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## **Reliving the Past for Recreating the Present in Margaret Atwood's Selected Poems**

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### **Abstract :**

For centuries poets tend to utilize the past in their poetry, however their approaches are various. The Canadian icon and phenomenal poet and novelist Margaret Atwood's approach is unique as she revise while others simply retell past stories. She delves deeply into the rich past, reliving its stories whether it was taken from myths, history, or fairy tales, revising them to present a new version of the old stories, but this time from women's perspective. She invested heavily in the past to recreate something new, something that is going to make the present liveable and to fortify the future.

Her literary oeuvre is rich with revised poems. The poems usually tackle serious issues that affect the lives of women. She chooses the victimized muted misrepresented female protagonists, those who were silenced and subjugated by patriarch society, revising them and endows them with voices, awareness, power, free-will and autonomous identity. Reliving the past and recreating of the gendered prescribed roles is a means of survival that will help women to properly live the present and ensure a better future.

The past is, undeniably, a reckoned and defining force that might influence and even shape the present as well as the future. Many poets utilize the past in their writings aiming to control this force to create a liveable present and fortifying, at the same time, the future. For the poets the past is an inexhaustible source of inspiration, its wealth of stories, legends, and myths represents a world of limitless possibilities for the poetic innovation.

Conventionally, coded messages to women that presented limited gender roles are embedded in the past stories. While the past stories revolve around the glorification of men as aspiring, brave, adventurous, warriors, in short, unconquerable heroes, women are

expected to be gentle, submissive, timid, and silent. In addition, to be true women, they are not to be creative or ambitious, and most importantly of all, they are not independent and completely helpless without men. For years women were trapped in these prescribed gender roles, they had to willingly embrace the roles of wives and mothers set by the patriarchal society. The submission of women to this stereotype hindered their lives and creativity and literally confiscates their free will and freedom.

In literature in general and poetry in particular, the subjugated position of women in patriarchal society causes the absence of distinguished women's literary traditions. At the same time, the male tradition of literature presented prejudiced representation of the women. A drastic change becomes a persisting need and women writers and poets had their own agendas to make the change possible. In addition to the utilization of different literary genres, the revisiting and re-creating of past stories and the archetypal roles assigned to women turns to be one of the commonest agendas of the twentieth century feminist literary traditions. The reclamation of the past makes cultural change possible; it is a kind of "cultural purgation".<sup>1</sup>

In one of her lectures Margaret Atwood claimed the past as her own, she said that the "past no longer belongs only to those lived in it; the past belongs to those who claim it, and are willing to explore it, and to infuse it with meaning for those alive today. The past belongs to us, because we are the ones who need it."<sup>2</sup>

To live the present the past is desperately needed, however, the past is not to be accepted as it is since the credibility of the past is questioned. After all, the past is but records of what could be true or inaccurate invented stories. For Margaret Atwood:

the past is made of paper; sometimes, now it's made of microfilm and CD-ROMs, but ultimately they too are made of paper. What is on the paper? The same things that are on the paper now. Records, documents, newspaper stories, eyewitness reports, gossip and rumour and opinion and contradiction.<sup>3</sup>

As past information and stories are unreliable, since they could be easily invented and it is hard to check and verify, past's exploration and investigation are required. More importantly, to infuse the past with meaning the poet had to imagine, invent, and recreate a past that will help to readjust the modern world making the present endurable

and worth living. Margaret Atwood reuses and retells the old stories revising them to interweave the old stories with the feminist issues. In her hands, the old stories, taken from different sources, are given a new woman-centered perspective as well as contemporary landscapes, characters and problems.

The first source for past stories is mythology, to be precise male-authored mythologies. Myths have greatly attracted women poets for years and Margaret Atwood too fell under their spell, according to her:

Strong myths never die. Sometimes they die down, but they don't die out. They double back in the dark, they re-embody themselves, they change costumes, they change key, they speak in new languages, they take on other meanings... But myths can be used- as they have been, so frequently- as the foundation stones for new versions, new renderings- renderings that have, in turn their own contexts that find their meanings within their own historical moments.<sup>4</sup>

Though Myths are influential, inspiring, and mesmerizing they are very challenging at the same time, as feminist critic and poet Alicia Ostriker explains:

At first thought, mythology seems an inhospitable terrain for a woman writer. There we find the conquering gods and heroes, the deities of pure thought and spirituality so superior to Mother Nature, there we find the sexually wicked Venus, Circe, Pandora,

Helen, Medea, Eve, and the virtuously passive Iphigenia, Alcestis, Mary and Cinderella. It is thanks to myth we believe that woman must be either "angel" or "monster".<sup>5</sup>

In her poetry and since the beginning of her career, Margaret Atwood extensively utilized myths and mythical figures. For her, cultural changes can be made possible by exposing and revising the misrepresentation of women roles in myths to present subversive, more realistic versions of the stories based on the reality of female experiences. She revises many well-known myths giving the passive, silent, and victimized heroines, like Circe, the Sirens, Eurydice, Athena, Daphne and Helen of Troy, a voice and setting them free of the male prescribed roles of either "angel" or "monster". Hence, revision turned to be an essential life-changing act; a strategy for survival.<sup>6</sup>

In Margaret Atwood's "Circe/Mud Poems", a group of twenty-four poems, from her 1974 volume *You Are Happy*, the poet challenges the mythical stereotype of the woman as either angelically passive or devilishly deceitful and cunning. She reaches back towards the old myth, the past, to make a change, a change that is going to affect not only the present but also the future. The way the poet chooses to change the present is by reliving and recreating the old myth reconstructing women's patriarchal predetermined roles. Challenging the masculine tradition, the poet presents the story of the silent female figure in Homer's *Odyssey*, Circe. The mythical Circe is an intriguing figure who turned to be a very important figure in the twentieth century revisionary mythmaking.

Homer dehumanized Circe in the old myth. She is seen and described only through Odysseus' eyes, who shaped her character from patriarchal point of view to serve only male's ends. Her real role and value in the whole myth are determined by how useful she was for the male hero. Though she is presented as a powerful goddess, a lethal and sinister sorceress and seductress, she is in fact a passive and silent victim who is imprisoned in a monstrous and infamous role. On the other hand, Margaret Atwood's Circe is more like earthy, ordinary, and vulnerable woman who is simply seeking love and hoping to live a normal life with the man she loved. In the poem, Circe is not endowed with actual mythical power but the poet revises, contemporizes, and humanizes her giving her a voice, the power to choose, and awareness.

Giving Homer's silent female character a voice is an important and outstanding change. Circe herself retells the old masculine myth from her own point of view presenting alternatives to old established roles and the myth's plot. Circe in the poems "seems to be speaking with two voices, one of the mythical prophetess and another one of the contemporary woman with a feminist consciousness."<sup>7</sup>

At the very beginning of her retelling and the first thing to do is to defy the wrongly construed notion that she turned men into animals, saying:

It was not my fault, these animals  
who once were lovers  
It was not my fault the snouts  
and hooves, the tongues

...

I did not add the shaggy  
rugs, the tusked masks,  
they happened (203)<sup>8</sup>

She holds no responsibility since men are turning themselves to animals.

Then, she revealed a sad and painful fact about her subjugation, as well as that of all women through generations, when she affirms: "I made no choice/ I decided nothing" (205). In the old myth, Odysseus' arrival on her island was not her choice; he was not invited but imposed on her: "One day you simply appeared on your stupid boat,/your killer's hands, ... pretending to be - what ?a survivor?" (205). She gradually revealed Odysseus' real character, though in the original myth he is presented as noble, brave, adventurous, and unconquerable hero. Circe "dethrones him from his mythic height"<sup>9</sup> revealing his untrustworthiness, arrogance, greed, trickery and oppressive:

Those who say they want nothing  
want everything.

It was not this greed  
that offended me, it was the lies.(205)

Though she is the one who revealed the flaws of Odysseus, she cannot help but to fall in love with him. However, long before she became tired and bored of his mask of heroism that is why she aimed to humanize him by taking him out of the mythical heroic role. Circe wanted to break free and "to escape with him from the conventions of myth which can imprison and indeed destroy."<sup>10</sup> She is aware of the importance of the change and she yearns to be real, to get rid of her predetermined mythical gender related role, and to live a real life but Odysseus was not ready to give up his heroic role, she scornfully asked him:

Don't you get tired of killing  
those whose deaths have been predicted  
and are therefore dead already?

Don't you get tired of wanting  
to live forever?

Don't you get tired of saying Onward? (206)

Through the lines, Circe tuned Odysseus into a mocked hero, and undermining at the same time centuries of male vanity, heroism, and feverish quest for fame and immortality.

She made a very brave and important choice; she chose to leave Odysseus when she realized that he wanted to turn her into a "Mud Woman". Circe told the story of the mud woman based on what a traveller told her about how "he and another boy constructed a woman / out of mud. She began at the neck and ended at the knees / and elbows: they stuck to the essentials" (214). The mud woman is simply a headless body that is created to satisfy males' desires. She is like a puppet forever silent, with no desires and has no needs or demands. Odysseus apparently wanted to reduce Circe to be a mud woman, this frustrated and hurt her, and she angrily asked him "Why do you need this? / What do you want me to admit?" (210). Then she added, "Is this what you would like me to be, this mud woman? Is/ this what I would like to be? It would be so simple." (224)

For Circe this moment is critical as she realized that she is going to be reduced to a mere body and not a woman so she had two choices. The easiest is to simply surrender, and to relive the passive, silent, and monstrous role created for her, also to mold herself to become the mud woman. Yet, Circe cannot do it, not now while she had the power to choose, the power to change and to release herself from masculine mythical convention. This leads to the second choice that is to sacrifice her love and be alone but free from the misogynistic plot of the old myth. She refused to become the mud woman, hurt and offended, she ordered Odysseus to "get out of here" (216).

Her rejection to be locked in the past, in frozen evil and notorious mythical role, is a rejection of the subjection and exploitation of women. Her awareness of the importance of the change and her desire to free herself is an attempt to relive and recreate the old story. For Margaret Atwood the liberation of Circe and other female characters is not the most important aim to achieve, as she is more concerned with their survival in the ruthless roles imposed on them. Reliving the past and recreating of the gendered prescribed roles is a means of survival that will help to properly live the present and ensure a better future.

At the end, Circe achieved her liberation in the last poem of "Circe/ Mud Poems" entitled "Book of Ancestors". She renounced and mocked all old myths, saying : "So much for the gods and their / static demands... / History / is over" (239) This rejection is a clear statement that she is successfully breaking free from the old myth and she is now free to choose the role she is going to play and the life she will live.

Another mythical female figure whose transformation is fascinating is Eurydice. She is transformed from obedient, helpless, and silenced figure into a powerful independent woman who speaks out loud her thoughts and feelings and who is able to take life changing decisions. Margaret Atwood upsets the patriarchal tradition again by giving Eurydice a voice to tell the truth about the original myth. What Eurydice revealed is appalling, that forces the readers to reconsider the original myth.

In the ancient myth, Orpheus lost his wife Eurydice shortly after their marriage when she was fatally bitten by a snake. Endowed with his musical skills, Orpheus descended to Hades in an attempt to get her back and by charming Pluto, and his wife Persephone, he succeeded in convincing them, but under one condition. Eurydice was to follow him while walking out of the caves of the Underworld, but he should not look back at her until they are back to the Upper world, else he would lose her. However, Orpheus turned and looked at Eurydice, she immediately began to fade away, and he lost her forever. Their story is a tragic story of a love that seems to transcend death. Yet, the story told from Eurydice's perspective frustrates such assumptions and proves that it is not love, it is rather Orpheus's self-cantered need, arrogance, and ego disguised as love.

In "Orpheus 1" from Margaret Atwood's *Selected Poems II: 1976 – 1986*, (1987) and at the very beginning of the poem, Eurydice implied that going back to the world of the living was not her choice:

You walked in front of me,  
pulling me back out  
to the green light that had once  
grown fangs and killed me.  
I was obedient, but  
numb, like an arm

gone to sleep; the return  
to time was not my choice. (106)<sup>11</sup>

Eurydice seemed reluctant to follow Orpheus out of the underworld at the same time he was carelessly "pulling" her back, against her will, to the place that killed her once. She revealed her passivity, lack of power implying that she is forced to fit within the model that had been set by patriarchal society saying, "I was obedient," "the return / to time was not my choice," "I was used to silence" (106), "I had to / fold like a gray moth" (107). Even when she was following him it is not out of love but because she felt compelled to do it as "It was this hope of yours that kept me following" (106). She explicitly admitted that the bond between them is so weak, "something [that] stretched between us" and the love is but an "...old leash"(106) that she does not consider as love, regardless of what Orpheus "...might call it" (106). Her words challenged the male-focused mythical tradition shattering the old concept that Orpheus is the hero and immortalized tragic lover.

Eurydice's clear resentment towards Orpheus is justified. She is frustrated with his inability to see her as an independent woman with free will, rather than an object of desire:

Before your eyes you held steady  
the image of what you wanted  
me to become: living again.

...

I was your hallucination,... (107)

Eurydice is not an individual living entity but an "image" created based on the memory of the woman he loved and lost. She existed only as he wants her to be, she is his "hallucination", a ghostly muted figure. What Orpheus wants for her is to be "living again", he wants to bring her and her love for him back to life.

Yet, due to his arrogance and egocentric, he failed to notice that Eurydice is changed "already new skin was forming on" her.(107) Her horrible death and journey to the underworld had transformed her utterly. In the original myth, Eurydice's pain was ignored while Orpheus' suffering and emotions were prioritized. His fault and failure go unnoticed and though Orpheus is held responsible for Eurydice's second death and her agony, but he was presented as the tragic hero who arouses readers' sympathy rather than Eurydice.



However, Eurydice in Margaret Atwood's hands is no more passive and obedient. She boldly asserts herself by evolving to be an independent powerful woman. In the darkness of Hell, Eurydice discovered a source of power and hope within her own being. She did not let herself be trapped within the myth, so she got empowerment outside of patriarchal myth. For Eurydice, she chose death and to go back to Hell rather than the life with Orpheus. She refused to be an extension or a shadow of her husband, even if that means to stay in Hell forever.

Eurydice insisted that the moment Orpheus turned back to look at her, she had already left, she was lost forever: "...when you turned/ and called to me because you had/ already lost me..."(107). Though he was ordered not to turned and look back at her he turned anyway, his carless and naive action force her to undergo death for the second time. However, it was not his look but rather his treatment of her as an object that forced her to leave. Her abandonment of Orpheus "undercuts one of the most enduring hero myths".<sup>12</sup>

Eventually it was not Orpheus who braves death but rather Eurydice. She bravely went back to Hell to free and assert herself and her identity as an independent woman who have a voice of her own and free will. Eurydice made the choice that she was denied in the original myth: to "let go"(107) and seize the opportunity for an alternate life.

In the last line of the poem, Eurydice voiced her protest against Orpheus desire to compel her to identify with his point of view, and to accept the role imposed on her by the male constructed myth. She addressed him saying, " You could not believe I was more than your echo." (107). He failed to see her as a person rather than an "image" of what he want or his "echo", thus he failed to win her back to him. He ultimately should accept the fact that she is powerful enough and ready to finally "let go".

Through her retelling of the myth, Eurydice "shatters the romantic aura of the Orphic myth... Orpheus, the immortal lover gets transmuted into a self-centred brute"<sup>13</sup>, Orpheus loss of his beloved is seen as a "failure", Eurydice said:

Though I knew how this failure would hurt you, I had to fold like a gray moth and let go. (107)

To lose Eurydice forever when her death became irrevocable did not hurt Orpheus but his “failure” did. It was all about his ego that is disguised as love.

In her poem "Orpheus 1", Margaret Atwood breaks the patriarchal tradition by challenging the commonly accepted notion that his myth is a tragic love story. Moreover, she disrupts the idealized gender role providing power and voice for the minor silent protagonist, Eurydice, to narrate her story. She turned to be an emblem of victimization who refused subjection and free herself.

In her poem "Half Hanged Mary", from *Morning in the Burned House* (1995), Margaret Atwood introduces another victimized female figure who turned to be an icon of free will and women's suffering to achieve it. The poet steps back into the realm of history this time to relive the story of a real woman, her famous "witch" ancestor Mary Webster.

Mary Webster was accused of witchcraft in 1683, and with no evidence at all she was proven innocent in court, however her neighbor carried out her hanging. Miraculously, Mary survived the hanging and she lived to tell her story. Mary narrated not only her own story and suffering but that of all the innocent women who have already been hanged. The poem is told from Mary's perspective, it is divided into stanzas with different length and no specific form, and that could be simply a reflection of the confusion in Mary's mind due to the horrible act of violence she underwent.

Mary is telling her story gradually taking the reader with her into that horrible journey. First she described the day of her condemnation, a dull and ordinary day but there is a bad omen as "Rumour was loose in the air/ hunting for some neck to land on", (58)<sup>14</sup> and she was the victim of this rumour. Then she bitterly but with sarcastic tone stated the reasons behind her accusation of witchcraft:

I was hanged for living alone  
for having blue eyes and a sunburned skin,  
tattered skirts, few buttons,  
a weedy farm in my own name,  
and a surefire cure for warts;(59)

Basically, Mary was punished for "transgressing the patriarchal law that confines women to dependency and inactivity."<sup>15</sup> She was the ideal person for such charge lonely, independent, somewhat eccentric,

and vulnerable, but above all and most importantly, a woman, she added:

Oh yes, and breasts,  
and a sweet pear hidden in my body.  
Whenever there's talk of demons  
these come in handy. (59)

According to her, being a woman is the main reason for targeting her, however, what really affected her is not only men's hatred but that "their own evil turned inside out like a glove, / and me wearing it. ", her hanging causes men's evil to transfer to her, she is not evil by herself. She debunked that patriarchally constructed association of women with evil. The evil these men attribute to women is projected clearly in Mary's hanging, which is a manifestation of their own evil.

Moreover, Mary felt deeply frustrated with the women, once her friends, now they considered her evil witch and attended her hanging. She said, "I can see their fear." (60) the fear seems to be of her power as a witch, but in fact, it is more of their identification with her. They know that she is just like them and hence they might end just like her dangling from a rope. She desperately addressed them saying:

Help me down? You don't dare.

...

I understand. You can't spare  
anything, a hand, a piece of bread, a shawl  
against the cold,  
a good word. (60)

Though, she was angry and frustrated with her old friends' inaction and renouncing of her, but deep inside her she knew that these women are submissive and powerless as she used to be. Their crippling fear of breaking the social rules or crossing the boundaries makes them accept social injustice and the inhuman act of hanging innocent woman.

Mary then turned to speak with God and began to question her faith and religion in general. She felt resentful, abandoned, and lonely, she is losing faith, she painfully declared:

Faith, Charity, and Hope  
are three dead angels

falling like meteors or  
burning owls across  
the profound blank sky of Your face. (62)

In the poem, Margaret Atwood constructs “a mythical paradigm for women that may subtly interrogate the traditional Christian message of sacrifice and forgiveness.”<sup>16</sup>

In 3am, after hours of being hanging alive and in her torment and despair, she persistently affirmed her innocence in the eye of God:

... I call  
on you as witness I did  
no crime I was born I have borne I  
bear I will be born this is  
a crime I will not  
acknowledge ...(65)

She did nothing wrong and her only crime is that she exist, a crime that she will never admit, she is not defeated yet, the stanza ends with " I will not give in".

With the raise of the sun of the next day, Mary had gone through tremendous change; the ordeal had changed her utterly. She was not reborn but rather lived through death:

I would like to say my hair turned white  
overnight, but it didn't.  
Instead it was my heart:  
bleached out like meat in water. (66)

Although Mary survived the hanging, the physical death, but she did not escape the spiritual death. Her heart is gone “bleached out” with no love, mercy, compassion, or goodness due to the hate of her townspeople.

The next morning when townspeople came to "harvest" her "corpse", they were shocked to find her still alive, she contemptuously addressed them saying:

surprise, surprise:  
I was still alive.  
Tough luck, folks,  
I know the law:  
you can't execute me twice  
for the same thing. How nice.(67)

According to the law she cannot be punished again for the same crime and that gives her a sense of prevail over them; she defeated them just as she defeated death. However, her cynical speech gives the townspeople, if not the readers as well, chills.

There is a clear and profound change that happened to Mary, her haunting experience seems to empower her. Mary is poor and uncanny woman who was subject to patriarchal suppression, violence, and injustice. She went through sever, life-changing struggles for survival, and eventually she gained her autonomous identity and free will.

She was unable to living up to the patriarchal constructed stereotype of a woman, and accordingly she was condemned to be evil, to be a witch. The poet is "well aware of the higher moral expectations that women face, and also of the social consequences of not living up to these exacting, and unrealistic, standards".<sup>17</sup> In her lecture "The Curse of Eve" , Margaret Atwood insists that :

. . . if you are not an angel, if you happen to have human failings, as most of us do, especially if you display any kind of strength or power, creative or otherwise, then you are not merely human, you're worse than human. You are a witch, a Medusa, a destructive, powerful, scary monster.<sup>18</sup>

In her poem " Half Hanged Mary", the last and powerful words of Mary to her townspeople:" Before, I was not a witch. / But now I am one." (67) prove that women are not evil and can do no evil transgression but they are turned to be so. Alicia Ostriker suggests that what Margaret Atwood" implies, as do other women who examine the blackness that has represented femaleness so often in our culture, is that the female power to do evil is a direct function of her powerlessness to do anything else."<sup>19</sup> The powerlessness of Mary towards those hurt and suppress her transformed her into a "witch". She is forced to live—and re-live forever—her fate that is prescribed by the patriarchal society, she is not a witch, but by embracing this role, she had been granted power, freedom, and free will. Being a witch she felt liberated "I can now say anything I can say,"(68) as they cannot convicted her again. By telling her story, Mary provided the possibility of survival for other women by exposing the injustice of

the society and the notorious witch trials, which aimed to suppress and control women.

In the same collection, *Morning in the Burned House* (1995), Margaret Atwood presented another motivating female figure, but this time she is taken from another rich source of inspiration, that is fairy tales. "Girl Without Hands" discusses a critical issue that face women, known as "the Rapunzel Syndrome"<sup>20</sup>, when life denying women enclosed themselves in internalized isolation, and became unable to communicate with others. The girl without hands is in fact one of the two women in the poem.

The first to address in the poem is a modern, urban unnamed woman, "you", who imprisons herself in her little self-made world, in a "dead space"; she is feeling unable to go on:

No one can enter that circle  
 you have made, that clean circle  
 of dead space you have made  
 and stay inside,  
 mourning because it is clean.(112)

She surrounded herself with a "clean circle", isolated in her sanctuary from all that is around her and mourned.

The second woman is a reworking of the heroine of the fairy tale "Girl Without Hands". In the original fairy tale, the girl's father unwittingly sold her to the devil, but being pious, she was able to ward off the devil. Not keeping his end of the bargain, and to save himself the father was ordered by the devil to chop off his daughter's hands. Eventually, the girl made her decision to leave her family and seek her fortune in the world, despite her father's protestations and refusal. The rest of the story is a recount of her further trials and tribulations after she marries a king, before she finally reached the happily ever after ending.<sup>21</sup>

In the poem, Margaret Atwood presents the handless girl saying:

Then there's the girl, in the white dress,  
 meaning purity, or the failure  
 to be any colour. She has no hands, it's true.  
 The scream that happened to the air  
 when they were taken off  
 surrounds her now like an aureole

of hot sand, of no sound.

Everything has bled out of her.(113)

The girl in white dress had undergone a horrible act of violence; her hands had been violently chopped off. The violent haunting imagery reveals the girl's profound agony. The amputation of her hands is seen as a conceding to patriarchy, a manifestation of the patriarchal need to mutilated and cripple women, to demonstrate power.

In fact, both women are victims of patriarchal mutilation, past trauma of loss and suffering ruins their lives. However, they had undergone different kinds of mutilation, the girl without hands suffered from physical mutilation, while the first woman, the "you" is symbolically handless; the poet addresses her saying: "... you can't hold it,/ you can't hold any of it. Distance surrounds you," (112). She is unable to touch, communicate, or interact with the world, as she had already isolated and imprison herself in her self-made circle. Despite her internalized isolation and lack of communication with others, the poet insists that the girl without hands is the only person who can relate to "you", since "Only a girl like this/ can know what's happened to you." (113) ,as both of them are victims.

Nevertheless, being a victim changed the life of the handless girl, she is transformed into altruistic healer, since "victimization holds promise of survival.<sup>22</sup> By revising the original fairy tale, Margaret Atwood empowers the girl, not by giving her a voice but by giving her a healing power, she was endowed with a healing "touch":

If she were here she would  
reach out her arms towards  
you now, and touch you  
with her absent hands  
and you would feel nothing, but you would be  
touched all the same. (113)

The non-physical touch feels like "nothing", but it really changes everything. The girl without hands turns to be a source of inspiration , a life-changing agent who would help to guide the isolated and desperate woman's soul back to life, moving her out of the "dead space" in which she imprison herself. Although the poet stated earlier that "Everything has bled out of her," (113) yet, the girl

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still "bridges the distance, partly of past and present, to heal both herself and others. " <sup>23</sup>

Margaret Atwood's reworking of myth, historical stories, and fairy tales contributes to change the patriarchal stereotypes of women characters, and by changing the misrepresentation of women's roles cultural change as whole become possible.

The patriarchal mechanisms in literature is to present male-constructed model for women, usually passive, submissive, silent, weak and most importantly male dependent, to subjugate women. However, these models are not the only roles provided for women, there are other roles for those who refuse to succumb. There are the roles of the witches, evil goddess, seductress, notorious woman, in short all the evil roles. These models set for women were projected on the society and culture hence the women were forced and subjected to fit in either role designed for them, submissive or evil.

In her poems, there is always a change that promises different endings and provides new possibilities and opportunities for alternative life for the women in the real world. Being entrapped in gendered determined roles suffocates women and prevents them from expressing themselves freely or demonstrates and enhances their creativity.

Margaret Atwood challenges the patriarchal literary tradition. In her poetry, she explores women's entrapment in their male-determined gender roles whether it is in myths, history, or fairy tales. She revises the old women's roles, exposing their victimization, and endows them with awareness, voice, power to choose, and free will. Her literary work is the promotion of gender empowerment and prioritization of women's voice

Her women storytellers are victimized and oppressed women whose silence has been forced on them. They are feeling deeply dissatisfied with being presented as mere puppet or a toy, an object of male desires, with no feelings or identity. Atwood steps in to make a change, she did not only enable women protagonists to narrate their stories but also she enables them to seize control, to make the choice that they are not given in the original stories.

Therefore, by reliving the old stories and revising them the poet sets female protagonists free as well as all the generations of women to come. For her, women needs true representation, and their



transformation is going to contribute to their empowerment as well as it will help to project women's feelings, opinions, and their identity. Margaret Atwood reworking of myth, historical stories, and fairy tales contributes in changing the patriarchal stereotypes of women characters, and by utilizing this change social and cultural change become possible to achieve.

### Notes

1. Veronica Leigh House, "Backward to Your Sources, Sacred Rivers: A Transatlantic Feminist Tradition of Mythic Revision", PhD thesis, (The University of Texas at Austin, 2006), p.6.
2. Margaret Atwood, *In Search of Alias Grace: on Writing Canadian Historical Fiction*, (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1997), p.39.
3. Ibid, pp.31-32.
4. Funda Basak Dorschel, "Female Identity: Rewritings of Greek and Biblical Myths by Contemporary Women Writers", PhD thesis, (Middle East Technical University, 2011), pp.35-36.
5. Ibid, p. 109.
6. See Margaret Atwood *Survival: A thematic Guide to Canadian* (Toronto: Anansi, 1972)
7. Kiriaki Massoura, "The Politics of Body and Language in the Writing of Margaret Atwood", PhD thesis, (University of York, 2001), P.62.
8. All quotations from Margaret Atwood's *Selected Poems, 1965-1975*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1976) unless otherwise noted, are from this edition, and only pages' number will appear in parentheses.
9. Nita P. Ramaiya, "The Exploration of the Self in the Poetry of Margaret Atwood", PhD thesis, (S.N.D.T. Women's University, 1995), p.781.
10. Massoura, p.67.
11. Margaret Atwood, *Selected Poems II: 1976 – 1986*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987).
12. Jeffrey Wainwright, "Female Metamorphoses: Carol Ann Duffy's Ovid", *Choosing Tough Words': The Poetry of Carol Ann Duffy*, Angelica Michelis and Antony Rowland eds. (Manchester :Manchester UP, 2003), p.51.

13. Rani Mathew, "Revision as Art and Medium: A Study of Revisionist Mythmaking in Feminist English Poetry", PhD thesis,(University of Sanskrit, 2011),p. 253.
14. Margaret Atwood, *Morning in the Burned House*,(Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company,1995).
15. Mathew, p.144.
16. Sarah A. Appleton (ed.), *Once upon a Time Myth, Fairy Tales and Legends in Margaret Atwood's Writings* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008). p.7.
17. Tina Pylvainen, "Dawn of Discovery: Margaret Atwood's *Morning in the Burned House*" MA thesis,( Lakehead University, 1996),p.94.
18. Margaret Atwood, "The Curse of Eve--Or, What I Learned in School ",*Canadian Woman Studies*, 1( 3) 1979, p.25.
19. Alicia Ostriker, *The Thieves of Language: The Emergence of Women's Poetry in America* (London: Women's Press ,1987), p.222.
20. For further explanation of the theme of "Rapunzel Syndrome", see Atwood's *Survival: A thematic Guide to Canadian*,pp. 209–10.
21. Maria Tatar, *The Hard Facts of the Grimm's Fairy Tales*(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), p.9.
22. Mathew, p.145.
23. Stephen Benson (ed),*Contemporary Fiction and the Fairy Tale* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press,2008),P.106.

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استرجاع الماضي لإعادة خلق الحاضر في قصائد مختارة لمارجريت آتوود

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ماجستير في الادب الانكليزي

مدرسا قسم اللغة الانكليزية اكلية الاداب جامعة الموصل

استرجاع الماضي لإعادة خلق الحاضر في قصائد مختارة لمارجريت آتوود

**المستخلص:**

لقرون خلت وظّف الشعراء استخدام الماضي في شعرهم ، لكن أساليبهم اختلفت. كانت مقارنة الأيقونة الشاعرة والروائية الكندية مارجريت آتوود فريدة من نوعها فقد كانت تحورو تنقح بينما كان الآخرون يعيدون سرد الماضي كما هو. ولقد تعمقت كثيرا في الماضي الغني ، مستعيدة قصص عديدة من مصادر مختلفة سواءا كانت مأخوذة من الأساطير ، أو التاريخ ، أو الحكايات الخرافية ، نقحتها لتقدم نسخة جديدة من القصص القديمة ، لكن هذه المرة من منظور المرأة. لقد استثمرت الماضي بشكل كبير لإعادة إنشاء شيء جديد ، وهو شيء سيجعل الحاضر قابلاً للعيش ولتعزير المستقبل.

أعمالها الأدبية غنية بالقصائد التي تم تحويلها. تتناول القصائد عادة قضايا مهمة تؤثر على حياة المرأة. اختارت الشاعرة الشخصيات التي كانت ضحية للمجتمع الذكوري والتي أسّء تمثيلهن وتم اضطهادهن وتكريمهن و قامت بمنحهن الوعي والقوة والإرادة الحرة والهوية المستقلة والصوت للتعبير عن انفسهن. إن إحياء الماضي وإعادة صياغة الأدوار المحددة مسبقا المرأة هي وسيلة للبقاء من شأنها أن تساعدن في العيش على نحو صحيح وضمن مستقبل أفضل لهن.