

PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ALGERIA
MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND
SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY OF AMMAR THELEDJI- LAGHOUAT
FACULTY OF LETTERS AND FOREIGN LANGUGAES
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH



**Cultural Inbetweenness and the Dilemma of Identity in Margaret
Atwood's *The Blind Assassin* (2000)**

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH IN PARTIAL
FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR MASTER DEGREE IN CIVILIZATION AND
LITERATURE

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Academic Year 2021-2022

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, we would like to praise Allah, The Almighty and The Most Merciful, for the blessings we received during our study and our research.

We would like to express our gratitude to our patient and supportive supervisor, Dr. Fattoum Mouissa.

Additionally, we are extremely thankful to the jury members for examining our work.

Also, we would love to show our appreciation to our teachers throughout the five years of university.

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to Mr. Zidelkheir Miloud and Mrs.Zidelkheir Saida, my caring gold-hearted father and my supportive mother.

To my garden angels Manal, Amira, Yasmine, Aya, Ahmed, and Tarek , my siblings, who supported me in this journey.

To myself for always standing still during the past five years.

To the creative, Kharchi Meriem, for being a colleague, a partner, and a sister.

To the one who gave time and effort to better present this dissertation, my fiancé, Salous Khaled.

Lastly, to all my beloved ones each by his/her name.

Zidelkheir Hanin

Dedication

I dedicate this work to my beloved mother, who has always been there for me
And who has always encouraged me by saying “Everything is going to pass well with
you”.

To my dear father, who never stops guiding and advising me

To my supportive siblings: my sister Hadjer and my brothers Rachid and Abbas.

To my whole family.

To my hard-working partner and my best friend, Zidelkheir Hanin. Thank you for
always helping and supporting me the last five years.

I dedicate this work to all of you.

Kharchi Meriem.

Abstract

Identity construction has always been a question of interest in postmodern writings. Postmodern literature conceptualizes the issue of identity through different social settings. Margaret Atwood is one of the main authors who depict the process of identity development and crisis. Predominantly, she portrays in her writings the crucial journey of identity formation. Also, she pictures the main reasons behind the construction of troubled self / identity, chiefly, in her work *The Blind Assassin*. This novel portrays the struggle of different characters in Canada during the 1930's and 1940's. Atwood uses the shift between past and present to highlight the different processes of constructing an identity. This dissertation discusses the issue of identity through different approaches such as the psychological approach, adding to the humanistic approach to better interpret the different mind settings and identities of the main characters in the selected novel. Accordingly, this work divulges the characters' struggle with identity construction. This paper comes at the result that social, political, and economic aspects might affect the psyche of characters, leading to predicaments at the level of identity.

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General Introduction

General Introduction

General Introduction

Postmodernism is a contradictory movement as it contradicts Modernism. It emerged in response to the Second World War's consequences. It is a reaction against violence, social classification, gender divisions, and all that is stereotypical. It, also, develops against Modernism, which is characterized by ironic self-reference and absurdity. The deconstruction of the war and the complex political context, specially the period of the Cold War, has paved the way to smoothly move from Modernism to Postmodernism. Postmodernism brought about social and political transformations. It includes abandoning traditional and stereotypical concepts and beliefs, including social class, ethnic, and cultural conflicts. The movement influenced art, architecture, philosophy, ethics, criticism, and literature.

Identity construction has been the main concern of postmodern writers due to the mental breakdown that characterizes Western societies after the Second World War and the Cold War. Postmodern society has always been concerned with the issue of identity. Thus, postmodernists always question the validity of their previous beliefs and thoughts. Therefore, the question of identity and the ultimate truth has always been raised. Identity, or more specifically identity crisis, is a major concept that postmodern authors tend to highlight and depict in their fiction. The changes brought about by Postmodernism caused emptiness and confusion for humans. Eventually, it resulted in troubled identities and a confused self -image.

Margaret Atwood is a Canadian postmodern author. She is highly interested in the issue of identity, especially Canadian social, cultural, and psychological identities. Her fiction reflects the Canadian struggle with identity construction on account of its previous colonial history. Furthermore, Canadian history is a history of combat for existence, considering that Canada was

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under British as well as French control. Therefore, a nation suffered from double victimization and confrontation in order to reach realization and actualization. In other words, they suffered to achieve their freedom and to prove their existence. Margaret Atwood uses literature to portray Canadian social issues, chiefly in her book *The Blind Assassin*. The latter, is an autobiographical novel published in 2000. The book is basically an embedded narrative in which another story existed within the same novel.

This research explores Canadian identity construction and identity crisis through the eyes of Margaret Atwood. It depicts different identity issues through different characters in the novel. Also, this paper focuses on cultural inbetweenness in relation to the issue of identity based on Margaret Atwood's literary production. Moreover, it highlights how the author represents Canadian identity through a diverse set of characterizations. This research is conducted to answer the following questions:

- How does Margaret Atwood picture Canadian society in her novel, *The Blind Assassin*?
- How was Canadian cultural inbetweenness portrayed or envisioned by Margaret Atwood in the novel?
- To what extent the cultural in-between was problematic and how did characters, in *The Blind Assassin* deal with their identities?

This research suggests various assumptions such as the following: Margaret Atwood pictures Canadian society through social settings in addition to the effect of industrialization and political powers in the novel. Secondly, the protagonists seem to develop their identity and identity crisis due to childhood and adolescence trauma (Laura), gender divisions and political powers (Iris and Richard) as well as social classification and political beliefs (Alex). Lastly,

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Atwood depicts Canadian cultural inbetweenness through language and wording choice. In which she smoothly shifts from French to English in her fiction.

This paper is devoted to investigate cultural in-betweenness, identity construction, and identity crisis in a postmodern frame. It focuses on studying Canadian cultural and social identity construction with reference to Margaret Atwood's, *The Blind Assassin*. What is more, this dissertation attempts to picture the Canadian historical and social spheres of the novel. It highlights the troubled identity construction of characters through a psychological lens. Consequently, its main objective is to probe the Canadian cultural inbetweenness and the main causes of identity crisis of the protagonists.

Cultural inbetweenness and identity crisis have been a question for many scholars and writers. In her book entitled *House of Difference: Cultural Politics and National Identity in Canada (1998)*, Eva Makey explores national identity and cultural inbetweenness in Canada. She also highlights how colonialism affects racial and cultural differences. Furthermore, Daniel Eric Oledzki in his comic book titled *The Adventures of Dani Canuck: Canada's Identity Crisis (2013)*, explores how cultural and ethnic diversity in Canada contributed to Canadian identity. Hence, he tackles multiculturalism, marginalization, and identity crisis in Canada.

Hence, *The Blind Assassin* has caught the attention of many scholars and researchers. Initially, Earl Ingersoll, in his article "Waiting for the End: Closure in Margaret Atwood's *The Blind Assassin*"(2003), analyzes the plot of the novel with much focus on Iris, the first-person narrator. Furthermore, Alias Laura in her article "Representation of the Past in Margaret Atwood's *The Blind Assassin*" (2006) focuses on literary characteristics used by Margaret since publishing her book *Surfacing* (1972) in addition to tacking female issues.

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Additionally, the article entitled “Narrative Anchors and the Processes of Story Construction: The Case Study of Margaret Atwood’s *The Blind Assassin*”(2007) by Barbara Dancygier presents the story construction of the novel in particular themes, symbols, and language. Moreover, the article of Alison Reed’s “Disembodied Hands: Structural Duplicity in Atwood’s *The Blind Assassin*” explores the structural duplicity and the representation of universal truths through mimetic modes of imitation in the novel. Last but not least, Tapash Rudra, in his article “Element of Historiographical Metafiction in Margret Atwood’s *The Blind Assassin*” explores *The Blind Assassin* in which he highlights the major historical events and all aspects of Historiographical Metafiction in the novel. However, these works neglected the issue of identity and its relation to cultural inbetweenness. Therefore, this research aims to analyze the relationship between the variables previously mentioned through psychological and sociological frames.

This paper is conducted through various methods and approaches. Initially, it uses a historical approach to portray the historical background of the novel and to question the postmodern touch in this oeuvre. The research, in the main, is based on a psychoanalytical approach in addition to the use of different theories to help in depicting the problem. Additionally, the humanistic approach is relied on to provide a better understanding of social and psychological settings in the novel.

This dissertation is divided into three chapters. The first chapter is dedicated to explain identity and cultural inbetweenness in postmodernism. It, also, provides hints on Canada’s colonial history. It contains relevant psychoanalytical theories that describe the main variables of this research. The second chapter, on the other hand, is devoted to analyze the novel as a postmodern production. Most interestingly, it includes the story analysis and the portrayal of

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cultural inbetweenness in the novel. Last but not least, the third chapter exposes identity crisis in *The Blind Assassin*. It explores the psyche of characters and the process of developing their identities.

Chapter One

Identity and Cultural Inbetweenness in Postmodernism

Chapter One Identity and Cultural Inbetweenness in Postmodernism

Introduction

Identity has been in question for many years by many scholars and psychoanalyst. The struggle of identifying the self and finding the truth behind identity construction was fundamental and still is. This chapter discusses the issue of Canadian national identity and self-recognition of the Canadian entity. This chapter will dive deep into the meaning of identity and the different identity theories. Also, it describes the development of Canadian literature due to social changes including colonization. In addition to that, this part interrogates the relation between colonialism and the impasse of identity, especially the Canadian struggle throughout history. Moreover, it briefly investigates Canadian literary development and its origins. All in all, this chapter depicts cultural inbetweenness and identity crisis within the context of postmodernism from a psychological perspective.

1.1 Historical Background

Canada is a territory that has been under the control of different imperial powers. Its history is full of previous colonial experiences, mainly French and British control.

1.1.1 Canada Under the French Rule

During European exploration, France appeared as a colonial power in different lands of North America in the sixteenth century. Canada was a French colony for more than 200 years. It was claimed by France in 1535 during the second voyage of Jacques Cartier. The French reconnaissance continued in the majority of areas of Canada. By then, both terms 'Canada' and 'New France' were permanently used. According to National Geographic, "in 1604, the French settlers instituted the colony of Acadia near the area of Gulf of St. Lawrence. Four years later,

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the French explorer Samuel De Champlain established the first official Canadian settlement, Québec. He built a lucrative and beneficial fur trade in Canada.” (Mathieu 1,2)

New France, as it is called, consisted of five massive colonies of North America, extending from Hudson Bay in the north to the Gulf of Mexico in the south. By that time, the area became the source of fur traders, soldiers, and indigenous people who lived there for many years. Though, Canada is an agrarian nation and is famous for its active fur trade; yet, France faced serious problems due to the harsh weather, mostly during winter. Despite the extreme expansion of New France’s boundaries, the French fortunes were expected and destined to collapse. Although, it spent the majority of its savings on military purposes and held peace with the natives; yet, New France failed to hold off against the biggest colonial contender, Britain. In effect, Canada remained a French colony until 1763. Later, it was handed to the British forces through the Treaty of Paris in 1763. (E. Blakemore 1,2)

1.1.2 Canada Under the British Rule

British history is full of colonial experiences since it was one of the major imperial powers overseas. Britain extended its power in each of the following lands: Nova Scotia, Hudson Bay, and Newfoundland, preparing for Canadian colonialism. Thus, the French struggled to defend their Canadian territories against the British attack. Eventually, the major forces of Britain defeated France. Years later, Britain developed a powerful economic system in Canada, including trade, agriculture, . . . etc. However, colonists were anxious and concerned about several issues such as the fear of facing economic issues due to regional growth. These dreads led England to merge three of its colonies, namely Canada, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick, into the Dominion of Canada in 1867. Furthermore, the British dominion paved the road to

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independence for these Canadian districts. It allows Canada to be governed by its own rules and laws. However, this was only the first step towards autonomy and sovereignty. Yet, Canada remained under the British rule. (E. Blakemore 1)

1.2 Canadian Literature

Canadian literature covers the literary productions that reflect the dual origin and the official bilingualism in Canada. The literature of Canada is divided into two major divisions: Anglophone literature and Francophone literature (Betsos 1). First of all, Anglophone literature is the literature produced by English-speaking authors. The term is used to describe English-speaking groups in Canada. More accurately, Anglophone literature can be defined as literature written in English produced by writers from nations that were under British colonialism. The first writings in Canada cannot purely be called Canadian; yet, they were written in Canada. The earliest Canadian writings were narratives of travel and exploration in addition to diaries, charts, journals, and letters written by English officers, visitors, travellers, and explorers. These writings and narratives describe the voyages and journeys of the writers. Such writings reflect a hunger for knowledge, understanding origins, and claiming personal and national identity. (Hayne 1-3)

It is worth mentioning that diaries and journals are fundamental documents in the evolution of Canadian literature; for instance, Samuel Hearne's "A Journey from Prince of Wales's Fort in Hudson's Bay to the Northern Ocean" (1795). Also, others, like Sir Alexander Mackenzie and Simon Fraser, in addition to John Franklin with his narrative "A Journey to the Shores of the Polar Sea" (1823) formed the Canadian literature. These historical figures and writings inspired modern writers and authors like Rudie Wiebe and Margret Atwood.

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Francophone literature, on the other hand, is the literature written by French-speaking authors. The term is used to describe French-speaking community in Canada. French literary productions in Canada began in the 1830s. The first collections of verse, epistles, satires, songs, epigrams, and other pieces of verse by Michel Bibaud were produced in 1830. Besides, the first novel was published in 1837 under the name “ L’Influence D’un Livre “ (Influence Of A Book) by Philippe Ignace Froncois Aubert de Gaspé. In the same year, however, the first play was published entitled Griphon; Ou, la Vengeance d’un Valet (Gryphon ; or, the Vengeance of a Valet) by Pierre Petit Clair. It was the first play published by a native-born Canadian. (Hayne 1- 3)

It is necessary to note that Canadian literature is part of post-colonial literature. It is affected by imperial powers (French and British). In view of that, Canadians use literature to revise history, prove their existence, and claim their national identity. On the whole, the linguistic duality characterizes Canadian literature. (Harrison 1)

1.3 Identity and Self: Freudian Viewing

Identity is a concept that has been a question of interest for decades. Identity is defined as the distinguishing character or personality of an individual, or as the oneness that constitutes the objective reality of individuals. (“identity” Merriam Webster dictionary). The psychologist Sigmund Freud, in his psychoanalytical paper entitled “The Ego and the Id”, breaks the usual by introducing a new vision of the human mind and self. Mind and self contribute to shaping identity. Initially, human beings were seen as one undivided entity. Accordingly, the self was at the core of mental and physical behaviour of individuals. However, he divided the mind into three parts: conscious, unconscious, and preconscious. These three parts of the mind can highly

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affect human actions and behaviour in which these behaviour and attitudes shape a person's identity. First of all, the conscious mind includes rational thoughts, daily habits, wishes, feelings, and memories that can easily be recalled. Secondly, the preconscious mind includes all that is unconscious but can be recalled and brought into the conscious mind with no effort, like memories and stored knowledge. Last but not least, the unconscious mind is a reservoir for urges, feelings, random thoughts, fears, and lost memories. It is beyond consciousness and cannot be controlled. These powerful mental processes control human's mental life and physical behaviours. Therefore, it controls identity shaping of an individual. (Freud 5-7)

Sigmund Freud defines identity as the combination of three components, which are the Id, the ego, and the superego. These elements are responsible for the complex practices of individuals. The Id is the core of identity; it is available in the human psyche since birth. This part of identity is responsible for the intuitive and primitive practices of human beings. The ego, on the other hand, is related to the conscious mind. Moreover, it presents logic and common sense. The ego guarantees that the Id can be properly expressed in the real world. Furthermore, the ego is the representation of the external world. It controls the process of transforming rational thoughts into behaviours and actions in a real social situation. Lastly, the super-ego has the mission to civilize and idealize the primitive urges and needs of the Id. It is what differentiates humans from animals. The superego is divided into two: the conscience and the ideal self, which is responsible for guilt. (Freud 5 -8)

The feeling of guilt is a punishment by the super ego in case the ego renders to the urges and needs of the Id. The superego is a reflection of the utopian image of an individual in addition to how one should act so that he/she can easily be accepted in society. All in all, human identity is defined through these complex mental processes. Each part of the mind completes

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the other in the process of shaping identity. Therefore, Freud believes that identity is defined through complex mental operations in the mind. (Freud 1 -10)

Therefore, the components previously mentioned are fundamental to mental structure. Eventually, these three elements cooperate to result in harmony and stability of human's personality and identity. (Freud 8-19)

1.4 Identity Under the Shades of Colonialism

Colonialism is the process of a country taking full or partial political control of a dependent country, territory, or people. Thus, colonialism causes several social identity issues due to the cultural clash between the colonizer and the native indigenous people in the settled colonies. Culture is different and each culture gives a different identity response. These responses are dynamic and shift generationally depending on the political, economic, or social context in a colonized nation. (Longley 1)

According to Henri Tajfel, social identity is the individual's self-conception derived from the perception of a group membership (Tajfel 1-2). According to Reid and Rout in their work *Social Identity Responses to Colonialism*, social identity can only be perceived either as a positive social identity or a negative social identity. Moreover, positive social identities are largely determined by in-group / out-group dynamics. And, in case it was negative, members of the community would either leave it or make it more positive. It is the same idea as colonialism considering that it highlights the gap between white races and other races. In which it emphasizes the superiority of the colonizer in relation to the inferiority of the colonized. Furthermore, colonialism contributes to shaping an image of a negative identity in the minds of the marginalized. Therefore, people who experienced colonial oppression felt the urge to make

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their social identity more positive by imitating the colonizer, including language, clothing, and even lifestyle. (Reid and Rout 3-6)

Additionally, Reid and Rout mention that colonialism and colonial narratives play a major role in justifying colonization. This affects the way indigenous people receive their social identity. In which the colonizer controls all sources of knowledge that shape the psyche of the colonized. Additionally, colonial narratives picture western society as culturally superior and other cultures as inferior entities. Colonized people are seen as primitive, communal, mystical, and ignorant; in which they cannot govern or handle the responsibility of their lands. These narratives create negative associations with indigenous social identity. These negative associations will trouble the process of shaping a positive social identity and cause a serious identity crisis in societies that have been/ are under the colonial control. (Reid and Rout 1-9)

1.5 Cultural Inbetweenness: The Case of Canada

The concept of inbetweenness is the position that a diasporic subject involves in while it is attached to two different worlds. This attachment can be classified into two categories. The first category contains confusion concerning both places and their identification like most of African nations. The second category is hybrid as it is the case for Canadian societies. This type is about maintaining the link with the home of origin in addition to living and communicating with the host community. Moreover, hybrid individuals maintain the sense of belonging to both cultures; two halves of their hyphenated identities are reconciled. The ‘hybrid space’ or the ‘third’ space as it is mentioned by Homi Bhabha supports creativity and civil communication. This space is a new imaginative home that cures their scratched identity. (Alwan para 1)

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1.6 On Identity Crisis

An identity crisis is simply defined as a personal psychological conflict, especially in adolescence. It involves confusion about one's social role and often a sense of loss of continuity to one's personality. ("Identity" Merriam Webster dictionary). The term identity crisis was first coined by the developmental psychologist Erik Erikson. He presents the idea of an identity crisis and a midlife crisis. Also, he believes that personalities are created from the process of finding solutions to life-problems and issues. Identity crisis often happens due to life stressors, or striking changes in life. Moreover, Erikson highlights that identity issues are a lifelong concern. Thus, identity crisis cannot completely be solved; it just changes shape due to age and time. (i.e.: expectations, first job, marriage, first child, death... etc.) (Ekokotu 1)

According to Erikson, an identity crisis is a time of intensive analysis and exploration of different ways of looking at oneself. An identity crisis is a time that a person feels like he/she does not know who they are or what they want in life. In brief, it results in the feeling of emptiness, feeling of being lost and confused, In addition to being uncertain neither about the future, the present, nor the past. (Cherry 1)

1.6.1 Cultural Identity

Each nation has its own unique culture. Each culture is characterized by different social, racial, and ethnic values. In accordance to National Geographic Organization:

Cultural identity is what defines a group of people that share the same social and cultural characteristics. Culture is the common characteristic shared by one

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community. It includes place of birth, religion, language, cuisine, social behaviour, art, literature, and music. Furthermore, different values, beliefs, and origins around the world shape different cultural identities. Cultural identity can provide a clear vision of ourselves, others, and the globe. (Orgnization)

Our world is full of different cultural identities. The difference is based on the huge diversity of this world. It includes different races, cultures, life styles, etc. Therefore, each society has a cultural identity that reflects the oneness of individuals within the same community.

1.6.2 Linguistic Identity

According to the Encyclopedia of Global Studies, linguistic identities refer to belonging to a community through the symbolic resources of a language. It also refers to ways which we come to use in order to understand ourselves and our language. Linguistic identity is how a person locates himself in a social context or environment through language. Moreover, linguistic identity is a central aspect in the conceptualization of the self. (Park para 1,2)

Therefore, the language we speak reflects our position in the world and shapes our reality (Soleil 1) . Thus, Canadian cultural and linguistic identity is more complicated to perceive. This is due to bilingualism and cultural duality in Canada.

1.7 Identity in the Eyes of Erik Erikson

Erik. H. Erikson, the psychoanalyst, is famous for his contribution to the field of psychoanalysis with the eight psychological stages of the development of human beings. He believes that in order to develop a personal identity, human beings must pass the eight stages of

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developing an identity. The stages are: Trust vs. Mistrust, Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt, Initiative vs. Guilt, Industry vs. Inferiority, Identity vs. Identity Confusion, Intimacy vs. Isolation, Generativity vs. Stagnation, and lastly Integrity vs. Despair.

These stages are characterized by conflicts. Each conflict has the possibility of bipolar outcomes. Individuals must learn from both sides of the psychological conflict. If the outcome of this conflict is syntonic (positive), it would contribute to developing a positive self-conceptualization. However, if the outcome is dystonic (negative), it would trouble the process of developing a healthy identity and result in a serious identity crisis. For Erikson, the most important stage of the human development process is the stage of 'Identity and Identity Confusion'. This stage holds challenges for individuals (from the age of 11 to 22 years old) to develop a sense of self while interrogating their beliefs, values, needs, and goals. At this stage, adolescents will try as many selves as they can until they reach their actual personality and personal identity. The main focus of this stage is to develop a stable personal identity. The success of this stage will lead to a strong sense of self throughout an individual's lifespan. In case the stage fails, the individual will suffer from severe confusion. Therefore, a fragile and troubled identity will be created. (Erikson 3-10)

1.8 Roger's Self Theory and Personality

The psychoanalyst Carl Roger has highly contributed to studies concerning self and identity development. He developed a theory called 'The Self Theory'. This theory is a model that focuses on the perceptions that individuals have about themselves, in addition to the perceptions of relationships that individuals have with other members of the community and other social aspects. Carl Rogers emphasizes the various perceptions of "I" and "Me" and its

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relation to others. He proposed the self-actualization tendency as a foundation for his theory.

This theory consists of four factors, which are:

- **Self-Image:** It is a term that describes an individual's perception of himself. It is built on the basis of a person's beliefs and principles.
- **Ideal Self:** This term is used to describe how an individual would like himself to be. It is different from self-image taking into consideration that it shows the utopian perception of the individual. On the other hand, self-image is the reality that he/she perceives.
- **Looking-Glass Self:** It refers to individuals' perception of how others perceive them. It includes how they perceive their qualities, feelings, thoughts ... etc.
- **Real-Self:** it is what others show individuals in relation to their self-image.

According to Carl Roger, the self is divided into two: the real self and the ideal self. The real self includes actualizing tendencies and positive regard (self-image). This means that humans are inherently good. In view of that, people struggle to achieve and fulfil their goals and to know who they really are. On the other hand, we have the other part of the self, which is the ideal self. The ideal self involves striving for ambition and self-worth. For Carl Rogers, a fully functioning person is a person that is able to operate his valuing processes fully and is able to self-actualize himself. All in all, the self in the eyes of Carl Roger is controlled by two aspects, which are the ideal self and the real self. (Ismail and Tekke 30-32)

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1.9 The Looking-Glass Self: Charles Cooley

This theory was first introduced by Charles Cooley. This theory is based on Cooley's intensive studies of childhood social development. The looking glass-self theory describes how self or social identity is dependent on how the individual appears to others. Ideas, beliefs, and feelings that individuals have for themselves are developed in response to how they are built in relation to others' views, perceptions, and acceptance in a social environment. Furthermore, self-image is structured in response to social interactions with other community members. Cooley stated that as we see our face figures dress in the glass and are interested in them because they are ours, so in imagination we perceive in another mind some thoughts of our appearance, manner, aims, deeds, character are variously affected by it. This means that self-creation is like a mirror that reflects who we really are. According to Cooley, all mental processes that occur in the mind are results of social interactions. (Nickerson 1-3)

1.10 Social Representation Theory

This theory was coined by Serge Moscovici in the early 1960s. This theory is one of the main theories in social psychology (Moliner 1-2). It highlights how social representation is raised through social interactions and communication between individuals and other community members. According to Moscovici, social representation is a combination of ideas, beliefs, values, and practices that operate in creating social order. This gives individuals the ability to locate themselves in their social and material environment. Also, it provides better communication between members of society. Furthermore, social representation is dynamic, complex, and holistic. In other words, they can be seen as theories or more like networks of ideas. More accurately, it is metaphors and images that include emotions, attitudes, and

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judgments. All these are included in communicative practices like dialogues and debates, in addition to media and scientific discourses. (Höijer 1- 4)

Conclusion

Identity construction and identity issues have been, for a long time, under discussion and examination. Many scholars and psychoanalysts like Sigmund Freud, Carl Rogers, and Erik Erikson, to name a few, were concerned with such an issue. It is the main question of the modern age. This chapter is devoted to deal with the different definitions of identity and different theories related to identity construction. Also, it deals with colonialism and its effects on identity construction and social responses and how it is reflected in literature, especially Canadian literature.

Chapter Two Cultural Inbetweenness in *The Blind*

Assassin

Chapter Two Cultural Inbetweenness in *The Blind Assassin*

Introduction

The Blind Assassin is an autobiography narrated by the protagonist Iris Chase Griffen. This novel recounts the confessions and experiences of Iris. Margret Atwood presents this work as a novel within a novel written by Iris Chase and published under the name of Laura Chase¹. The sub-novel is categorized as science fiction. It describes life on a planet called Zycron. In addition to that, it highlights the effect of political power and the different social classifications. This novel symbolizes the real misery of human beings in a fictional framework. This chapter provides further readings that guarantee better understanding of this literary production. It shows in what terms *The Blind Assassin* is classified as postmodern, including the depiction of postmodern techniques and methods. Basically, this chapter provides deeper reading and further understanding of Margret Atwood's *The Blind Assassin*. Mainly, this section indicates the cultural inbetweenness in the novel.

2.1 *The Blind Assassin*: A Postmodern Oeuvre

The Blind Assassin is a novel located in Canada, Ontario during 1930's and 1940's. This novel contains the main techniques of postmodernism. Margret Atwood in this work presents a unique form of intertextuality² as she presents a novel within a novel in *The Blind Assassin*. Intertextuality and allusion³ can be noticed in this work, especially that the author has inserted a novel within her novel. This novel is written by Iris Griffen, and published under the name of Laura Chase entitled, also, *The Blind Assassin*. Atwood describes in it the memories of

¹ Laura Chase is one of the main characters in this novel; she is the sister of the protagonist .

²Intertextuality means 'between texts' and is a field of study in which the relationship between texts is investigated. (LICOR)

³ Allusion is when a writer mentions some other work, or refers to an earlier part of the current work. (Terms)

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Iris, the first-person narrator, the protagonist. The author is using the flashback technique⁴, which is also one of the features of postmodernism. The reader can easily notice the shift between the past and present in the plot. This technique highlights the mental and psychological state in addition to past actions and how they affected the present and future of characters. (Dancygier 137)

The importance of time is highly significant in *The Blind Assassin*, as Atwood starts her work with a specific time setting “Ten days after the war ended, my sister Laura drove a car off a bridge...” (Atwood 1). Historically speaking, this time frame describes a horrific historical period, which is Years of Depression, following the two world wars. Additionally, the word choice in this statement, especially the use of the verb ‘to drive’, presents the death of Laura not as an accident but as an intentional behaviour. *The Blind Assassin* is a fragmented narrative that dives deep into the memories and confessions of Iris. This work is injected with dark humour⁵. This technique characterizes most of the postmodern works. This style is easily noticed, especially in the description of the mentality of Reenee, their care taker.

This novel can be classified as the perfect presentation of postmodernism. It contains the major features and techniques of postmodern. Margret Atwood brilliantly used several and different postmodern techniques in order to present a literary production that contains troubled emotions, love affairs, rape, and the social oppression on women.

⁴ Flashbacks is a device that moves an audience from the present moment in a chronological narrative to a scene in the past. (Terms.)

⁵ Dark humor is a comedy style that discusses the taboos like rape, affairs, and suicide

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2.2 *The Blind Assassin*: A Historiographical Metafiction

Atwood, in her work *The Blind Assassin*, focuses on introducing fictional and historical events based on real life situations. She tends to merge history with fiction using magical realism⁶ to tell the story. Therefore, it represents the memoir of an unreliable female narrator, Iris. The novel fabricates fictional plots against real life events like the First and the Second World Wars, also the importance of social and political aspects in the twentieth-century Canada. (Arthur 1-2)

According to the novel, Sakiel-Norn or The Pearl of Destiny is a fictional city on the planet Zycron that symbolizes violence and misery. This place is referred to by Atwood as follows: “On the planet Zycron, located in another dimension of space, there’s a rubble-strewn.” (Atwood 6). It is a brutal and oppressive place that classifies people according to their language, religion, social class, and cultural attitudes. Moreover, the aristocrats are a group of community members of Sakiel-Norn that represent powerful and wealthy people, whose social life is completely different from others. They dress luxuriously and show their skills and tastes differently.

The aristocrats of Sakiel-Norn were called the Snilfards. They were skilled metalworkers and inventors of ingenious mechanical devices, the secrets of which they carefully guarded. By this period they had invented the clock, the crossbow, and the hand pump [...] The male Snilfards wore masks of woven platinum, which moved as the skin of their faces moved, but which served to hide their emotions. The women veiled their faces in a silk-like cloth made from the cocoon of the chaz moth. It was

⁶ It is a literary genre that incorporates fantastic or mythical elements into realistic fiction. (Webster)

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punishable to death to cover your face if you were not a Snilfards, since its imperviousness and subterfuge were reserved for the nobility. The Snilfards dressed luxuriously and were connoisseurs of music and played on various instruments to display their taste and skill. (11)

On the other hand, another group in that city is the smallholders. They were a group of people dissatisfied with their lives; among them were slaves who suffered the most. They were bought, traded, and murdered at wish; quietly treated like goods and barred from acting and living like they want.

He says “the wealth of Sakiel-Norn was based on slaves, and especially on child slaves who wove its famous carpets. But it was bad luck to mention this. The snilfards claimed that their riches depended not on the slaves, but on their own virtue and right thinking — that is, on the proper sacrifices being made to the gods”.
(Atwood 22)

Therefore, Atwood in this novel tends to highlight the fact that all the horrific and brutal events in that fictional city are in fact the same as what individuals and humans in general are facing and dealing with in society. Also, Margret Atwood used her fiction in order to present the misery that people, and in particular slaves, faced through the historical time line.

2.3 The Depiction of Cultural Inbetweenness in Atwood’s The Blind Assassin

Cultural inbetweenness can be easily noticed through the language used by Margret Atwood in *The Blind Assassin*. Atwood uses a list of French-originated words. Therefore, the shift between French and English in the text reflects the bilingual duality in Canadian society.

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This is due to previous colonial experiences in which Canada was under, namely British and French control, for centuries. This affected Canada and its cultural identity. In this novel the use of French words is highly noticeable. The reader can sense the French touch in the use of words such as instalment, voracious, nomads, arid, vengeance, banquets, and others. The author even used some pure modern French words like “début”, “connoisseurs”. This idea is illustrated in the following passages: “Mr. Griffen was the brother-in-law of the late Laura Chase, who made her début as a novelist this spring.”(10) Also, “The Snilfards dressed luxuriously and were connoisseurs of music...” (11)

All these words are derived from old French. The shift between the two languages is smoothly noticed. Altogether, the bilingual duality is an obvious indicator of cultural inbetweenness. The wording choice reflects French and British effects on Canadian literature and society, especially in the works of Margaret Atwood.

2.4 Gender-based Social and Cultural Expectations in the Novel

This novel deals with issues like social classification and gender-based divisions. In this novel, Atwood highlights the iniquity and injustice that women suffer in their society of which Iris and Laura are the perfect examples in the novel. Both sisters realize that they are controlled, abused, and tied to the men of their environment, especially Richard and their father, Norval Chase. As Iris is mentally struggling with her industrialized life in her unhappy marriage to Richard, Laura, on the other hand, is also suffering in her life for being raped and abused by her brother-in-law and for forcing an abortion on her. No matter how the two sisters try to escape and overpower the obstacles that restrict them, yet they cannot. However, their decision in giving a shelter to Alex, a union organizer, gives them for the first time a feeling of being independent

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and empowered. Nonetheless, this action took hold of their personal lives. Eventually, both sisters got stuck in the same affair with Alex, which resulted in horrific events like Laura and Richard's suicide.

After an unexpected absence of several days, the body of industrialist Richard E. Griffen, forty-seven, said to have been favoured for the progressive conservative candidacy in the Toronto riding of St. David's, was discovered near his summer residence of "Avilion" in Port Ticonderoga, where he was vacationing. Mr. Griffen was found in his sailboat, the *Water Nixie*, which was tied up at his private jetty on the Jogues River. He had apparently suffered a cerebral haemorrhage. Police report no foul play is suspected. (9)

Richard's death frees Iris from an unhappy marriage and its misery. She, subsequently, finds herself publishing her book, in which she confesses and tells all of her secrets, all under her sister's name, Laura.

2.5 The Power of Memory in the Novel

The Blind Assassin is a novel that is rich in different literary devices and techniques. It describes the past events and life experiences of the Chase sisters, Laura and Iris. Moreover, Atwood employs a specific technique to present a smooth journey of reading for readers, which is the flashback technique. The technique is used by the author to simplify the shifts in the memory of Iris Griffen. The smooth shift between different time settings is controlled by chronological presentation. As it is mentioned by Barbara Dacygier:

Chronological presentation is never really just chronological, given that there are typically numerous cases of omissions, changes of pace, or concurrent narration

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in any chronological narrative. From the point of view of narrative comprehension, what makes chronological disruption interesting is not that they occur, but how they affect the understanding of the story. A flash back does not just break the sequence, but breaks it so that important aspects of the story construction are highlighted __ such as the character psychological state or the way in which past actions affect future choices. (Dancygier 137)

In this meaning, the chronological presentation and flash back technique lead the reader to dive deep into the memory of the protagonists and fetch for answers for why Laura committed suicide, in addition to the reason behind the calmness of her sister, Iris. As it is mentioned at the very beginning of the novel “It wasn’t the brakes, I thought. She had her reasons.” (Atwood 1). Also, memory is noticed in the following passage “She has a single photo of him [...] the photo is of the two of them together, her and this man, on a picnic. Picnic is written on the back, in pencil__ not his name or hers, just picnic. She knows the names; she doesn’t need to write them down” . (4)

Basically, the whole novel is based on the memories of Iris. This leaves the reader in a circle of uncertainty, arriving at the vision that memory is never reliable. This idea is portrayed in the novel as Iris confessed: “I didn’t think of what I was doing as writing—just writing down. What I remembered and also what I imagined.” (Atwood 484)

The only source of information to better receive the truth is the old lady Iris and her blurred memory. All things considered, Atwood used flashback to smoothly describe and present past events and the reasons for ups and downs in the plot, including the death of Laura, the triangle love affair between Laura, Iris, and Alex Thomas, in addition to raping Laura and forcing abortion on her by Richard Griffen, her brother in law. (Dancygier 137-138)

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2.6 Existence: the Desire to Be Known

This novel is a collection of confessions of Iris about all the traumas surrounding her and Laura. The Chase sisters are longing to be understood and to be noticed. At this point the only person who has given them this feeling of appreciation and independence is Alex.

What is it that I'll want from you? Not love: that would be too much to ask. Not forgiveness, which isn't yours to bestow. Only a listener perhaps; only someone who will see me. Don't prettify me through, whatever else you do. I have no wish to be a decorate skull. - Iris. (Atwood 496)

Lately, Iris reaches validity and verity in her book. She understands throughout the obstacles she faced and went through, that what she and her sister were really looking for and aiming for, is to be recognized and understood by someone. For her, writing the book is a way of telling everyone about the person she is and the person that went through a lot, until reaching her final truth. (G. Editors 1)

The only way you can write the truth is to assume that what you set down will never be read. Not by any other person, and not even by yourself at some later date. Otherwise you begin excising yourself. You must see the writing as emerging like a long scroll of ink from the index finger of your right hand you must see your left hand erasing it .- Iris. (Atwood 268)

In this case, Iris does not want the truth to be totally revealed. She seems like she is afraid of judgments .The fact that she published the novel of her own confessions including her affair with Alex under the name of Laura, the already dead. This tells us that Iris is controlled by social boundaries, unlike her dead sister.

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2.7 Death and Despair in *The Blind Assassin*

The *Blind Assassin* tackles postmodern concepts mainly death and despair. Death is highly noticed from the first beginning of the novel. Atwood states at the beginning of her work “Ten days after the war ended, my sister Laura drove a car off a bridge”. - Iris. (Atwood 1). Therefore, Atwood depicts and pictures death in her book as a desolation and devastation that is embedded in human beings. The narrator opens her novel with the death of her sister. The death of Laura presents the conception of death as a salvation and as an escape from her brutal reality. In this context, Atwood mentions “She was washing her hands of me. Of all of us. (Atwood 1)

Furthermore, Iris is blaming herself for being the reason she lost her beloved ones (Laura, Alex, and Aimee Griffen). She only gave them despair and pain. She suffers from the news of the death of her lover Alex in the war. Correspondingly, she is being traumatized by the suicide of her sister Laura after the death of Alex, for also being in love with him. As well as the suicide of her husband Richard after Laura’s death, the one he truly loves. Eventually, Iris learns how to live with all the incidents and how to remain as strong as possible. Also, she aims to endure everything she had been through, in addition to looking back at things with gratitude till her deathbed. This can be further illustrated in the following words:

Happiness is a garden walled with glass: there’s no way in or out. In paradise there are no stories, because there are no journeys. It’s loss and regret and misery and yearning that drive the story forward, along its twisted road.- Iris. (Atwood 485)

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All in all, the tough journey that is full of despair and pain of the Chases is ended by death. Death is a central concept in *The Blind Assassin*. It is salvation for Laura, punishment for Richard, destiny for Alex, and the end of Iris.

Conclusion

The Blind Assassin is a pure postmodern work by the Canadian writer Margret Atwood. It reflects Canadian society during the 1930s and on. It highlights the cultural diversity in Canada using different systems of communication which are French and English. This chapter deals with the social classifications and gender-based divisions that dramatically affect the main characters and their identities' construction in *The Blind Assassin*. Also, it tackles memory as the only source of truth in the plot. Additionally, this chapter spots light on the conception of death and despair through the different character of this novel.

Chapter Three

The Issue of Identity in *The Blind Assassin*

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Introduction

Identity construction is the main question raised by postmodern scholars and authors, who have depicted the process of developing and constructing identity in their works. Moreover they have highlighted the severe struggle with identity and identity crisis. Likewise, Margret Atwood tackles this issue in all her writings, mainly *The Blind Assassin*. This chapter exposes the process of identity construction in the heretofore-mentioned novel.

3.1 Iris as a First-Person Narrator

As a woman in her eighties, Iris narrates and tells her side of the story to her granddaughter Sabrina and to the readers as well. Iris Griffen Chase, discusses the Chase family's past, her relationships, thoughts, and her life experiences. In addition to the different circumstances that resulted in the death of her sister, her daughter, and her husband as well. In this novel, she is a character that is marginalised by her family's state of affairs and by her social issues. She is surrounded by social, ethical, political, and economical boundaries. The author presents this idea from the first beginning as she states the following passage: "I was informed of the accident by a policeman: the car was mine, they'd traced the licence. His tone was respectful: no doubt he recognized Richard's name" (Atwood 1).

As a first-person narrator, the old lady, Iris, is an unreliable character and sometimes not dependable. She tends to shift views between all the characters and describes and judges them according to her limited vision, and what she experienced with them. In her novel, *The Blind Assassin*, Iris recalls her childhood and her arranged marriage to Richard Griffen. She also reveals the events her sister Laura went through during her marriage to Richard, which eventually ended with Laura's suicide. As she realizes that it was a mistake to stay quiet and not

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speak out about it; yet, by writing her memoirs, she breaks out and tells her granddaughter and her audience the truth. With this novel, she voiced out all that she and her sister went through. Iris achieves her goals by reclaiming her voice. This only would result in a much understood narrative relationship between the writer and the reader. According to Atwood, an ideal reader is someone who is conscious of anything you do in a literary way; someone who will understand your work. However, a narrator in general has the permission to modify and change the real truth, simply by either adding ideas or removing facts. At this point, Iris is an unreliable narrator and her truth, the one that remains questionable, is neither considered a lie, nor an emphatic. Even if she admits it, she still holds a touch of ambiguity and control over which truth is stated by her. The truth does exist in the novel, yet it is buried in the story. This can be portrayed as follow:

The only way you can write the truth is to assume that what you set down will never be read. Not by any other person, and not even by yourself at some later date. Otherwise you begin excising yourself. You must see the writing as emerging like a long scroll of ink from the index finger of your right hand you must see your left hand erasing it .– Iris. (Atwood 268)

Since the novel was published under the name of Laura Chase, this illustrates the extent to which Iris was controlled by society and how she was still afraid of what others might think of her.

This can be referred to in the novel in the following passage:

The book is now in the public domain and anyone at all can publish it, so Laura's estate won't be seeing any of the proceeds. That's what happens a set number of years after the death of the author: you lose control. The thing is out there in the

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world, replicating itself in God knows how many forms, without any say-so from me. (Atwood 268)

As the plot progresses, it becomes obvious how much of a skilled liar Iris is; it can be noticed in several parts of the novel. One of them is this passage:

“Where are you supposed to be?” He says.

“Shopping. Look at my shopping bag. I bought some stockings; they’re very good—the best silk. They’re like wearing nothing. She smiles a little. I’ve only got fifteen minutes.” (Atwood 13)

Readers from the beginning thought that the main character and the unnamed woman in the novel was Laura since the book is named after her too. Yet, eventually the truth is revealed that the author and the female character of the novel is in fact Iris. As Iris confessed at the end of the novel: “As for the book, Laura didn’t write a word of it. But you must have known that for sometime. I wrote it myself.” (Atwood 483). Progressively, Iris realizes at the end that nothing matters since we are all going to die and death is human’s last destination.

3.2 The Issue of Identity in *The Blind Assassin*: An Eriksonian Viewing

According to the psychologist Erik Erikson, the term identity crisis involves individuals’ questioning of their self-meaning and their place in society. It is also the intensive study of different methods of looking at oneself. Identity crisis is a term that describes a person’s failure in realising his/her basic goals and values. At this point, *The Blind Assassin* is a story of the two Chase sisters; each one has her own character. While Iris manages to deal with the obstacles she faces in a very competitive society; Laura, on the other hand, struggles from an identity crisis and finds her peace and salvation in death. The novel helps in showing how the

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social boundaries, in particular family, affect all the character's decisions and thoughts, and the ways they try to confirm it, mainly Iris, Laura, Alex, and Richard. According to Erikson, in order to develop a stable identity, individuals must pass the eight stages of developing an identity. These stages, however, are characterized by conflicts. Each conflict has the possibility of bipolar outcomes either positive or negative.

3.2.1 Iris Chase Griffen

Iris appears as an elderly woman that shows fewer emotions and generally seems preoccupied with living in the past. Her personality in the novel is likely an ordinary, careful, and practical woman without a sense of equity. However, her identity is hunted by the mistakes she made in the past, particularly her ignorance about Richard's abuse of Laura. Yet, she tried to mention them in her writing. (Seresin) . Iris went through the first five stages successfully. As it is noticed in the novel, Iris is a stable, careful, and a character that knows exactly what she is doing and what she wants. It is clear through this passage: "I shouldn't be here, she says. It's too much of a risk" (Atwood 15). The protagonist here is certain about her deeds. She is convinced that she is doing something wrong, yet she is doing it.

Yet, at her last years she started to feel guilty for being quite about all what happened to her sister. Therefore, she decided to confess everything in a novel published under Laura's name. All in all, according to the eight stages of Erikson, Iris was stuck in the last two stages Generativity vs. Stagnation and Integrity vs. Despair.

When it comes to Iris, despair can be noticed at the end of the novel, in this following passage :

As for the book, Laura didn't a word of it. But you must have known that for sometimes. I wrote it myself, during my long evenings alone, when I was waiting

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for Alex to come back, and then afterwards, once I knew he wouldn't. I didn't think of what I was doing as writing—just writing down. What I remembered, and also what I imagined, which is also the truth. I thought of myself as recording. A bodiless hand, scrawling across a wall. I wanted a memorial. That was how it began. For Alex, but also for myself. It was no great leap from that to naming Laura as the author. You might decide it was cowardice that inspired me, or a failure of nerve. (Atwood 483-484)

This quotation contains Iris's confession of writing the novel. Also, it shows how desperate Iris is.

3.2.2 Laura Chase

Unlike her sister Iris, Laura is a complicated character with so many contradictions. She is anxious and bold at the same time, very religious, and believes in her faith. Also, she is very curious about the things that gravitate her attention. However, the novel progressively hints at the psychological issues that Laura went through in her life. She often gets sick and dazed. As it is described in the novel, what causes Laura a very tough mental illness is the fact that she is repeatedly raped by Richard, adding to the news of Alex's death, which eventually leads to her suicide. As it is revealed in the novel as follow:

What had she been thinking of as the car sailed off the bridge, theft hung suspended in the afternoon sunlight, glinting like a dragonfly for that one instant of held breath before the plummet? Of Alex, of Richard, of bad faith, of our father and his wreckage; of God, perhaps. (Atwood 2)

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With reference to Erikson's theory, Laura struggles in passing the fifth stage, which is Identity vs. Identity Confusion. All the previous terrible events that Laura went through, including family stress and being raped, leads to her serious mental devastation leading her to severe identity crisis. It is necessary to note that due to her failure at this stage, she developed a fragile troubled identity.

3.2.3 Alex Thomas

Alex is a union organizer and a science-fiction character in the novel or the unnamed man. What characterizes him from the other characters is that he does not look at the past, but seizes his opportunities on creating his own person. Also, he shows his opinions and beliefs carelessly. Alex has a much more complex and contradicted identity for having an affair with Iris, yet being cruel and sarcastic with her. He challenges social classification by using sarcasm with Iris the rich lady. As it is stated in the novel:

Whose car is this? She says.

A friend's. I am an important person; I have a friend with a car.

You're making fun of me, she says. He doesn't answer. (Atwood 20)

He is introduced in the novel as a communist, lately he volunteers in the Spanish Civil War and eventually loses his life. Though he was brave and courageous, yet, he suffers from identity crisis. Accordingly, he develops a dystonic identity that resulted in a troubled and confused identity. That is symbolized by his sarcastic way of communication.

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3.2.4 Richard Griffen

Richard in the novel is a wealthy, cruel, and morally corrupt businessman. He is tough and abusive toward his wife Iris, and also blackmails her sister Laura, which mostly conveys his evil side. He is extremely preoccupied with his name and appearance in the society, for what he thinks it benefits him in achieving more political power than he wishes. However, when Iris publishes her book in which she confesses everything; it, subsequently, ruins his ambitions and he loses his wealth and power. This, however, led to his suicide.

Mr. Griffen had a distinguished career as the head of a commercial empire that embraced many areas including textiles, garments and light manufacturing, and it was commended his efforts in supplying Allied troops with uniform parts and weapons components during the war [...] The Prime Minister reached by telephone at his private estate of 'Kingsmere' commented, Mr. Griffen was one of this country's most able men. His loss will be deeply felt". (Atwood 10)

Richard is the most narcissistic character in the novel. His selfishness controls his identity and his mind-set. In accordance with Erikson's eight stages, Richard develops a dystonic identity construction due to his terrible deeds against his wife and her sister. Richard, eventually, struggles with inner conflicts after realizing that his wife was cheating on him. He fails at passing the fifth stage, namely Identity vs. Identity Confusion because of his greediness, selfishness, and his egotism. Due to all these troubled feelings and thoughts, he commits suicide.

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3.3 Identity Construction of the protagonists: Freudian View

According to the psychologist Sigmund Freud, human personalities and identities are supposed to be double, complex, and situated. Therefore, identity construction, also called identity development, is a term that challenges the idea of the individual as a bounded one with a specific identity. In this case, individuals develop a clear and unique view of themselves, including their identity (Cherry). At this point, *The Blind Assassin* by Margaret Atwood is a multi-layered and complex novel that deals with issues like questioning the self as well as creating a new national Canadian identity. This is all seen through the events that Iris, Laura, Alex, and Richard went through in the novel.

3.3.1 Iris Chase Griffen

Since the novel is considered a complex multi-layered text, Iris is presumed to show her truth and the events that shaped her identity. Iris's character in the novel is constructed as she describes herself as appearing to be like her father, inheriting his hard nature. Since, she was raised in a very well-known industrial, conservative, and aristocrat family. Atwood refers to this idea in the following quotation:

Ms. Griffen was the sister of noted local authoress Laura Chase. In addition she was the daughter of Captin Norval Chase who will be long remembered by this town, and granddaughter of Benjamin Chase, founder of Chase Industries which put up the Button Factory and others. As well, she was the wife of the late Richard E. Griffen, the prominent industrialist and political figure. (Atwood 486)

She is often reserved and secretive. She doesn't reveal her true feelings, which always leads her to consider herself the most responsible child in her family. However, she challenged

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her social boundaries in developing her manlike identity. From thinking of not being useful enough and competent to eventually being passionate, assertive, and creative, Iris proves herself as an independent and strategic woman by leaving her husband Richard, and confessing all of her secrets. The novel she wrote sheds the light on her dark experiences of her past, on the misery that Laura experienced, also on the terrible deeds of Richard and their triangle affair with Alex. Iris is controlled by her conscious mind as she is rational and logical. She does not let her unconscious mind interrupt her life and her decisions. Therefore, the division of mind in accordance to Sigmund Freud can be easily detected in Iris mind-setting in the novel. According to Freud, the Super-ego is part of the mind that is responsible for guilt. This component of the mind is sensed in Iris's character when she decides to confess everything.

3.3.2 Laura Chase

In this novel, Laura's character is simply sensitive and impressionable. She is depicted as an uneasy child in her family and the one who is resistant to physical aches. However, she is emotionally and mentally stressed. Laura represents a character that is bounded and controlled by her emotions; she was in love with Alex, and at the same time, she was also repeatedly assaulted by Richard, who uses her feelings towards Alex to manipulate her or else he will hurt him. Laura eventually could not stand family and social boundaries and obstacles, and by the time she finds out about Alex's death in the war and his affair with her sister; she commits suicide and surrenders to death. . Laura was hunted by fears and ghosts of the past, including her horrible experience with Richard and the death of Alex in the Spanish Civil War. Due to all these terrible events, Laura, eventually, lives in a trauma until she decides to end her life at the bridge. These experiences were stuck in her preconscious mind; however, she could never get

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rid of these harsh memories. They could be easily recalled to her conscious mind; therefore, she found her peace in death.

3.3.3 Alex Thomas

Alex is described in the novel as a darkish man that reflects a person with a dark personality. He eventually starts having an affair with Iris; yet, his behaviour puts him in a frame of being a narcissistic person, greedy, and cruel with her. His personality is complex and contradicted because even if he supports his communist society, yet he lastly fell in love with a wealthy woman (Editors 1). Alex's mind is controlled by evil urges that take control over his behaviour and attitudes that result in shaping his troubled identity. His sarcastic personality is a result of the confusion of the conscious mind. Therefore, he is irrational, childish, and selfish. This can be noticed in the following passage:

Sometimes you don't like me very much, she says.

I can't think about much else lately, he says.

But liking is different. Liking takes time. I don't have the time to like you. I can't concentrate on it. (Atwood 20)

This shows Alex is a person that has a troubled mentality and trust issues with people surrounding him.

3.3.4 Richard Griffen

Richard is a wealthy industrialist man. His personality in the novel is cold, cruel, and selfish. He likes to dominate people and control them. This is portrayed by Atwood as follow: "Mr. Griffen was one of this country's most able men." (Atwood 10) Also, it can be noticed at

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the very beginning of this novel as Iris said: “I was informed of the accident by a police man [...] his tone was respectful: no doubt he recognized Richard’s name.” (1). His name and appearance in society is all that he cares about to achieve his political ambitions. He is described in the novel as a corrupted man and abusive towards his wife Iris and her sister Laura. Eventually, he kills himself for not being able to deal with the backlash that his wife created, when she confessed all of her secrets in her book.

His industrialized mind is controlled by logic, which results in his practical thoughts and behaviours. His character shows that his mind is controlled only by the Id and the Ego. It dominated his greedy and narcissistic personality. All his terrible deeds to his wife and to his beloved one did not make him feel guilty. This shows the disappearance of morals and the function of the Super-Ego.

Chapter Three The Issue of Identity in *The Blind Assassin*

Conclusion

The Blind Assassin is a work that portrays the relationship between social, political, and economic status and identity construction. This work shows different types of identities, mainly through the main characters Iris, Laura, Alex, and Richard. Each has a different personality due to their social circle and class. It pictures how social boundaries can be one of the main reasons for identity crisis through the image of the Chase sisters, especially Laura, who committed suicide. It also highlights through Richard that feeling guilty is needed to develop a healthy personality and identity this is what Richard does not have. Moreover, Iris, though she has a strong personality; yet, her fear of social judgment contributed to developing her troubled identity. She did not want to admit her mistakes including her affair with Alex after Laura's death. Therefore, she had written her book with all her confessions under the name of her dead sister. Till the end, she was restricted by social boundaries and classification. Lastly, Alex tends to live freely without any sense of respect to social expectations in which he sarcastically challenges social stereotypes, as it is seen in his relationship with Iris. Then he surrendered to death of his free will when he volunteered for the Spanish Civil War.

General Conclusion

General Conclusion

General Conclusion

The issue of identity is crucial in most psychological postmodern studies. Scholars focus on analysing identity conception through different psychoanalytical theories. Their main concern is to deeply understand the complex mental processes that control identity construction of postmodern men. Identity construction is tied to human's social circle. It is also affected by culture and history. Therefore, this dissertation links the effects of cultural inbetweenness with identity formation and its crisis.

Furthermore, Margaret Atwood in her work *The Blind Assassin* attempts to highlight the concept of identity through different character settings. She points out the reason behind the characters troubled identities. In addition to how society, including family cause them severe identity crisis. In this work, the female protagonist is restricted by different boundaries, including her family, her unhappy marriage, and her affair. All these aspects result in her unstable identity. This fiction is set to portray different fragmented identities through the different characterizations of the book.

This autobiographical novel pictures the cultural inbetweenness in Canadian society. Therefore, this paper is explored through psychological, cultural, social, and historical perspectives. In addition to that, this fiction depicts identity conformation and crisis. Also, it emphasizes the effect of gender division and social classification on the process of identity development. This can easily be detected in the psyches of the main characters, namely Iris, Laura, Alex, and Richard.

Overall, this research tackles the relation between cultural inbetweenness and identity construction in the novel. Also, it portrays the struggle of the characters in the journey of

General Conclusion

developing their identity. Hence, *The Blind Assassin* embodies the Canadian society and the extent to which it is influenced by cultural inbetweenness. It also sheds light on the role of political power and social classification in causing identity crises. The latter, however, can be visualised through Richard and Alex's psyches.

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Appendices

Appendix A

The Biography of Margaret Atwood

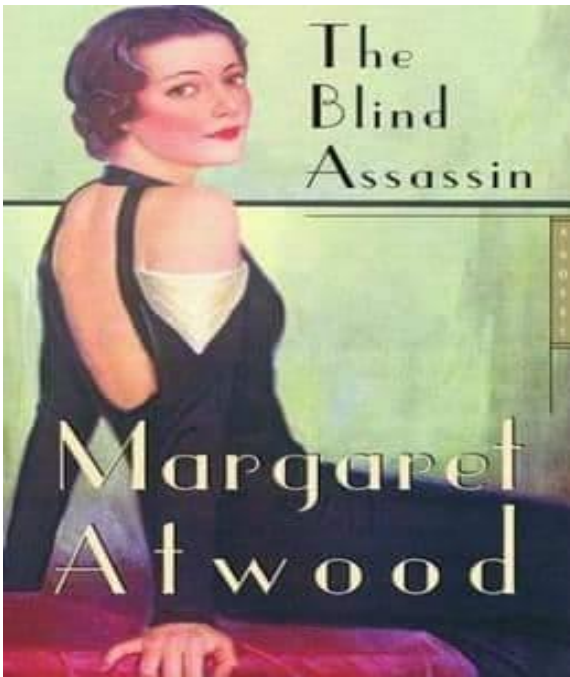


Margaret Eleanor Atwood (born November 18, 1939) is a Canadian poet, novelist, literary critic, essayist, teacher, environmental activist, and inventor. Since 1961, she has published 18 books of poetry, 18 novels, 11 books of non-fiction, nine collections of short fiction, eight children's books, two graphic novels, and a number of small press editions of both poetry and fiction. Atwood has won numerous awards and honors for her writing, including two

Booker Prizes, the Arthur C. Clarke Award, the Governor General's Award, the Franz Kafka Prize, Princess of Asturias Awards, and the National Book Critics and PEN Center USA Lifetime Achievement Awards.[2] A number of her works have been adapted for film and television.

Appendix B

Synopsis of *The Blind Assassin*



The premise of the book is an autobiographical confession of the protagonist, Iris Chase. She writes upon her deathbed and intends to turn the novel over to her only surviving relative, her granddaughter. Iris and her sister Laura grew up in Ontario. Despite being raised by a single father, they were happy children. Iris recalls some important memories from her childhood and adolescence, anchored with historical events of the time. As an adult, she marries a harsh older man named Richard Griffen. They have a daughter and have remained married for many years. After recording her teenage years, Iris includes a novel within her novel. It is supposed to be written by Alex Thomas, a science fiction author with a radical bent. Actually, Iris is still the author, but within the novel she attributes this pulp fiction inset to her sister, Laura. Alex has a tumultuous love affair with a woman who also writes a story which is included in Iris' memoir. This science fiction work, *The Blind Assassin*, is a thrilling account of another

love affair. Iris leads her readers to believe that her novel-within-a-novel is about her sister's love life with a man named Alex. After the novel-within-a-novel's end, Iris comes back to her real life account.

Laura learns that Alex has died in the war. Immediately she kills herself. Shortly after, Iris finds her sister's journal and learns that she had been blackmailed and raped by her own husband – Richard – for years. Iris then confesses that the novel “written by” is actually about herself and her affair with Alex. She learns from Laura's diary that Richard got her sister pregnant and forced her to have an abortion. Needless to say, she becomes greatly afraid and horrified at his actions. She takes her daughter, Aimee, with her and leaves her husband. Then , Iris struggles to parent as a single mother. She frequently contacts Richard, continually upsetting her daughter and damaging their relationship. When questioned, Iris convinces Richard that Laura was actually the one who had an affair with Alex. The news is too much for the already unstable Richard, and he commits suicide. Iris winds down her narrative, writing up to the moment of her death. She bequeaths her unpublished autobiography to her granddaughter, hoping that she will accept the responsibility of its secrets.

ملخص

لطالما كان بناء الهوية محط اهتمام في كتابات ما بعد الحداثة. يصور أدب ما بعد الحداثة قضية الهوية من خلال أوضاع اجتماعية مختلفة. مارجريت أتوود هي واحدة من أهم المؤلفين الذين يصورون عملية تطور الهوية والأزمات التي تمر بها، وهي تصور في عملها *The Blind Assassin* مشكل الهوية. كما أنها تصور الأسباب الرئيسية وراء الهوية المضطربة. يصور هذا الإنتاج الأدبي نضال الشخصيات المختلفة في كندا خلال ثلاثينيات وأربعينيات القرن العشرين. تستخدم أتوود التحول بين الماضي والحاضر لتسليط الضوء على العمليات المختلفة لبناء الهوية. يناقش هذا العمل قضية الهوية من خلال مناهج مختلفة مثل النهج السيكلوجية، إضافة إلى النهج الإنساني لتفسير الإعدادات الذهنية المختلفة وهويات الشخصيات الرئيسية في الرواية المختارة. وفقا لذلك، يكشف هذا العمل عن صراع الشخصيات مع بناء الهوية. يأتي هذه البحث بنتيجة مفادها أن الجوانب الاجتماعية والسياسية والاقتصادية قد تؤثر على نفسية الشخصيات، مما يؤدي إلى ازمه على مستوى الهوية.

Résumé

La construction identitaire a été une question d'intérêts dans les écrits postmodernes. La littérature postmoderne conceptualise la question de l'identité à travers différents contextes sociaux. Margaret Atwood est l'une des principaux auteurs qui décrit le processus de développement et de crise d'identité. Elle décrit principalement dans ses écrits le voyage crucial de la formation de l'identité. En outre, elle décrit les raisons principales de la construction soi / identité, principalement son travail *The Blind Assassin*. Cette production littéraire dépeint la lutte de différents personnages au Canada durant les années 1930 et 1940. Atwood utilise le décalage entre passés et présents pour mettre en évidence les différents processus de construction d'une identité. Cette thèse aborde la question de l'identité à travers différentes approches telles que l'approche psychologique, en ajoutant à l'approche humaniste pour mieux interpréter les différents paramètres d'esprit et les identités des personnages principaux du roman sélectionné. En conséquence, ce travail divulgue la lutte des personnages avec la construction identitaire. Cette recherche arrive au résultat que les aspects sociaux, politique et économique pourraient affecter la psyché des personnages, conduisant à des situations difficiles au niveau de l'identité.