin, she uses window, not door⁷⁸ and the moment she gets out at once the fear leaves her like a hand lifting from her throat.⁷⁹ She soon learns to listen to her newly acquired instincts because she knows there must be rules: places she is permitted to be, other places she is not. She'll have to listen carefully, if she trusts them they will tell her what is allowed,⁸⁰ and later she refers to the cabin where her father lived as to a cage, wooden rectangle she is not allowed to go back into.⁸¹ She starts living outside, feeding herself on wild berries and roots as "tin cans and jars are forbidden, they are glass and metal"⁸² – and everything what has been produced by humans and what might remind her of her human life is forbidden. She keeps hiding from people who came to look for her, she considers them hunters who would like to catch her.⁸³ At this point her transformation is finished.

2.2. Strategy of gaining vision as a means of survival in *Surfacing*

Phoenix, Phoenix, burning bright, in the forest of the night⁸⁴

In *Surfacing*, the narrator's dual, trickster nature is linked with the second strategy to survive – gaining vision. She must heal her metaphorical blindness in order to survive and this healing process is

⁷⁸ see *Surfacing* 169.

⁷⁹ see *Surfacing* 169.

⁸⁰ see *Surfacing* 169.

⁸¹ see *Surfacing* 172.

⁸² *Surfacing* 172.

⁸³ see *Surfacing* 162.

⁸⁴ Subtitle of the chapter was inspired by William Blake's poem „Tiger,“ from *Songs of Experience*, 1794.

tightly bound with the process of uniting her split selves into one again. Only thus she will get rid of her victim role and survive.

Narrator's profound metaphorical blindness, together with self-deception are of a great importance,⁸⁵ because it is the self-deception of the narrator that blocks her survival. To survive, she must heal her blindness to her own role in her extramarital love affair and the consequent abortion and accept the consequences of her own actions.

The narrator lives in denial about her traumatic experience. She has adjusted her memories to a version that is more tolerable to her – therefore deceiving herself and holding herself in vicious-circle victim position. But when the real memories start to leak, she must deal with the fact that she needed a different version of what happened to her and that she pieced it together the best way she could, flattening it, scrapbook, collage, pasting over the wrong parts.⁸⁶ She must come to terms with the true version of her victimizing experience. However, instead of accepting and dealing with the guilt she feels, she commences her transformation into an animal, for she cannot see that she also was partly responsible for her trauma, and keeps blaming the others.

Atwood uses the motif of mirrors as mediators of the narrator's reality. Mirrors are supposed to show the narrator her true face, the reality as it is. If she could look at it and accept it, her blindness would be healed, for she would see herself, with all the blame and guilt and she would know that she played her part in the victimizing experience. But instead, she is avoiding mirrors and as the narrative proceeds, she becomes afraid of them and stops looking into them completely. She also avoids being reflected in any kind of mirrors or reflecting device - when narrator's lover Joe and her friend David make a movie about their journey to wilderness, they include a footage of each of them, "except the narrator,"⁸⁷ as she strictly refuses to be a part of it. When

⁸⁵ see Sharon R. Wilson, "Blindness and survival in Margaret Atwood's major novels" 177.

⁸⁶ see *Surfacing* 137.

⁸⁷ *Surfacing* 158.

already rid of her human identity, she demonstrates an animal fear of the camera (part of which is mirror lens), which results in destroying it together with the films. She does so because she believes that camera can imprison human soul and she wants to liberate Anna's soul she believes was trapped. But when she looks at Anna, after disposing of the films, she sees that her release has made no difference, because the green eyes regard her unaltered from the enamel face.⁸⁸ This attempt to liberate the entrapped souls can be interpreted as her own attempt to liberate herself from the vicious-circle victim position. However, the destruction of camera and films does not work as narrator expected and therefore it is possible that the mirrors are not the traps the narrator considers them to be. The mirror does not steal the souls, it duplicates the image of the person, shows the person as she really is, it duplicates the reality and demonstrates it in front of the narrator for her to see. But narrator is still blind and she finds a fitting answer why breaking the camera lens did not liberate Anna – she claims Anna's soul is imprisoned in another mirror – mirror “in the gold compact, that and not the camera is what I should have broken.”⁸⁹

The narrator's fear of mirrors intensifies as her transformations into an animal nears the end. Then, when she is looking in the mirror at “her distorted glass face,”⁹⁰ the mirror is showing her her distorted image, her deformed, split trickster self. She mentions that the reflection is intruding between her eyes and vision⁹¹ and refuses to look into the mirror again; she reverses it so it's towards the wall, it no longer traps her.⁹² But she does not see that it is her distorted, trickster self that is in the way of her vision, that she must unite herself and stop being a trickster in order to see, in order to gain vision, in order to stop being a victim and therefore to survive.

⁸⁸ see *Surfacing* 160.

⁸⁹ *Surfacing* 169.

⁹⁰ *Surfacing* 169.

⁹¹ see *Surfacing* 169.

⁹² see *Surfacing* 169.

Gaining the vision as a means of the narrator's survival is intertwined with her animal transformation; one cannot go without the other. Even though narrator's transformation is caused by her trying to escape the responsibility and guilt and sealing herself in the vicious-circle victim position, it is necessary for her to undergo it because only this way she will gain the vision that will finally lead her out of the victim role. Only as an animal, the narrator experiences the moment when the power flowed into her eyes⁹³ and she was suddenly able to see the true core of her friend David, she "could see into him, he was an imposter, a pastiche, layers of political handbills, pages from magazines, affiches."⁹⁴ As a human she would never be able to recognize the falsehood and without this vision, she would never be able to see what victim-role trap she got herself into and understand how to escape it and she would remain locked in the vicious-circle victim position. But the moment her transformation into an animal is complete, she starts healing her blindness, as her split self starts uniting again.

The process of uniting the narrator's split self and therefore healing her blindness reaches its climax when she can feel her lost child surfacing within her, forgiving her...its eyes and teeth phosphorescent; the two halves clasp, interlocking like fingers, it buds, it sends out fronds.⁹⁵ In this moment the two halves of the narrator unite again and she can see everything, understand everything. Also the light coming out of the child's eyes can be interpreted as a potential symbol of vision she gains at that moment.

The narrator, possessing vision and having united herself is no longer afraid of mirrors. She turns it back to face the room and she can see "a creature neither animal nor human."⁹⁶ She does not see herself as a distorted image anymore, she stopped being a trickster and instead she is a perfect, united blend, a "natural woman, state of

⁹³ see *Surfacing* 146.

⁹⁴ *Surfacing* 146.

⁹⁵ see *Surfacing* 155.

⁹⁶ *Surfacing* 184.

nature."⁹⁷ She is no longer a vicious-circle victim for she knows that "this above all, to refuse to be a victim...give up the old belief that I am powerless and because of it nothing I can do will ever hurt anyone."⁹⁸ She is giving up her victim role, her convenient notion of innocence that was supposed to shelter her from responsibility. She knows now that it was not the doctors or not only her lover who made her a victim, but also herself. It is "because she resolves not to be a victim that she appears to be...a seer and a survivor."⁹⁹ Only through a rebirth, not unlike that of Phoenix, which was one of the fairy tales she was supposed to draw illustrations for, she can accept her own guilty cruelties¹⁰⁰ and stand face to face to who she really is.

⁹⁷ *Surfacing* 184.

⁹⁸ *Surfacing* 185.

⁹⁹ Sharon R. Wilson, "Blindness and survival in Margaret Atwood's major novels" 181.

¹⁰⁰ see Shannon Hengen, "Margaret Atwood and environmentalism," *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 80.

Chapter 3

The Handmaid's Tale

The Handmaid's Tale, published in 1985, remains Atwood's most popular novel, also due to its being shortlisted for Man Booker Prize in 1986. This novel uses a very inventive background for the victim and survival theme – Atwood lets it evolve on the grounds of a dystopia, a nightmarish outcome of an utopia gone wrong and it also presents a fight for survival not in its metaphorical meaning, as did *Surfacing* or *Cat's Eye*, but in its literal meaning – Offred fights for life. In this novel it is possible to follow the development of victimization theme in Atwood's writing, how it is taking up new shapes and variations. The shift in the dealing with victim and survival theme is considerable, becoming more complicated and less transparent than it was in the previously discussed novel.

The Handmaid's Tale is a “classic dystopia,”¹⁰¹ a story of another nameless narrator, whom we know only under the name of Offred. Her voice delivers her story from a tape that remained as an artefact from the age of The Republic of Gilead, a totalitarian state controlled by a group of Commanders, where women were divided into homogenous groups, each of them to fulfill the role ascribed to them. The narrator belongs among the handmaids who, as stated in Bible, are to bear children for Commanders and their wives as they are the only remaining fertile ones.

Also this analysis will have two subchapters that will deal with strategies Offred uses in order to escape her victim position. Offred's victim position is slightly different from the position of the narrator in *Surfacing*, as she does not become locked in the vicious-circle victim position but lingers between this one and liberating victim position from the beginning. As for the strategies she uses to survive, similarly to *Surfacing*, they are becoming a trickster and gaining vision; only in

¹⁰¹ David Staines, “Margaret Atwood in her Canadian context” 24.

this case we deal with physical, rather than metaphorical, survival; as Offred fights for her life. The trickster transformation itself differs greatly from that presented in *Surfacing*. To represent the process of gaining vision, Atwood uses the motifs of mirrors and reflective surfaces that represent the narrator's crossing from blindness to vision.

3.1. **Identifying the victim position and strategy of becoming a trickster in *The Handmaid's Tale***

“Nolite le bastardes carborundorum“¹⁰²

Similarly to *Surfacing*, also in *The Handmaid's Tale* it is not Nature itself that victimizes the people. There are no snowstorms or floods that would try to exercise their destructive power on human race by drowning it or freezing it to death.¹⁰³ However, Nature is one of the inspirations that the leading groups of Republic of Gilead use to victimize the narrator and other women that remained fertile. The ultimate selection of who is to fulfil what part in the society in Gilead is given on grounds of natural selection. Those women who cannot reproduce have no other choice but to become marthas, the servants, or aunts, ravenous guardians of handmaids, the relatively lucky ones are the Wives, spouses of the Commanders. Those that are still functional and can have children, must be handmaids, or, if they prove to be incorrectible, they are sent to Colonies to tidy up harmful waste. Therefore thanks to the natural ability of reproduction, a large group of women is severely victimized – their marriages discontinued, their children stolen, their identities lost. Still, even though the nature provided the reason, the true victimizers, using this reason against the others, are the humans, the civilization once again. The society „conscripts the women into sexual service to the state, reduced by its doctrine of biological essentialism to her female role as a child breeder,

¹⁰² „don't let the bastards grind you down“ – a note Offred finds written in her room by previous handmaid, *The Handmaid's Tale* 62.

¹⁰³ see *Survival* 66.

a “two-legged womb.”¹⁰⁴ “Under such threats of erasure Offred fights for her psychological and emotional survival.”¹⁰⁵ Her quest is not only to learn to name her victimizer and fight against being a victim but also survive the situation she found herself in as an emotionally unharmed human being.

In *The Handmaid’s Tale*, Atwood uses one narrator to focus on a group of individuals being victimized. Offred represents one of the many, the fact that might be enforced by the absence of her real name, while at the same time the names of several other Handmaids are revealed. This presents a shift from the situation in *Surfacing*, where the focus was entirely on a single person, the narrator. This alteration in treatment of victimization and survival theme was also identified in Roberta Rubenstein’s “Nature and Nurture in Dystopia” where she described the shift in Atwood’s writing from “the issues of survival as a condition of Canadian experience to the condition of female experience...where she connects the personal and political dimensions of victimization and survival in explicitly female and feminist terms.”¹⁰⁶ This is particularly true about *The Handmaid’s Tale* where the victimization and survival are clearly defined as female experiences and even though it is obvious from the plot that also many men became the victims of the Gilead regime and had to fight for their survival, the focus is intentionally aimed at women only. And Offred is the one that stands for all of them.

Atwood presents several forms of victimization that the regime of Gilead exercises on handmaids. From Offred’s memories we get to know that the process of victimization was gradual but quick, in the course of just several weeks women were bereft of the possibility to handle money, to travel or to work, ending up branded and a “national resource, too important, too scarce.”¹⁰⁷ The handmaids are treated like

¹⁰⁴ Coral Ann Howells, “Margaret Atwood’s dystopian visions,” *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 165.

¹⁰⁵ Coral Ann Howells, “Margaret Atwood’s dystopian visions” 165.

¹⁰⁶ Roberta Rubenstein, “Nature and Nurture in Dystopia,” *Margaret Atwood: Essays on her works* (Toronto: Guernica Editions Inc., 2008) 115.

¹⁰⁷ *The Handmaid’s Tale* 75

brood livestock and they are kept in line by aunts who wield electric cattleprods.¹⁰⁸ As they are gradually robbed of their identities, their names, their free choice, they become the objects, a mere possession of those on top, the Commanders, which is aptly represented by their newly acquired names “of” plus the name of Commander. Their bodies are “used as a tool for reproduction, it is objectified and described in terms of parts rather than as wholes.”¹⁰⁹ Already in *Bodily Harm* (1981) Atwood “implied that the reduction of the body to a “thing“ is connected to its violation; in *The Handmaid’s Tale* torture and mutilation as well as less extreme forms of manipulation underscore the ruthless and repressive value that shape Gilead.”¹¹⁰ This reduction of a female human being into a mere object to be used is also observed by Offred; as she mentions the dolls “that would talk if you pulled a string at the back.”¹¹¹ When she hears herself talking to Serena Joy, the Commander’s wife, she muses that “I was sounding like that, voice of a monotone, voice of a doll.”¹¹² Offred is therefore well aware of her situation, she knows that she has been made a victim, that she has been objectified.

In *The Handmaid’s Tale*, Atwood does not present a straightforward vicious-circle victim, as she did in *Surfacing*; in here, she creates a variation. Offred lingers between the vicious-circle and the liberating victim position. Her starting point is being a victim because of the “dictates of biology.”¹¹³ But she is not victim because, given by nature, she is the weaker sex and therefore victimized by the stronger ones; the dictates of biology that make her a victim were misused by a certain group of population. Therefore she does not put herself in the victim role as the nameless narrator in *Surfacing* does by refusing to “accept power, to admit that she has it, refusing to exercise

¹⁰⁸ see Roberta Rubenstein 121.

¹⁰⁹ Roberta Rubenstein 118.

¹¹⁰ Roberta Rubenstein 118.

¹¹¹ *The Handmaid’s Tale* 26.

¹¹² *The Handmaid’s Tale* 26.

¹¹³ *Survival* 47.

it because the exercise of power is defined as evil.¹¹⁴ Offred knows who is victimizing her, she can identify the cause of the oppression and she feels a lot of anger that she would like to direct against the real source of oppression¹¹⁵ which moves her more to the third victim position.

However, Offred chooses two strategies to fight her victim position as she does want to escape it and survive. The strategies are, similarly to *Surfacing*, becoming a trickster creature and to gain vision. In this novel, the traces of a trickster nature of the narrator are not so obvious as they were in *Surfacing*; here the trickster character does not demonstrate itself as a physical transformation of the narrator's body; the transformation of the narrator remains in her own mind, and is represented by her shifting from her past self into her present self. On the surface, the transformation demonstrates itself just once – by the change of Offred's costume.

When telling her story, Offred often slips into her past self that expresses silent rage and disobedience towards the regime but it does not turn Offred's anger into a constructive action of liberating her. However, she takes small pleasures in breaking the small rules, sometimes by breaking them only in her head, by what she really thinks; for example she knows she should not have the feeling of ownership to anything, as she is a mere vessel in the greater plan, still, she does call the room she lives in hers – “I called it *mine*.”¹¹⁶ This can be a hint that Offred is not a believer, a blind follower and servant to the regime, but that she hides another self inside her that is truer to what she is really like. Offred's protest is, however, a silent one, she appears not to have courage or strength to fight her victim position openly. Her present self is prevailing and when she is offered help that could set her free, she feels scared – “it's the choice that terrifies me. A way out, a salvation.”¹¹⁷ Offred is aware of her lack of courage and she is horrified by it, by the fact that she would rather stay a victim than to

¹¹⁴ Graeme Gibson 13.

¹¹⁵ see *Survival* 48.

¹¹⁶ *The Handmaid's Tale* 59.

¹¹⁷ *The Handmaid's Tale* 71.

take the chance and accept the risk the saving herself would bring. This approximates her to the narrator in *Surfacing* who would also rather remain innocent, a victim, than to accept the power and responsibility she has.

Offred fights for survival only in her head, where her past self is hidden from the eyes of the regime. In her head she imagines the acts of revolt she could perform; she could “spit out of the window, or throw something and hit the Commander who is coming out”¹¹⁸ or “burn the house down with the match she had been given.”¹¹⁹ Imagining that is such a fine thought, it makes her shiver.¹²⁰ The revolting spirit, embodied in Offred’s past self is always present in Offred’s mind, telling her not to succumb, even though it never demonstrates itself in an actual action.

As Offred is not able to act on her revolutionary ideas, in the course of her story she introduces three people who were and who thanks to it did not manage to survive. Firstly, it is her mother, a radical feminist and an incorruptible who ended up in Colonies. Offred is very reluctant to succumb to the idea of her mother having been defeated because when she “thinks of her mother, sweeping up deadly toxins...she can’t quite believe it. Surely her cockiness, her optimism and energy, her pizzazz, will get her out of this. She will think of something.”¹²¹ But at the same time, she knows better and must admit that “I know it isn’t true...I’ve mourned for her already.”¹²² Somehow Offred knows that courage and audacity is not the right strategy to get out of the victim role and to survive.

Secondly, it is Offred’s friend Moira, a fighter for freedom, who “had power, who had been set loose, she’d set herself loose. She was a loose woman.”¹²³ Moira is a handmaid-to-be who would not be victimized, who would fight actively. Offred describes the contrast

¹¹⁸ see *The Handmaid’s Tale* 67.

¹¹⁹ *The Handmaid’s Tale* 200.

¹²⁰ see *The Handmaid’s Tale* 220.

¹²¹ *The Handmaid’s Tale* 265.

¹²² *The Handmaid’s Tale* 265.

¹²³ *The Handmaid’s Tale* 143.

between herself and other handmaids like her on one side and Moira on the other side – “I think we found this frightening, Moira was like an elevator with open sides, she made us dizzy. Already we were losing the taste for freedom, already we were finding these walls secure. In the upper reaches of the atmosphere you´d come apart, you´d vaporize.”¹²⁴ But what Moira fights primarily for freedom. She is not afraid of becoming loose, of disintegrating, her goal is to be set free. On the other hand, Offred fights for survival and she knows that being a victim and consequently to stop being a victim and survival come together hand in hand, for the time being; that other strategy than an active and open fight must be chosen in order to shake off the victim role. It is necessary to become a trickster, to appear to be one thing while in fact being another. Offred´ s duality is hidden as it exists only on psychological level – within her split self.

However, there is a moment, when Offred transforms herself into her past self also externally, when she is taken out to Jezebel´ s, a nightclub of the old ways inside the Republic of Gilead where she is required to wear make-up and a provocative costume. Inside she sees women in various types of disguises. This motif of masquerade, masks and disguises can be interpreted as a hint on an ancient pagan ritual *festum stultorum* (feast of fools) that was popular in 12th century and that underwent several changes until it was finally eradicated in the 16th century by Catholic church.¹²⁵ This ritual was heavily inspired by trickster myth and is supposed to have originated in another pagan festivity known as “*cervula*“ during which people disguised themselves as animals.¹²⁶ This way it is possible to see Jezebel´ s as a modern version of this pagan ritual that emphasizes the element of trickster myth, present in Atwood´ s novel. Inside Jezebel´ s, Offred meets Moira, “dressed absurdly“¹²⁷ in a rabbit costume that “doesn´ t quite fit her, it´ s

¹²⁴ *The Handmaid´ s Tale* 143.

¹²⁵ see C.G.Jung, “O psychologii postavy šibala,“ *Trickster, mýtus o šibalovi* (Praha: Dobra, 2005) 201.

¹²⁶ see C.G.Jung 202.

¹²⁷ *The Handmaid´ s Tale* 250.

too large, so that one breast is plumped out and the other one isn't."¹²⁸ Radin claims that trickster is frequently identified with animals as coyote, raven, spider or hare,¹²⁹ there it is possible to interpret this rabbit costume of Moira's as her attempt to become a trickster (a variation on a hare) in order to survive. But the costume does not fit her, she cannot play the game well enough, she can only become an absurd rabbit instead of a hare that would be the impersonated trickster. Since Moira does not succeed in becoming a trickster, she is not able to win her fight and survive. She does not die immediately afterwards, but she gives up and resigns, satisfies herself with the fact that she "has three or four good years before her snatch wears out and they send her to the boneyard"¹³⁰ therefore her death is only a matter of time. Offred is frightened when seeing this, wondering if they have really done it to Moira then, taken away something...that used to be so central to her.¹³¹ She even refuses to give up her hope that Moira will escape one day and keeps imagining how "Moira escaped, for good this time...or how she blew up Jezebel's, with fifty Commanders inside it."¹³² She'd like her to end with something daring and spectacular, some outrage, something that would befit her. But as far as she knows that didn't happen.¹³³ Moira, even though strong and revolting, is defeated in the end because she failed to be elusive, changeable, she failed to become a trickster. Offred, even though she lacks heroism she ascribes to Moira, is elusive enough to survive, she fits well enough into the Handmaids' uniform as into her frilly Jezebel's costume. She can be one thing or the other just as easily as easily she slips from her present self to her past self.

The third person who contrasts with Offred in the matter of becoming a successful trickster, and therefore achieving survival, is another handmaid, Ofglen. At the beginning, Ofglen is presented as

¹²⁸ *The Handmaid's Tale* 250.

¹²⁹ see Radin, „Poznámka na úvod“ 20.

¹³⁰ *The Handmaid's Tale* 261.

¹³¹ see *The Handmaid's Tale* 261.

¹³² *The Handmaid's Tale* 262.

¹³³ see *The Handmaid's Tale* 262.

being identical to Offred – “I watch her” – says Offred when meeting Ofglen for the first time – “She’s like my own reflection, in a mirror from which I am moving away.”¹³⁴ Here Offred also hints that this likeness in their appearance is only superficial, only in terms of appearance. This can be interpreted in several ways, one of them being that even though they both share the same revolutionary ideas, as they are both non-believers, they do not act alike, Offred is moving away from the sight, she does not want to be in focus, she prefers passive (non)action. Ofglen, on the other hand, is impatient, she needs the action and when she finds out that Offred is seeing her Commander alone at night, she wants her to get information from him – “find out and tell us...anything you can”¹³⁵ Offred is reluctant, she is unwilling to drag attention to herself, as she is unwilling to give away her dual nature. Her participation in the actions of the revolutionary Mayday organization is only provisional, while Ofglen seems to be the heart of it. Offred’s approach is sheerly realistic – “I hardly listen to Ofglen, I no longer credit her. The things she whispers seem to me unreal. What use are they, for me, now?”¹³⁶ Offred sees Mayday as a nuisance, she does not want to take any risks that would endanger her currently safe position. And for the third time, Offred’s wariness pays off when she finds out that Ofglen’s participation was revealed and she hanged herself before she could be taken away by the black van. Offred summarizes the situation briefly by contrasting her condition with Ofglen’s – “so she is dead, and I am safe, after all.”¹³⁷ Ofglen also failed to become a proper trickster, she remained too faithful to her ideas, she could not manage to lie and trick convincingly.

Offred’s “strategy for survival is her condition of double consciousness. She survives in the present by continually slipping back into the past.”¹³⁸ Offred therefore has two personalities in one body, one

¹³⁴ *The Handmaid’s Tale* 54.

¹³⁵ *The Handmaid’s Tale* 235.

¹³⁶ *The Handmaid’s Tale* 282.

¹³⁷ *The Handmaid’s Tale*, 298.

¹³⁸ Coral Ann Howells, “Margaret Atwood’s dystopian visions” 166.

is her past self, an independent woman who held her life in her hands and the second one is a handmaid, seemingly obedient servant of the regime. These two personalities are interconnected and the past self nurtures her present self and thus keeps Offred alive. However, she keeps her true ideas under cover even though she is clinging to the old ways of the pre-Gilean world. When Commander offers her some old magazines during their night sessions she wants it with a force that makes the ends of her fingers ache¹³⁹ – but nevertheless she does not grab them and it is this restraining herself that makes her feel pain, still it is necessary not to give herself away. She likes small demonstrations of the little power she has, small outbursts of her past self that reveals itself through breaking the code of behavior, for example when she is talking dirty about aunts she admits that “there is something powerful in the whispering of obscenities, about those in power. There’s something delightful about it, something naughty, secretive, forbidden, thrilling.”¹⁴⁰ She enjoys breaking the small rules while being unsuspected and unseen, keeping her dual nature to herself. She also manages to secure what was left of her individuality, which seeps unobtrusively through the layer of her new handmaid personality. This causes that after some time the Commander no longer sees in her a usable body...just a boat with no cargo, a chalice with no wine in it, an oven...minus the bun, to him, she is not merely empty.¹⁴¹ She managed to save her essence, she is no longer just a vessel, a walking incubator that has no value if not filled with child. She has started to be rid of her victim role for she found a way how to manipulate the victimizing force.

Offred’s greatest trick to be performed in order to survive is to get impregnated by a different man than her Commander who is most probably sterile. This action would save her life, as handmaids are given just three years to fulfil their function, if unsuccessful, they are disposed. Atwood, however, never reveals whether the trick worked for

¹³⁹ see *The Handmaid’s Tale* 164.

¹⁴⁰ *The Handmaid’s Tale* 234.

¹⁴¹ see *The Handmaid’s Tale* 172.

Offred or not. The man with whom she decides to do it, Commander's driver Nick, is of potential dual nature as well and therefore there is a risk that Offred, even though a trickster herself, will be tricked, too, as Nick can be just as well a member of Mayday as an Eye, the secret informants of the Gilead regime.

The end of the novel is rather pessimistic, in comparison to *Surfacing*. There it was clear that the narrator managed to repudiate the victim role and regain the control over her own life. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the outcome is ambiguous. Offred might have been successful and her trickster nature might have rescued her life but also there is the possibility that Nick really was an Eye and that the black van that came to fetch her was not Mayday as he claimed, but the notorious black van of Gilead. The pessimistic aspect of this is that if Offred's strategy did not work, nothing would. Moira and Offred's mother, the open incorrectibles, ended up in Colonies or in a whore club, with approximately the same life expectancy of three years, even Ofglen who tried to invade the regime from inside failed, for none of them managed to become a trickster of sufficiently persuasive dual nature. Only Offred managed and still it might not have been enough to survive.

3.2. **Strategy of gaining vision as a means of survival in *The Handmaid's Tale*.**

The Eyes that never sleep

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the vision imagery plays an important role when linked to victimization and survival. Similar to *Surfacing*, also in here the ability of the narrator to see is essential for her ability to survive and for getting rid of the victim role. In addition, the vision imagery gains a double role here, positive as well as negative. Also in this novel, Atwood uses motifs of mirrors and reflective surfaces that reflect Offred's reality in its distorted manner and make her see, but also the embodiment of the victimizing forces is represented by a vision

symbol – an Eye, which watches everything around; thus Atwood pays a tribute to Orwell's 1984, a dystopia that probably inspired her in the choice of the genre.

The everpresent Eyes, “a network of informants,”¹⁴² whose members watch every Handmaid, every person in the Gilead and can be mingled with the crowd at the least expected places, is the symbol of vision misused. The vision even becomes a device that can be used for touching. When seeing two Guardians, Offred remarks that since they are not allowed to touch women, “they touch with their eyes instead.”¹⁴³ Atwood enables the exchange of sensations here, a passive percept of sight becomes an active percept of touch, hinting on the active and potentially dangerous nature of the Eyes and also the potency of the vision. Those who have vision are the survivors, the strong, powerful ones. But Gilead and Eyes are misusing the power to victimize other members of the society. Eyes and ability to see are considered dangerous. That's why the handmaids are deprived of vision by the prescribed issue on their uniforms – “the white wings that keep us from seeing but also from being seen.”¹⁴⁴ Vision is not needed for handmaids as they are not expected to be the powerful ones, neither they are expected to survive; they are supposed to be used for three years and then to be rid of. When she is walking on the street, Offred emphasizes that “what the other people must see is the white wings only, a scrap of face, my chin and part of my mouth. Not the eyes.”¹⁴⁵ In eyes there is power that is not wanted in handmaids' possession for it might prove dangerous for the whole establishment of Gilead. The fight for vision is what Offred undergoes, which is synonymous to her fight for survival.

The motif of lens and mirrors occurs again as means of reflecting the distorted reality of Offred and herlikes and thus lead her to vision. When Offred walks downstairs, she sees her reflection in the hall mirror – “round, convex, a pier-glass, like the eye of a fish, and myself in it like

¹⁴² Roberta Rubenstein 119.

¹⁴³ *The Handmaid's Tale* 32.

¹⁴⁴ *The Handmaid's Tale* 18.

¹⁴⁵ *The Handmaid's Tale* 38.

a distorted shadow, a parody of something, some fairytale figure in a red cloak.¹⁴⁶ Mirror might be the device of showing the reality as it really is – deformed, deranged, unbelievable – like a fairy tale. It might be interpreted as a device that should help Offred realize the distortion of her existence as it is now, it should help her see.

Offred also mentions mirrors again when talking about the magazines she gets to read in Commander's office during their secret meetings – what was interesting about them was that “they dealt in transformations; they suggested an endless series of possibilities, extending like the reflections in two mirrors set facing one another, stretching on, replica after replica, to the vanishing point...the real promise in them was immortality.”¹⁴⁷ Mirrors here are the reminder of the old ways, they represent the endless possibilities women used to have. Once again mirrors should help Offred to see how much her reality of her present self is changed from the reality her past self occupied, changed for the worse. Mirrors can also be seen as a hint on Offred's tricksterous nature, if she wants to survive and stop being a distorted image of herself, she must be inspired in what the mirrors show her – an endless series of possibilities, which might be an insinuation to the transformation; only by transforming herself she can survive.

The mirror is also the item that helps Offred to gain the vision required to survive. When she makes her first eye contact with Ofglen, which reveals that Ofglen is a non-believer and therefore could be Offred's ally, it happens via their mirror image. They are watching the machines producing prayers through the window but then Offred “shifts her gaze and what she sees is not the machines, but Ofglen, reflected in the glass of the window. She is looking straight at her.”¹⁴⁸ Offred describes the experience – “We can see into each other's eyes. This is the first time I've ever seen Ofglen's eyes, indirectly, steadily, not

¹⁴⁶ *The Handmaid's Tale* 19.

¹⁴⁷ *The Handmaid's Tale* 165.

¹⁴⁸ *The Handmaid's Tale* 176.

aslant.¹⁴⁹ This eye contact is a key moment in Offred's story, for it opens Offred's eyes, she gains the vision. Now she can see other Handmaid's eyes, and her eyes can be seen, too. Seeing is only for the powerful ones, for the survivors; thus Offred becomes one, she no longer sees herself as a helpless victim, she knows something can be done about it and escape it. A mirror is a helper, it reflects the reality as it is, that is why Offred can see Ofglen's true, revolting nature in it and Ofglen can see Offred's past self in the mirror instead of her redcloaked obedient present self.

However, it is essential for the handmaids to keep their vision secret and pretend blindness. Whatever demonstration of their vision might be fatal for them; so when the black van passes by, Ofglen tells Offred "pretend not to see"¹⁵⁰ which might be interpreted as a signal for Offred to pretend blindness, vision non-existent. Vision is essential for her survival but so is the tricksterous nature. And Eyes are everywhere, watchful, screening everyone for signs of disobedience, which an ability to see certainly is. Therefore it is vital for Offred to cloak herself back into her present self and hide any traces of her power.

Offred's vision becomes even clearer when she starts her relationship with Nick. After the affair started, "everything is the colour it usually is, only brighter"¹⁵¹ – which can mean that Offred's vision intensifies. She also begins to be ravenous for light; when with Nick, she "keeps her eyes open. She would like a light on somewhere, a candle perhaps...I want to see what can be seen, of him, take him in, memorize him, save him up so I can live on the image, later."¹⁵² She started acting actively on her survival, she is no longer the victim of the regime, now she is tricking it. She will trick her victimizers by getting pregnant by a different man than she is prescribed to, and she will also fall in love with this man and he with her. She will live as her

¹⁴⁹ *The Handmaid's Tale* 176.

¹⁵⁰ *The Handmaid's Tale* 178.

¹⁵¹ *The Handmaid's Tale* 236.

¹⁵² *The Handmaid's Tale* 281.

past self but in the body of her present self. She will live on love, which is her way how to survive the victimization.

The ending of the novel is open. Nick, after all, may not have been her way to survival, but to certain death. She might have been betrayed and double tricked. Therefore it is possible for Offred to step “into the darkness within; or else the light”¹⁵³ – Nick might have led her to either first or the other. It might be so that neither Offred’s vision nor her dual nature of a trickster was sufficient to escape the victimization. However, the important thing is that in her mind, she managed to repudiate the victim role and fight for all she was worth for her survival, physical and emotional.

¹⁵³ *The Handmaid’s Tale* 307.

Chapter 4

Cat's Eye

Cat's Eye, published in 1988, is the most recent of the three novels discussed that also gained a considerable academic and critical attention, especially for its being shortlisted for Man Booker Prize in 1989. In this novel, Atwood tries to inspect the situation of two victims of the same type meet and their interaction. Therefore the pattern of victimization evolves into a completely new shape, where victim and a bully exchange roles and the victor-victim game becomes much more interconnected with the vision imagery and symbology than in the previous works discussed. Again, the narrator becomes a trickster in order to survive her victimization but her struggle with blindness versus ability to see is everpresent during her fight for survival.

Cat's Eye is a story of a painter, Elaine Risley, who experienced severe trauma as a nine-year-old girl, caused by constant bullying by her best friend Cordelia. Though believing she has long overcome her traumatic experience, she has to face the fact that she has been haunted by spectre of Cordelia all her life and that her fight for survival has not actually ended.

In this novel, for the first time, we have the victim that does not stand for a group of victims (handmaids – Offred) or for a whole sex (women – *Surfacing*). In *Cat's Eye*, the narrator is clearly identified by her name and therefore Atwood focuses on a single instance of victimization, a private case, a story of one person, which, however, can be taken as an exemplary situation every child can get into. This chapter will deal with victimization of the narrator and the strategies Elaine uses in order to fight her victim role and to survive. Similarly to the previous novels discussed, Elaine becomes a trickster creature and also disposes of her symbolical blindness in order to fight her victimization.

4.1. Identifying the victim position and strategy of becoming a trickster in *Cat's Eye*

Sisters in pain

When looking at Elaine's case, she appears to be, similarly to Offred, a type of victim that lingers between the second and the third type of Atwood's distinctive victim model – the vicious-circle victim and liberating victim. Since Elaine is a child when her victimization begins, she cannot understand that it is not inevitable and that she herself can do something against it. She takes it as a natural part of her life and tries to deal with it. The victim of the second type “does not identify the real source of oppression, it displaces it for a vast cause such as fate, will of God or dictates of biology and the anger victimization produces is directed against both fellow-victims and oneself.”¹⁵⁴ Elaine might be interpreted as a variation on the second victim model. She is confused about what is happening to her, she does not know how she deserved it. When she tries to convey the message to her mother, she finds out that “as far as this thing is concerned, her mother is powerless.”¹⁵⁵ This can be a hint on the invincible power that causes Elaine's victimization against which not only Elaine herself is helpless, but also the person who is supposed to protect her and shield her from it. Therefore it can be assumed that Elaine's victimizing power is something as strong as God and his will, something she cannot name or identify. This notion is also supported by what Elaine hears in the Smeaths' house, where she overhears Mrs. Smeath telling that what is happening to Elaine is “God's punishment”¹⁵⁶ which reinforces the notion that Elaine's victimization is really God's will.

As her torment continues, Elaine starts directing the anger against herself, as it is typical for the vicious-circle victim. She starts “chewing the ends of her hair, gnawing the cuticle off from around

¹⁵⁴ *Survival* 47.

¹⁵⁵ *Cat's Eye* 157.

¹⁵⁶ *Cat's Eye* 180.

her fingernails, leaving welts of exposed, oozing flesh."¹⁵⁷ However, these things she does without thinking about them. Later, her actions against herself become more harmful, she starts peeling her feet, she would "bite a small opening in the thickest part of the skin..she would pull the skin off in narrow strips. She would go down as far as the blood"¹⁵⁸ and she herself admits that while chewing her hair was done mindlessly, "the feet were more deliberate."¹⁵⁹ She feels the need to cause herself pain, to let the anger out and since the source of oppression is nowhere to be found, she takes it out on herself.

Elaine would like to blame Cordelia for having made her a victim. Here Elaine seemingly crosses the boundary between the second and the third type. She tries to name the cause of her victimization and she points at Cordelia, her tormentor and bully. But in here she is wrong, for Cordelia is a victim just as Elaine. Cordelia is a vicious-circle victim, too. Although the reader never gets to know what exactly Cordelia went through, there are several hints in the text that she had been victimized by her father for many years, especially in her childhood which caused her to transfer her anger on the nearest person who seemed weak enough to take it. Therefore Cordelia is a typical example of the vicious-circle victim, as she is unable to fight her victim role, instead she passes her victimization along to others ("man kicks child, child kicks dog.")¹⁶⁰ And Elaine, having made a mistake by misidentifying the source of her oppression, starts fighting the wrong battle as she tries to exchange victim-victor roles with Cordelia.

Elaine's strategy how to fight her victimization is the same as Offred's or the unnamed narrator in *Surfacing*; she becomes an entity of dual nature, a trickster. However, the nature of the trickster is different from the previous two. Elaine, unlike the narrator in *Surfacing*, does not transform her physical form, nor does she become an animal-like creature. Her transformation is closer to Offred's, for she also splits

¹⁵⁷ *Cat's Eye* 114.

¹⁵⁸ *Cat's Eye* 114.

¹⁵⁹ *Cat's Eye* 114.

¹⁶⁰ *Survival* 49.

her personality into two different selves - a nine-year-old victimized self and her present self. But unlike Offred, she encapsules her nine-year-old past self within herself, shutting it out, trying to ignore its existence. After that, her present self takes over and starts taking up the role of the victimizer.

Throughout the text, there are many hints on the dual nature and on the importance of halves. One of Elaine's teachers has a recipe for symmetry - "everything has two halves, a left and a right"¹⁶¹ which can be interpreted as a reference to the potential of dual nature within human beings. Soon Elaine discovers a way how to escape being fully present when she is being bullied, she learns how to faint intentionally - "I slip sideways, out of my body, and I'm somewhere else...I feel blurred, as if there are two of me, one superimposed on the other, but imperfectly."¹⁶² Elaine's two selves are already clearly defined but dependent on each other, they are two halves of one person. Also when she compares herself with the members of her family, she admits that she feels older than they are, much older. She feels ancient,¹⁶³ which may hint on a trickster, one of the oldest myths there is, and how it contrasts with the people who did not have the need to fight victimization as Elaine did. Therefore they could remain whole, while she had to split herself and become a trickster.

The trickster nature of the narrator is alluded to also via numerous references to defacement, when one half is scarred and mutilated and the second half is seemingly all right. Such a reference can be found also in the structure of the novel, whose part eight is called Half a face. These images can be interpreted as insinuations on Elaine's dual nature. Her trauma and her victim experience make her such a double faced being, her scarred and deformed self hidden inside, poisoning the second half and waiting for a chance to demonstrate its powers fully. The impact of the hidden self are, however, everpresent.

¹⁶¹ *Cat's Eye* 128.

¹⁶² *Cat's Eye* 173.

¹⁶³ see *Cat's Eye* 239.

Even though Elaine believes that she got rid of her victimizer (Cordelia) and stopped being a victim, she is long way from truth.

A significant scene that supports the fact that Elaine is still a trickster and therefore still a victim even at the age of around fifty is the one where Elaine passes her poster and she sees that it has been drawn moustache on and she must admit that “that looks sort of good. The moustache is like a costume...I think about men and their facial hair, and the opportunities for disguise and concealment they have always at their disposal.”¹⁶⁴ Moustache is for her a means of protection and of expressing her dual nature – it is a costume, under which another personality could remain hidden. When she is looking at her picture on the poster, she remarks that “the name is hers, and so is the face, more or less”¹⁶⁵ – another hint on Elaine’s multiplicity of character. She even accepts the moustache as a legitimate part of her – “it goes with my hair.”¹⁶⁶ As Coral Ann Howells mentioned in “Elaine Risley’s Retrospective Art,” “Elaine’s view of her own face “defaced“ is surrounded by images of multiples identities and disguises...all of which underline Elaine’s indeterminacy and multiplicity as a subject.”¹⁶⁷ Therefore it is possible to interpret Elaine’s multiplicity as a proof of her tricksterous nature; which means that she actually did not unite her selves again after having faced Cordelia. She did not overcome her victimization, she still is a victim. Even though a nine-year-old Elaine finally does face Cordelia and gets to see that she doesn’t have to do what Cordelia says and manages to free herself,¹⁶⁸ she is not entirely free. Instead, she becomes “hard-shelled, firmly closed”¹⁶⁹ – her trauma seals inside her and causes her to forget it ever existed.

Forgetting, however, is not the end of things. When Elaine watches the bridge come down, the bridge under which she almost

¹⁶⁴ *Cat’s Eye* 20.

¹⁶⁵ *Cat’s Eye* 20.

¹⁶⁶ *Cat’s Eye* 20.

¹⁶⁷ Coral Ann Howells, “Elaine Risley’s retrospective art,” *Margaret Atwood: Essays on her work* (Toronto: Guernica Editions Inc., 2008) 133.

¹⁶⁸ see *Cat’s Eye* 193.

¹⁶⁹ *Cat’s Eye* 201.

froze to death thanks to Cordelia, she has “an uneasy feeling, as if something’s buried down there, a nameless, crucial thing, or as if there’s someone still on the bridge, left by mistake.”¹⁷⁰ In order to deal with her victimizing experience, Elaine shut out her trauma, she locked her victimized self inside her. The thing she feels is buried under the bridge is that past self of hers and it is crucial to acknowledge its existence in order to deal with her victimizing experience for good, for no sooner will she unite her two selves than she will ever be rid of her victim role.

When Elaine becomes a teenager and is reunited with Cordelia at the secondary school, she is still carrying her dual nature with her. But since she identified Cordelia as the source of the oppression, she starts channelling her anger and negative feelings into victimizing Cordelia, not realizing that Cordelia was just the same victim as herself and did just the same thing to her that Elaine is doing now.

A significant implication on victim nature of Cordelia’s is the horror comic book Elaine and Cordelia read together, about two sisters, one of them scarred, the other one beautiful, where the scarred one dies and gets into the body of the pretty sister.¹⁷¹ It might be interpreted as the hint of Elaine and Cordelia being sisters of such kind, their roles interchanging, once Cordelia is the scarred sister, later Elaine. At the same time, it might be seen as another hint of Elaine’s dual nature, for ever since she read the comic book, she is afraid that “she’ll find out that there’s someone else trapped inside her body; that she’ll look into the bathroom mirror and see the face of another girl, someone who looks like her but has half of her face darkened, the skin burned away.”¹⁷² Subconsciously, Elaine is aware of the fact that there is, indeed, another personality inside her, the result of her victimizing experience, her past, nine-year-old self that she enclosed into a void inside her.

¹⁷⁰ *Cat’s Eye* 202.

¹⁷¹ see *Cat’s Eye* 211.

¹⁷² see *Cat’s Eye* 212.

As Elaine seemingly found the source of her victimization, she starts acting like a liberating victim – she “refuses to accept the assumption that the victim role is inevitable and tries to channel the anger and energy into a constructive action.”¹⁷³ There are two problems with that – firstly, Elaine somehow gets “locked into her anger and fails to change her situation”¹⁷⁴ and then, she identified the cause of victimization wrongly and therefore what Elaine is doing, is just behavior of a victim of the second type – she is “passing her victimization along to others.”¹⁷⁵ Therefore Elaine starts getting stronger on Cordelia’s expense, for “energy has passed between them, and Elaine is stronger”¹⁷⁶ and Elaine, when tormenting Cordelia, “is surprised at how much pleasure this gives her, to know Cordelia is so uneasy, to know she has this much power over her.”¹⁷⁷ Elaine likes having power over Cordelia, she is pleased to be able to return the kicks she had once been given by her. What she does not realize is that it is her dual, tricksterous nature that is doing this, her past self, hidden inside her that is influencing her actions.

Soon, Elaine becomes known for her mean mouth and she is “surrounded by an aura of potential verbal danger, she is treated with caution”¹⁷⁸ which tells us that Elaine tends to channel her anger not on Cordelia exclusively. However, Cordelia is the most common target for her mean mouth; Elaine admits that “she doesn’t even have to provoke her.”¹⁷⁹ She returns everything to Cordelia. When Cordelia has to face her father, the real source of oppression for both girls, she is losing it, because “she is too frightened of him.”¹⁸⁰ Elaine muses that “nothing Cordelia can do or say will ever be enough, because she is somehow the wrong person. I watch this, and it makes me angry.”¹⁸¹

¹⁷³ *Survival* 48.

¹⁷⁴ *Survival* 48.

¹⁷⁵ *Survival* 49.

¹⁷⁶ *Cat’s Eye* 233.

¹⁷⁷ *Cat’s Eye* 233.

¹⁷⁸ *Cat’s Eye* 234.

¹⁷⁹ *Cat’s Eye* 235.

¹⁸⁰ *Cat’s Eye* 249.

¹⁸¹ *Cat’s Eye* 249.

Instead of realizing who is the real cause of her situation, she feels anger against Cordelia. She even feels gusts of physical violence towards her, for being “so abject.”¹⁸² This feeling of aggressiveness towards Cordelia can be seen as a proof that Elaine still considers Cordelia the force that once victimized her and therefore feels tempted to return the kicks.

Cordelia soon develops similar ways of surviving her victimizing experience as Elaine once did - she starts escaping her body and when Elaine watches her, she sees that “Cordelia’s face goes still, remote, unreflecting. It’s as if she’s not inside it.”¹⁸³ This observation confirms that Cordelia, too, is a victim. But still, Elaine is somehow not able to see it and behave accordingly. Even when she visits Cordelia in psychiatric clinic, after an attempted suicide, there is another proof of Cordelia using the same manoeuvres to survive her victimization as Elaine – she has her child self locked inside her. It shows itself when Elaine is watching Cordelia and noticing “a frantic child in there, behind that locked, sagging face.”¹⁸⁴ When Cordelia tells her about the place where she would feel safe, Elaine has the chance to understand that Cordelia is victim, just as herself because “Cordelia’s face dissolves, re-forms: I can see her nine-year-old face taking shape beneath it...It’s as if I’ve been standing outside in the dark and a shade has snapped up, over a lighted window, revealing the life that’s been going on inside in all its clarity and detail. There is that glimpse during which I can see. And then not.”¹⁸⁵ Elaine can see Cordelia’s child self materializing in front of her and she even admits that for a moment she could see everything clearly, but then she is blind again and does not see what is and was going on with Cordelia or herself. A possible interpretation might be that Elaine had a chance to heal her blindness and get rid of her victim role, but she could not sustain the vision. And after the moment has passed, Elaine doesn’t feel gentle towards her (Cordelia).

¹⁸² *Cat’s Eye* 249.

¹⁸³ *Cat’s Eye* 221.

¹⁸⁴ *Cat’s Eye* 359.

¹⁸⁵ *Cat’s Eye* 252.

She is seething, with a fury she can neither explain nor express.¹⁸⁶ The fury is that of her nine-year-old self that is close shut inside her, that is why she cannot express it, nor explain it; because she forgot that it ever existed.

Elaine is not free of her ghosts. She feels haunted by Cordelia, even though she feels to be the stronger one. "I am not free, of Cordelia...she knows I have deserted her, and she is angry...She could ring the doorbell at any minute, call on the phone. She could be anywhere."¹⁸⁷ Elaine still fears Cordelia, letting this irrational, unexplained fear control her. Being a trickster does not work out well for her survival, it enabled her to survive only seemingly, in fact, her life is as much a slave to her victimizing experience, as it was when she was nine years old.

The ultimate proof of Elaine's dual nature is her own suicide attempt. "I hear the voice, not inside my head at all but in the room, clearly: Do it. Come on. Do it. This voice doesn't offer a choice; it has the force of an order."¹⁸⁸ It is her second self that is compelling her to end her life. "I know it wasn't really there. Also I knew I heard it. It wasn't a frightening voice, in itself. Not menacing but excited...the voice of a nine-year-old child."¹⁸⁹ Here the trickster in her tries to trick her into killing herself. Its role has turned over completely. What Elaine tried to accomplish by becoming two selves, two halves, was to survive as a full-value person. But trickster in her got herself tricked, for she was not able to free herself from Cordelia, from her victimizing experience, from her being a victim. Only by identifying the cause of her victimization correctly, she can understand her experience and move on, to free herself of it, to remember fully what happened and shake off her victim role. Becoming a trickster worked for the narrator in *Surfacing*, for it showed her the way how to become complete again and how to free herself. It worked less for Offred, for it might have lead her either to

¹⁸⁶ see *Cat's Eye* 359.

¹⁸⁷ *Cat's Eye* 360.

¹⁸⁸ *Cat's Eye* 373.

¹⁸⁹ *Cat's Eye* 374.

survival or certain death. For Elaine, it seemed to be the right way to survival, but it turned out to be willing to kill her. Elaine must therefore find a way how to unite her two selves, how to make peace between them, in order to achieve survival.

4.2. **Strategy of gaining vision as a means of survival in *Cat's Eye***

The Third Eye

In *Cat's Eye*, Atwood hints on Elaine's process of gaining vision, and therefore her ability to survive, via rich vision imagery that permeates the entire story of Elaine's fight for survival and is even tightly bound to her trickster game. Throughout the story, Atwood introduces several subjects, connected with vision and a lack of it; firstly the everpresent gaze of somebody or something watching Elaine, or at least, she perceives it so, secondly the darkness, that symbolizes lack of vision and also victimizing force, thirdly the mirrors, reflectors of the reality, either distorting it or setting it right and finally the Cat's Eye of the title, a clear marble Elaine treasures and that leads her from blindness to vision.

Gaze and the notion of being watched all the time, everywhere, is what Cordelia uses to victimize Elaine, she makes her feel that she is always being watched¹⁹⁰ by constant nagging "people are looking"¹⁹¹ when supposedly Elaine does something wrong. Gazing concentrated on her becomes for Elaine a nightmare, she knows that everything the teacher says to her and everything Elaine does, is heard and seen...and will be reported later¹⁹² because Cordelia created a watching net Elaine cannot get out of – similarly to the Eyes in *The Handmaid's Tale* - the friends of Cordelia's, Carol and Grace, function as the informants that see and report every movement Elaine does and thus reinforce Elaine's fear of Gaze.

¹⁹⁰ see *Cat's Eye*, 121.

¹⁹¹ *Cat's Eye*, 119.

¹⁹² see *Cat's Eye*, 127.

Elaine cannot even stand her Christmas gift, a doll with fringed eyes that open and close and she rather puts the tissue paper around it, over the face, because she doesn't want it watching her,¹⁹³ for she is so scared of the gaze that she ascribes it to almost everything around her. Therefore Elaine soon gets to feel that even stars are watching her – “the stars no longer look cold and white and remote...now they look watchful.”¹⁹⁴ This might be interpreted as the ultimate watching power that is seemingly after Elaine, for it is impossible to escape the gaze of stars; their gaze is almost the gaze of God. Elaine soon develops wish to become invisible, in order to escape this searing gaze, since there is no other way how to avoid it. This wish is not granted though, and Elaine must come up with another strategy.

When freeing herself of immediate bullying by Cordelia, she no more listens to Cordelia's commands, nor does she obey them; she “acts as trickster by ignoring Cordelia and the friends' attempts to control her.”¹⁹⁵ Here the vision imagery and its role in the fight for survival is intertwined with another of Elaine's strategies how to survive. She learns “how to exist under the Gaze”¹⁹⁶ just as she learned how to become a trickster. But even though she learned to deal with the gaze, she is not free, for even in her adult age, she is worried about being watched, just as she was worried during the children theatre performance in which Cordelia played a weasel and Elaine could not recognize her among many other children acting in identical weasel costumes. She then said that “knowing she is there but not knowing where is the worst thing. She could be anywhere.”¹⁹⁷ Therefore it can be assumed that for Elaine, the most scaring thing is to know she is being watched and having no power over it. Later, when Elaine becomes trickster, she still “doesn't like being looked at from behind: it was a

¹⁹³ see *Cat's Eye* 128.

¹⁹⁴ *Cat's Eye* 101.

¹⁹⁵ Sharon R. Wilson, “Blindness and survival in Margaret Atwood's major novels” 183.

¹⁹⁶ Sharon R. Wilson, “Blindness and survival in Margaret Atwood's major novels” 183.

¹⁹⁷ *Cat's Eye* 127.

view over which she had no control.¹⁹⁸ Still she is aware of people watching her and she does not like being powerless about it.

A very negative meaning in the novel is given to the notion of darkness. Darkness represents the victimizing power and it can be also interpreted as symbolic blindness, which makes survival impossible. It is necessary for Elaine, or for any other victim, to find the way out of darkness, or a way to vision in order to survive. When Elaine comes again to the place where she nearly drowned, her “head is filling with black sawdust; little specks of the darkness are getting in through her eyes.”¹⁹⁹ Elaine cannot remember what happened to her there, it is hidden in darkness. Those black specks that hinder her vision are symbolic blinding force that prevents her survival, since Elaine has to admit, remember and see what traumatic experience she had to face in order to deal with it; only thus she will unite her two selves and heal her blindness.

Elaine knows that darkness must be fought and she uses the expression in exclusively negative meaning. She tries to fill in her memory gaps, she feels the need to “fill in the black square of time, go back to see what’s in it.”²⁰⁰ She tries to invoke the vision, she “closes her eyes and waits for pictures, at first there’s nothing; just a receding darkness, like a tunnel, but after a while something begins to form.”²⁰¹ She never manages to bring about the complete memory, it’s only hints and dribs and drabs. But it is enough to let her know that there is something hidden, something she must drag out of darkness to light and have a look at it.

Darkness is also connected with power that must be fought. For Elaine, similarly to Offred and the narrator in *Surfacing*, power is negatively perceived, the powerful ones are often the victimizers. In *Cat’s Eye*, when Elaine explains why she believes the stories about paternal beating the children, she mentions that darkness is what

¹⁹⁸ *Cat’s Eye* 294.

¹⁹⁹ *Cat’s Eye* 188.

²⁰⁰ *Cat’s Eye* 108.

²⁰¹ *Cat’s Eye* 108.

“brings home the fathers, with their real, unspeakable power.”²⁰²

Darkness stands for the force that enables fathers to victimize, as it is in case of Cordelia. Only she does not know it at that time, she just feels that fathers possess strange power that is scary and dangerous and therefore when you fight darkness, you fight the victimizing force as well and try to survive.

The way Elaine tries, in order to fight darkness, is to see in it, not to enable it blind her. She mentions several times the pervasiveness of darkness – “it’s the darkest time of the year. Even in the daytime it seems dark; and at night, when the lights are on, this darkness pervades everything, like a fog.”²⁰³ She makes a hint that even the lights cannot fight darkness, they are on and still the darkness pervades everything. That might be a reference that it is not the usual darkness she is describing, but the blindness, the obstructed vision. A force that blinds and makes the survival impossible. Therefore Elaine is grateful to her brother that he teaches her to see in the dark, saying “you never know when you might need to do this. You can’t use a flashlight, you have to stay still, in the darkness, waiting until your eyes become accustomed to no light...now I can see in the dark.”²⁰⁴ It is necessary for survival to fight the darkness by other means than flashlight; by gaining vision in it. Once Elaine is able to see in it, she is able to fight her victimization. And she is able to fight Cordelia, an illusory victimizer. But still, Elaine is displacing the real source of her oppression.

Another reference to Elaine and Cordelia being the same victims is also connected with the light and darkness contrast. Elaine is amazed by the effect of the photo negatives – the overturned colours that are there – “everything that’s white in the real picture is black in the negative.”²⁰⁵ If we comply with the traditional colour symbolism, typical for Euroamerican culture, where white is positive and black

²⁰² *Cat’s Eye* 164.

²⁰³ *Cat’s Eye* 56.

²⁰⁴ *Cat’s Eye* 26.

²⁰⁵ *Cat’s Eye* 55.

negative, we can deduce that Atwood, in the victim-victor context, uses the image of photo negatives as a hint on the interchangeable nature of the victim. It can also be interpreted as foreshadowing of what is to happen, since Elaine, the victim, does assume the role of the oppressor later on. She turns from white to black, just as Cordelia turns from black to white. Cordelia becomes a more obvious victim and Elaine her tormentor. Black here can also symbolize Elaine's lack of vision, her blindness, her inability to see that she and Cordelia are in reality "like the twins in old fables, each of whom has been given half a key."²⁰⁶ This proves ultimately that both girls are victims, even victims of the same kind, the twins.

Similarly to *Surfacing* and *The Handmaid's Tale*, in *Cat's Eye* Atwood uses mirrors as reflectors of the reality the main character must face. In Elaine's case, they might be the symbol of the objects that should help her to see. Elaine mentions mirrors right at the beginning in connection with her inability to see herself properly, she is either a blur when looking too close, too far back she can't see the details.²⁰⁷ These eye problems might hint on Elaine's blindness, the mirror does not reflect her properly. It can also be because of her trickster nature, she is neither this nor that, never her herself. She keeps squinting into the mirror, preparing her face²⁰⁸ but the problems do not go away and Elaine suggests to herself that she "should get bifocals."²⁰⁹ The bifocals might represent the device to help her with vision, but still, Elaine condemns the idea instantly.

Mirrors, however, keep following the narrator, all the way through reflecting the distorted, deformed reality, even though not literally at times – as it is in case of the horror comic book about the two sisters. In this particular case the mirror seems to be the bearer of evil, it is the place where the evil, burned sister hid herself. But the scene might be interpreted in a different manner; mirror can be seen as a device that

²⁰⁶ *Cat's Eye* 411.

²⁰⁷ see *Cat's Eye* 5.

²⁰⁸ see *Cat's Eye* 19.

²⁰⁹ *Cat's Eye* 19.

tries to reflect what is hidden, but still existing – Elaine’s dark, deformed part that she is not consciously aware of. The mirror appears to know it though. It may even hint on the fact that Elaine still is a victim and perceives herself as a victim. It might be trying to make Elaine see that, that is why Elaine sees herself in Cordelia’s sunglasses, “in her mirror eyes, in duplicate and monochrome, and a great deal smaller than life-size“²¹⁰ – if the mirror reflects the reality, though biased, it just reflects how Elaine perceives herself as Cordelia’s victim. And she truly is a victim, but not Cordelia’s.

Later, Elaine starts to be interested in various types of glass surfaces, especially mirrors – “I study paintings in which there are pearls, crystals, mirrors...what fascinates me...is the pier-glass...which reflects in its convex surface not only the backs (of the figures on the picture) but two other people who aren’t in the main picture at all. These figures...are slightly askew, as if...locked in, sealed up in the glass. This round mirror is like an eye, a single eye that sees more than anyone else looking.“²¹¹ Here Atwood gives us the key – Elaine starts recognizing the power of mirrors or mirroring surfaces, she comes to see that they might show something that is hidden from the normal sight, that they possess a certain power that is not own to anyone or anything else. The things that these mirrors show might be distorted, biased, but it is the reality in its deformed shape that they are showing. The mirrors are the eyes that see more and they try to demonstrate it, to make Elaine heal her blindness and gain vision.

The item that may symbolize the objectified vision Elaine is after in order to survive, is the cat’s eye, the clear marble. Their value for children and especially for Elaine, is high. As she muses, they are “passed from winner to winner“²¹² which may mean the winner of the game children are playing, but on symbolical level, the winners might be those who manage to gain the vision, the survivors, those, who get to possess the cat’s eye . Elaine soon gives the marble a supernatural

²¹⁰ *Cat’s Eye* 303.

²¹¹ *Cat’s Eye* 327.

²¹² *Cat’s Eye* 62.

power; the marbles are “really like eyes, but not the eyes of cats. They are the eyes of something that isn’t known but exists anyway...like the eyes of aliens from distant planets.”²¹³ The vision contained in the object is given its own power, again the symbol of gaze appears, cat’s eyes are the watchful eyes, but this time it is Elaine who possesses them and it gives her power to fight victimization and thus to survive. She even ascribes protecting powers to it that are bound with the ability of vision – “she (Cordelia) doesn’t know what power this cat’s eye has, to protect me. Sometimes when I have it with me I can see the way it sees...I can see people moving...I can see their shapes and sizes, their colours, without feeling anything else about them. I am alive in my eyes only.”²¹⁴ Elaine feels the cat’s eye protects her through enabling her the vision, therefore it enables her to survive as well. Vision and survival are tightly bound together, when Elaine can possess the vision, she can survive.

There might be even secondary symbolism bound with the cat’s eye marble. As was already mentioned, for survival it is necessary to see in dark. Usually, real cats are able to see in dark quite naturally. Atwood’s choice of the object that may be the embodiment of vision is highly symbolic then – the cat’s eye as the bearer of vision, cat’s eye that can see in dark.

The problem comes when Elaine, though doing everything in order to fight her victimization, does not escape her victim role because of displacing the source of her oppression, blaming Cordelia, her fellow-victim instead of the real source - herself – for her inability to revolt against Cordelia. The vision does not work as she hoped, for she still is haunted by Cordelia even in her older age. Something has gone wrong, and it can be assumed that that is the reason why Elaine forgets the meaning of cat’s eye. Once so treasured a possession then just lies forgotten in her red plastic purse, hidden just as Elaine’s tricksterous past self. Elaine has dreams in which the past self demonstrates itself

²¹³ *Cat’s Eye* 62.

²¹⁴ *Cat’s Eye* 141.

but she does not understand the meaning of it – “I dream that I’ve found a red plastic purse, hidden in a drawer...I know there is treasure inside it, but I can’t get it open. I try and try and finally it bursts, like a balloon. It’s full of dead frogs.”²¹⁵ Elaine’s trauma is the purseful of dead frogs, in the place where the marble used to be. The possible interpretation is that Elaine’s trauma unites with the cat’s eye marble. Once the object of her protection and her means of survival tries to give her hints on the way how to really survive – to open up and face her past self that lies hard-shelled inside her head, to stop making a victim of herself.

The motif of cat’s eye also pervades Elaine’s pictures. Her painting seems to have mostly therapeutical function for her – she paints pictures where many allusions to her previous life appear and she even uses it as a means of revenge – by painting deformed images of Mrs. Smeath, who said it serves her right to be tormented, or her mother who proved helpless in Elaine’s fight against torment. The motif that appears in one of her pictures is “scarcely visible, far back in the dense tangle of the glossy leaves...the eyes of cats.”²¹⁶ It is her past self talking to her through the pictures. Elaine at the adult age does not know why she hates Mrs. Smeath so much, why her mother wants forgiveness from her²¹⁷ or why she embeds cat’s eye motif in her picture; it is the cry of her traumatized self, which needs to be noticed.

It is the cat’s eye that brings about the vision Elaine needs. When going through her old things, she finds the red plastic purse and the once magical cat’s eye in it. She “looks into it and sees her life entire.”²¹⁸ Metaphorically meant, the cat’s eye shows her the locked out trauma of hers that kept victimizing her all the time. Not Cordelia, not Grace or Carol. Even though “those girls gave her a bad time,”²¹⁹ it was not them who made Elaine a victim. For she never had to listen to

²¹⁵ *Cat’s Eye* 250.

²¹⁶ *Cat’s Eye* 337.

²¹⁷ see *Cat’s Eye* 395.

²¹⁸ *Cat’s Eye* 398.

²¹⁹ *Cat’s Eye* 394.

their orders, to comply with their wishes. She came to know that even as a nine-year-old. What was necessary for her in order to free herself was to recognize the fact that Cordelia was a victim too, that they were sisters in the same kind of pain, like the photo and its negative, like the sisters from the comic book, like the reflections of one another in the sunglasses. The cat's eye marble truly is magical; it "is transformed into the lens of imaginative vision, becoming the Third Eye."²²⁰ And this Third Eye suddenly enables Elaine to see, healing her blindness, she can "see herself, through these painted eyes of Mrs. Smeath: a frazzle-headed ragamuffin from heaven knows where...and yet she took her in. She has not done it justice, or rather mercy. Instead she went for vengeance. An eye for an eye leads only to more blindness."²²¹ At this point Elaine discovers what kept her bound, blind and not free. Only with freeing herself, with freeing her past, victimized self, she manages to unite again and find her means of survival that is tightly linked with vision.

Only when coming to terms with what happened to her, Elaine paints a self-portrait that represents a perfect unification of all the elements that accompanied Elaine on her journey to survival – the cat's eye, mirrors and dual nature of a trickster. Her self-portrait is called symbolically *Cat's Eye*. "Behind my half-head, in the centre of the picture, in the empty sky, a pier-glass is hanging, convex and encircled by an ornate frame. In it, a section of the back of my head is visible; but the hair is different, younger."²²² In this description Atwood puts everything – Elaine's past self with younger hair that was kept hidden from her consciousness, that's why it is placed at the back of her head in the picture; her older self with "the incipient wrinkles and a few grey hairs,"²²³ the mirrors that kept showing Elaine the distorted reality and also reflected the truth she was not able to see.

²²⁰ Coral Ann Howells, "Elaine Risley's Retrospective Art" 138.

²²¹ see *Cat's Eye* 405.

²²² *Cat's Eye* 408.

²²³ *Cat's Eye* 408.

Elaine's final act of liberating herself is to visit the place where she once almost drowned and she can feel the "same shame, the sick feeling in her body, the same knowledge of her own wrongness, awkwardness, weakness; the same wish to be loved"²²⁴ but she realizes that "these are not her own emotions any more. They are Cordelia's; as they always were."²²⁵ And when she realizes this, she finds out that the spectre that kept haunting her is "no longer there...and there's nothing more for her to see."²²⁶ Elaine is no longer blind, she saw everything there was to see, understand everything there was to understand. She is no longer a victim, she has survived.

²²⁴ *Cat's Eye* 419.

²²⁵ *Cat's Eye* 419.

²²⁶ *Cat's Eye* 419.

Conclusion

The goal of this thesis was to provide a thematic study of victimization and survival themes in Margaret Atwood's long fiction. The three chosen novels were analyzed in chronological order, in order to follow Atwood's development of these particular themes. The theoretical base for the analysis was Atwood's thematic guide to Canadian literature that is directly linked to the theme of victimization and survival, which is also expressed by the obvious title of the book itself – *Survival*. In this guide Atwood elaborated on the victimization theme and identified four types of victims that appear in Canadian fiction.

For the purposes of this thesis, I applied two of the victim models on Atwood's main female characters and then analyzed what strategies they used in order to stop being victims. I worked with Atwood's second victim model that I named a vicious-circle victim – a victim that is unable to get rid of her victim role and Atwood's third victim model that I named a liberating victim – a victim that comes to see her own role in her victimizing experience and manages to free herself.

In order to become a liberating victim and therefore to get rid of their victim role, the narrators used two strategies. The first strategy was becoming a trickster creature – a being of dual nature. This strategy is not described by Atwood herself; I used Radin's description of trickster myth and applied it on Atwood's writing where I interpreted certain aspects of main characters' behavior as the proof of their possessing the trickster nature. I came to the conclusion that all the narrators in question possessed traits of trickster nature. Then I analyzed how their trickster nature relates to the fight for survival and discovered that there is an existing link – in all the cases the narrators had to split themselves, or to transform themselves to deal with and to overcome their victimization.

The second strategy was gaining vision - moving from blindness to sight. This strategy is demonstrated in the text via Atwood's use of

variable vision imagery – most often mirrors or any reflective surfaces. This strategy of survival was also described by Sharon Wilson in her essay “Blindness and survival in Margaret Atwood’s major novels,” from whom I took the idea of analyzing the role of vision imagery in the novels in connection with the survival of the main characters, as well as concept of metaphorical blindness that is an obstacle in narrators’ survival.

The concept of survival I use in analyses of *Surfacing* and *Cat’s Eye* brings us back to Atwood and her *Survival* where she widened the meaning of the word to “spiritual survival, to life as anything more than a minimally human being.”²²⁷ Only in *The Handmaid’s Tale* survival keeps its literal meaning of saving the main character’s life.

I came to the conclusion that the themes of victimization and survival mark strongly Atwood’s writing and that she is able to develop those themes even on variable backgrounds of different genres. She profoundly links the tricksterous nature of her characters to the conditions of their survival and also to the strategy of gaining vision her characters use. Development of the theme can be seen in the type of victim Atwood presents. The older the author grows, the more complicated victims people her novels. Also the strategy of gaining vision becomes more complex, the vision imagery richer. Atwood never fails to provide an imaginative and genuine account of the victimization and survival themes.

²²⁷ *Survival* 42.

CZECH SUMMARY

Tato práce se zabývá tématem viktimizace a přežití v díle současné kanadské autorky Margaret Atwoodové a strategiemi, které hlavní ženské postavy tří vybraných románů volí, aby přežití viktimizace dosáhly. Jedná se o tematickou studii a teoretické jádro práce je postaveno na monografii Atwoodové, napsané v roce 1972, která se zabývá tématem viktimizace a přežití v kanadské literatuře – *Survival: a thematic guide to Canadian literature*. V této monografii Atwoodová vymezuje čtyři typy obětí, z nichž pro tuto práci mají význam typy dva – jeden představuje oběť, která nedokáže určit zdroj své viktimizace a z role oběti se nedokáže efektivně vymanit, takže mnohdy svou traumatizující zkušenost předává dál, na jiné oběti. Druhý typ oběti dokáže zdroj své viktimizace určit a proto je jí taky umožněno s ním efektivně bojovat. Pro účely této práce byly tyto dva typy pojmenovány oběť v začarovaném kruhu a osvobozující se oběť.

Hlavní ženské postavy, na které se tato práce zaměřuje volí dvojí strategii přežití – první je rozpúlit svou osobnost a stát se takzvaným tricksterem, šibalem, jak ho popisuje ve své monografii *Trickster, mýtus o Šibalovi* Paul Radin. Šibal je bytost dvojí povahy, která se snaží ošálit své okolí, ale často se stává obětí svých triků. Mnohdy se identifikuje se zvířaty.

Druhou strategií, která má vést k přežití je posun od slepoty k vidění. Přežití není jen přežitím ve smyslu záchrany života. Mnohdy se jedná o přežití ve smyslu práva na plnohodnotný život, mentálního naplnění a spokojenosti se svým životem. Stejně tak slepota je slepotou metaforickou, kdy ženská postava není schopna vidět cestu, která by ji dostala ze začarovaného kruhu role oběti. Atwoodová tuto strategii získávání vidění v textu demonstruje použitím motivů zrcadel a reflektivních povrchů, které odrážejí realitu, které je hlavní postava součástí, v její deformované podobě; a ukazují tuto realitu hlavní postavě. Ta, když ji vidí, uvědomí si podstatu své viktimizace a dokáže se role oběti zbavit.

Pro tematickou analýzu byly zvoleny tři tituly románů Margaret Atwoodové – *Surfacing* (1972, *Z hlubin*), *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985, *Příběh služebnice*) a *Cat's Eye* (1988, *Kočí oko*). Řazení je chronologické, aby vynikl Atwoodové vývoj v zacházení s tímto tématem. Jedná se o romány, které nejlíp demonstrují téma viktimizace a zároveň poskytují dostatečně různorodý půdorys, na kterém se toto téma vyvíjí. První román *Surfacing* byl publikován krátce po vydání *Survival* a jeho vliv na tento román je nepopiratelný. V tomto románu se setkáváme s bezejmennou vypravěčkou, která podle svého chování zapadá typologicky do druhého typu oběti – oběti, která nedokáže určit zdroj své viktimizace a tím pádem obviňuje všechny kolem sebe – doktory, američany, nakonec celé lidstvo. Na boj proti viktimizaci použije první strategii, rozpůlí svou osobnost na lidskou a zvířecí a nechá zvířecí polovinu převládnout, protože ta lidská reprezentuje viktimizátora, sílu, která z ní oběť udělala.

Tím, jak se z vypravěčky postupně stává zvíře, si zároveň uvědomuje svůj vlastní podíl na traumatu, které se jí stalo a v momentu, kdy je její lidské já úplně potlačeno, pochopí, že oběť ze sebe dělá hlavně ona sama. Určí tak zdroj své viktimizace a rozhodne se mu čelit. Tím se z ní stává oběť třetího typu – osvobozující se oběť, která dokáže efektivně se svou viktimizací bojovat a přestává přesouvat své trauma na své okolí. Když se rozhodne převzít odpovědnost za své činy, znovu se z ní stává člověk, její rozpůlčené já se oběť sjednotí a ona se zbavuje role oběti.

Druhou strategii, která vypravěčce pomáhá oprostít se od role oběti, reprezentují v románu zrcadla, která pomáhají vypravěčce zbavit se své slepoty a nalézt schopnost vidění. Vypravěčka v ranné fázi svého vývoje odmítá do zrcadla pohlédnout, bojí se, že jí ukradne duši. Je to fáze, ve které je slepá, není schopna vidět svou vlastní roli ve svém traumatu. Je dokonce natolik slepá, že zastírá, co se skutečně stalo, lže sama sobě o svém potratu i o své milostné aféře. Zrcadla jí ovšem jenom ukazují realitu – tedy ji samou jako ženu, která je členem lidské rasy, ne té zvířecí, součástí které by se ráda stala. Když vypravěčka

pochozí a uzná svou míru viny a zjistí, že oběť ze sebe dělá ona sama, zrcadlo přestává být nepřítel, protože vypravěčka je smířená s realitou a dokáže jí čelit. Zároveň je to její cesta ke svobodě, protože v tom momentu již není obětí, ale svobodným člověkem.

Druhý román, *The Handmaid's Tale* již predestinuje složitější situaci viktimizace. Rozdíl je také v tom, že Atwoodová téma viktimizace a přežití rozvíjí v žánru dystopie, z čehož plynou některé specifika tohoto případu. Jako v jediném případě ze tří, ženské vypravěčce skutečně jde o přežití v základním slova smyslu. Kvůli politické situaci, ve které se nachází, jí na každém kroku hrozí smrt. Hlavní ženská postava se typově pohybuje mezi obětí v začarovaném kruhu a osvobozující se obětí, jelikož si je od začátku vědoma síly, která z ní dělá oběť – jak Gileadského politického režimu, tak jejího vlastního strachu tomuto režimu uniknout.

Jako strategii přežití vypravěčka *The Handmaid's Tale* volí, stejně jako vypravěčka v *Surfacing*, rozpůlení své osobnosti. Nicméně v tomto románu nedochází k tělesnému projevu tohoto rozpůlení; vypravěčka pouze rozdělí své já na minulé já a přítomné já, přičemž minulé já zosobňuje veškerou rebelii, veškerý nesouhlas s politikou Gileadu, proti kterému se vypravěčka bojí otevřeně bojovat. Stejně tak v tomto románu najdeme i druhou strategii, získávání vidění. I zde tuto strategii Atwoodová demonstruje použitím zrcadel, která odráží absurdní realitu vypravěčky a skrze zrcadlicí povrch je později schopna poznat pravé politické vyznání své společnice Ofglen a tím pádem navázat kontakt s odbojovou skupinou, která stojí proti Gileadskému režimu.

Ve třetím románu, *Cat's Eye*, Atwoodová demonstruje nejvyzrálejší formu tématu viktimizace ze tří analyzovaných románů. Autorka uvádí typ oběti, který se, podobně jako Offred z *The Handmaid's Tale*, pohybuje mezi obětí v začarovaném kruhu a osvobozující se obětí. Vypravěčka Elaine se stává jako dítě obětí školní šikany ze strany její kamarádky Cordelie. Elaine sice dokáže určit zdroj své viktimizace a dokáže se jí i efektivně bránit, čímž by zapadala typově do role osvobozující se oběti; problém je v tom, že vypravěčka

nemá co dočinění s viktimizační silou, jak se domnívá, nýbrž s další obětí začarovaného kruhu, která přenáší svou viktimizaci na slabší článek ve svém okolí. Tudíž se i z Elaine stává oběť v začarovaném kruhu, která své trauma vybíjí na další oběti. Také tato vypravěčka volí strategii rozpůlení osobnosti na minulé já a přítomné ja, podobně jako Offred. Ovšem tady se vypravěčka rozhodne své minulé, dětské, traumatizované já, uzavřít do vzduchoprázdna a snažit se zapomenout, že existovalo. Neuvědomuje si, že trauma a viktimizace prostupuje celou její osobností a tudíž i její přítomné já je pořád paralyzované stejným strachem, který svazoval její minulé já, a že od tohoto strachu se neosvobodí, pokud své já zase nespojí v jednu komplexní bytost, podobně jako vypravěčka v *Surfacing*.

Viktimizace je v *Cat's Eye* daleko víc než v předchozích románech spjata se strategií boje proti symbolické slepotě. Elainina slepota se projevuje hlavně tím, že není schopna vidět, že místo úniku z role oběti se naopak posunula o krok zpátky – zapouzdrila se ve fázi oběti v začarovaném kruhu a vybíjí si svůj hněv a trauma na jiné oběti. Proto víc než strategie rozpůlení je pro Elainino přežití v metaforickém slova smyslu důležité získání vidění. Atwoodová stejně jako v dalších dvou románech pracuje se zrcadly a zrcadlicími povrchy a také v tomto románu schopnost vidění reprezentuje konkrétním objektem – skleněnou kuličkou, kočičím okem. Zrcadla opět odráží deformovanou realitu a snaží se Elaine přivést k vidění – ukazují jí její dvojí podobu, zohavenou a zdravou, která naráží na její traumatizované dětské já, které uzavřela uvnitř sebe. Zrcadla se jí snaží ukázat, že Cordelie není její skutečný viktimizátor, nýbrž další oběť, která je stejná jako ona sama. Až kočičí oko přivede Elaine k vizi, až pohledem do něj si uvědomí existenci svého devítiletého já a nastane spojení, které jí umožní pochopit svou i Cordeliinu roli ve viktimizačním procesu, kterým prošla. Až pak se Elaine osvobodí a přestává být obětí – stejně jako vypravěčka *Z hlubin*.

Tematická analýza výše zmíněných románů měla sloužit zejména k demonstraci vývoje tématu viktimizace a přežití v díle Margaret

Atwoodové. Zatímto *Z hlubin* představuje exemplární příklad využití tématu v jednoduché formě - vypravěčka je jednoznačnou obětí v začarovaném kruhu a skrze strategie rozpůlení a získání vidění se z ní stává oběť, která je schopna se svou viktimizací úspěšně bojovat, zbylé dva romány predestinují oběti nejednoznačného typu a v případě *Kočího oka* se téma viktimizace propojuje víc se strategií získání vidění, přičemž tato strategie nabývá na komplexnosti. Atwoodová zároveň rozvíjí toto téma na pozadí rozdílných žánrů, a tudíž získává možnost variací.

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