Between Oneself and the Other:
Empathy, Dialogism, and Feminist Narratology
in Two Novels by Margaret Atwood

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Abstract

This thesis will propose a model of feminist narratology that is informed by insights offered by cognitive literary studies, intersectionality, and Bakhtinian dialogism. Focusing on empathy between women as a core concern, I examine the thematic and discursive treatment of this concept in two novels by Margaret Atwood, *Cat's Eye* (1989) and *The Robber Bride* (1993). I particularly emphasise the novels' creation of an active reading position, which is facilitated by the interaction and tension between elements of story and discourse. As the novels' female protagonists learn to empathise with women whom they see as Other while simultaneously respecting the autonomous selfhood of these women, readers of the texts are positioned to identify emotionally with the protagonists while also viewing them from a more distanced standpoint. Through the balancing of emotional closeness with intellectual distance, the evocation and subsequent problematisation of schemata, and the metafictive treatment of storytelling as an authorial construction of self and other, these novels engage both the emotive and the cognitive elements of narrative empathy and also position the reader to reflect actively upon her own viewpoint. This formulation of narratological dialogic empathy, I contend, is thus an appropriate model to reflect and reinforce prevailing feminist philosophy, which combines empathetic understanding with respect for difference and autonomy.

This thesis is presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Research at Macquarie University. I certify that this thesis is entirely my own work and that I have given fully documented reference to the work of others. The thesis has not previously, in part or in whole, been submitted for assessment in any formal course of study.

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Introduction

Empathetic connection between self and other is an ethical and political concern with significant implications for our contemporary social order. Both within literary studies and in other critical discourses, from postcolonialism and poststructuralism to psychology and psychoanalysis, self/other relationships have been a key focus of study for more than a century. The question of how to empathise with the other, to come to grips with her point of view without controlling or exteriorising it, has absorbed feminist scholars in recent years, as the concept of intersectionality has reformulated the former monolithic idea of Woman into a more complex model that focuses on appreciation of difference. The ability of the novel to foster empathy for out-groups and thus effect social change has been a commonly (if not critically) accepted belief since the days of the Victorian social protest novel, but the cognitive turn in literary studies, prompted by developments in cognitive science, is casting doubt upon this proposition even as it offers insight into how the brain processes empathetic response to narrative. With these points in mind, is it possible to find a model of feminist narratology that both reflects the movement's desire for empathy across social, cultural and racial divisions without denying the existence of difference, and incorporates the recent research on narrative empathy within cognitive literary studies?

This study will suggest that such a model exists. By connecting the work of the Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin with the values of intersectional feminism, in combination with Suzanne Keen's research on empathy in the novel and Mark Bracher's work on schema criticism, I will propose a narratological model of dialogic empathy that represents the desire and struggle for a consideration of all viewpoints, the recognition of the inherently limited nature of one's own perspective, and the necessity of making an active choice between competing voices. I will apply this model to two novels by the Canadian author Margaret Atwood, *Cat's Eye* (1989) and *The Robber Bride* (1993). My analysis will demonstrate not only that the empathetic journeys undertaken by the novels' protagonists have striking similarities to the principles of Bakhtinian dialogism and intersectional feminism, but also that the texts subtly position the reader to experience a

similar development of empathy over the course of the narratives. The novels' focus on the dynamics of women's relationships is notably strong even within Atwood's female-centric body of work, which makes the texts particularly appropriate for a study of the ways in which the issue of empathy between women can infuse all aspects of the text, from the story to the discourse to the response of the reader.

Margaret Atwood, *Cat's Eye*, and *The Robber Bride*

I have chosen to analyse two Atwood novels in this study for three main reasons: Atwood's attitude to feminism as demonstrated in her fiction, interviews, and criticism; what I see as the philosophical resonances with Bakhtin identifiable in her fiction; and the surprising lack of research on Atwood's work that draws on cognitive literary theory. Atwood is a best-selling and critically acclaimed feminist author who has consistently engaged both with feminist concerns and with the evolution of the feminist movement itself throughout her long literary career (Bouson, *Margaret Atwood* 8). She has expressed a strong resistance to categorical labels and has explained that although she is a political writer, her politics are rooted in her observations of the world surrounding her rather than in an allegiance to any branch of literary theory or party line. She writes from the "ground up" rather than "from some theory down" (Tennant qtd. in Bouson, *Brutal* 5), and, at least in her earlier fiction, represents the political and cultural issues of her time without taking any overt position; as she has exclaimed in an interview, "Am I a propagandist? No! Am I an observer of society? Yes! And no one who observes society can fail to make observations which are feminist. That is just based on real-life common sense" (Jamkhandi 5). As I will show, this attitude reveals an ideology that echoes that of Bakhtin, and Atwood's ongoing engagement with feminism through her fiction makes these novels ideal choices for a study of the way Atwood's novels can assist in the development and articulation of a new model of feminist narratology.

Literary criticism of Atwood's work has, as a rule, been shaped by critical trends as well as by the shifts in focus of the novels themselves, and her many critics "take various approaches and concerns, from the feminist to the ecological, and the postcolonial to

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studies in humour, Gothic, science fiction and other genres" (Wisker 1-2). A notable weakness in the abundance of Atwood criticism, however, is the lack of application of cognitive literary theory to her work, or indeed any significant exploration of reader response. With the important exceptions of Jane Brooks Bouson, Barbara Dancygier, and Roxanne Fand, critics have largely analysed the ideological, generic, and stylistic elements of Atwood's novels without reference to the possible emotional or cognitive effects on the reader. In my view, a study of Atwood's treatment of empathy will contribute significantly not only to the critical conversation surrounding her work, especially when informed by recent important developments in cognitive literary studies, but also to the broader study of feminist narratology.

Margaret Atwood's novels *Cat's Eye* and *The Robber Bride* thematise the tension between power and empathy in female relationships, which makes them well suited to a discursive analysis of narrative empathy and of the way it can be used to reflect feminist ideology. Each novel hinges upon the relationship between one or more female protagonists and another elusive woman who is part double, part other. In *Cat's Eye,* middle-aged artist Elaine Risley returns to her childhood home for a retrospective exhibition of her work, and is confronted with memories of her troubled, power-driven relationship with a former friend, bully and victim, Cordelia. It is not until Elaine develops empathy for Cordelia that she is able to find some measure of peace with her past and her self. In *The Robber Bride,* the beautiful, destructive and semi-fantastical Zenia re-enters the lives of friends Tony, Charis and Roz, after having absconded with each woman's husband or partner years earlier. The three friends find strength both in their sense of community and, eventually, in their realisation that Zenia embodies a darker, hidden side of each of their selves. In these two novels, elements of discourse such as intertextuality, self-reflexivity, and patterns of imagery position the reader to reflect on the empathetic journey of each protagonist, which in turn (as I will show) encourages the development of the same type of empathy in the reader.

The figure of the other/Other[1] woman in each text appears to have particular resonance for Atwood. Cordelia has been described as a "literary precursor" to Zenia (McWilliams 114), and in a recent short story of Atwood's, "I Dream of Zenia with the Bright Red Teeth" (2014), Zenia is textually resurrected,[2] indicating her continuing conceptual relevance, perhaps even timelessness, for Atwood. As Atwood commented in an interview shortly after *The Robber Bride'*s publication, "She's been around since Delilah, so why wouldn't she come back? She'll back in another form, in other book" (Lyall). Atwood sees the figure of the evil female character as being morally significant for women, and although the two novels' double/other figures have been extensively theorised in terms of psychoanalysis[3] and, to a lesser extent, postcolonialism,[4] the use of these characters to thematise empathy between women, and the echoing of this empathy in the texts' discourse, has been absent from critical discussion.

Feminist ideology and narratology

The connection between feminist politics, literature, and literary criticism has been particularly strong since the emergence of second-wave feminism. The women's movement has not only resulted in "the expansion of the territory available to writers, both in character and in language" (Atwood, "Spotty" 132), but has also generated a preoccupation with discovering or creating a uniquely female narrative voice. An influential concept within second-wave feminism was that of essentialism. Its vision of the essential Woman, which proved divisive politically, translated into critical literary approaches ranging from Elaine Showalter's "wish to manifest 'what it is to be female', to declare the experience and perceptions that have been heard" (Eagleton, *Feminist* 1), to Hélène Cixous' *écriture feminine,* which aimed to *create (*rather than discover) a uniquely feminine form of writing that existed outside of the current phallogocentric system of language. This focus on gender to the exclusion of other categories such as race, class,

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[1] Capitalisation of 'Other' varies according to critics and/or their translators. As it is currently more common to use the lowercase form and this is also Bakhtin's approach, I will capitalise 'Other' only when the meaning would otherwise be ambiguous.

[2] The now-aged Tony, Charis and Roz continue to tell stories about Zenia, and Charis is convinced that Zenia has been reincarnated in the form of a fluffy white dog, but Zenia as we know her is still dead.

[3] E.g., Wyatt, Perrakis, and Ingersoll "Re-Viewing".

[4] E.g., Potts, and Howells "Robber".

culture, sexuality, and religion (among others) continued even into the 1990s, with feminist narratologists such as Susan Lanser and Robyn Warhol still tending to speak of 'women' as a universal group without regard to other categories (Lanser, "Gender" par. 13).

More recent approaches to gender and subjectivity have been influenced by the growth of political pluralism, leading to the development of forms of feminism that align with multiplicity. The essentialist notion of Woman, despite best intentions, tended to tacitly exclude anyone (particularly non-white, non-middle-class, non-heterosexual women) who did not fit the model, and it caused damaging divisions between women. Currently, a dominant philosophy within feminism is the cultivation of appreciation and tolerance of all different forms of womanhood. The development of this ideology has been influenced by Kimberlé Crenshaw's coinage of the term *intersectionality* ("Demarginalizing")*, which* "argues that diverse aspects of identity converge to create the social positions, perceptions, limitations, and opportunities of individuals and groups" (Lanser, "Gender" par. 15). Intersectionality emphasises the idea of a person's viewpoint being determined by multiple vectors of identity – not just gender, but also race, class, and sexuality, among others – and the recognition of these factors is an important component of cross-cultural empathy. The concept has translated to a valuing of multiplicity and heteroglossia within feminist discourse.[5]

This consideration of multiple subject positions is now also beginning to be theorised in feminist narratology. As Marion Gymnich observes:

> The category of gender is not sufficient for doing justice to the full potential of textual features for generating meaning and engaging with cultural contexts. Gender needs to be complicated by taking into consideration the interaction between gender and other social and cultural categories. (713)

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[5] Intersectionality was first proposed as a way of theorising the intersection of different systems of oppression; for example, though a black man might experience racism and a white woman might experience sexism, there is no clear way to discuss the different combinations of sexism and racism that a black woman might encounter. It is important to clarify that neither Atwood's novels nor my own analysis contain significant engagement with issues of race or class; I use the term intersectionality in regard to its influence upon the development of a more general feminist philosophy that recognises and values both connections and differences between social groups and individuals.

A similar sentiment has been expressed by Atwood, whose resistance to ideological labels has made the issue of her feminist status something of a bone of contention. She has rejected the idea of Woman, both in her fiction and in speeches and interviews, and although she does not deny that she is a feminist, she resists being defined solely this way: "I would not deny the adjective, but I don't consider it inclusive. There are many other interests of mine that I wouldn't want the adjective to exclude" (Fitz Gerald and Crabbe 139).[6]

Narrative empathy

Strongly connected to intersectional philosophy is the notion of empathy between individuals and social groups. Empathy is generally agreed to involve two components: the "vicarious, spontaneous sharing of affect" in which "we feel what we believe to be the emotions of others" (Keen, *Empathy* 5), and the more cognitive, perspective-taking process of 'slipping into someone else's shoes'.[7] Fiction is notable and valuable for its ability to activate both types of empathy. It generates powerful "emotional fusion" with characters, which is often prized by readers (Keen, "Theory" 210), and it also engages the role-taking imagination, which "gives us practice in projecting ourselves into the minds of others … [and] understanding the world from their point of view" (Oatley, "Theory" 18). Narrative empathy, which "designates an affective element of the operations investigated by cognitive narratology" (Keen, "Narrative" par. 16), studies the role of empathy in narrative processing and its enduring effects (or lack thereof) on the reader. As Suzanne Keen explains in her cornerstone study of empathy in the novel (2007), it is a common belief that the novel has the power to elicit empathy for out-groups through the access it provides to the hearts and minds of others, which is thought to make readers more empathetic and altruistic in daily life. In a feminist context, this vision of the novel as an

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[6] In this interview, Atwood goes on to explain her attitude to American feminism in language that reveals her problems with the movement's tendency to exclude other identity categories: "People who understand my viewpoint tend to be women from Scotland or black women in America who say, 'Feminist, as it is used in America, usually means white middle-class American women saying *they* are *all* women'" (139).

[7] Empathy, in which we feel *with* another, is "distinguished in both psychology and philosophy (though not in popular usage) from *sympathy*, in which feelings *for* another occur" (Keen, "Theory" 208).

incubator of empathy and a catalyst for social change is surely invaluable, as intersectional feminism strives for understanding and valorisation of difference across cultural, racial, social, and sexual divisions.

The ability of the novel to generate empathy that can bridge cultural divides, however, is far from certain. Keen's work puts this truism to the test by engaging with recent research in cognitive science, including neuroscience and psychology, which has investigated the actual workings of the brain as it processes fictional narratives.[8] She shows that this theory of empathy in the novel has not undergone sufficient critical scrutiny to date, and that the factors that go into the eliciting of empathetic reading responses are far more variable than the common perception would suggest. Some of her conclusions are encouraging. Real-world empathy, for example, comes much more readily for those whom we perceive as similar to us rather than different, which calls into serious question the claim that it can be used to mend social rifts, but Keen finds that empathy for fictional characters "appears to require only minimal elements of identity, situation, and feeling, not necessarily complex or realistic characterization" (xii). This finding certainly seems to indicate that the novel could play an important role in fostering empathy between dissimilar people and groups. On the other hand, Keen has demonstrated that the link between narrative empathy and real-world altruism, or prosocial action, is "inconclusive at best" (vii); while readers can certainly experience profound empathy as a result of reading, there is little evidence to suggest that this feeling will translate into actions, or even altered attitudes, in the real world.

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[8] The field of cognitive literary studies encompasses a very broad range of critical aims and approaches, and there is no "grand theory of cognition and literature" that unites the work of its theorists (Zunshine, *Oxford* 1). While cognitive literary scholars necessarily draw upon insights from cognitive science, they use these insights to expand research into various areas of literary and cultural studies, including cognitive postcolonial studies, cognitive narratology, and cognitive ecocriticism. My focus in this study is on cognitive narratology, which examines the ways in which aspects of narratives combine with readers' own "mental states and processes" to create meaning, as well as the way narrative can provide "a basis for understanding the intentions, goals, emotions, and conduct of self and other" in the real world (Herman, "Cognitive" par. 1). The most important subfields of cognitive narratology for this project are narrative empathy and schema theory, which I will discuss in detail in Chapters 1 and 2 respectively.

Dialogism

Narrative empathy, I suggest, thus runs the risk of being a passive process whose lasting effect on the reader is insufficient to prompt a notable shift in attitudes. It is for this reason that, in my view, the synthesis of cognitive literary studies of empathy with Bakhtinian philosophy could prove enormously valuable in creating a more active reader response that better reflects the ideology of intersectional feminism. Dialogism describes an "incorporation and interweaving of various voices to create a sum far greater and more generative than the parts" (Hohne and Wussow viii); it is, as Michael Holquist points out, "an exercise in social theory" (*Dialogism* 36) as well as a tool of literary analysis, and it "involves a world which is fundamentally irreducible to unity" (Robinson). In this way, dialogism resonates strongly with intersectional feminism's respect for polyphony and its awareness of different subject positions.

Although dialogism was conceived as a philosophy rather than as a tool of literary analysis, Bakhtin considered the novel an ideal means of accessing multiple and conflicting viewpoints; as Jane Brooks Bouson explains, "because the novel incorporates conflicting social voices in dialogic exchange, it 'always includes in itself the activity of coming to know another's word'" (*Brutal* 7). In Bakhtin's idea of a dialogic novel,[9] each character (including the narrator) is an 'ideologue' who represents a different social group or world view, which in turn is refracted through the voice of the author (Bakhtin, *Dialogic* 324). The author, however, must avoid fusing his own voice with that of any character, "utiliz[ing] now one language, now another, in order to avoid giving himself up wholly to either of them" (314), and letting the contradictory voices coexist rather than attempting to unify them into a monologic ideology. This complex play of voices mirrors the social heteroglossia of the world at large, and the author's relinquishing of control helps to

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[9] Bakhtin's use of the term 'novel' is confusing and somewhat inconsistent; he contrasts the dialogic power of the novel genre with the inherent monologism of the epic and poetic genres, but later "suggests that only one kind of novel conforms to this definition – the heteroglossic, dialogic novel, exemplified by Dostoevsky – whereas other texts that he also identifies as novels are more monologic and epical, and not at all subversive" (Glazener 158). It is perhaps most helpful, as Holquist suggests, to make a distinction between Bakhtin's treatment of 'novels' and 'novelness'. While a 'novel' is any individual book that we would classify as belonging to that genre, 'novelness' is "the study of any cultural activity that has treated language as dialogic" (Holquist, *Dialogism* 66), which Bakhtin considers to be manifested "to the highest degree" in certain novels, but which is "not confined to novels as such" (70).

"construct more active and analytic strategies for reading" rather than "situat[ing] implied readers in restricted and passive subject positions" (McCallum 17). Just as humans should learn to resist the real-world "monologic forms of discourse" that repress difference (McCallum 265), readers are encouraged to make choices between a polyphony of voices. Thus, while the ability to understand the other's point of view is certainly important, it is an active and conscious process that demands the use of the reader's cognitive powers.

Crucially, Bakhtin's theory of dialogism is based on some degree of distance between the self and the other in order to cultivate understanding; an acknowledgment of the separateness of the other is as important as the consideration of interrelatedness. As Russell Valentino explains, Bakhtin "proposed to replace talk of emotional identification with something his early writings call *vzhivanie*" (111), which was later discussed in terms of dialogism and is based on the idea of "enter[ing] actively into another individuality, another perspective on the world – without losing sight even momentarily of one's own unique perspective, one's own 'surplus' of life experience, one's own sense of self" (111). Later, Bakhtin re-termed this phenomenon *creative understanding*, which means "entertaining a view of oneself that comes from outside" (111). This complex self-positioning has also been framed in terms of individual responsibility. Bakhtin "contends that dialogism consists of making choices among voices, not just airing them" (Fand, *Dialogic* 200), and Roxanne Fand has placed this idea in a feminist context, emphasising the importance of women's exercising their subjective moral power by making individual judgments while also remaining open to Others. A Bakhtinian adaptation of empathy, then, could be said to comprise not only cognition and emotion, but also a judicious amount of distance between self and other in order to cultivate a relational perspective.

Although Bakhtin himself was conspicuously silent on the subject of gender, many feminist scholars have seen the value of applying his work to feminism, recognising that "dialogism, by promoting negotiation and exchange while respecting honest differences, can empower marginalized voices, within and across individuals" (Fand, "Moral" 65-6). The potential application of dialogism to feminist narratology in particular gained considerable critical attention in the early 1990s; as Marianne Cave observed in 1990, "the Bakhtinian paradigm of heteroglossia and polyphonia is becoming an increasingly popular

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method of fusing feminist criticism with narratologist concerns" (118). This synthesis is no longer the subject of notable critical attention and has not been combined with recent research in cognitive narratology. There is also a general absence of literary criticism that discusses dialogism and empathy in relation to each other, despite the fact that both concepts are fundamentally concerned with developing an understanding of the Other. Through a study of the relationship between dialogism, empathy, and feminism in Atwood's novels, I hope to show the value of combining these concepts in the context of feminist narratology.

Bakhtin's philosophy resonates with Atwood's own views as she expresses them in interviews, and is also helpful in the interpretation of the use of narrative voice in her novels. Atwood's sense of cultural specificity recalls Bakhtin's foregrounding of "social, cultural, political and historical contexts" (Halasek 67), and the many differing and intertwined approaches to feminism, postcolonialism, environmentalism, and various other isms in her fiction constitute a polyphony of voices. Atwood's refusal to align herself with any particular strand of feminism, as well as her unapologetic and often penetrating examination of the potential cruelty of women and the problems inherent in essentialism, mean that the feminist attitude in her novels, though undeniable, is never monologic. Her combination of realist, psychoanalytic, experimental and fantastic modes of narrative, particularly when representing female subjectivity, means that her discourse as well as her ideology is heteroglossic, and her dialogic approach to both ideology and discourse make her novels ideal subjects of study for a feminist application of Bakhtin. As I will also demonstrate, her use of narrative polyphony and tension between story and discourse places the reader in a position where she must make an active choice between competing voices.

Dialogic empathy

My conception of a Bakhtinian version of empathy, in both ideological and narratological forms, involves the affective and cognitive elements of empathy and also emphasises the importance of conscious interpretation and choice. I contend that it is thus an appropriate

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model of feminist narratology to reflect and reinforce prevailing feminist philosophy, which combines empathetic understanding with respect for difference and autonomy. In the following chapters, I will demonstrate three ways in which Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye* and *The Robber Bride* lend themselves to an application of this theory of narratological dialogic empathy.

In Chapter One, I will draw upon recent research within cognitive literary studies in order to explore the novels' thematic and discursive treatment of empathy. I argue that in *Cat's Eye* and *The Robber Bride*, Atwood encourages a reading position that is delicately balanced between empathy for the focalising characters and a sense of intellectual separation from them, thus replicating the Bakhtinian model of understanding through distance. While Elaine in *Cat's Eye* and the three protagonists in *The Robber Bride* move from friendship to isolation to aggression to a provisional empathy with other women, the reader's journey is not always in alignment with that of the focaliser. While the reader is certainly positioned to connect emotionally with the characters, she is also able to see the characters from outside themselves; narrative strategies such as knowledge gaps and shifting focalisation prevent uncomplicated emotional identification with any one character, encouraging an interpretive reader role that involves a choice between competing voices. Through her dialogic treatment of story and discourse, Atwood encourages a reading position that, while empathetic, also necessitates intellectual consideration and active choice.

Chapter Two will examine a particular aspect of cognitive narratology, that of schema theory, in terms of its importance to the texts' representation of empathy between women and the reader's mirroring of this process. Schema theory, which was originally developed within the field of psychology, is regularly used in literary criticism to study the way a reader's cultural context and personal experiences combine with specific features of a text in order to create meaning. It is based on the idea of the conceptual *schema*, or mental template, which is built through "shared cultural and linguistic knowledge" (Stephens, "Writing" 237), which shapes individuals' expectations and helps them to make sense of the world. A *script*, which is a subcategory of a schema, is an idea of "how a sequence of events is expected to unfold" (Mercadal qtd. in Herman, "Scripts" 1047). In the context of feminism, schemata are key: archetypal images of women have permeated our culture

through everything from Renaissance art to television commercials, which has led to the development and internalisation of limiting schemata of womanhood. In addition, "Woman" as a schema is a monologic concept, and the essentialist conviction that women are inherently more moral and egalitarian than men sets up limiting behavioural scripts. Atwood engages with these phenomena in her texts, placing particular emphasis on the divisive nature of schemata; as Lynn Bloom and Veronica Makowsky argue, "Atwood demonstrates that if women allow themselves to be divided and to divide themselves into good girls and Zenias, all will be conquered" (177). Various schemata of womanhood shape the characters' lives and their views of other women, limiting both their capacity for self-determination and their empathy for others. In order to develop both their selfhood and their empathy, they must learn to break down and break free from these schemata.

This process of breaking down schemata has recently been the subject of research by Mark Bracher, who has examined the human mind's formation of schemata in relation to the stereotyping of out-groups (*Literature*). As Patrick Hogan writes, "our minds spontaneously organize the social world in terms of in-group / out-group divisions" (25); in other words, we develop schemata in order to categorise others. This process, though seemingly innate and essential to our ability to function in the world, can also be harmful and limiting to our conceptions of others. Bracher has recently developed a model of what he dubs schema criticism, which promotes the value of literary study in activating a process of metacognition that helps to draw people's attention to their faulty schemata and then to rework these schemata into more inclusive, less prejudicial forms. In Chapter Two, I will apply this concept of schema criticism to Atwood's texts and suggest that her postmodern play with genre and intertextuality on the level of discourse reflects the breaking down of schemata that occurs within the story, thus encouraging an active, empathetic reading position.

In Chapter Three, I will discuss the texts' use of the metaphors of vision, voice and authorship to represent the changes in the characters' conceptions of self and other that occur as a result of their development of empathy, and the self-empowerment and creative agency that result from the characters' learning to define themselves in relation to

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others rather than in opposition to them. Vision and voice are used as metaphors for perception and point of view throughout the texts (as in Bakhtin), and voice becomes authorship when the women take control of their own lives and viewpoints while also respecting the intrinsically different views of others. Through metafictive references to the process of storytelling, the texts position the reader to reflect upon the multiplicity of voices both within the novels and in the outside world, and just as this reader is positioned to actively consider multiple points of view, the creative protagonists must author dialogic, empathetic versions of self and other.

Through the balancing of emotional closeness with intellectual distance, the evocation and subsequent problematising of schemata, and the metafictive treatment of storytelling as an authorial construction self and other, these novels engage both the emotive and the cognitive elements of narrative empathy and also position the reader to reflect actively upon her own viewpoint. Atwood interrogates the monologism that sometimes permeates discourse surrounding the concept of sisterhood, showing that while empathy can be an important unifying force, the core feminist tenets of individual agency and choice are equally vital. In *Cat's Eye* and *The Robber Bride,* the protagonists undertake emotional journeys in which they learn to balance empathy with power, eventually taking responsibility for their own actions and learning to value a plurality of voices. Reflecting this, the texts are constructed polyphonically so that the reader must also consider multiple voices and exercise her own moral power to choose between them. By synthesising philosophies of intersectional feminism, dialogism, and narrative empathy, I hope to demonstrate the value of dialogic empathy to an inclusive model of feminist narratology in which every voice, including that of the reader, is part of a meaningful dialogue.

1.

Closeness and Distance

Dialogic empathy, in my formulation, is a model of empathy that encompasses both the affective and cognitive components of empathy, as well as an element of distance that encourages active choice. It comprises both the "vicarious, spontaneous sharing of affect" in which we feel another's emotions (Keen, *Empathy* 4) and the more cognitive process of perspective taking, in which we place ourselves in another's shoes. The vital third element is that of a more distanced, intellectual consideration of another, in which we acknowledge the difference and separateness of their viewpoint from our own. In other words, we feel the emotions of the other and also *recognise* the viewpoint of the other, even though we might not share it. In the case of the novel, I posit that narratological dialogic empathy can involve an empathetic connection with characters and also a more analytical view of these characters. This effect is facilitated by elements of the novel's discourse that draw attention to the limits of the characters' interpretations, positioning the reader to view the characters objectively as well as empathetically. In this chapter, I will explore the way *Cat's Eye* and *The Robber Bride* create an active reading position that is dialogically divided between empathetic identification with the characters and a sense of intellectual distance from them. This negotiation of reader closeness and distance reflects and sometimes complicates the empathetic journey that the characters themselves undergo in their relationships with other women, and the dialogic interaction between story and discourse creates a space in which the reader can grapple with conflicting views.

Empathy in female relationships, particularly between women of different or overlapping social groups, has become an important area of feminist concern in the current political climate, as divisive essentialism has largely been supplanted by the valuing of difference and the desire for cross-cultural understanding. This concern is thematised in both novels. The balance of empathy and alienation between female characters is a key focus in the texts, as the protagonists learn to balance sense of self with consideration of other, empathy with self-respect, and closeness with distance. In *Cat's Eye,* Elaine is victimised as

a child by a group of girls led by Cordelia. She deals with this alienation by dissociating herself from her emotions and closing herself off from others. Her suppression of empathy results in the reversal of power relations when Cordelia re-enters her life as a teenager; Elaine's newfound "self-assured separateness" (Wisker 103) protects her from further harm, but it also leaves her cold to the emotions of others and unable to control her "cruelty and indifference, [her] lack of kindness" (*CE* 259). Power shifts occur each time Elaine and Cordelia interact over a period of decades until Elaine declines to help Cordelia escape from a rest home / mental institution and then never sees her again. Though Elaine longs for a future in which she and Cordelia are close friends once again, "two old women giggling over their tea" (421), Cordelia remains absent from the text.

In the present-day sections of the novel, Elaine returns to Toronto and, haunted by the spectre of Cordelia, struggles to balance her emotion-fuelled memories with more dispassionate attempts to decode and analyse her life and relationships. She is able to come to terms with her guilt and grief only when she is able to develop empathy for the childhood-bully version of Cordelia, realising that Cordelia's behaviour had stemmed from "the same knowledge of [her] own wrongness, awkwardness, weakness; the same wish to be loved; the same loneliness; the same fear" (419). Similarly, Elaine gains the ability to see herself through the eyes of the dreaded Mrs Smeath, the malicious mother of a friend, and recognises the common ground between them: Mrs Smeath was "a displaced person; as [Elaine] was" (405). In addition to identifying similarities, however, Elaine also recognises the independent selfhood of others, perceiving that these others are not defined by her views of them. She develops not just empathy, but intersubjectivity, in which she is able to acknowledge the other as an "equivalent center of experience" (Benjamin, "Recognition" 184).[10] In *Cat's Eye,* empathy comes with the mirroring of others' emotions, an ability to see the other's point of view, and a more distanced perception of the other as a subject.

While Elaine's childhood experiences make her unable to develop positive relationships with women in adolescence and adulthood, *The Robber Bride* "goes a step further by

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[10] I will discuss the attainment of intersubjectivity in depth in Chapter 3.

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creating a dialogic relation between the centrifugal forces dividing women and the centripetal power of sisterhood" (Fand, "Moral" 69). The unlikely friends Tony, Charis and Roz share a common enemy in the beautiful and destructive Zenia, whose existence "creates the need for cooperation and dialogue" (Fand, "Moral" 75). At first blush, Zenia appears to be the classic *femme fatale* who uses her mysterious charms to ensnare guileless men and then abandons them when they no longer serve her interests. However, her role is more complex than that. In *The Robber Bride,* her relationships with the women are more significant than the affairs she has with the men; while she does indeed heartlessly make off with each woman's husband in turn, she first develops a seemingly deep and empathetic friendship with the woman in question. She plays the dual role of fantasy and rival for each woman, and as Bouson observes, "while Zenia is depicted as the competitive 'other woman' and sexual rival, she is also … the psychic projection and double of the three characters" (*Margaret Atwood* 15-16).

While Zenia is certainly destructive, her function is arguably a positive one as she forces the other women to confront the repressed parts of themselves and take control of their own lives. Defeating Zenia not only requires the three women to combine their strengths and support each other emotionally, but also results in their provisional sense of empathy for Zenia herself. As Tony wonders at the end of the novel, "Was she in any way like us? … Or, to put it the other way around: Are we in any way like her?" (564). The characters begin to realise, as the novel's readers likely did much earlier, that Zenia embodies the repressed aspects of their own natures and is thus far closer to their double than to their other, and "they learn to acknowledge and even respect her as a member of their dialogue" (Fand, *Dialogic* 172). As in *Cat's Eye,* empathy depends on the experience of emotion, the ability to see the other's point of view, and the respect for the autonomous selfhood of the other – a dialogic model of empathy that includes understanding through distance as well as both affective and cognitive forms of empathy. This same model takes place on a discursive level within both texts, as the reader is positioned both to empathise

with the protagonists and to identify other points of view that push at the edges of the narrative, thus requiring active interpretive choice.[11]

Recent cognitive research has provided insight into how empathy functions in the human brain. Empathy has been shown to involve two different neural systems, with one corresponding to emotional or affective empathy ("I feel what you feel"), and the other to a more advanced, cognitive perspective-taking form of empathy ("I understand what you feel"), which is also referred to as Theory of Mind (Shamay-Tsoory et al. 617-18). Although scientists disagree on the nuances of how (and even whether) these systems interact,[12] studies have suggested that engaging the cognitive system by "utilizing perspective taking and reasoning to elicit empathetic concern for others" is a more significant and active form of empathy, in terms of considering the selfhood of others, than affect alone (Decety and Yoder 9).[13] These findings support the earlier theories of philosophers such as Louis Agosta, who emphasised the importance of the "mutual interrelation of empathic receptivity and interpretation" (51) – or in other words, of affective response and cognitive processing – in attaining intersubjectivity. In *narrative* empathy, as Keen observes, it is all but impossible to consider these two types of empathy as independent systems: "narrative empathy invoked by reading must involve cognition, for reading itself relies upon complex cognitive operations" (*Empathy* 28). An incorporation of dialogism further increases the role of cognitive/interpretive involvement in the development of empathy, as the reader must not only feel the

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[11] The characters' eventual development of empathy for Cordelia and Zenia admittedly does not erase the predominantly negative impressions of these characters that the reader has received for the majority of the novels. Bouson observes that "commentators have harshly judged Cordelia, who has been variously described as Elaine's 'torturer' and 'guide through the hell of childhood'; as a 'mean spirited brat'; and as 'an incarnation of evil'" (*Brutal* 170), and that Zenia is "characterized variously by commentators as 'the sisterhood's worst nightmare', as 'Richard III with breast implants', and as 'the Nietzschean Uberwench with the voracious will to power'" ("Slipping" 150). The readers, like the characters, must look carefully to see beyond the dominant viewpoint.

[12] Some theoretical models are based on the two systems always functioning independently, some posit that they *can* be dissociated but don't *have* to be, some conclude that they are intertwined, and others argue that cognitive empathy builds on affective empathy and cannot occur without it. For more detailed summaries of these models, refer Shamay-Tsoory et al., and Dvash and Shamay-Tsoory.

[13] Decety and Yoder also find that the cognitive form of empathy could prove more effective in promoting altruism than the emotional facet of empathy alone, which is "not significantly correlated with justice either for oneself or for the other" (9). As Keen has shown, however, this finding is not necessarily applicable to empathy in the novel: "the empathy-altruism hypothesis, which has been shown to work among real people, does not automatically function in the same way when it comes to narrative empathy" ("Hardy" 384).

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emotions and take the perspectives of the characters, but also view them from a more distanced, intellectual standpoint in order to consider them as fully realised subjects. This avoids the potential passivity of emotional fusion alone, and insists upon an active reading position that could result in more lasting effects on the empathy of the reader. As I will show, Atwood ensures that the reader's interpretive cognition, as well as her emotion, is always engaged when empathising with a character; as Bouson writes, "Atwood designs her brutal yet carefully choreographed fictions to elicit both an intellectual and emotional response from readers" (*Brutal* 183-4).

Emotions are the dominant means through which the novels convey the protagonists' negative relationships with other women, and also the devices that secure the empathy of the reader, both in terms of shared affect and shared viewpoint toward the antagonists. The neuroscientist Marco Iacoboni explains that when we read about the feelings of fictional characters, we "literally experience the same feelings" ourselves, as *reading* about emotions activates the same neurons in our brains that are stimulated when we actually *feel* these emotions (4-5, 94). Keen finds that "a character's negative affective states, such as those provoked by undergoing persecution, suffering, grieving, and experiencing painful obstacles, make a reader's empathizing more likely" (*Empathy* 71), and this situation is reflected in both Atwood texts. The childhood sections of both novels focus on the suffering or alienation of the focalising protagonists, and the prose reflects the pain that they feel: Elaine is brutally bullied; Tony is emotionally alienated by both of her parents; Roz is split between two cultures to the point that she never feels comfortable anywhere, least of all within her own skin; and Charis is beaten by her mother and repeatedly raped by her uncle. As Fand points out, Atwood's trademark irony is suspended during moments of intense suffering, and "the reader is moved to swing entirely into sympathy with a character's state of mind during deep pain and agonizing soul-searching" ("Moral" 74).

The novels also position the reader to feel the same complex emotions toward other women as the characters do. Cordelia and Zenia are both mentioned in a foreboding manner by the focalising protagonists in the opening pages of each novel, giving the

reader preconceived notions about them that mirror the feelings of the focalisers. While Elaine tells the reader that her first glimpse of Cordelia as a child is "empty of premonition" (73), this is certainly not the case for the reader, who has already been privy to the adult Elaine's memories of the tough, scornful thirteen-year-old version of Cordelia and the ghoulish fantasies that Elaine harbours about her fate. Similarly, Tony's opening ruminations about Zenia's origins are liberally infused with terror, featuring "someplace bruised, and very tangled … [with] ancient twisted roots" and the occurrence of "something ordinary but horrifying" (3), as well as references to "spontaneous massacres", "violent contradictions", and "mass bloodshed" (3). This kind of language is characteristic of the way Zenia is represented by the protagonists throughout the novel. Tony tells us that Zenia inspires "overdone emotions" (39) and indeed, the narrators' descriptions of her are exaggerated. The blurred boundary between attraction and repulsion that is characteristic of the horror genre (Carroll 160) is reflected in the text; though Zenia's beauty is continually emphasised, she is also frequently described in language that suggests violence, monstrosity and disease. She is full of "malign vitality" (11), she wears perfume that is the "smell of scorched earth" (38), and her aura is "a turbulent muddy green, shot through with lines of blood and greyish black – the worst, the most destructive colours, a deadly aureole, a visible infection" (78). Charis thinks of her as a sort of parasitic demon who invades different bodies and has "taken a chunk of Charis's own body and sucked it into herself" (79), and Roz somewhat comically echoes this concept when she reflects that fragments of Zenia's "burnt and broken soul infest the old woodwork like termites, gnawing away from within. Roz should have the place fumigated. What are those people called? Exorcists" (113). These representations of Zenia effectively convey her extreme effects on the emotions of the other characters, and while the violent, evocative language positions the reader to share these emotions, the exaggerated nature of the descriptions also encourages the reader to consider the subjective nature of the characters' somewhat overdrawn perceptions.

The emotional responses of Elaine, Tony, Charis and Roz to their antagonists are inextricably tied to their senses of self, and both texts use imagery of the uncanny and abjection to convey this blurred boundary between self and other. In *The Robber Bride*

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particularly, the figure of Zenia embodies the "peculiar commingling of the familiar and unfamiliar" (Royle 1) that is the hallmark of the uncanny and involves a simultaneous experience of empathy and alienation. Zenia's connection to the other women also echoes Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection, which holds that in order to construct a coherent identity, the human psyche expels elements of the self that are seen as incompatible or undesirable and projects them on to others.[14] Though more violent than the uncanny, abjection is likewise based on the "loss of the distinction between subject and object or between self and other" (Felluga) and is bound up with "dissolving all assurances about the identity of a self" (Royle 16). Significantly, abjection is strongly associated with maternity, and the figure of the abject monstrous-feminine is a common motif in the horror genre. Feelings of disgust and horror, both in a text's characters and in its readers, are triggered primarily by horrific depictions of female sexuality and reproductive functions (Creed 7). Both *Cat's Eye* and *The Robber Bride* use imagery of female monstrosity in order to convey the characters' separation from other women and their inability to consider these women as fully formed subjects in their own right rather than the objects of horror. Abjection is above all a bodily response that is based on affect, and the use of monstrous imagery positions the reader, at least initially, to share the characters' negative emotions in a particularly strong instance of affective empathy.

In *Cat's Eye,* Elaine's discomfort with femininity manifests itself in grotesque descriptions of women's bodies. While Elaine is unmoved by bugs, earwax and snot, the female body is a source of disgust and horror. Elaine's discovery of the existence of menstruation through a used sanitary pad with its "brown crust, like dried gravy" (93) activates her awareness of women's bodies, which are "revealed in their true, upsetting light: alien and bizarre, hairy, squashy, monstrous" (93). Her friend Carol's developing breasts are "puffy-looking, their nipples bluish, like veins on a forehead" (165), and cause Elaine to be gripped by nausea, and even when Elaine is an adult, the body of an artist's model "frightens" her and the thought of touching the model makes her "recoil … [she has] no wish to run [her] fingers over this woman's goose-pimply flesh" (272). The body of Elaine's nemesis Mrs Smeath is likewise a source of revulsion, with her "skin that looks

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[14] This psychological process of projection is also discussed by Mark Bracher in terms of schema theory, which I will discuss in Chapter 2.

rubbed raw as if scrubbed with a potato brush" (57) and her "bibbed aprons that make it look as if she doesn't have two breasts but only one, a single breast that goes all the way across her front and continues down until it joins her waist" (57-8). As an adult, Elaine obsessively paints multiple pictures of Mrs Smeath's imagined naked body, "white as a burdock root, flabby as pork-fat. Hairy as the inside of an ear" (404), and the reader continues to share Elaine's sense of revulsion.

Even such emotive language as this, however, also prompts more detached analysis in the reader, as *Cat's Eye*'s recurring imagery allows the reader to realise that Elaine's abject artistic depictions of Mrs Smeath stem from emotive memories. While Elaine cannot recall the cause of her hatred for Mrs Smeath, the imagery of the painting described above mirrors her bodily reaction as a child upon overhearing Mrs Smeath expressing her real opinion of Elaine. She describes the sensation as "like a fleshy weed in my chest, white-stemmed and fat; like the stalk of a burdock, with its rank leaves and little green burrs, growing in the cat-piss earth beside the path down to the bridge" (180). The recurrence of *white, burdock* and *fat* insists upon a connection between Elaine's intense experience of abject emotion and her visual representation of Mrs Smeath; Elaine has projected her emotive self-loathing on to her enemy. Significantly, this same experience of emotion is invoked when Elaine empathetically (though subconsciously) connects Cordelia's imagined childhood emotions with her own. When Cordelia mentions her sense of alienation as a child, Elaine's reaction is profoundly affective: "A wave of blood goes up to my head, my stomach shrinks together … as if I've heard other people talking about me, saying bad things about me, behind my back" (253). These emotions, of course, are the same as those experienced by Elaine in the eavesdropping incident described above, but as Elaine will later realise, it is in fact *Cordelia's* emotions that she feels in the second instance. Although Elaine doesn't know "where these feelings have come from, what [she's] done" (253), the similarity in emotive imagery allows the attentive reader to make the connection between Elaine's childhood emotions and Cordelia's.

The reader's simultaneous emotional and intellectual engagement is also encouraged in *The Robber Bride.* As in *Cat's Eye,* the reader is able to see that the characters' reactions to

Zenia are only partly evoked by Zenia herself – they stem equally from elements of the characters' pasts. While the characters do occasionally connect Zenia to their respective doubles explicitly, such as when Tony Fremont looks into Zenia's eyes and "sees her own reflection: herself, as she would like to be. Tnomerf Ynot. Herself turned inside out" (197), the novel contains far more (and far subtler) associations between Zenia and the childhoods of the protagonists. For example, Tony thinks the name of her secret double, Tnomerf Ynot, has "a Russian or Martian sound to it, which please[s] her" (162), and Zenia later turns out to be Russian in the version of herself that she presents to Tony (and *only* in this version). Tnomerf is also associated with Tony's left hand, which she is taught to suppress despite the fact that it is "the hand she loved best" (163), and Zenia is similarly associated with Tony's left, or deviant, hand: "Tony will be Zenia's right hand, because Zenia is certainly Tony's left one" (199). In addition, Tony's subconscious association of Zenia with her mother is signalled in myriad ways. Just a few pages after Tony's recollection of an incident in which her mother disappeared downhill on a toboggan, she describes her sudden friendship with Zenia as feeling like "she's racketing downhill on a bicycle, with no hands and no brakes either" (158), which is strongly reminiscent of her mother's speedy descent down the hill. While Anthea has "a bright enameled cheerfulness … that makes her seem covered with nail polish" (176), Tony "feels herself being sucked back, pushed into the black enamel of the wall" (149) during her first encounter with Zenia.[15] This extensive pattern-finding that is encouraged in the reader has the complex effect of both increasing our cognitive (or perspective-taking) empathy for the protagonists, since we are privy to the workings of their subconscious minds, and widening the gap between our perceptions and theirs, since they remain unaware of these subliminal associations.

This blending of 'inside' and 'outside' views of the characters, to use Wayne Booth's terminology (*Rhetoric* 17), is assisted by the complex narrative timelines in both novels, which adds greater complexity to the texts' balancing of reader closeness and distance. While *Cat's Eye* is narrated in its entirety by the fifty-year-old Elaine, each slice of time (corresponding roughly to Elaine's childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, first

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[15] I have used Tony as a case study for the sake of brevity, but similar recurring associations occur in the Charis and Roz sections.

marriage, and life in Vancouver) is very strongly rooted in the present-tense consciousness of that particular version of Elaine, giving the impression that Elaine is reliving these events rather than recalling them. Even though the language is that of an adult, the narrating Elaine does not impose her perceptions on earlier events; it is the older Elaine who speaks, but the younger Elaine who focalises.[16] During the childhood sections, we are given "a record of things as the child saw, felt, understood them" (Rimmon-Kenan 75), such as when Elaine smells her teacher's "smell of hand lotion, and the other smell that is not tea" (162) and does not realise (as both the reader and the adult Elaine presumably do) that the other smell is alcohol. We are encouraged, however, by the frequent jumping back and forth between present and past times and the patterns of imagery that infuse the text, to make associations between events and to analyse Elaine's subconscious in a way that she herself is not yet able to do.

This dynamic is further complicated by Elaine's extended period of memory loss, during which she is unable to recall her childhood bullying and cannot identify the reasons for her inexplicable (to her) negative emotions toward Cordelia and Mrs Smeath. When Elaine sees a woman who resembles Mrs Smeath, her "gut clenches in fear" and "rancid hate [flashes] up in an instant" but she cannot explain these affective reactions; as she comments, "It's still a mystery to me, why I hate her so much" (352). The reader, however, knows exactly why, and is able to empathise with that version of Elaine even as the gap between their knowledge and perceptions increases.[17] The reader is able to view Elaine and her story as an "empathic insider … as Elaine's confidant and as a privileged observer of what is largely hidden from others" (Bouson, *Brutal* 167), which facilitates a strong emotional connection with the character, and also to "interpret and thematize, to focus on the complexities of narrative structure and on the evolving patterns of signification within the text" (Bouson, *Brutal* 12).

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[16] This distinction was identified by Gérard Genette, who lamented previous theories of narrative that conflated the issues of narration and focalisation. Such theories, he states, "suffer from a regrettable confusion … between the question *who is the character whose point of view orients the narrative perspective?* and the very different question *who is the narrator* – or, more simply, the question *who sees?* and the question *who speaks?*"(qtd. in Niederhoff par. 8).

[17] This phenomenon also occurs to a certain extent in *The Robber Bride* with the use of childhood memories and recurring imagery, but the third-person narration and absence of memory loss make the gap between focaliser and reader perceptions considerably smaller.

Drawing the reader's attention to the discursive elements of the text also increases appreciation of what Atwood calls the novel's "well-doneness" (Hancock 219). As well as requiring interpretive cognition, this attention also generates aesthetic emotions such as admiration and appreciation, as opposed to the narrative emotions that are evoked through empathy with the characters. According to David Miall and Don Kuiken, these aesthetic emotions are "prompted by the formal (generic, narrative, and stylistic) features of a text", and they reflect "heightened interest", slow the reading process, and "may initiate changes in the reader's grasp of the text's meaning" ("Feeling" 224-5). A similar conclusion is reached by Merja Polvinen, who suggests that reading can in fact engage the empathetic and rational systems concurrently in a model of 'joint attention'. In this model, the reader simultaneously considers "both the events and the artefactual nature of a fiction" (167) and self-reflection "can be seen as an integral part of engagement" (177). Thus, the combination of narrative and aesthetic feelings results in a more engaged and active reading experience in which the reader reflects on the text from different perspectives.

Bakhtin has noted the ability of the novel to create distance between the points of view of the narrator and the author, which in turn places the reader in an active interpretive position as we "puzzle out the author's emphases that overlie the subject of the story, while we puzzle out the story itself and the figure of the narrator as he is revealed in the process of telling his tale" (*Dialogic* 314). In *Cat's Eye,* this effect is achieved through the focalising Elaine's limited perceptions of others and the discrepancy between what she describes and what she admits. For example, the reader is able to find deeper meanings in the paintings that Elaine describes than Elaine herself is willing to acknowledge. Clear-cut symbolism such as in the double triptych of Elaine's mother, in which her domestic activities show her "slowly dissolving, from real life into a Babylonian bas-relief shadow" and her more authentic outdoor activities show "a materialization, out of the white pipe-cleaner mist into the solid light of day" (151), makes Elaine's simplistic explanation of "It was only my mother cooking, in the ways and places she used to cook, in the late forties" (151) seem disingenuous or deliberately evasive. As Judith McCombs observes, Elaine's "resistance to feminist commentary can only partly camouflage her pursuit of female

icons and myths in Mrs Smeath and the Virgin … Risley's life and art do engage and dramatize a number of salient feminist concepts" (14-15). Elaine's commentary on feminism is prickly and often oppositional – she defiantly tells the reader, "I am not Woman, and I'm damned if I'll be shoved into it" (379) and admits that "Sisterhood is a difficult concept" for her (344) – but the reader is able to find numerous feminist concepts lurking between the lines (or perhaps the brush-strokes) of Elaine's narrative.

Significantly, the reader is also positioned to empathise with Cordelia before Elaine is able to do so. When Elaine asks Cordelia if she (Cordelia) is gifted, Cordelia "puts her tongue in the corner of her mouth and turns away, as if she's concentrating on something else" (72). Cordelia's face sometimes "goes still, remote, unreflecting. It's as if she's not inside it" (221). Elaine even notices Cordelia's "dithering, fumble-footed efforts to appease [her father]" and comments that "nothing she can do or say will ever be enough, because she is somehow the wrong person" (249). The reader clearly sees Cordelia's discomfort and alienation, even though Elaine simultaneously describes it and fails to acknowledge it directly. Although Elaine freely comments upon the connection she feels with other 'outsiders' such as Mr Banerji and Mrs Finestein, noting that she "can sniff out hidden misery in others now with hardly any effort at all" (129), she refuses to see this same misery in Cordelia or Mrs Smeath. Although Elaine is unaware of this inconsistency, the reader is not.[18]

In *The Robber Bride,* story and discourse interact with extreme complexity when it comes to empathy for Zenia. On the one hand, she is a somewhat cartoonish construction whose claims to humanity are constantly undercut by the protagonists, such as when Roz emphatically comments, "Fellow human being, my fat fanny … If she was a fellow human being, I'm the Queen of England" (14), as well as by the frequent imagery of disease, monstrosity and vampirism that accompanies descriptions of her. On the other hand, many readers would surely (though perhaps reluctantly) admire her gumption and delight in her unapologetic villainy; when Roz comments that women like Zenia are "fantasies for other women" (472), it applies to the reader as well. Despite our emotional

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[18] The novel also includes imagery of vision and mirrors that serves to emphasise the limited nature of Elaine's perceptions; this will be discussed in Chapter 3.

alignment with Tony, Charis, and Roz, the narrative also gives the reader space to see the weaknesses and blindness of each woman. Unlike the protagonists, we are not taken in by Zenia's stories – the narrator tells us from the outset that interactions with Zenia never end well, so each section is a matter of *how,* rather than *if,* Zenia will wreak destruction. We know, far before Tony, Charis or Roz will acknowledge it, that their husbands are manipulative, boring, or both of the above, and while Zenia's eventual tirades against each woman may be brutal, the reader knows that they are not without accuracy.

The Robber Bride's multiple focalisation also enables the reader to see each of the characters from an outside as well as an inside view, which draws attention to "perceptual and cultural differences between the ways that [the] characters conceive of the world" (McCallum 63) and also gives the effect of each character being "constituted … by the others' accounts and qualities as well as her own" (Fand, "Moral" 69). Tony, Charis and Roz are very clearly defined characters, each of whom has "a particular way of viewing the world" (Bakhtin, *Dialogic* 33) – Tony's military metaphors, Charis's New-Agey vocabulary and synaesthetic descriptions,[19] and Roz's faux swearing and Yiddishisms leave the reader in no doubt as to whose voice is being heard. Atwood frequently illustrates this plurality of perceptions by contrasting the ways in which each woman describes or interprets the same situation, such as at Zenia's funeral when the focalising Tony comments that "they wanted to see the end of Zenia, make sure she was now fully (Tony's word) inoperational. Charis's word was *peaceful.* Roz's was *kaput*" (12) and when each woman has a separate encounter with panhandlers and describes it in very different terms. Tony sees the homeless as "spies, scouting the territory before a mass invasion; or else they are refugees, the walking wounded, in retreat before the coming onslaught" (30); for Roz, they are "huddled cloth-covered shapes … calculating whether she's good for a touch" (114); and Charis sees only the "swollen, sunken faces of those who eat too much refined sugar" (231).

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[19] Atwood has commented in an interview that Charis "is one of those children who have 'synesthesia,' a condition in which 'numbers have color and tastes have sound'" (qtd. in Bouson, "Slipping" 164), which is indicated in the text when she (for example) hits her head and describes the feeling as "a bright red sensation in her head (*It's not a hurt, it's a colour*)" (231).

When each woman focalises, the reader shares her subjective perceptions, but when the focalisation switches, we also gain a more objective view of her. Tony, for example, describes her first sexual encounter with West in romantic terms – he "smooths her as if she's a velvet cushion" and she feels like she's "falling into a river" (212) – but Roz later reflects that she doesn't understand their relationship, as "tiny Tony, with her baby-bird eyes and her acidulated little smile … [has], you'd think, the sex appeal of a fire hydrant, with more or less the same proportions" (470). Charis is gently mocked through Tony and Roz's focalisations, and she herself realises that her friends sometimes think she's "hysterical, a nitwit, a flake" (75), but the text as a whole avoids dismissing her this way: she *does* have real psychic power beneath the superficial New Age trappings. The three narrative voices coexist without authorial attempts to privilege one view over another or to unify them into a cohesive whole, meeting Bakhtin's requirement of "the relinquishing of authorial control" (McCallum 17) in a dialogic novel, and our understanding of each character is enhanced by the polyphony of voices.

While Elaine in *Cat's Eye* subconsciously aligns herself with other cross-cultural 'others' such as Mr Banerji yet fails to notice Cordelia's similar sense of unbelonging, this obliviousness takes on elements of race, class and sexuality in *The Robber Bride.* As Fiona Tolan points out, "Atwood confronts the implicit racial prejudices of her white protagonists" ("Situating" 459) and shows that power and privilege extend much further than issues of gender and sexism. Critics with postcolonial interpretations of the novel have observed the way Zenia is coded as an outsider and an other within the text; the representation of Zenia as the 'other woman', suggests Tolan, "becomes simply a metaphorical figure of 'the other'" when considered from a postcolonial perspective ("Situating" 454). As well as being a sexual rival, Zenia is always also a foreigner and a "member of a persecuted and ostracized group – an outsider to the community" (Potts 287) against whom the women define themselves, at first in a 'colonial' stage of "internalization and imitation" and then in a 'postcolonial' stage of rejection" (Tolan, "Situating" 466). The isolating 'outsider' status that each of the three women experienced previously is projected on to Zenia, which leads first to an empathetic connection with her and then to an abject rejection. Viewed through this postcolonial lens, the exclusion

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of Zenia's point of view takes on a different significance as it reflects the lack of consideration of Other voices within the feminist movement and in society at large.

The characters' blindness to their privilege extends further than their interactions with Zenia. Roz fights against sexism in the workplace but has no idea how to deal gracefully with her socioeconomic privilege, and is blissfully unaware of the extent to which her assistant Boyce performs comforting gay stereotypes for her benefit. Charis's naïve exoticisation of her mixed-race boss, Shanita, is funny until Charis refuses to recognise the privilege that she holds as a white woman and denies Shanita's experiences of racism: "Streetcar conductors are *all* rude! They say *Move to the back* to everybody, they're rude to *me!*" (67) and obliviously reflects that "Being white is getting more and more exhausting … In her next life she's going to be a mixture, a blend, a vigorous hybrid, like Shanita. Then no one will have anything on her" (67). Shanita's conviction that the question "Where do you come from?" actually translates to "When are you leaving?" (66) is echoed through Tony later in the novel when Zenia appears at her door: "'Where are you staying?' Tony asks politely, meaning, when are you leaving" (216), which links Zenia and Shanita all but explicitly as cultural and racial Others. While the characters remain unaware of their own inconsistent views, the novel's discourse places issues of race, class, sexuality and gender alongside each other to encourage a reading position that recognises the fact that "oppression is produced through the interaction of multiple, decentered, and co-constitutive axes" (Carastathis 308).

While we are given deep insight into Tony, Charis, and Roz, both from their own points of view and from each other's, Zenia remains inaccessible as a character. Our perspective of her is governed entirely by the extremely subjective descriptions of the other protagonists, and their eventual sense of (limited) empathy with her does not translate into a section of narrative from Zenia's point of view or a representation of her that hints at a third dimension, except perhaps the acknowledgement that parts of her stories may have been true. Even Charis realises that, despite the novel's opening declaration that it is the "story of Zenia" (3), Zenia herself has always been an object rather than a subject of the story: "although she has often thought about Zenia in relation to herself … she has

never truly considered what Zenia was in and by herself: the Zenia-ness of Zenia" (542). Zenia's death brings very little closure, as her origins and motives (and, indeed, existence) remain uncertain.[20] The attentive reader, perhaps, realises that she has been positioned by the narrators to 'read' Zenia in a certain way, but the discourse has subtly provided the opportunity to read around, and sometimes against, the narrators.

Through their dialogic treatment of story and discourse, *Cat's Eye* and *The Robber Bride* encourage not only affective and cognitive forms of empathy in the reader, but also interpretive choice. As well as positioning the reader to feel the emotions of the characters and to see the world from their points of view, the texts create an often-tense balance between closeness and distance that "challenge[s] the reader's existing framework for understanding [and] motivate[s] attempts to revise and reconstruct this interpretive framework" (Miall and Kuiken, "Feeling" 224-5). Atwood's novels thus formally coerce the reader to follow Bakhtin's imperative to "productively and actively engage knowledge and discourse" by reading centrifugally and struggling against the boundaries of the text (Halasek 71), making for a reading experience in which empathy is strengthened by active reflection. Just as the characters combine their newly developed empathy for the other with an appreciation of this other's autonomous selfhood, the reader is positioned to develop dialogic empathy through consideration of the texts' multiple voices.

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[20] Zenia continues at least her textual existence, albeit in the form of a dream, in Atwood's very recent short story "I Dream of Zenia with the Bright Red Teeth" (2014), adding to her story's lack of closure.

2.
Scripts and Schemata

As we have seen, *Cat's Eye* and *The Robber Bride* develop a dialogic model of empathy that engages affective empathy, cognitive empathy, and rational consideration in the reader. Emotional immersion is balanced with intellectual observation as the reader is positioned to feel the emotions of the characters but also, with the help of discursive textual features such as recurring imagery and limited points of view, to see these same characters from a greater emotional distance. In this chapter, I will explore the importance of this *noticing* of discursive elements in relation to schema theory and its implications for character and reader empathy. The characters in both novels must learn to free themselves from the schemata of femininity and motherhood that are imposed upon them by others and by themselves, and also to avoid fixing other women within these same schemata. Only when this is achieved can they see their lives and selves with clarity and develop empathetic, dialogic relationships with others. This process is mirrored in the reader, as the texts' 'use and abuse' of genre scripts functions as a form of ideological critique, which encourages the reader to consider the ways in which her views of others are shaped by schemata in both literature and life. This noticing and subsequent reworking of schemata, according to recent research, has the potential to evoke a level of reader empathy that could eventually justify the novel's reputation as a facilitator of social change.

The belief in the ability of the novel and literary criticism to change society through the fostering of empathy is grounded in the anticipated response of readers. When authors and critics use the medium of the literary text to expose flawed systems and ideologies, their hope is that readers will "spot, confront, and work against the political horrors of [their] time" (Lentricchia 12).[21] This has certainly been the goal of feminist criticism, in which texts reveal "the contradictions and injustices within the dominant gender discourse" and make visible "the strategies by which that discourse is naturalized, including genre conventions and narrative" (Cranny-Francis 25-26). Ideological critique,

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[21] Atwood's speculative and dystopian fiction, such as *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and the *MaddAddam* trilogy (2003-2013), takes this approach even more overtly than *Cat's Eye* or *The Robber Bride.*

however, has historically "lacked a theory of subjectivity" that would explain "how reading and analyzing literary texts and other discourses can produce the sorts of alterations of knowledge and belief that will lead to the kinds of behavioral modifications that result in social change" (Bracher, *Literature* 4-6).

The field of cognitive literary studies is now beginning to provide insight into how ideological critique in literature can potentially affect readers' knowledge and beliefs. Mark Bracher's recent work, which combines cognitive research with schema theory, discusses common and harmful schemata that inhibit empathy between different social groups. He shows that literary texts do in fact have the potential to change readers' harmful and limiting views of others through his newly developed *schema criticism*. Schema criticism is a strategy that aims to induce a process of metacognition, or "awareness of one's own processing activities" (*Literature* 26), in which the subject is prompted first to notice her own faulty schemata of other individuals, groups, and cultural narratives, and then to revise them and develop more adequate information-processing routines. Bracher contends that the novel is ideal for generating this process, as it "routinely operates with and on all forms of exemplars and prototypes, as well as leading readers through, or inducing them to perform, each step of information processing" (*Literature* xiii). The reading process is intrinsically active, as the reader continually relates elements of the text to her own experience and vice versa, engaging in a constant dialogic exchange with the text. In *Cat's Eye* and *The Robber Bride,* the characters must recognise their flawed schemata in order to rework them and free themselves from their influence; similarly, the texts' problematisation of genre scripts positions the reader to recognise their inadequacy and then to revise her own perceptions of these genres and the ideologies that they embody.

In *Cat's Eye* and *The Robber Bride,* the characters' development of empathy for other women hinges upon their ability to recognise and break free from cultural schemata of womanhood, which limit self-development, inhibit empathy with other women, and prevent participation in a meaningful dialogue with others. These schemata are forms of what Bakhtin calls centripetal forces, which are associated with powerful, conservative discourses whose often-unquestioned monologic authority is granted by "generic, cultural or religious tradition" (Halasek 69), and which attempt to unify or suppress divergent

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narratives in order to maintain the status quo. Elaine, Tony, Charis and Roz are all, to varying extents, fixed and controlled by the schemata that dictate desirable female behaviours, as they suppress the subversive voices within and adopt the "prescribed roles of the of the dutiful daughter or passive wife or those of the sexual object or female victim" (Bouson, *Brutal* 11). This passivity "leads to a sense of self-alienation and inauthenticity" (Bouson, *Brutal* 177) and also to a lack of empathy with other women. It is not until the characters are able to free both themselves and others from limiting schemata that they can participate in an unscripted, empathetic dialogue.

While Bracher's model of schema criticism through literature stresses the importance of pedagogy in helping the reader to recognise and rework her schemata, I suggest that Atwood's use of genre critique, intertextuality, and metafiction could prompt the same process of metacognition in the attentive reader. Atwood's postmodern subversion of genres has been the subject of much critical attention, feminist and otherwise, but to date it has focussed solely on the ideological critique that is inherent in this strategy. The application of schema theory adds the important dimension of reader response to this ideological critique, and this in turn gives depth to our understanding of how Atwood's use and abuse of genre scripts could prompt a process of recognition and reworking in the reader that is similar to the way schema criticism functions. Additionally, Bakhtin's work on genre echoes many of the key features of schema theory; he states that "literary images are modeled by the structures of prior knowledge in the minds of readers and writers" and equates a generic pattern to "the expression of a mental structure (a world view)" (Keunen 3), which is generally both conservative and monologic. The subversion of genres, therefore, is also a subversion of authoritative discourses, which the reader is positioned to recognise and then (ideally) to learn to resist. In feminist fiction such as Atwood's, the subversion of genres "operates to make visible within the text the practices by which conservative discourses such as sexism are seamlessly and invisibly stitched into the textual fabric" (Cranny-Francis 2), and the reader can make new meaning from the ideological and schematic struggle that she experiences.

The Robber Bride is, as Roz's section of the novel makes explicit, a fairy tale (of the Gothic-tinged pre-Disney variety), but it is also a commentary on fairy tales. Zenia is the female

version of the villainous Robber Bridegroom, who "lures innocent girls to his stronghold in the woods and then chops them up and eats them" (351), and in Atwood's reworking of the fairy tale, the men, as well as their wives, are the victims. In many ways, the novel retains the mythic characters and structure of a fairy tale. Villainous Zenia is deliberately overdrawn, and Tony, Roz and Charis, representing the mind, body and spirit respectively, must combine their powers in order to defeat her. The perspective of the villain is omitted "to slant the reader's sympathies, as [in] a proper fairy tale" (Fand, "Moral" 68), and as is compulsory in such a story, this villain is vanquished: as Roz's twins insist, the pigs and the wolf can't just "forget about the boiling water and make friends," since "somebody [has] to be boiled" (351).

So far, the fairy tale script is followed almost to the letter apart from its gender-bending elements, and the novel itself thus reflects the tendency of the characters to see their lives as stories. Roz is the most transparent in this habit: she sees herself as "Roz the toilet cleaner, Roz the down-market Cinderella, sullenly scrubbing" in the time before "her father the hero turn[s] rags into riches" (86). As an adult, she fully (albeit cynically) expects her life to follow the plots of the novels she reads and movies she sees, wherein "women renounced things for the sake of other people, or in which they were loved and then abandoned" (387) and the hero recovers from his injuries and sets "off, off in his longboat, off in his galleon, scouring the seven seas for the Holy Grail, for Helen of Troy, for Zenia, peering through the spyglass, on the watch for her pirate flag" (456). Even Tony and Charis shape their own narratives according to fairy-tale-like tropes, as seen in Tony's comment that she "feels like a stray child, ragged and cold, with her nose pressed to a lighted window" (190), and in Charis's notion that "maybe she was the matron of an orphanage in a previous life – a Victorian orphanage, with gruel for the orphans and a cosy fire and a warm four-poster bed with a down-filled quilt for the matron" (47). The novel thus explores the propensity of people, particularly women, to see their lives as constrained and scripted, and the "difficulty of curing plot of life, and life of certain plots" (Bouson, *Brutal* 6), drawing attention to the way literary, artistic and media schemata help to shape women's views of their own lives.

The fairy-tale script of *The Robber Bride,* however, is also problematised, not just in the twins' overt way but also more subtly through the tension between the novel's story and its discourse. Despite the novel's immaculate triple-triadic structure,[22] the narrator frames the story by insisting that its assembly is random, claiming in the opening pages that the beginning of the story is "an arbitrary choice" (4), and maintaining at the end that "every ending is arbitrary, because the end is where you write *The end*" (558). This metafictive comment on storytelling, as Brown observes, "belies the actual structure of the novel. It is a sneaky key to the artificiality of that structure and is in turn belied by it" (203). As discussed in the previous chapter, despite the story's gesture toward empathy with Zenia, there is no room in the fairy-tale structure for Zenia's own point of view or for an ending wherein the conflict is resolved peacefully. Regardless of the multiple and often contradictory archetypes and icons with whom Zenia is associated, the genre, as well as the characters, reduces her to the role of Villain. As the characters recognise the flawed schemata that fairy tales have helped to instil in them, the attentive reader notices the way *The Robber Bride* itself both utilises and subverts these same schemata.

The characters' tendency to "view life as a story in which their roles are dictated rather than created" (Wilson, "Magical" 35) is associated with the passive assumption of a 'victim' role, which, Atwood argues, allows the so-called victim to avoid moral choice and responsibility. Atwood has spoken about victimhood in the context of both Canadian nationalism and feminism, and she "protests any tendency toward easy passivity and naivety [and] refuses to allow either Canadians or women to deny their complicity in the power structures that may subject them" (Hutcheon 12). During the second wave of the feminist movement, this type of victimhood was embodied in what Naomi Wolf aptly dubbed 'victim feminism', a "narrow but influential" strand of essentialism in which the push for valorisation of 'feminine' traits such as empathy and cooperativeness led to an ideology that cast women as "beleaguered, fragile, intuitive angels" and held that any

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[22] As Jane W. Brown observes:
> [The novel] is constructed essentially of three triads: after the introductory scene, the novel presents us with a triad of chapters, each from the viewpoint of each protagonist, each about her reaction to the shocking moment when she realizes that Zenia has returned from the dead. In the long middle triad, each section presents the history of Zenia's damaging involvement with its narrator. The last triad returns to the Toxique Restaurant, where the three friends have gathered to decide how they will confront and exorcise Zenia from their lives—again from the perspective of each protagonist in turn. (203)

"female competitiveness, aggression, [and] thirst for recognition" was due to "unfortunate and inauthentic eruption[s] of male behavior" (Wolf xviii, 135, 145). Virtue was thus associated with powerlessness and victimhood, which robbed women of the will to power and, like the patriarchal culture it fought against and the fairy tales that perpetuated such archetypes, "split women apart – into the good and bad woman" (Bouson, "Slipping" 149).

The Robber Bride, as Bouson has convincingly argued, in many ways echoes Wolf's impatience with victim feminism and her espousal of the contrasting 'power feminism', in which women are encouraged to claim their voices and seize their power.[23] [24] For most of the novel, Tony, Charis and Roz repress their darker sides in order to conform to an essentialist conception of Woman as nurturer. Their rejection of Zenia, who represents the "aggressive, controlling, dominating, and violent impulses" (Wolf 150) that the other women repress, is a by-product of Bracher's essentialism schema, in which the anxiety to maintain a unified sense of self results in the rejection of others as a form of boundary reinforcement.[25] This victim-victor or winner-loser discourse, as Fand points out, is thus divisive both among women and within individual women, as it "splits the self into a destructive either-or polarity" (*Dialogic* 155). In *The Robber Bride,* and to a lesser extent in *Cat's Eye,* each character's development depends – as in Bracher's schema criticism – upon their recognition of the faulty schemata that they have internalised, which have led to their passive adoption of the victim role and divided them from other women, and their subsequent breaking down of these schemata. Once they have acknowledged the darker sides of their natures, they are able to empathise with 'other' women and make conscious moral choices about their actions, rather than passively allowing schemata to dictate their behaviour.

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[23] As always, however, Atwood refuses to be monologic. Although victim feminism is lightly but firmly skewered with such comments as "The [black] eye was living proof of something or other. Of Zenia's neediness, or else her goodness. Of her status" (266), Zenia's 'power feminist' attitude does not escape parody either, with her breezy disdain for the Third World and her unapologetic materialism constituting a deliberately exaggerated portrayal of this ideology.

[24] Wolf's book *Fire With Fire,* in which she contrasts victim and power feminisms, was published in the same year as *The Robber Bride* (1993). While the question of the novel's direct influence on Atwood is uncertain, the two texts certainly reflect the same *zeitgeist*.

[25] This description also echoes Kristeva's theory of abjection as discussed in the previous chapter, in which the contradictory elements of the self are expelled and projected on to others.

In *The Robber Bride,* Tony, Charis and Roz have each become entrapped in the cultural schema of the self-sacrificial 'nurturing' woman, in which they put others' needs before their own and hide the more rebellious sides of their personalities. Tony conceals her dark side from her husband West, who "likes to think of her as kind and beneficent. And forgiving, of course" (16), avoids difficult conversations with him because she thinks they will upset him, and treats him like a fragile wounded soldier: "filled with the joy of giving, [she] drags West from the field of defeat and carts him off behind the lines, and tends his wounds, and mends him" (212). Charis gives all she has to her boyfriend Billy at the expense of her own financial and emotional needs, and cannot understand why he leaves her: "Hadn't she been affectionate enough, hadn't she nodded her head when he talked, hadn't she cooked the meals and laid herself down compliantly whenever he wanted her to...? She was not an ungiving person" (246). Roz cannot quite bring herself to follow the doctrine of self-sacrifice that she was taught as a child, in which "she'd be suffering for love, suffering passively, instead of fighting … The right kind of love should be selfless, for women at any rate, or so said the Sisters" (359), but she nevertheless puts up with her husband Mitch's exploits, "[tries] so hard to be kind and nurturing, to do the best thing" (352), and blames herself for Mitch's behaviour on the basis that "Maybe it's her excessive love that pushes him away" (361).

Roz and Tony are both also convinced that Zenia has activated the 'rescue' script, a typical trope of fairy tales, in the relevant man: Tony thinks that "to West it looks as if he's on a rescue mission, and who is Tony to deny the attraction of that?" (217), and Roz fears that she has smothered Mitch and "he was tired of being given to, of being forgiven, of being rescued; maybe he wanted to do a little giving and rescuing of his own" (447). Whether these suppositions are initially true is open to interpretation, but the important point is that the women are convinced of the truth of these scripts and continue to live by them without questioning their validity. As Fand observes, they "passively accept the 'text' that Zenia hands them" ("Moral" 78) and cast themselves as self-sacrificing victims, their husbands as easily-duped-heroes-turned-victims, and Zenia as the villain. It takes Zenia to show them that their nurturing cannot buy devotion, and that the men are responsible for their own behaviour. Charis affirms the value of her own life rather than mooning over Billy and discovers that her daughter Augusta "[loves] her even when she

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isn't trying. Trying to figure out what other people need, trying to be worthy" (541); Tony finally has an honest conversation with West and finds a deeper level of contentment; Roz is freed from the spectre of Mitch and looks forward to a future where she is not constrained by her marriage. They finally acquire power and agency, along with more dialogic relationships with others, only when they realise the falseness of the scripts they have been clinging to and break out of the victim roles.

This power, however, is less ruthless than that described by Wolf; although they acknowledge their power and capacity for evil, they make the conscious moral choice to refrain from using it. In the final section of the novel, each woman fantasises about killing Zenia – Tony even goes so far as to formulate an elaborate plan involving a cordless drill – and goes to Zenia's hotel room to confront her, but leaves without resorting to violence. The next time the characters and the reader see Zenia, she is very much dead, floating face down in the hotel fountain after having fallen from her window. Though each woman later realises that in terms of both logistics and character, both of the others were capable of the murder, none of them actually kills her (or at least not as far as the reader knows). As Charis reflects, "they were tempted, each one of them, but they didn't succumb. Succumbing would have been killing Zenia, either physically or spiritually. And killing Zenia would have meant turning into Zenia" (532-3). They break free of the victim role but do not turn the tables by seizing the role of the victimiser, as Elaine does; Zenia is ultimately neither a villain nor a victim, but one of the female 'bad' characters who, according to Atwood, "act as keys to doors we need to open, and mirrors in which we can see more than just a pretty face. They can be explorations of moral freedom" ("Spotty" 125). Zenia enables the other women to make active moral choices and to take responsibility for them, reflecting Bakhtin's insistence that "dialogism consists of making choices among voices, not just airing them" (Fand, *Dialogic* 200). The protagonists' polarising schemata of 'good' and 'bad' women, victims and villainesses, are broken down, and they develop dialogic relationships both within and among themselves.

In *Cat's Eye,* Elaine's loss of self and lack of empathy for others (as discussed in the previous chapter) result from the scripts of femininity that are imposed upon her during childhood. She spends the first eight years of her life with her nomadic family in the

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wilderness, where the cultural performance of gender is not policed – her parents dress in more or less the same attire (34), and Elaine and her brother are treated the same way, to the extent that she wears his hand-me-down clothes (27). When her family moves to Toronto, she receives a brisk and painful education in femininity from her new friends. She is held to a constantly-shifting standard by Cordelia and the others and is punished whenever she deviates from the acceptable norm, resulting in great emotional pain and even self-mutilation. As Bouson observes:

> When Elaine becomes the victim of her girlhood friends, she also becomes subject to the repressive cultural code that her friends enforce, in a childish imitation of their parents … the social construction of feminine identity is viewed as a formative trauma. (*Brutal* 164)

Elaine feels controlled by the scripts the others impose upon her, is unable to develop a coherent sense of self, and minimises her physical being by peeling the skin from her feet and chewing her fingers and hair (113-14). She adjusts her own behaviour to conform to the requirements of cultural schemata, performing femininity "as if [she's] only doing an imitation of a girl" (52) and losing her ability to recall her non-scripted self. This feeling of being controlled by scripts is echoed in the style of the novel's prose, as Elaine's descriptions of her activities take on the quality of stage directions during the periods of her life when she feels the most restricted. In the Smeath house, she tells us: "I've learned the way things are done here. I climb the stairs past the rubber plant, not touching it, and go into the Smeaths' bathroom and count off four squares of toilet paper and wash my hands afterwards with the gritty black Smeath soap" (125). During early motherhood, her tone is similar: "I walk Sarah up the inside stairs, open the inside door, put her inside, close the baby gate, go back down for the bags, carry them up, open the gate, go back in, close the gate, go into the kitchen, set the bags on the table and begin to unpack" (340). In both cases, her scripted performance of femininity is accompanied by a sense of emotional isolation and lack of agency.

Elaine's following of scripts is associated with silence, passivity, and feelings of nothingness. She loses her sense of self and is thus unable to form dialogic relationships with others, reflecting Bakhtin's opinion that "separation, dissociation, and enclosure

within the self [are] the main reason[s] for the loss of one's self" (qtd. in Emerson 257). When under the power of Cordelia and the others, Elaine has "nothing to say … Even to myself I am mute" (117); tells an imaginary Cordelia, "You made me believe I was nothing" (199); and confides to the reader, "*Nothing* … was a word I came to connect with myself, as if I was nothing, as if there was nothing there at all" (41). Later, her miserable passivity in her relationship with Josef is likewise connected to his influence over her words: "He has taken to demanding speech from me; or else he puts his hand over my mouth" (316). Her suicidal impulses occur when she is feeling the most constrained by others' scripts, firstly in the ravine when she has the urge to stay where she is and become frozen in the "water made from the dead people … I will be a dead person, peaceful and clear, like them" (188), and then as a young mother when she succumbs to the urge to slash her wrist with a knife. On this second occasion, her by-now-familiar feeling of nothingness is conveyed through imagery that recalls her experience in the ravine:

> I lie in the bedroom with the curtains drawn and nothingness washing over me like a sluggish wave … My body is inert, without will. I think I should keep moving, to circulate my blood, as you are supposed to do in a snowstorm so you won't freeze to death. (372-3)

The connection to her childhood is strengthened by the fact that it is Cordelia's voice that orders her to slash her wrist, "as if proposing an escapade, a prank, a treat … The voice of a nine-year-old child" (374). Significantly, Elaine's powers of artistic creation also fade when the scripts are at their strongest. With Josef, she doesn't have the energy to paint and "end[s] up reading murder mysteries in the bathtub" (298), burying herself in a genre that is both as formulaic and as destructive as her relationship, and when she is consumed by her scripted motherhood role, she loses confidence in her abilities and reflects gloomily, "perhaps all I will ever be is what I am now" (342). The imposition of scripts, along with the nihilistic passivity that follows, is consistently represented as damaging to the self.

Schemata, as well as being potentially damaging to individual agency and selfhood, also inhibit empathy when they are faultily applied to others. As Bracher writes, "Each type

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and form of knowledge contained in a cognitive schema is thus a kind of prejudice, or prejudgment, that can function to exclude, distort, or even fabricate crucial information about other people" ("Schema" 89). In *Cat's Eye,* the reader can see that in addition to being contained within cultural schemata herself, Elaine imposes these same schemata upon other women. She resents her mother for failing to fit the socially acceptable schema of motherhood and not "fit[ting] in with the idea" of other mothers (156), an idea which is echoed in *The Robber Bride* with Charis's mother sobbing that her own mother was "never like a real mother … She never was!" (285) and Tony's resentment of her mother for rejecting the motherhood script and leaving her behind.[26] Elaine distances herself from Susie, Josef's other lover, by denying their similarities and convincing herself that Susie is a different 'type' of woman: "the sort of girl who would go in for this [obsessive] kind of love. She would be abject, she would cling and grovel" (293). When Elaine realises that both she and Susie are "limp, without will, made spineless by love" (306) and, when Susie tries to give herself an abortion, that she "would have done what she has done, moment by moment, step by step … Everything that's happened to her could well have happened to me" (321), she feels a new empathy for Susie. However, the judgmental Smeath-like voice of her childhood intrudes to once again push Susie into a limiting 'bad girl' schema: "*It serves her right*" (321).

Elaine's fantasies about Cordelia's fate are also based on fixing her within limiting schemata, which echoes the sense of imprisonment that Elaine herself feels. Images of powerlessness and confinement recur in the novel, from Elaine's fantasies about Cordelia being trapped in an iron lung, "fully conscious, but unable to move or speak" (8), to Cordelia's literal confinement within a rest home later in the novel. As with Susie, Elaine cannot or will not see the many similarities between herself and Cordelia that are obvious to the reader, but instead continues to define herself by what Cordelia is not. This behaviour reflects the damaging homogeneity schema as described by Bracher, which "homogenizes self and other into all good or all bad, thus blocking awareness of one's

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[26] Tellingly, the only character who questions this 'bad mother' schema is the subversive Zenia, who comments to Tony, "I think your mother was a romantic … She sounds fun-loving … She sounds full of life" (191). Despite their development of intersubjectivity in other areas, none of the other characters in either novel really learns to "see the mother … as an independent subject" who has "a purpose apart from her existence for her child" (Benjamin, *Bonds* 23-24).

own negative qualities as well as the positive qualities of others … [and] thus [denying] our common humanity" (*Literature* 15). It is not until the very end of the novel that Elaine gains empathy for Cordelia and releases her compulsion to fix her friend within schemata, choosing to use her power for compassion rather than control. In one of the novel's magical realist passages,[27] the middle-aged Elaine walks through the ravine, encounters the child Cordelia, and recognises that Cordelia has always been just as vulnerable as Elaine herself. Elaine realises, "I am the older one now, I'm the stronger" (419), reaches out to Cordelia, "hands open to show I have no weapon," and tells her, "*It's all right … You can go home now*" (419). With this symbolic action, she demonstrates that she has released both Cordelia and herself from their power struggle and has reworked her schemata of self and other so that the relationship is no longer divisive – neither of them has to play the victim or the villain roles any longer.

Cat's Eye's generic subversion is not of fairy tales, although the novel does contain many intertextual fairy-tale references. Instead, its ideological critique is based on the literary representation of the development of selfhood. The concept of the female Bildungsroman has, of course, been a subject of feminist scrutiny for decades, as critics have noted the limited possibilities for women that exist within the traditional form of the genre (and their similarly limited options in life, at least during the genre's Victorian heyday).[28] The conventional form of the genre is described thus by Rita Felski:

> The Bildungsroman can be construed as biographical, assuming the existence of a coherent individual identity which constitutes the focal point of the narrative; dialectical, defining identity as the result of a complex interplay between psychological and social forces; historical, depicting identity formation as a temporal process which is represented by means of a linear and chronological narrative; and teleological, organizing textual signification in relation to the projected goal of the protagonist's access to self-knowledge, which will in practice be realized to a greater or lesser degree. (135)

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[27] In magical realism, which is most often associated with Latin American literature, "the recognizably realistic mingles with the unexpected and inexplicable" and "elements of dream, fairy-story, or mythology combine with the everyday" (Drabble qtd. in Wilson, "Magical" 23). This genre is distinct from Atwood's later science fiction / dystopian texts such as the *MaddAddam* trilogy. For a perceptive analysis of magical realism in *The Robber Bride,* refer Wilson "Magical".

[28] See, for example, Rachel Blau DuPlessis' *Writing Beyond the Ending (*1985) and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979).

The applicability of this model to female experience has been widely questioned and reworked, largely because of the recognition that "autobiography is inextricably caught up with notions of selfhood and identity which are gender-specific and socially conditioned" (Grace, "Gender" 190). Like many other feminist texts, including most of Atwood's own, *Cat's Eye* is both a recognisable Bildungsroman and a subversion of the genre, and the novel's postmodern play with the Bildungsroman/autobiography genre[29] engages reader attention in much the same way as *The Robber Bride* does with the fairy tale form.

The notion of a unified, coherent identity, which was so central in earlier examples of the Bildungsroman, has come under attack from both poststructuralism and feminism in recent decades. The traditional autobiographical 'I' "enforces (writes, creates) an image of unified identity; it denies *différance,* fragmentation, gaps, otherness" (Grace, "Gender" 191). Though Elaine's story undeniably focuses on the formation and development of identity, this identity is anything but cohesive; as she tells us, "my life is now multiple, and I am in fragments" (316). As a child, she is temporarily buried in a hole by Cordelia and is later unable to recall the experience, telling the reader: "It's as if I vanish at that moment and reappear later, not knowing why I have been changed" (108), and the same could be said of the various incarnations of both herself and Cordelia that appear in the novel. Each woman is considerably different in each section – as Elaine comments, "There is never only one, of anyone" (6) – and the reader is able to form only tenuous impressions of what might have happened in the intervening time to cause these changes, particularly in Cordelia's case. In *Cat's Eye,* gaps are exposed rather than disguised; in contrast to a traditional Bildungsroman, the text is not dialectical but rather dialogical, willing to let ambiguities and contradictions stand rather than papering over them, and Elaine's difficulty in remembering and reconstructing her past speaks to the impossibility of constructing a teleological life narrative that avoids monologism.

Perhaps most importantly, Atwood's dismantling of the notion of the unified, coherent, individualistic self is tied strongly to her rejection of essentialist feminism's limiting

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[29] Critics have categorised *Cat's Eye* variously as a Bildungsroman and as a fictional autobiography. Both descriptors are accurate, and they of course overlap a great deal; for my purposes, the distinction does not greatly matter, as both genres centre on the concept of developing selfhood, and it is this concept that Atwood deconstructs.

schemata, as well as to intersectional feminism's valuing of multiplicity and Bakhtin's commitment to dialogism through intersubjectivity. While Tony, Charis and Roz must unearth the buried elements of their selves, Elaine's equivalent 'self' is Cordelia, and Elaine's development depends on her recognition and consideration of this other. While Elaine's development *is* certainly partly shaped by social forces (though hardly in the same way as in a male Bildungsroman), individualism and rationality are not prized attributes, and she experiences alienation rather than power if the self becomes "separate, discrete, bounded, distinct from the Object of its own discourse as well as from all others" (Grace, "Gender" 191). Elaine is very far from the solipsistic figure of the "Romantic artist as a lonely genius" (Holquist, *Dialogism* 87) that dominated narratives of the early nineteenth century, and her growth, in contrast to the Hegelian idea of "greater and greater awareness of one's self as a unique self" (Holquist, *Dialogism* 72), depends instead upon "the self's discovery of the other" (72). Empathy for others is the key to self-development, the female 'self' comprises multiple and sometimes contradictory elements which do not need to be unified in an attempt to fit socially prescribed schemata of womanhood, and the tendency of the autobiographical 'I' to monologically exclude other points of view is criticised. Through its clear engagement with the Bildungsroman form and its simultaneous subversion of the genre's naturalised conventions and invisible ideology, *Cat's Eye* positions the reader to rethink and expand her conception of the genre, particularly as it applies to women.

Just as the characters in *Cat's Eye* and *The Robber Bride* break down their schemata, resulting both in empathy for others and in increased moral agency, the reader is likewise positioned to refuse a passive reading position and to observe the way that monologic authoritative discourses shape and constrain self and other in both literature and life. While Bakhtin's ideal author relinquishes ideological control with the aim of "construct[ing] more active and analytic strategies for reading" (McCallum 17), his ideal reader breaks free from the position of the "'passive listener' assumed, from the standpoint of traditional stylistics, to lie beyond the self-sufficient, 'closed authorial monologue' which is the literary work" (Shepherd, "Bakhtin" 137, quoting Bakhtin, *Dialogic* 274). As we have seen, the characters in the novels gain the power to resist the constraints of authoritative discourses and make conscious choices rather than passively

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accepting the dominant narrative. This process is replicated in the attentive reader, as she acquires the ability to interpret and create meaning from texts when her attention is drawn to the way they tend to monologically convey ideologies that are irrelevant or harmful to women. In Atwood's texts, both characters and readers learn to participate in a dialogue of voices as the breakdown of limiting schemata leads to a sense of empathy with the other.

3.
Self and Other

Previously in this study, I have explored the development and cultivation of empathy in both characters and readers in Margaret Atwood's novels *Cat's Eye* and *The Robber Bride.* Using Bakhtin's concept of dialogism, cognitive theories of narrative empathy, and elements of schema theory that relate to empathy (and lack thereof) for the other, I have examined the ways in which the novels' protagonists develop their awareness of the subjectivities of other women and break down harmful cultural schemata of womanhood. I have also studied the positioning of the reader during this process: though the reader is encouraged to mirror the characters in their development of empathy, Atwood avoids a monologic approach by using polyphonic narration and tension between story and discourse to emphasise the novels' plurality of viewpoints. Through a combination of empathetic closeness and non-controlling distance, Elaine, Tony, Charis, and Roz learn to acknowledge their doubles as members of their dialogues, and through an interpretive reading practice that involves both emotion and cognition, the reader joins the dialogue as well.

In this chapter, I will explore the ways in which the empathetic development of self in relation to others results in the protagonists' eventual self-empowerment and creative agency. Empathy and creation go hand in hand as the protagonists refuse divisive models of self/other, including the victor/victim schema and monolithic conceptions of womanhood, and learn to define themselves in relation to others rather than in opposition to them. The oppositional model of subjectivity, in which a self is delineated by its differences from others, gives way to a more dialogic and intersubjective paradigm in which the self is constituted partly by its *relation* to the other: binaries are dissolved, and the self is not "a unitary thing; rather, it consists in a relation, the relation between self and other" (Holquist, *Dialogism* 34). Metaphors of vision and voice are used to explore the protagonists' development of perception and self-expression, and the metafictive treatment of authorship as a construction of self and other suggests a form of narratology that, like Bakhtinian dialogism, is inclusive rather than divisive. Just as readers are

positioned to actively consider multiple points of view, the creative protagonists must author multi-dimensional, ever-evolving versions of self and other that reflect their development of dialogic empathy.

Dialogism is not only a tool of literary analysis. It is frequently applied to the study of literature not because it was originally designed to analyse novels (it wasn't), but because Bakhtin considered the novel to be an inherently dialogic genre, and used examples from various literary texts (particularly those of Fyodor Dostoevsky) to illustrate his conception and application of the term. Dialogism has a wide range of functions, both within Bakhtin's own work and in secondary analysis of it; at its heart it is a social philosophy, and it is commonly "used to describe language, narrative and subjectivity" (McCallum 12). Holquist defines dialogism as "a theory of knowledge, an architectonics of perception" (*Dialogism* 33), which conceives a relationship between self and other that is "neither oppositional (i.e. differences between the two positions are not irreconcilable), nor dialectical (in the sense that it does not entail a synthesis of the two positions), nor monological (neither position is dominant)" (McCallum 13). Foundational to dialogism is the notion of relative perspective or point of view, and so it follows that "metaphors of vision and voice are inescapable elements in any consideration of Bakhtin's thought" (Holquist, *Dialogism* 161);[30] authorship, too, is a metaphor used by Bakhtin to describe the perceptual construction of self and other. In *Cat's Eye* and *The Robber Bride,* all three of these metaphors are used, to varying extents, to represent the protagonists' relationships with others. The concepts of voice and authorship are also extended to signify female empowerment, hinting at a model of *écriture feminine* in which one woman's voice does not claim to represent others, but instead gains strength from being part of a dialogue of voices.

The most vital components of dialogism are the relational nature of the concepts of self and other, the conception of the world as a heteroglossic "roiling mass of languages, each

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[30] As Holquist explains, "'voice'…has long been a means for representing the distinctiveness of what otherwise is called a 'point-of-view'" (*Dialogism* 161), and I would add that this very term 'point of view' is a metaphor for opinion and belief. Similarly, vision and comprehension have a long-standing equivalence in both everyday discourse and literary metaphor: "I see" and "I understand" are often interchangeable, as we "map the concept of 'vision' onto the unrelated concept of 'understanding'" (Trites 67).

of which has its own distinct formal markers" (Holquist, *Dialogism* 67), and the recognition that every utterance is informed and shaped by its various contexts. In this vein, Bakhtin's chosen metaphor for modelling variety is that of "two actual people talking to each other in a specific dialogue at a particular time and in a particular place" (Holquist, "Introduction" xx). Atwood's complex treatment in both texts of the concept of the double, or doppelgänger, serves as a fascinating illustration of the way her work reflects Bakhtinian ideas of self and other. As she does with many other tropes, Atwood draws upon and utilises literary conventions of the doppelgänger, only to then subtly subvert them in order to draw attention to their limitations or obsolescence. In psychoanalytic readings of Gothic literature, the double signifies a split psyche in which a troubling aspect of the self is "expelled from the self and located in another person or thing" (Jackson 66), and this concept is echoed in the context of social theory by Kristeva, who notes that "The foreigner is within us … when we flee from our struggle against the foreigner, we are fighting our unconscious" (*Strangers* 191). Inevitably, a monstrous other in literature must be destroyed in order for a sense of stable selfhood to be restored, just as the foreign or impure elements of self are violently expelled as other in Kristeva's theory of abjection in order to maintain a coherent sense of self. The other is thus defined entirely by its opposition to the self, and "there is no possibility of either dialogue or dialectic synthesis between the character and its double" (McCallum 76).

Both novels draw upon this history of the psychoanalytic and literary doppelgänger and complicate its resolution. Though Zenia is destroyed, this outcome only occurs after a partial reintegration of her qualities into the selfhood of the others, along with a consideration of her as a self rather than an other, a subject rather than an object. This recognition signals the development of intersubjectivity, in which the subject "observes that the other whom the self meets is also a self, a subject in his or her own right" (Benjamin, *Bonds* 20). When Hilde Staels states that the protagonists in *The Robber Bride* "evolve from projecting strangeness onto Zenia and repudiating the other as separate and alien to accommodating otherness as part of the self" (44), she is correct; however, the protagonists must also acknowledge Zenia as a person *separate* from themselves, not simply "an adjunct of [their] ego" (Benjamin, *Bonds* 23), in order to consider her as part of their dialogue (as provisional as this revelation may be). Similarly, Elaine learns to

perceive Cordelia as a subject in her own right rather than a reflection, or half of her own face (*CE* 211); in Bakhtinian terms, she realises that "the mirror we use to see ourselves is not a passively reflecting looking glass but rather the actively refracting optic of other persons" (Clark and Holquist 79).

Unlike other literary doubles, Cordelia is not a static being, but an ever-changing and developing self just like Elaine. Eventually, Elaine understands the extent to which she formerly allocated Cordelia a "finished-off, static quality which self always assigns to the other" (Holquist, *Dialogism* 156). Her early comment that "there is never only one, of anyone" (6) acquires a new resonance, as she must develop empathy for the child version of Cordelia to prevent her from being trapped in "the wrong time" (419), in contrast to her earlier attempts to "fix Cordelia in one time, at one age" in her portrait (227). In addition, the novel does not end with Elaine smashing the metaphorical mirror that represents her relationship with Cordelia, as in the horror story they read as teenagers (211), but instead by her recognising the expanded view that this mirror can provide. "Accommodating otherness as part of the self" is important, but in Bakhtinian terms, "although the other helps constitute the self … it always remains strange and separate from the self; in fact, this very separation sparks our existence" (Hohne and Wussow xvi). A Bakhtinian formulation of empathy, as discussed previously, involves the ability to take another's viewpoint but not to control it.

The motifs of vision and mirrors are used in both novels to represent the development of empathy, signalled by a recognition (if not always a sharing) of another's emotions and points of view. Vision is the predominant metaphor in *Cat's Eye,* right down to the novel's title, and the development of Elaine's metaphorical vision is tied closely both to her empathy for others and to her growth as an artist. As Sharon Rose Wilson observes, "because Elaine is a visual artist, the development of her identity or 'I' is even more dependent upon the development of her vision, her 'eye,' than in Atwood's earlier works" (*Fairy-Tale* 296). As discussed in the previous chapter, however, the Bildungsroman (and, in this sense, Künstlerroman) elements of the novel are problematised by the representation of Elaine's identity as less than coherent and certainly not self-contained. Elaine's empathetic vision hinges upon her ability to see others' points of view and to

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fully appreciate their subjectivity, which involves the realisation that there is an impassable gap between the way in which she sees them and their incarnations outside the confines of her vision.[31]

Just as Elaine is constrained within the schemata of femininity imposed upon her during childhood, she is trapped within the gaze of others, which is represented in the novel as another means of control from which she must struggle to break free. Her constant feeling of being watched echoes the ruthless cultural monitoring of female appearance and activities, symbolised in the text by the figure of the Watchbird, whose "one-way gaze" monitors the activities of badly-behaved women in magazine illustrations and then "turn[s] outward, toward the female reader" (Hite 137) with the admonition "This is a Watchbird watching YOU" (*CE* 397). Elaine's paranoia is conveyed through the motifs of mirrors and reflections, which signify the way she is perceived by others, and the text makes it clear that this preoccupation stems from the period of her childhood when she was bullied and was under constant, critical observation from Cordelia and the others.

Atwood establishes the roots and ramifications of Elaine's paranoia through recurring language about her discomfort with being observed. As a child, Elaine constantly worries about "what I've said today, the expression on my face, how I walk, what I wear, because all of these things need improvement" (118), and she is forced to walk in front of the other girls so that they can "talk about how I'm walking, how I look from behind" (120). At one point, Cordelia brings a mirror to school and forces Elaine to confront her own reflection, saying in disgust, "Look at yourself! Just look!" (158). When Elaine leaves the city with her family in the summer, it is a vast relief when she can "walk without seeing how I look from the back, talk without hearing the way I sound" (143), but when she returns to Toronto, so does her paranoia. This discomfort recurs throughout her life; when she visits Josef's apartment during her time at university, she thinks that "the driver

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[31] Though this revelation is most strongly thematised in Elaine's relationships with Cordelia and Mrs Smeath, it is also echoed in her realisations about other characters. As a teenager, she wilfully refuses to imagine her father as "a separate person with an earlier, mythological life of his own" but instead wants him to be "just [her] father, the way he has always been" (217). In contrast, she later acknowledges the separate selfhood of others: she sees that her artistic representations of Mrs Finestein, Miss Stuart, and Mr Banerji are "not as they were, to themselves: God knows what they really saw in their own lives, or thought about" (407), which is also echoed in her description of the ravine as "not empty: filled with whatever it is by itself, when I'm not looking" (419).

[is] looking at [them] in the rear-view mirror" (294), and she worries that Josef will ask her to take off her clothes and will then "turn me this way and that, looking at me from a distance. I didn't like being looked at from behind: it was a view over which I had no control" (294). As a middle-aged woman, she cranes her neck in order to see herself from behind in a dressing-room mirror, noting that "it's amazing how much bigger you always look from the back" (44).

The power struggle between her and Cordelia is likewise conveyed through the motif of reflections, reflecting Elaine's difficulty in separating others' perceptions of her from her view of herself. When Elaine feels that Cordelia's life is more successful than her own, she describes seeing her reflection in Cordelia's sunglasses, "in duplicate and monochrome, and a great deal smaller than life size" (303). She measures her success by the level of Cordelia's, and is unable to consider Cordelia as a separate subject. An image from a horror comic Elaine reads as a teenager, in which the spirit of a hideously burnt girl who has killed herself enters the body of her beautiful sister through a mirror, recurs in the novel both in Elaine's subconscious and in her art: she is afraid that she'll look into the bathroom mirror and "see the face of another girl, someone who looks like me but has half of her face darkened, the skin burned away" (212). The only portrait Elaine paints of Cordelia is entitled *Half a Face,* despite the fact that Cordelia's entire face is visible in the painting, and in Elaine's self-portrait, only half of her own head appears. This motif represents Elaine's inability to separate her concept of self from her idea of Cordelia: self and other are blurred together, despite her attempts to eject Cordelia from her consciousness.

As Elaine gains power during adolescence, she learns to use her own gaze as a means of control over others.[32] After the ravine incident, she describes her indifference to the other girls as "something hard in me, crystalline, a kernel of glass" (193), and Wilson has convincingly demonstrated that this kernel of glass, in an intertextual reference to the fairy tale "The Snow Queen", resides in Elaine's eye and represents the cold, alien vision

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[32] She also harnesses the power of language and narrative to exercise control over Cordelia, scaring her with vampire stories just as Cordelia did to her during childhood (233). This use of narrative as a means of control anticipates her later tendency to mentally trap Cordelia within restrictive schemata, as discussed in Chapter 2.

of the cat's eye marble. She "look[s] through glass eyes without feeling" (Wilson, *Fairy-Tale* 303) and "puts a barrier between herself and the world" (De Jong 105), becoming a harder, more detached person. With the "impartial gaze" (*CE* 155) of the cat's eye marble, Elaine is able to view others without emotion or a sense of their humanity. She watches Cordelia, Grace and Carol as they walk and "look[s] at their shapes … the way shadow moves from one leg to another, the blocks of colour, a red square of cardigan, a blue triangle of skirt" (155). She can "see people moving like bright animated dolls" and "can look at their shapes and sizes, their colours, without feeling anything else about them" (141).

This emotionless aestheticisation recurs later in her art classes, where Elaine discovers that she draws human bodies as if they were objects: "I have drawn a person-shaped bottle, inert and without life" (272). Much as she pasted the magazine ladies into scrapbooks as a child, she literally frames others within her paintings, fixing and controlling their appearance through her art. By closing herself off from others, viewing them dispassionately and failing to acknowledge their selfhood, Elaine solipsistically "fails to recognize or effaces the subjectivity of the other" (McCallum 15) in a form of monologism, which "denies the existence outside itself of another consciousness with equal rights and responsibilities, another *I* with equal rights (*thou*)" (Bakhtin, *Problems* 292). At the end of the novel, when she is finally able to view Cordelia with compassion, "the snow in [her] eyes withdraws like smoke" (419) and her full empathetic vision is restored.

In order for Elaine to "restore a self in which distanced reason is united with a feeling heart" (De Jong 104-5), she must learn to "recognize [others] as subjects rather than objects or mirrors of [herself]" (Wilson, *Fairy-Tale* 304). Her empathy for Mrs Smeath is made possible when she is able to see *into* Mrs Smeath's eyes, "defeated eyes, uncertain and melancholy, heavy with unloved duty" (405), and also to see herself *through* Mrs Smeath's eyes: "a frazzle-headed ragamuffin from heaven knows where … how could she know what germs of blasphemy and unfaith were breeding in me? And yet she took me in" (405).[33] Elaine also recognises the malice that went into her paintings of Mrs Smeath,

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[33] This connection between vision and empathy (or lack thereof) also recurs in the novel through the subtly implied association of the heart and the eye. For example, Elaine dreams that Mrs Smeath's

and admits that her somewhat vicious depictions did not do justice to Mrs Smeath's humanity. She gains a stronger sense of self by seeing herself through others' eyes – not to be controlled by this view, as in childhood, but instead to gain *additional* knowledge of herself. Similarly, rather than seeing Cordelia as a dark reflection of herself, she realises that her view of Cordelia supplements Cordelia's selfhood rather than defining it: "But I could give her something you can never have, except from another person: what you look like from outside. A reflection" (411). Selfhood, as in Bakhtin, is shaped partly by "the process of conceptually seeing [one]self by refracting the world through values of the other", and by adding her view of Cordelia to Cordelia's view of herself, Elaine is giving "the gift of a perceptible self" that makes Cordelia's selfhood more complete (Clark and Holquist 73, 79).

This attitude, whether Elaine is aware of it or not, is also present in her own self-portrait, in which a pier-glass reflects a section of the back of her head on which "the hair is different, younger" (408),[34] in a somewhat distorted parallel of her earlier description of Van Eyck's painting *The Arnolfini Marriage*.[35] Her fear of being viewed from behind has evolved into a more mature recognition that she cannot control others' perceptions of her, nor can she *be* controlled by them; they will always be different from her own, but that does not make them lesser. This revelation has remarkably strong resonance with Bakhtin's metaphor of perception as a basis for subjectivity: "For in order to see ourselves, we must appropriate the vision of others … it is only the other's categories that will let me be an object of my own perception… I see my self as I conceive others might see it" (Holquist, *Dialogism* 27).[36] As in Jessica Benjamin's description of intersubjectivity,

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"bad heart floats in her body like an eye, an evil eye, it sees me" (180), and she says of a dissected turtle that "you can see right down into it, right to the heart … It's like a hand, clenching and unclenching. It's like an eye" (170).

[34] The 'younger' appearance of Elaine's hair also ties in to the novel's complex philosophical treatment of space and time, which has exciting parallels to Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope but which is unfortunately outside the scope of this study.

[35] Refer De Jong for a detailed analysis and comparison of the two paintings.

[36] Holquist goes on to explain the metaphor in more detail:

> Let us envisage you and me confronting each other. There are certain things we both perceive, such as the table between us. But there are other things in the same encounter we do not both perceive. The simplest way to state the difference between us is to say that you see things about me (such as, at the most elementary level, my forehead) and the world (such as the wall behind my back) which are out of my sight. The fact that I cannot see such things does not mean they do not exist; we are so arranged that I simply cannot see them. But it is equally the

the reciprocal relationship between self and other is based on each subject's ability to "look two ways simultaneously" in order to recognise the simultaneous mutuality and distinctiveness of their experience (*Bonds* 25-26).

In *The Robber Bride,* mirrors and reflections are used chiefly in the Gothic mode to represent Zenia as the projected double of each of the other women. For example, she first appears in the smoked glass of the Toxique mirror (37), whereupon Tony wonders, "What is she doing here, on this side of the mirror?" (40), and the younger Tony looks into Zenia's eyes and "sees her own reflection: herself, as she would like to be. Tnomerf Ynot. Herself turned inside out" (197). Like Elaine, however, Tony and the others eventually realise that they are not defined by Zenia, nor by the reflections of themselves that she represents. Tony recognises that "you saw what [Zenia] wanted you to see; or else you saw what you yourself wanted to see. She did it with mirrors … but there was nothing behind the two-dimensional image but a thin layer of mercury" (553). In other words, Zenia's power is an illusion since, as Atwood puts it, "power after all is not real, not really there, people give it to each other" (qtd. in Fand, "Moral" 78).

As in Elaine's relationship with Cordelia in *Cat's Eye,* each of the three women in *The Robber Bride* at first feels defined and diminished through comparisons to Zenia. For instance, Tony believes that her own life story dwindles in comparison to Zenia's and seems "no more than an incident, minor, grey, suburban; a sedate parochial anecdote; a footnote" (196). However, they ultimately realise that Zenia's viewpoint, while often revealing, does not show the whole picture. Charis is devastated when she "sees her life the way Zenia must see it: an empty cardboard box, overturned by the side of the road, with nobody in it" (517), but she also recognises the coldness of Zenia's vision when she is able to look through her eyes: "Zenia's eyes won't come off; they're stuck to her own eyes like the scales of a fish. Like smoked glass, they darken everything" (479). Tony gains confidence in her relationship with West, acknowledging with amusement that "maybe Zenia was right: from a certain point of view, West *was* boring. But one woman's meat

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case that I see things you are unable to see, such as your forehead, and the wall behind your back. In addition to the things we see jointly, there are aspects of our situation each of us can see only on our own, i.e. only from the unique place each of us occupies in the situation. (*Dialogism* 34-5)

was another woman's boredom … and that's what a woman like Zenia would never see" (489). Like Elaine, they acquire the ability to "appropriate the vision of others" (Holquist, *Dialogism* 27) while recognising that the *full* picture can only be seen through a composite of different points of view.[37] The subjective, variable nature of Zenia's appearance is made possible in the novel through Atwood's use of magical realism and the fantastical, but it is also an exaggerated expression of Bakhtin's conviction that "perception can only be perceived from a unique point in the spectrum of possible perspectives"[38] (Holquist, *Dialogism* 161), and that "it is not a question of whose version of reality is the 'truth,' but rather whether all available versions are taken into account" (Fand, *Dialogic* 189).

As discussed in Chapter 1, the multi-focalised structure of *The Robber Bride* makes possible a more discursive representation of polyphony than in *Cat's Eye*, with the three protagonists offering different viewpoints of both Zenia and each other in an "incorporation and interweaving of various voices to create a sum far greater and more generative than the parts" (Hohne and Wussow viii). As a result, the later novel's dominant metaphor for dialogism becomes that of voice (particularly as used in narration) rather than vision, as the women break free from prewritten narratives and scripts, and begin to construct their own. While Elaine feels controlled primarily by Cordelia's gaze, Tony, Charis and Roz are most affected by the power of Zenia's narratives, along with the gender-based scripts of self-sacrifice and nurturing as discussed in the previous chapter. Similarly, just as Elaine fights against her own entrapment by attempting to confine others within her views of them, the three women in *The Robber Bride* inadvertently seek to control others by casting them in oversimplified roles within even more oversimplified narratives. Tony cannot let go of her conviction that West was irreparably damaged by Zenia and will never love Tony as much; Charis is unable either to remove Billy from the 'true love' category or to release her guilt about raising her daughter Augusta without a father; and Roz persists in seeing Mitch as the victim of women rather than a man who is responsible for his own actions.

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[37] This revelation is echoed in the increased intricacy of the novel's polyphonic structure near the end of the novel, with each woman's description of her confrontation with Zenia giving irreconcilably different information to the reader.

[38] This language also resonates with feminist standpoint epistemology, "a way of framing what can be known" that is based on the acknowledgement that "what one sees depends entirely on where one is standing while one looks" (Warhol 97).

These victim-oriented narratives also involve passive silence and refusal of dialogue on the part of the women, which prevents any possibility of dialogic empathy within their relationships with others. Charis does not tell Billy about her lack of sexual pleasure and "without anything being said, he simply assumed, as she did, that what she felt about it didn't matter" (246); Roz plays her mother's role whenever Mitch has extra-marital affairs, continually "forgiving him and taking him back just the way her mother had … She [playing] the saint and he the sinner" (460) and not saying a word about how his infidelity affects her; and Tony "wonders about having babies, but doesn't bring up the subject because West has never mentioned it" (213) and "never mention[s] Zenia … because she thinks it will upset West" (213). When the three women learn to refuse the victim role, they simultaneously break their own silences and release their grips on the narratives of others. Tony questions West about his past with Zenia and discovers not only that Zenia is much lower in importance to West than she had supposed, but also that West loves Tony "much more than [he] ever loved Zenia" (490). Roz understands that her identity does not depend on her husband, and that she'll "finally be a widow. No. She'll be something more, something beyond that" (561). Charis looks at her daughter and sees a "small wound" at her centre, then acknowledges that "it belongs to Augusta, not to Charis; it's for Augusta to heal" (542) – Augusta, too, is an independent subject whom Charis should not seek to control, even with love. As the women gain confidence in their own voices rather than in the narratives that are constructed for them, they "begin to liberate themselves from the authority of the other's discourse" (Bakhtin, *Dialogic* 348).

An authoritative discourse (such as a religious, political, parental, or historical one, among others) is a manifestation of centripetal forces that seek to impose a single, unified narrative on events at the expense of heteroglossia and dialogism. According to Bakhtin, an authoritative discourse "demands our unconditional allegiance", "permits no play with … its borders [or] creative stylizing variants on it", and imposes its ideology upon others to the point that its authority is naturalised and differing individual voices are suppressed (*Dialogic* 342-3). Bakhtin contrasts narratives of history with dialogic novels based on the former's need to impose meaning on events, and *The Robber Bride* experiments with similar ideas, as Tony's frequent meditations on the constructed nature of history draw attention to the way meaning is imposed upon both events and people. The novel is framed by the

historian Tony's ruminations on how to construct the story of Zenia, and about the nature of history in general. At the beginning of the novel, Tony does not hesitate to assert that "history is a construct" (4), but she is still hopeful that the puzzle of Zenia can be solved and meaning can be found: "She has a historian's belief in the salutary power of explanations" (4). This urge to unify, whether Tony realises it or not, is a manifestation of monologism and the "centripetal forces that work to make things cohere" (Holquist, *Dialogism* 66), of the need of histories to "create a coherent explanation in the form of a narrative" (Holquist, "Introduction" xxviii).[39]

This urge to unify, however, is a monologic impulse that Tony manages to resist. By the novel's end, Tony realises that Zenia "will only be history if Tony chooses to shape her into history. At the moment she is formless, a broken mosaic; the fragments of her are in Tony's hands, because she is dead, and all of the dead are in the hands of the living" (553), and she is "daunted by the impossibility of accurate reconstruction" (554). Her faith in ideological unity has faded; she is no longer confident that the "stories of history [can] really teach anything at all" (554). Zenia, despite the "dizzying array of meanings" (Bouson, *Margaret Atwood* 20), that are associated with her by the text and its focalisers, does not intrinsically *mean* anything unless the others choose to impose meaning upon her. Ultimately, Tony accepts that the 'truth' about Zenia lies out of reach. Multiple versions of her will continue to exist in the memories of the three women, and they will all increasingly use their voices to "tell stories … about Zenia" (564), but she will never be pinned down. Just as Elaine accepts that she can "no longer control [her] paintings, or tell them what to mean" (409), and that her art is only one voice or viewpoint among many, the three women in *The Robber Bride* tentatively relinquish their control over the narrative of Zenia.[40]

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[39] The same forces are at work when Tony attempts to make her fragmented memories of her mother make sense: "The memory of her is composed of shiny fragments, like a vandalized mosaic … Every once in a while Tony takes out the pieces and arranges and rearranges them, trying to make them fit" (159). Similarly, Roz and her psychiatrist "arrange and rearrange the pieces [of Roz's life], trying to get them to come out better … work[ing] out a tentative plot" (460).

[40] Of course, as discussed in Chapter 1, the novel itself imposes a tight structure on the 'story of Zenia', and the characters' slight adjustments in their attitudes toward Zenia do not translate into a discursive representation of Zenia's point of view. This could be seen as a contradiction, but in my view it is a product of the novel's magical realism and the trope of Zenia as the shadow self – part of the novel's conceit is that Zenia's very existence should be uncertain, which precludes reader access to a direct

While the use of 'voice' in *The Robber Bride* is largely literal, with all three women breaking their silences, it also functions as a feminist metaphor. As Susan Lanser writes, "Few words are as resonant to contemporary feminists as 'voice' … for the collectively and personally silenced the term has become a trope of identity and power" (*Fictions* 3). By telling stories, about Zenia as well as about themselves, the women of *The Robber Bride* exercise their creative agency, just as Elaine does through her artwork in *Cat's Eye*. Their newfound ability to tell their own stories represents their power of self-determination and their freedom from the cultural narratives that they previously allowed to control them. In *Survival,* Atwood outlines various 'victim positions' in relation to Canadian identity that are, as Fand observes, "strikingly parallel to the steps in Atwood's novels for empowering women's subjectivities" ("Moral" 66). In *The Robber Bride,* the three women are eventually able to leave behind the passivity of Atwood's Victim Position Two, which finds its analogue in victim feminism (as discussed earlier) and in which they are "resigned and long-suffering" and "can neither be blamed for [their] position nor be expected to do anything about it" (Atwood, *Survival* 37). In Position Three, they recognise the flaws in their constructions of self and other and "can distinguish between the *role* of Victim (which probably leads [them] to seek victimization even when there's no call for it), and the *objective experience* that is making [them victims]" (38).

Their graduation to Position Four grants them the title of Creative Non-Victim, in which "creative activity of all kinds becomes possible" and they are "able to accept [their] own experience for what it is, rather than having to distort it to make it correspond with others' versions of it" (*Survival* 39). Accordingly, Tony, Charis and Roz no longer allow their stories to be shaped and defined by cultural norms and scripts or by comparisons to others' narratives such as Zenia's. Instead, they can accept their stories for what they are, much as Elaine learns to stop defining herself by comparison to Cordelia, and they can begin to shape their own narratives. Crucially, however, this ability is contingent upon their development of empathy and recognition of others' stories – their narratives, like Tony's histories, avoid monologism. Just as Bakhtin frames the relationship between self and other in terms of "the essentially authorial techniques of dialogue and character

expression of her point of view. It also reflects Atwood's construction of dialogic tension between story and discourse, as discussed in Chapter 1.

formation which permit the poles of consciousness to interact while maintaining their fundamental difference from each other" (Clark and Holquist 80), the characters' ability to author their own unique stories includes a recognition that others will do the same. As Elaine realises of Cordelia, "She will have her own version. I am not the centre of her story, because she herself is that" (411).

The association of narrative, authorship, and female selfhood evokes a long history of feminist criticism that has endeavoured to identify or create a uniquely female literary voice. The characters' development of dialogic empathy, however, suggests that a singular voice is inadequate to the task of shaping a narrative of selfhood. As Karen Hohne and Helen Wussow ask, "what is this emphasis on singularity, on unity, on *voice* rather than *voices*?" (ix). If, as in dialogism, each voice "contain[s] the voices of others", a singular female voice is "at best an illusion, at worst a silencing of the many experiences and contexts about which and within which women have spoken through the ages" (ix). Woman must not so much "write her self … put herself into the text", as in Cixous' vision of *écriture feminine* (1942), but must instead author a narrative of self that includes the other, and recognise that "others are not just the subject matters of [her] story; they are also tellers of their own stories, which compete with [her] own" in what Seyla Benhabib calls a "web of interlocution" (348). Through Atwood's novels, readers are positioned to recognise the multiplicity of voices both within the texts and in the world at large, and empathy becomes not just an effect of narrative technique, but a matter of ideology.

Conclusion

Margaret Atwood has stated that the power of fiction resides "in its capacity to make us see ourselves and the world, and accordingly to modify our versions of them" (Rao, "Writing" 138). She posits that art is not only a "creation to be enjoyed" but also a mirror that shows the reader his own reflection and "behind his own image in the foreground, a reflection of the world he lives in" (Atwood, *Survival* 15); similarly, Bakhtin and his circle have commented upon the way literature both reflects and refracts reality (Bakhtin and Medvedev 124-8). In this conception of the novel, the relationship between the text and the reader is a dialogic one, in which meaning is produced through the interaction of the voices both inside and outside of the text – of the reader, of the author, of the narrator, of the characters, and of the ideologies that surround them. If this hypothesis is accurate, the novel could conceivably work upon readers' views of others, cultivate empathy, and lead to social change. This goal, of course, is far beyond the scope of this thesis, and indeed beyond the scope of current cognitive, literary, and social research. What a novel *can* do, however, is use narrative to foster certain perceptions and attitudes in the reader. Feminist fiction in particular has always been "at the forefront of [the] struggle to make new meanings … [which] is an essential part not only of literary experimentation, but also of social change" (Cranny-Francis 25), and texts such as Atwood's suggest a model of feminist narratology in which the interaction and tension between story and discourse could influence the views of the attentive reader. Even if narrative empathy does not lead to social change, the novel can use both story and discourse to demonstrate a model of self/other relationships that we might desire to see in the world. By using ideology to shape narratology, we can at least hope that narratology will shape (reader) ideology.

In *Cat's Eye* and *The Robber Bride,* Atwood uses the figure of the other/Other woman to interrogate the way women are divided, both within and among themselves, by the ideologies and schemata of femininity that persist in both literature and life. The novels emphasise the constantly changing, shifting nature of the physical and political worlds, of selfhood, and of ideologies, with feminism broadening to a more inclusive and nuanced political project. Just as the divisive essentialism of certain aspects of second-wave

feminism evolves into an appreciation of difference, Elaine, Tony, Charis, and Roz develop dialogic empathy for the women they once perceived as other. As this thesis has shown, an approach to these novels that combines cognitive studies of empathy with Bakhtinian dialogism reveals a paradigm of dialogic empathy in which narratology reflects ideology, in what Bakhtin and his circle call a 'sociological poetics' (Bakhtin and Medvedev 124). Story and discourse compete and overlap to encourage an active reading position, and the female reader is positioned to develop empathetic views of other women that, in a reflection of the ideology of intersectional feminism, are also respectful of difference.

The constant battle between Bakhtinian centripetal and centrifugal forces, in which the former "tends to push things toward a central point" and the latter "tends to push things away from a central point and out in all directions" (Klages 138), is reflected both in feminism, which struggles to balance political unity with an appreciation of difference, and in the discourse surrounding the concept of empathy. If empathy is encouraged by perceived similarity, as cognitive scientists suggest, how can we empathise with the other while still recognising and respecting difference? As Keen points out, the dependence of empathy upon similarity "limits the extension of empathy to all human beings on the basis of perceived otherness" (*Empathy* 164), which casts considerable doubt on its ability to bridge social divides. Keen's research suggests that the novel can override this phenomenon, since empathy for fictional characters, unlike real-world empathy, "appears to require only minimal elements of identity, situation, and feeling" (*Empathy* xii) – but as she indicates, the subsequent transference of this empathy to the real world is dubious. Cognitive studies tend to elide differences of (for example) race and class in favour of a focus on the inherent biological/neural similarity of all humans; psychologists insist upon a common "underlying basis for emotions" (Keen, *Empathy* 161); Bracher's work on schema criticism hinges largely upon developing schemata that "enable one to recognize the profound interconnectedness and sameness that subtend to all differences across groups and individuals" (*Literature* 291). Surely, however, this emphasis on universal traits carries the risk of monologically erasing difference, something that has proved so historically problematic. Postcolonial theorists, for example, equate the assumption of a "common humanity" with the "failure to acknowledge or value cultural difference"

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(Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 235), and this failure has strong parallels with the damaging essentialist concept of Woman.

The recognition of difference and the abolition of essentialist thought have been important aspects of feminism in recent years, as theorists of intersectionality have emphasised the importance of replacing unitary notions of Woman with "plural and complexly constructed conceptions of social identity, treating gender as one relevant strand among others, attending also to class, race, ethnicity, age, and sexual orientation" (Fraser and Nicholson 234-5). The struggle, however, has been to retain some measure of solidarity along with this respect for difference; as Teresa de Lauretis asserts, "If 'woman' is a fiction … and if there are no women as such, then the very issue of women's oppression would appear to be obsolete and feminism itself would have no reason to exist" (356). A conversion of intersectional philosophy to narrative poetics is still in its early stages, and as Lanser observes, cognitive narratology has proved problematic for some feminists, who "find its penchant for universal theories of mind to be as problematic as the universal structures proposed by classical narratology" ("Gender" par. 21). The challenge for feminist narratology as well as for feminism is to discover or develop a model that finds common ground without regressing to essentialism, and respects difference without seeing it as divisive. This is what Susan Stanford Friedman describes in a political context when she calls for a reinvention of "a singular feminism that incorporates myriad and often conflicting cultural and political formations in a global context" (4); this is what Hohne and Wussow describe in narratological terms when they call for a feminist dialogics that "emphasize[s] the relationships between race, class, gender, time, and space" and is also unified by the "cultural continent" of matriarchy (xiv).

As I have shown through an analysis of Atwood's texts, the concept of dialogic empathy goes a considerable way toward balancing these tensions. The characters of *Cat's Eye* and *The Robber Bride* learn to empathise with women whom they see as other while simultaneously respecting the autonomous selfhood of these women, and similarly, readers of the texts are positioned to identify emotionally with the protagonists while also viewing them from a more distanced standpoint. Strategies such as focalisation and

emotive language evoke cognitive and affective empathy for the characters, even as tension between story and discourse suggests alternative perceptions, and patterns of imagery encourage the reader to view the text as an artefact. Genre scripts are broken down in parallel with the dismantling of schemata, positioning the reader to reflect upon the way culture and literature shape her own views of self and other. Intersubjectivity is represented through metaphors of vision, voice, and authorship, prompting the reader to consider the multiplicity of perceptions and voices within the novels and also in the world at large. Dialogic empathy involves both the affective sharing of emotions and the cognitive perspective-taking process of seeing the other's point of view, and due to its multiplicity of voices, it also avoids the danger of the "complete fusion" with the other which would "preclude the difference required by dialogue" (Clark and Holquist 78).

While the novel may have the ability to cultivate empathy, this empathy is unlikely to have real-world effects unless it is accompanied by dialogue. Bakhtin has suggested that the novel is the ideal medium for dialogue – between characters, between reader and characters, between reader and author, and between the different ideologies that these groups represent – and as Keith Oatley argues, "if this is true, the novel, in its deepest meanings, is about meetings and their emotional and intellectual consequences for us" ("Meetings" 444). Bakhtin's vision of the novel is of a work that can continue to foster dialogue with changing times and ideologies, as "insofar as the work continues to live, it must be engaged in dialogue" (Clark and Holquist 243). Just as Elaine, Tony, Charis and Roz learn to view Cordelia and Zenia with openness rather than fixing them within restrictive schemata and closed narratives, the 'meaning' of novels constantly shifts as considerations of gender, race, class, sexuality, and culture are brought to bear on our interpretations. While the novel may not have the power to effect social change, it *does* have the power to model the change the author situates as desirable, and with the new insights of cognitive narratology, we are beginning to understand how the influence of narrative could result in improved attitudes toward the other. Gloria Anzaldúa has written that "nothing happens in the 'real' world unless it first happens in the images in our heads" (87) – perhaps now that cognitive science is able to provide more access to the images in our heads, the novel will truly gain the ability to effect change in the world.

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