

INTERPRETING DUALITY: A GOTHIC STUDY OF SPLIT-SELVES IN ATWOODIAN FICTION

Shehar Bano

Lecturer Department of English University of Education Lahore

Email: shehar.bano@ue.edu.pk

Shehar Bano. Interpreting Duality: A Gothic Study of Split-Selves In Atwoodian Fiction-- Palarch's Journal Of Archaeology Of Egypt/Egyptology 18(5), 573-586. ISSN 1567-214x

Keywords; Split-Selves, Paradoxical Duality, Atwoodian Fiction, Self-Isolated, Narcissism, Identity Crisis, Psycho-Analysis

ABSTRACT

The researcher aims to unfold the psychoanalytical layers of splitting selves (Freud 1938) and the way different types of split-selves can be incorporated into a wide range of psychoanalytical approaches in Atwoodian fiction. The study further explores paradoxical images of split-selves i.e. two selves of same person, one in real world and one in the mirror, that are connected and disconnected with each other at the same time as proposed by Jacques Lacan's Psychoanalytical theory of Mirror Stage (1936). This paradoxical duality of selves is further associated to Gothic concept *Doppelgangers* and these two paradoxical imagoes are seen co-existing in splendid isolation in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), *The Edible Woman* (1969), and *The Blind Assassin* (2000). Moreover, the researcher has also analysed the narrative structure of the works under discussion and after conducting in-depth study found psychoanalytical approaches like self-isolation, identity crisis, complex and multiple personalities, Primary and Secondary Narcissism (in Mirror Stage by Lacan 1936) prevailing in them. The intensive study of splitting selves shows the characters of Atwoodian fiction are seen having contradicting impulses which lead to their Mind-Body split (Adrienne Rich 1977). For instance, Atwood's protagonists Iris, Marian, and Offred all are suffering from these dilemmas but in the end after self-realization they become self-isolated characters. The detailed analysis of this interdisciplinary study under the microscope of psychoanalysis shows that this splitting of self into multiple selves and deconstruction of politics of gender highlights how different types of splitting are present in Atwood's fiction and how Atwoodian characters overcome their divided selves and are finally able to connect their mind and body and work as a whole individual.

INTRODUCTION

"The mind is like an iceberg it floats with one-seventh of its bulk above water"
(Freud 410).

Sigmund Freud said that there are three levels of consciousness: Preconscious (based on information you are not currently aware of but you can recall it), Conscious (your current state of awareness) and Unconscious (information outside your awareness). Along with this Freud also presented Id (works on pleasure principle), Ego (operates on reality principle) and Superego (drives us to attain Ego ideal) as the three parts of personality. These three parts of personality overlap in our preconscious, conscious and unconscious mind and shape our whole psychological personality. Sigmund Freud in "The Splitting of the Ego in the Defensive Process" (1938) traces the process of splitting of Ego. In this paper Freud says that whenever there is a conflict within the child between the instinctual demands and the reality principle, the child faces choice between satisfying the instinctual demand and acknowledging the danger that such satisfaction represents.

"On the one hand, with the help of certain mechanisms he rejects reality and refuses to accept any prohibition; on the other hand, in the same breath he recognizes the danger of reality, takes over the fear of that danger as a symptom and tries subsequently to divest himself of the fear" (Freud 373). The outcome of this is a "rift in the ego which never heals but which increases as time goes on. The two contrary reactions to the conflict persist as the center-point of a split in the ego" (Freud 373) in a way that contradicts any notion of the "synthetic nature of the workings of the ego . . . The synthetic function of the ego . . . is subject to particular conditions and is liable to a whole series of disturbances" (Freud 373). J. A. Brook in his paper titled "Freud and Splitting" has analyzed the historical development of the idea of splitting in the works of Sigmund Freud. Brook has also discussed the implication of splitting on the defense mechanism. There are three major forms of splitting which are dissociated or split off psychic groupings, splitting of objects and affects and splitting of ego. Out of these three major forms of splitting the splitting of ego was the main concern of Freud. The phenomenon of splitting interested Freud from as early as 1909 but he used the term 'splitting of ego' for the first time in 1937. This research paper is intensive study of the concept of splitting and different types of split selves and their application on Margaret Atwood's characters. This chapter unfolds the psychoanalytic layers of the concept of split selves and the relation of split selves with Lacan's theoretical framework of the 'Mirror Stage'. The first form of splitting which is the dissociated or split off psychic groupings is linked to Freud's phenomena of Repression¹. This split off psychic groupings in extreme cases may lead towards multiple personality disorder. This splitting is more common in those people who have suffered from trauma in their childhood. This type of splitting can also occur when the person is suffering from 'Hysteria'². The psychic groups split off in such a way that the split occurs not only at ego level but all the psychic systems split and thus the result occurs as alternative multiple personalities of a single person. For this type of splitting Freud used the terms like "Splitting of consciousness", "splitting of mind", and "splitting of personality or double conscience". Margaret Atwood's first novel *The Edible Woman* (1969) contains the issue of identity crisis and the splitting of 'self' in it. Marian MacAlpin, the protagonist of this novel, is a financially independent woman who lives in an apartment and works at a company to meet

¹ The state in which the ideas existed before being made conscious is called Repression

² According to Freud, Hysteria is a condition which occurs when something traumatic which

had never been properly integrated with the rest of the psyche happens.

her expenses. She is oppressed and manipulated in the name of marriage. By using food as a metaphor of female consumption in a male oriented society, Atwood shows how Marian oscillates between her personal definition of self and the role that society imposes on her. The culturally constructed roles for women are in contrast with the realities experienced by women. In this type of splitting the mind does not split into two but the representation and the content which is managed by the mind splits. So the consciousness of a person oscillates between the psychic groupings and the split off. When the consciousness of a person splits into empty or inferior self and the other superior self then the person himself becomes conscious of the two halves of the self at the same time. The victim in this case knows that his/her self is fragmented. Marian is shown as a strong character that becomes conscious of her oppression as women and finds the split in her 'self' and then breaks through the set norms and conventions of the society and in the end successfully connects her social self with her inner self. Most protagonists of Atwood's novels are conscious of their splitting and they either accept their role as oppressed beings or revolt against the set patterns of the society by taking control of their own lives.

The next form is the splitting of representation which according to Freud holds a central position in the field of psycho-analysis. The representation in this type of splitting means the memories, fantasies, images and description of the events and objects which could be real or imaginary given by psychic states to us. The original representation splits into two 'imagoes': One is good while the other is bad. These two paradoxical 'imagoes' co-exist in splendid isolation where each part functions as a whole. This paradox of duality can be traced in Atwood's *The Edible woman*. The structure of the novel *The Edible Woman* is split into three parts which further reinforces the presence of split in the identity of the protagonist. The first part of the novel is in first person perspective in which Marian presents herself and introduces her relations with fellow beings whereas the second part uses third person perspective which shows Marian's distancing from her 'self' but in the end, the third part is again in the first person narration where the protagonist re-gains her identity. The first part of the novel starts as, "I know I was all right on Friday when I got up; if anything I was feeling more stolid than usual" (Atwood 3). The second part opens up as, "Marian was sitting listlessly at her desk. She was doodling on the pad for telephone messages" (Atwood 129). Here Marian is described in third person narration. The final part is very brief which begins as, "I was cleaning up the apartment. It had taken me two days to gather the strength to face it, but I had finally started. I had to go about it layer by layer" (Atwood 349). These three parts are different yet connected to each other and thus we encounter Atwood's perfect style of narration. These three parts of the novel are representative of Marian's psyche which is also split into multiple parts.

The structure of the building where Marian works is also multi-layered. It is a three storey building where each floor represents a different rank of the society. This metaphorical split resonates with the structure of the novel which further reinforces the split in Marian's character. Marian herself describes it as, "The company is layered like an ice-cream sandwich, with three floors: the upper crust, the lower crust, and our department, the gooey layer in the middle (Atwood 13). M. F. Salat in her paper "A delicious fare: Margaret Atwood's

The Edible Woman” represents these three layers of building as “three planes of reality: mind, body and matter. The men are minds; the women are bodies” (Salat 42). Thus the physical structure of the building where she works shows how society is catalyzing the splitting of women by placing men at higher position than women. When Marian is about to sign the pension plans she gets scared of her dependence on Peter,

“It was the kind of superstitious panic about the fact that I had actually signed my name, had put my signature to a magic document which seemed to bind me to a future so far ahead I couldn’t think about it. Somewhere in front of me a self was waiting, pre-formal, a self who had worked during innumerable years for Seymour surveys and was now receiving her reward” (Atwood 17). For the first time she is regretting her decision of marrying Peter. She finally realizes that she has to suffer her decision. Marian’s choices are not welcomed by Peter as he continuously schools her to behave in a certain way and the submissive nature of Marian is the quality that attracted Peter towards her. When he invites her to have sex with him in the bathtub, Marian hesitates but couldn’t object,

“I was wondering why he had insisted that we go into the bathtub. I hadn’t thought it was a good idea, I much prefer the bed and I knew the tub would be too small and uncomfortably hard and ridged, but I hadn’t objected” (Atwood 68).

Marian communicates through the food that she chooses to eat and with her body. Pamela S. Bromberg says: “throughout part first she is hungry and eating. But in part second she begins to identify herself with the objects previously ingested and consumed. As she turns from subject to object, consumer to consumed, she loses her capacity to eat, to take the world into her ‘self’” (Bromberg 13). This novel is pregnant with food imagery and every single page of the novel contains a reference to something edible. The things are described through the symbolic use of food as there are so many discussions and descriptions about food in the novel. In the beginning of the novel when Marian and her apartment fellow Ainsley are having a conversation at breakfast, Marian says, “‘You’d better eat something before you go to work,’ I said, ‘It’s better when you have got something on your stomach’” (Atwood 4). The consumption of food is linked with power so Margaret Atwood comments on our social structure and power politics of gender with the help of food imagery.

Marian realizes that Peter wants to consume her as he consumes food, “He bit my shoulder, and I recognized this as a signal for irresponsible gaiety: Peter doesn’t usually bite” (Atwood 71). After that Marian starts observing change in Peter’s personality, “I attuned myself to Peter’s voice; it sounded as though it was coming from a distance. He was telling Len a story, which seemed to be about hunting ... The quality of Peter’s voice had changed; it was a voice I didn’t recognize” (Atwood 79-80). When Peter starts talking about his hunting skills, Marian imagined herself as a prey to Peter. Just like animals Peter is hunting her and will consume her up like food. Thinking about this she loses control over herself and starts crying in the powder room and then when they were about to leave the restaurant, “On the street the air was cooler; there was a slight breeze. I let go of Peter’s arm and began to run” (Atwood 83). This act

of Marian shows how unexpected the multiple personality disorder can get. This physical action of running away from Peter displays the effects of split in Marian's personality. She does not want to be the prey of food which Peter could feed on or could satisfy his carnal desires instead she wants to regain her lost identity.

The famous American poet and critic, Adrienne Rich, gave a speech in 1977 to a group of female students about 'taking responsibility' towards oneself. In this speech she said to the students that they must not treat their bodies as a commodity with which to purchase superficial intimacy or economic security. The minds and the bodies are inseparable in this life. If we separate the body from the mind and treat it as an object, then our mind is in mortal danger. So Rich gives a solution to splitting. This mind-body split is also present in the characters of Atwood's novels. Just like Rennie, the protagonist of *Bodily Harm* (1981), and the unnamed narrator of *Surfacing* (1972), Marian also experiences mind-body split. Her mind is telling her to revolt against the set patterns and oppressions but her body is starving due to deprivation of food. The 'Office Virgins' imagine her to be the lucky girl who is marrying Peter, she is expected to get married and settle down with Peter as he is the archetype of a man to be married to but at the same time her mind tells her to revolt and reject this decision as it will make her dependent on Peter. Marian suffers and oscillates between mind and body during the whole second section of the novel. In the last section of part two of the novel, with the act of baking a cake which resembles a woman, she actually is attempting through this mirror image of cake to join her split selves and connects the mind and the body together. She offers this cake as her substitute to Peter, "You've been trying to destroy me, haven't you", she said. 'You've been trying to assimilate me. But I've made you a substitute, something you'll like much better'" (Atwood 344). By providing a cake as the substitute of her own 'self' and by splitting that symbolic representation of her 'self', Marian is able to connect her mind with her body, "Marian looked back at her platter. The woman lay there, still smiling glassily, her legs gone. 'Nonsense', she said. 'It's only a cake.' She plunged her fork into the carcass, neatly severing the body from the head" (Atwood 346). So, Marian towards the end of the novel identifies her true identity by making it clear that she is not food or a thing to fulfill Peter's or as a matter of fact anyone's carnal desires instead she is a living human being having an identity of her own as T. D. McLlich rightly comments that in the end of the novel Marian "is a whole person again" by regaining her identity.

The last and important of all forms is the "splitting of ego" which Freud has discussed in detail. As discussed earlier the process of splitting by Freud that how the ego splits, in this type of splitting when the ego splits, it takes up two or more than two inconsistent attitudes to a single event. Here in this case 'attitude' does not mean representation but it means stances like acceptance, doubt or belief to the psychic representations. When an attitude splits then the victim simultaneously shows both acknowledgement and disavowal of a single event. According to Freud these two stances do not influence each other but exist at the same time. For example, in a person who lost a parent in his/her childhood, the acknowledgement and disavowal about the death of the parent co-exist. In this case a person both denies and acknowledges what he sees and

thinks of himself as a victim of childhood tragedy. In Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), the protagonist Offred experiences the similar situation of doubt. She loses her daughter and husband but still she sometimes sees their images and believe that they are still alive. Offred also possesses this paradox of duality in her character. She owns two identities: one as a woman which is associated with her role in the past while the other as a handmaid, the role she is playing in her present. There is a constant shift in the narratives of past and present in this novel. The protagonist holds reminiscences of the events from her past. In her present nobody knows even her real name; her identity is defined by the male for whom she acts as a handmaid. This novel is actually a story that a twenty-three years old woman is telling. She, just like Iris from *The Blind Assassin* (2000), is telling a story to record the events happening to her,

“It's a story I'm telling, in my head, as I go along. Tell, rather than write, because I've nothing to write with and writing is in any case forbidden... you don't tell a story only to yourself. There's always someone else” (Atwood 49). Similarly, Marian in *The Edible Woman* imagines the food in front of her as alive. These three varieties of splitting which are dissociated or split off of psychic groupings, splitting of objects and affects and the splitting of ego differ greatly from each other just like these terms splitting off, splitting up and splitting within. The splitting of psychic groupings uses the term ‘splitting off’ whereas the splitting of objects and affects uses the term ‘splitting up’ and finally the splitting of ego is a ‘split within’ the ‘self’. As shown through examples taken from Margaret Atwood novels, we can say that all these forms of splitting can be traced in Atwood's works.

In literature many writers have shown the consequences of this fragmentation or splitting of selves on the personality of characters. They have also analyzed the way this split happens and what are the factors that catalyze the process of splitting whereas I have not only explained the process of splitting and the elements catalyzing the process of splitting but have also tried to decipher either the person regains his/her identity or remains at the victim position. Margaret Atwood is a very strong supporter of gender equality. In her novels she talks about female victimization and their subordination in a male oriented society. The male members of society manipulate and exploit both the female bodies as well as their minds and at the same time oppress their rights. Atwood's main struggle is to highlight the gender based injustices happening in the society. Women are singled out of the society and become the victim of male gaze. Most of the protagonists of Atwood's novels one or the other way suffer from varying kinds of victimization. This victimization one or the other way becomes a leading cause of splitting in the selves of the female characters. Thus the characters of her novels become subject to identity crisis.

Just like after the process of metamorphosis a caterpillar transforms into a beautiful butterfly, Atwood takes her characters from the victim position and then transforms them into strong independent individuals. Her characters are weak and oppressed in the beginning but they realize that how they have been manipulated by society or by opposite gender and thus they revolt against the set patterns and take charge of their lives. Atwood's creative imagination and an appealing manner of narration beautifully deconstruct the politics of gender

and brings into light the consequences of gender oppression. Most of Atwoodian characters are psychologically haunted by their past. Those who are not possess paradoxical duality of divided selves: a conscious and other unconscious. These two divided selves of a person operate at the same time leading towards the multiple personalities of a single person. The identity crisis and duality of selves can be traced in almost every character of Atwood's fiction. For example, the protagonist of her second novel *Surfacing* (1972) has a divided self. In the beginning, unaware of her split identity, she started off her journey in search of her lost father but at psychological level she travels deep into her own psyche and finds her 'self' split into two selves. Similarly, the leading lady of *Lady Oracle* (1976) is also the victim of multiple selves which are all active at the same time. In *Bodily Harm* (1981), the protagonist Rennie, and Elaine, the protagonist of *Cat's Eye* (1988) have also fragmented selves. In all these novels of Atwood, women are victimized and oppressed but they are unaware of their victimization and oppression and blindly follow the standard patterns of the society. Atwood paves their way by making them aware of their position in the society through the course of their lives. In these works, Atwood wants us to know the seriousness of the critical situation of women if they continue to be victimized. This victimization causes identity crisis and split in their selves (Mehta 40).

Tina Burchette has analyzed Atwood's poem *Miss July Grows Older* in her paper titled "The Split Self in Atwood's *Miss July Grows Older*". In this paper she describes the factors that cause split in the identity of Miss July and she also discusses how the protagonist realizes of her split selves. She builds her argument on the views provided by Adrienne Rich on the mind and the body split. According to Rich, the mind and the body must be treated as a single unit for a healthy individual and if they are not then the self of the person splits into many selves and sub-selves. This is when the person shows multiple identities. Society is one of the major factors in prompting this type of splitting. Society dictates people to behave in a certain way which is considered as 'normal' or 'standard'. This helps the society as a whole to work in an organized manner, where everyone is performing his/her role dutifully but the problem arises when the society tags someone to be superior to the other. In this way the society oppresses a certain class by putting it in subordination of the other superior class. When people consider themselves superior to their fellow beings then a divide is formed in the society which is not healthy in the development of society. Such oppressions cause tensions in the mind of the victim and thus he/she starts questioning his/her identity. Thus a divide is created between how the person views himself in relation to how society views him. Even his wishes, desires and aims are constructed according to societal 'standards'.

From the very beginning of a person's life he is told to do certain things, behave in certain manners and follow certain norms set by the society. He starts obeying the society until the moment he realizes that he has been oppressed and has not been following his life according to his own wishes/desires. This self-awareness leads towards personality disorders like quest for identity or existential crisis. His mind tells him one thing but the body behaves in a contradicting fashion and craves for another thing. Thus the clash between the mind and the body appears which is evident in the poem *Miss July Grows Older* where the point of

view is that of the speaker i.e. Miss July. Atwood investigates the aging process and how society treats a woman getting old. In this poem, Miss July is unaware of her split self from the beginning but soon she realizes the conflict in her personality. She is trapped in false empowerment given by the “Beauty Myth³” (a concept introduced by Naomi Wolf in *The Beauty Myth*). A woman with mind and body working in connection is considered as a threat to society because a patriarchal system society does not approve woman being in charge or independent. That is why society has created this standard of beauty and innocence as a desirable trait in women. From the beginning a woman is told that she must look beautiful and delicate. She has to depend on the male members of the society and all she needs to do is just find a husband. Similar conflicts resonate in Atwood’s other works also which are *The Edible Woman* (1969) and *The Blind Assassin* (2000). These works are discussed in details in this paper. The protagonists of these novels Marian and Iris respectively are expected to find a husband and depend on him. They do not have the right to take charge and at the same time are unable to take decisions of their lives.

Likewise, other writers like Jane Austen and Nathaniel Hawthorne have also talked on this issue in their works. *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) by Jane Austen is one of the best examples in this regard. Mrs. Bennet intensely wished her daughters to be married off to a rich person so that their identity could be established because a woman’s identity is defined by the status of her husband. When her daughter Elizabeth rejects a proposal of Mr. Collins she has to face the anger of her mother but her father supports her as, “From this day you must be a stranger to one of your parents. Your mother will never see you if you do not marry Mr. Collins, and I will never see you again if you do” (Austen 67). When a woman rebels against this archetypal concept of being a female, she becomes an outcast in that society. Just like Hester Prynne in *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) by Nathaniel Hawthorne. She alone bears all the shame and punishment and was criticized a lot among the people. She was considered as a symbol of shame whereas the priest who was her partner in crime didn’t gather courage to confess his sin. Hester boldly accepts her sin and only this reason was enough to punish her. Society cannot stand a powerful image of woman. Society wants women to be fragile and dependent. So this is a universal issue, societal pressure being the major contributor in causing the split in mind and body which encourages woman oppression. Miss July from *Miss July Grows Older* (2005) identifies her split on the conscious level and understands how she has been manipulated in the name of beauty, however “she fails to unify herself because the disconnect between her identities induced by societal beauty standard, has become too strong” (Atwood 67).

Society declares ‘knowledge’ as an undesirable trait for women. By doing this it prevents women from gaining knowledge and thus they remain unable to discover their true selves. If any woman gains the access of this forbidden fruit of knowledge, she becomes able to unite her mind and the body. Margaret Atwood’s protagonists have the ability to do so and thus by doing so they are able to attain a complete whole. But in this poem Miss July is unable to connect her mind and body and thus she remains divided till the end of the poem. Society

³ In western society, the idea of beauty is explained as inert and timeless concept.

gives a timeless and static image of beauty just like a picture in the calendar whereas age is a cruel thing which has to come. Women become wiser with growing age as they gain knowledge through experience. Same is the case with Miss July but the Miss July who was once an object of affection during her youth is now brutally ignored by the society. Even her name “Miss July” is symbolic which represents a month in the calendar which signifies her passing age. She is not Miss April or Miss May, which are the months of newness, rebirth and youth but she is July i.e. going towards barren lethargy.

Miss July faces fragmentation and thus she is unable to bring together her mind and body because she identifies herself as a physical being. The poem is pregnant with sexual and youthful imagery like “shoes with bows”, “cunning underwear” and “the cat suit” that she once wore during her youth for sexual pleasures. Like other women in the society she is forced to think that beauty is in youth and ignorance. She tries to imitate the image that society displays for a good woman.

The split between Miss July’s mind and body can easily be seen by analyzing the language used by Atwood in this poem. The use of phrase “fucking cute” in the first line of the poem tells us about the tension between the standards that society sets for women and their personal feelings and experiences. In phrase “fucking cute” the word ‘fucking’ signifies the sexual experience while the word ‘cute’ denotes innocence. The use of oxymoron also depicts the split in the identity of the protagonist at linguistic level.

This virgin/whore dichotomy, where the ‘good girls’ who follow the standards of society submissively are credited as virgins (like Virgin Mary) whereas the ‘bad girls’ who revolt or rebel against the standards and mark their own existence are viewed as whores, is also present in Iris’s character from *The Blind Assassin* (2000). Iris was innocent in her childhood and being an elder sister she was supposed to take care of her younger sister Laura. Her father forced her to marry a person without her consent. Everyone expected from her to play the role of ‘good woman’ in the society,

“Mother was dead. Things would never be the same. I was told to keep a stiff upper lip. Who told me that? Reenie certainly, Father perhaps. Funny they never say anything about the lower lip. That’s the one you’re supposed to bite, to substitute one kind of pain for another” (Atwood 167). But just like Miss July, Iris too gained knowledge of being at the victim position and then rebelled against it. Miss July remains divided into two parts: her identity as a sex object in the society and the other is her mental awareness of being an oppressed being but she is unable to unite the both. Her continuous detachment from her youthful image can be seen in the way she refers to her picture as “the photo” instead of ‘the photo of me’ “the photo that’s mostly bum and daisies/back when my skin had the golden slick/of fresh-spread margarine” (Atwood 34-35) but in contrast to Miss July, Iris accomplishes her goal and re-gains her identity and succeeds in uniting her mind with the body by writing a novel and a memoir.

There is a line in the poem where Miss July addresses her elbows as “hen leg elbows” equating herself to bird (hen- a non-human) which are for the

consumption of humans. All her youth has been consumed and now just “hen leg elbows’ left which nobody wants to eat. This use of food imagery by Atwood can also be seen in *The Edible Woman* (1969) where Atwood compares women with food, just for the consumption of men. In *The Edible Woman* (1969) Marian in the end bakes a cake and gives it to her fiancé Peter and her friend Duncan and asks them to consume it, the way they both have been consuming her. In this way Marian re-connects her mind and body and becomes a whole but Miss July unlike Iris and Marian, loses her ability to do so. Miss July in this case jumps in the pool of unconsciousness and identifies her missing self but she is unable to connect both and thus in this way her mind and body remain divided.

In another novel, while swimming in lake the unnamed narrator of *Surfacing* (1972) has an epiphany “As she dives and dives again into the lake which mirrors her own sternly repressed, unconscious self, she at last finds . . . the power which resides in the unconscious. As she surfaces from the lake, her lost and burned self also surfaces to her consciousness” (Clark 7). Just like Marian and Iris, this unnamed narrator also regains her identity and rebels against the set norms of the society but the “mortal danger” that Rich mentions earlier while giving her concept about mind-body split, becomes literal in the poem “Miss July Grows Older”.

The concept of ‘Narcissism’ taken from Greek mythology of Narcissus was also introduced by Sigmund Freud in *On Narcissism* (1914) and further explained in *Ichspaltung of the imago* (1939). According to Freud narcissism is a kind of neurosis. There are two type of narcissism; primary and secondary. Primary narcissism is an in-born trait and it is present in all human beings throughout their development whereas the secondary narcissism occurs when any individual turns his object of affection back on himself. This type of behavior shows that the individual is cut off from the society and disinterested in other human beings. Such individuals have very low self-esteem and thus they become narcissistic and seek self-preservation. Severe narcissistic conditions can also be linked to the splitting of selves.

Sigmund Freud after researching in psycho-analysis commented that there are five stages of child’s psychological development. The first is Oral stage starting from birth till the child turns two years old. In this stage a child takes pleasure through his mouth (by putting things in his mouth). The second is Anal stage which starts from two years and lasts when the child becomes four years old. This stage occurs during toilet training of the child whereas the third stage is Phallic stage which occurs between four to seven years old children. During Phallic stage child starts recognizing gender differences. This is the stage when child develops Oedipus or Electra complexes. The fourth is Latent stage (7-11 years) which is also known as Cooties stage. In this stage libido is hidden. The fifth and the final stage is Genital stage which starts from child’s 12th years and lasts till death. Out of these five stages, Phallic stage is considered of prime importance. Jacques Lacan reinterpreted the works of Freud and also gave his own assumptions regarding children psychological development.

Taking further Freud's notions on Anal stage Lacan gave his views by applying this concept to the child in his Mirror Stage in 1930's. He says that a baby in Anal stage becomes aware of the difference between id and otherness. According to him when a child encounters mirrors for the first time literally or figuratively it is the moment when he develops a sense of self or individual identity and shows a jubilant reaction. This is the time when the child becomes aware of his own individuality and considers himself separate from his mother. Prior to this self-realization the child looks at fragmented actual nature of its body which is disorganized and lacks coordination. He looks into the mirror a complete whole organism and acknowledges himself to be the object of mother's desire. Lacan locates the individual's anticipation of the self in this moment. This stage is also considered as the primary narcissism. Furthermore, Lacan has also analyzed the role of language in analyzing the personality. According to him the unconscious is structured like semiotic language, words as well as silence both are significant in the psychoanalytical process. He says that a psychoanalyst must know the gaps between the speeches as they also reveal the dark secrets about the patients' problems. It is important to note here that both Freud's views on splitting and narcissism as well as Lacan's Mirror stage occur at conscious level of the individual. The victim is completely aware of his/her condition.

In Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman*, Marian's fiancé Peter has a secondary narcissistic personality, as described by Freud, who judges the world according to his own set of rules. He shapes the personality of Marian and dictates her to behave in certain way. He is consumer while Marian is compared with the food that is being consumed. He wants to hunt her like a prey and then to feed on her to satisfy his carnal desires. Another character from this novel is a college student Duncan who functions as Marian's alter-ego and Doppelganger in the novel. Whenever Marian feels emotionally disturbed, she tries to find solace in Duncan's company. When she puts on his gown, he comments "you look sort of like me in that" (Atwood 78). Duncan in this case provides mirror image to Marian through whom she comes to know of her split and reforms it.

All these problems of splitting selves echo in the lives of characters of Margaret Atwood's novels. Their personalities are distorted, and they are the victims of identity crisis. The characters of her Booker prize winner novel *The Blind Assassin* are also split into multiple selves as discussed earlier. This gothic romance story tells about the dirty secrets and the politics of the state as well as the politics of the gender which distorts the identity of the protagonist. The multidimensional plot deals with romance, tragedy, love, lust, science fiction, politics and death. The story is told in a Russian doll style. Just like the structure of *The Edible Woman* the structure of this novel *The Blind Assassin* is also a graphic representation of fragmented selves as it is a novel within a novel within a novel. This poly-layered novel consists of many selves who co-exist in splendid isolation. The identity of the narrator in this case is also questionable but in the end all the secrets are revealed and the readers get to know who killed whom and who wrote of which story.

The narrator Iris's identity is defined by her gender, her class, her role as a good sister to Laura and her feminine destiny is already laid out for her: as the eldest daughter of an old Anglo-Canadian family it is her duty to marry well in order to restore the family fortunes and to safeguard Laura's interests. Iris is just like Miss July and Offred (the protagonist of *The Handmaid's Tale*) who acts the way she is told. After the death of her mother she has to play the role of a mother for her little sister. Her father asks her to marry the man of his choice instead of inquiring her opinion. So the 'good girl' obeyed as she was expected. "'I've already given my consent,'" said Father. "So it's up to you." Then he added: "A certain amount depends on it.'" (Atwood 267), and then he indirectly forces her to marry Richard by telling her if she would not they will be financially disturbed. The marriage itself was not more than a business deal. Then her sister-in-law Winfred Prior dictates her how to live her own life. She has to learn what to wear and how to eat and speak in that society by saying, "'Don't worry, my dear,'" she said, in a tone that indicated scant hope. She patted my arm. "I'll take you in hand." I could feel my will seeping out of me – any power I still might have left, over my actions." (Atwood 286). Iris on another occasion says that "They're in the habit of speaking of me in the third person, as if I'm a child or pet" (Atwood 45). Whenever she meets her boyfriend Alex he also compels her to stay or leave and when to meet him. She does not know when and where she can find Alex. All these factors totally shape her personality. She is being discouraged to demonstrate her own personality instead she is shown a way to do things. But in contrast to Miss July, Iris is conscious of her split from the beginning as she describes her condition "But the old wound has split open, the invisible blood pours forth. Soon I'll be emptied" (Atwood 51). She is shaped into a stereotypical image of a woman but her inner self is different from her societal self. She first agrees to the societal pressures and tries to accept her role as a passive being but then she starts rejecting the external forces and gather courage to develop her own narrative. And unlike Miss July, Iris in the end is able to unite her mind and the body and attains a complete whole and unified personality. Just like the way Marian in *The Edible Woman* bakes a cake and attains her lost identity, similarly here Iris writes a memoir for her granddaughter Sabrina through which she completes the cycle of her split and finally attains whole personality.

In this novel Iris's husband Richard, her sister-in-law Winfred Prior and her lover Alex are the narcissistic personalities. All these characters consider themselves as flawless and perfect human beings and try to control the life of protagonist and her sister Laura according to their own set patterns. All of them exercise their powers to oppress the protagonist but Iris revolts against this oppression and fights for herself. Instead of being victim she stands for herself and gets her 'self' free, unified and organized. Whereas her sister Laura is an emotionally weak character and thus she is unable to connect her mind with the body which results in the first incident of the novel i.e. her suicide.

Iris's reaction on the death of her sister is very cold and on the first page of the novel readers come to know about her mind-body split. When the officer said that she should go and identify her sister's body Iris reacts, "I could hear the calmness of my own voice, as if from a distance. In reality I could barely get the words out; my mouth was numb, my entire face was rigid with pain"

(Atwood 1). Here we can see the split between mind and the body: the body is calm while her mind/soul is suffering and is in pain. These two emotions co-exist at the same time. This is the ‘splitting of ego’ that has Freud talked about. Same issue is again encountered in the part two of the novel when the novel “The Blind Assassin: The hard-boiled egg” starts and the man starts the story of planet Zycron, the role of memory is discussed where “the pile of stones thus marks both an act of deliberate remembrance, and an act of deliberate forgetting. They’re fond of paradox in that region” (Atwood 14). This deliberate remembrance and deliberate forgetting come again and again as a recurrent central theme in the novel and Iris’s purpose of writing the novel is an example of deliberate remembrance whereas her act of assigning the novel her sister’s name is an act of deliberate forgetting.

Atwood’s works are stuffed with characters having complex and split personalities and complexes such as narcissism as or self-isolation are persistent. Atwood’s protagonists Iris, Marian and Offred all in the end become self-isolated characters. The detailed study of the process of splitting of self into multiple selves shows us how different types of splitting are present in Atwood’s fiction. Woman, being the second sex, are more prone to splitting and possess fragmented selves as compared to men. The split selves are the mirrored image of each other and act as Doppelganger. These two selves relate to each other at some point but at the same time they are disconnected and behave totally different from one another. Atwood through contradicting impulses highlight these issues in her works. This research paper shows that paradox of duality and split selves have many psychological layers, and one has to dig deep into a person’s personality to extract the real problem in their personalities. In order to restore one’s personality, the person needs to connect his/her mind with the body. Atwood in her works shows us the ways to attain whole and resolve the conflict in our personality.

REFERENCES

1. Atwood, Margaret. (2015). *Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing*. London (GB): Virago.
2. Atwood, Margaret. (2004). *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*. Toronto, M & S.
3. Atwood, Margaret. (2000). *The Blind Assassin*. New York: N.A. Talese.
4. Atwood, Margaret. (1998). *The Edible Woman*. New York: Anchor Books.
5. Atwood, Margaret. (1986). *The Handmaid's Tale*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.
6. Austen, Jane. (1996). *Pride and prejudice*. Lulu. com.
7. Bromberg, Pamela S. (1988). "The Two Faces of the Mirror in The Edible Woman and Lady Oracle." *Margaret Atwood: Vision and Forms*, 12-23.
8. Brook, J, A. "Freud and splitting.(1992). " *International review of psycho-analysis* 19: 335-350.
9. Burchette, Tina. (2014). "The Split Self in Atwood's" Miss July Grows Older"." *Margaret Atwood Studies* 8 : 37.
10. Freud, Sigmund. (1941). "Splitting of the ego in the defensive process 1938." *Collected papers*, vol. 5, pp. 372-375.
11. Mouda, Asra Sultana. (2011). "The Woman’s Body and Consumer Society: A Feminist Reading of Margaret Atwood’s Edible Woman." *The Indian*

Review of World Literature in English. A Bi-Annual Online Literary Journal 7: 1-8.

12. Mehta, Vijay Singh. (2012). "Women's Identity in the Novels of Margaret Atwood." Kumaun University, S.S.J. Campus, Almora.

