

Master's Degree
in European, American and Postcolonial Language and
Literature

Final Thesis

**M. Atwood's *Wilderness Tips* as a Dialogical
Narrative**

Supervisor
Prof. Pia Masiero

Assistant supervisor
Prof. Simone Francescato

Graduand
Liliia Kuchmarenko
871575

Academic Year
2018 / 2019

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Introduction

Despite the fact that by now Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin is recognized as “one of the leading thinkers of the twentieth century” (Holoquist XV), modern literary studies do not show many examples of application of Bakhtinian ideas to the analysis of modern and postmodern literature. Scholars address Bakhtin’s heritage only when they need to analyze some specific features of a given narrative, for which it would be useful to apply such Bakhtinian categories as chronotope, carnival and intertextuality, however, it is difficult to find any full analysis of a whole narrative from a Bakhtinian perspective.

The goal of this work is to demonstrate how the concept of dialogism works on the example of “Wilderness Tips” by Margaret Atwood. We will demonstrate that the narrative thread of the short stories collection is organized as a typical dialogical narrative. We will base our judgments on the conclusions Bakhtin made in his main work dedicated to the questions of polyphony and dialogue – *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics*, first published in 1965, translated into English in 1984.

In the introduction to his work *Poetica Dostoyevskogo* L.P. Grossman, who was one of the forerunners of Bakhtin’s dialogical theory, claimed: “Dostoyevsky has developed an absolutely new form of a complex novelistic unity, which perfectly suits his sharp philosophic ideas and the bold expressionism of his literary style. Thus, he has created a new novelistic canon which still serves and probably will keep serving many other authors in the future, opening one of the most original and intensive chapters in the history of the world novel” (6; translation mine).

Margaret Atwood has become such an author of the future, whose work – I would argue – fails to be fully understood without considering the concept of dialogue. Her collection of short stories “Wilderness Tips” (1992) is a perfect example of a dialogical organization of the fictional space. Despite the fact that initially the term “dialogue” was invented in order to apply it to the description of the novel, specific features of the construction of fictional space within “Wilderness Tips” provide us with a possibility to venture a hypothesis that the term

“dialogue” can also be applied to short fiction. Therefore what will be done in this work is the analysis of intersubjective relations between the characters of these short stories from a Bakhtinian perspective and his concept of Dialogue. Firstly, Atwood’s characters form their identity depending on their interaction with the outer world. Dialogue, in a broad meaning of this term, is something that forms the very core of their “who-I-am” sense. T. Choi, the author of a dissertation dedicated to dialogism and the interrogation of social, ontological and aesthetic orthodoxies in the writing of Atwood, writes: “Although Atwood has explored various forms of interpersonal conflict and suffering in her writing, she has always worked towards an aesthetics of rapprochement which might transcend the boundaries and borders that divide human subjects or nations” (1). Secondly, language plays a crucial role in Atwood’s poetics. Her characters invent and re-invent themselves by means of language. According to Bakhtin, language is a perfect model of dialogical structure: “Dialogue is the only sphere possible for the life of language” (*Dialogic* 66). As J. Kristeva put it, “Dialogism is inherent in language itself” (Dialogue 68) as language is a *a priori* situation in which somebody talks to someone else, even when this “someone” is not present physically.

Another reason that encouraged me to start thinking about working on this specific topic is the fact that, strange as it might seem, there is not so much academic literature written on Atwood’s short-stories from a Bakhtinian perspective. There is plenty of works observing the role of dialogic concepts in her novels or poetry, but not in the short-stories.

The collection consists of ten short stories, whose main characters reconsider their lives coming back to the event that happened to them in the past (“True Trash”, “Isis in Darkness”, “The Bog Man”, “Death by Landscape”) or trying to find a place for themselves in a new world after some change that had happened to them previously (“Hairball”, “Uncles”, “Weight”, “Wilderness Tips”, “Hack Wednesday”). All of them try to reinvent themselves by setting a dialogue, no matter whether it is a dialogue with their inner “I” or with someone who was important to them (in many cases it is a dead person: Portia’s grandfather in “Wilderness Tips”,

Susanna's uncles in "Uncles", Molly in "Weight"). Most of the protagonists feel alien in the world surrounding them. Ronette in True Trash "often has a trouble making her way through the vocabularies of others" (Atwood, Wilderness Tips 29).¹ Kat from Hairball feels excluded from the possibility to make a family with a man she loves as he is already married. Selena from *Isis in Darkness* starts drinking at the end of the short story as she fails to find a place for herself in her own life and in the world around her. Therefore all the characters of these short stories try to construct a new narrative for articulating their life experience trying to move from the periphery to the center. As Jane Brown points out, "Atwood's work has always moved women and their concerns from their peripheral places in traditional storytelling to a position of primacy" (197).

By considering in each chapter such categories as intertextuality, carnivalization, chronotope, double-voiced discourse, internally polemic discourse, polemically colored autobiography, Menippea, heteroglossia, we will demonstrate the way they work in Atwood's narrative and how they prove the universality of Bakhtin's dialogical theory.

¹ Further references to this edition will be given in parentheses in the text.

1. “True Trash”: Dialogue as a way to wholeness

As we have already mentioned in the introduction, Wilderness Tips is the perfect example of a dialogically structured text. Despite the fact the collection consists of ten not connected short stories, together they construct a special poetical system which could be considered as a dialogical universe.

Four thematic threads that unite all ten short stories can be distinguished here:

1. Language as a tool of self-reinvention (“True Trash”, “Isis in Darkness”, “Hairball”, “Weight”, “Wilderness Tips”)
2. Novelizing the world around (“True Trash”, “Hairball”, “Isis in Darkness”, “The Bog Man”, “The Age of Lead”, “Wilderness Tips”)
3. Maternity as one of the ways of forming identity (“True Trash”, “Hairball”, “Weight”, “Wilderness Tips”, “Hack Wednesday”)
4. Treating men as a threat (“True Trash”, “Uncles”, “The Bog Man”, “Weight”, “Hairball”, “Hack Wednesday”)

It is important to notice that the first short story of the collection includes all the mentioned thematic threads.

The first thing that strikes our attention is the fact that the first sentence of the short-story is written in the present tense, which is not the default tense for narratives. Traditionally, narratives revolve around a retrospective point of view and the consequent employment of the past tense as soon. Moreover, using the past tense usually implies taking responsibility for reporting on these events. It means presenting an ultimate version of the events and their consequences. Never should we forget the fact that the whole collection represents different trauma narratives. The reader is being told the events from lives of different people that happened to be traumatic for them, those events have changed something within the identities of the characters and their lives will never be the same again after going through them. J.

Kristeva calls narratives “the caches for suffering”. Reflecting on Celine’s Journey to the End of the Night, Kristeva says: “It is a narrative of suffering and horror, not only because the “themes” are there, as such, but because his whole narrative stance seems controlled by the necessity of going through abjection, whose intimate side is suffering and horror its public feature” (Kristeva, Abjection 140). *True Trash* is not an exception. Present tense is the only possible place for a traumatized person to live in. One of the characters of the collection of short fiction by Atwood - Moral Disorder – that follows this, says: “These are the tenses that define us now: past tense, *back then*; future tense, *not yet*. We live in the small window between them” (Atwood, Moral Disorder 4). We can interpret it the following way: despite the fact that a traumatized person realizes that one’s identity can be defined only by means of what had already happened to him or her in his or her past and by those events that will happen to him or her in his or her future, the verb “to live” can be used only within the context of the present. Present tense is the only comfortable zone for a traumatized person to live in. Trauma narrative implies not telling about something, but rather trying to tell about it, searching for proper words. As Atwood herself points out, “Writing has to do with darkness, and a desire or perhaps a compulsion to enter it, and, something back out to the light” (Atwood, Negotiating with the Dead 35). As Choi interprets it, “She describes the writer as a grave-digger who unearths people’s fears, fantasies, anxieties and superstitions” (Choi 3).

The most interesting fact about the compositional organization of the text in terms of time is that not only the first, but all the sub-chapters of the short story, except the last one, start from a sentence in the present tense:

1. The waitresses are basking in the sun like a herd of skinned seals, their pinky-brown bodies shining with oil (9).
2. What the waitresses are reading is a *True Romance* magazine (11).
3. The waitresses stand at their stations around the dining hall, hands clasped in front of them, heads bowed (15).

4. The waitresses are doing the dishes (17).
5. Outside the window Darce and Perry stroll by, herding a group of campers (19).
6. Miss Fisk bumbles into the kitchen (21).
7. When they're all in their pyjamas, ready for bed, Joanne offers to read them the rest of the True Trash story (22).
8. Between two oval hills of pink granite there's a small crescent of beach (23).
9. They're on one of the pink granite islands, the four of them: Joanne and Ronette, Perry and Darce (24).
10. Donny and Monty are on a canoe trip, somewhere within the tangled bush of the mainland (25).
11. It's the end of summer (28).
12. Eleven years later Donny is walking along Yorkville Avenue, in Toronto, in the summer heat (30).
13. They go for coffee and sit drinking it at one of the new, daring, outside tables, under a large, brightly painted wooden parrot (32).
14. After the interview with Mr. B. and the stuffed pike's head, Donny walks down to the small beach where they do their laundry (34).

Such method of time-organization may suggest that the narrator is searching for the right words and the heroes are searching for finalization. According to Bakhtin, this is one of the features of polyphonic narratives. In a dialogic narrative the hero is open. "In a monological design, the hero is closed and his semantic boundaries strictly define his acts, expressions, thoughts and his consciousness within the limits of what he is." As in a dialogic narrative the hero is never defined, he is always in a state of expectation to get defined. As Kristeva put it, "Narrative is the only way out" (Kristeva, Powers of Horror 145), and the narrator is searching for it, however, we are not dealing with a first-person narration here. The narrative is gappy and puzzling as a typical trauma narrative. Atwood creates a narrative which is not united and it

appears to acquire a sense of wholeness and unity in the last sub-chapter which starts with the following sentence: “Joanne has just seen the end of the story, or one end of one story” (36). Here we can see that the first sentence of this sub-chapter is formed by a Present Perfect which describes a recent past. Should we pay attention to the semantic level of this element of the text, we will find out that Joanne, as the perceptual center in charge of a figural narrative sees this point of the plot as the end of the story. However, an addition “or one end of one story”, which comes after the comma, makes the reader start having doubts about the trustworthiness of Joanne’s vision. It makes us start seeing this character as an unreliable focalizer, which, in turn, encourages us to reread the story without trusting previously suggested vision.

Coming back to the first sentence, we should also mention that the very structure of it is already dialogical for the reason that it describes the situation of observation: “The waitresses are basking in the sun like a herd of skinned seals, their pinky-brown bodies shining with oil” (9). As Bakhtin puts it in one of his early essays, observation is the only active and productive form of communication with another. Although the boys’ spying could be interpreted as a negative action towards the girls, it sets a dialogue between them. Even though they do not enter into explicit interaction, the boys are trying to access the girls’ space. “I must empathize or project myself into this other human being, see his world axiologically from within him as he sees his world, I must put myself in his place, and then, after returning to my own place, “fill in” his horizon though that excess of my outer and inner seeing of the other human being, that constitute the purely aesthetic actions. <...> I must render his horizon complete aesthetically” (Bakhtin, Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity 25).

Later the reader learns that the binocular, through which the boys are spying on the waitresses, was given to them for bird-watching, instead of which they do “girl-watching”, which provides us with a possibility to set the parallel between the image of women, represented by the waitresses in this short story, and the semantic field of wild nature. “Monty’s dad gave them to him for bird-watching but Monty isn’t interested in birds. He’s found a better use for the

binoculars: he rents them out to the other boys, five minutes maximum, a nickel a look or else a chocolate bar from the tuck shop, though he prefers the money" (9).

Moreover, the waitresses are being compared to "a herd of seals" (9), which sets a direct connection between the feminine and wilderness. Moreover, by starting the short story with a situation of observation through a binocular Atwood awakens an association with haunting: just as a haunter watches his prey through the binocular before making a shot, the boys are watching the girls who represent victimhood within the patriarchal society. Coral Ann Howells mentions: "Within colonial discourse wilderness was presented as a space outside civilised social other and Christian moral laws, the place of mysterious and threatening otherness" (Howells 21). The image of the waitresses belongs to the sphere of nature, irrational, uncontrolled. This *threatening otherness* is always represented by the non-dominant elements of such binary oppositions as black and white, wild and civilized, male and female, etc. As this wilderness seems to the dominant elements of these oppositions dangerous, it needs to be destroyed - this is how their powerlessness is being turned into the positions of victims.

What is more, the first characteristic of female characters of True Trash belongs to the description of their physical appearance. By using an inner point of view as a tool for constructing the narrative, Atwood demonstrates that the first thing that strikes men's attention is a woman's body, and not characteristics of her personality or identity - "pinky-brown bodies shining with oil" (9). Even wondering what the girls read is considered to be dangerous, as Donny mentions. "Donny would like to know what they're reading with such absorption, such relish, but it would be dangerous for him to admit it. It's their bodies that count. Who cares what they read?" (11).

The two last sentences of this fragment represent not what Donny is really thinking about, but what he is supposed to be thinking about. They represent a male perspective which Donnie is trying to make a part of his own discourse for the reason that he is afraid not to suit it, to be out of it, which he considers to be dangerous. Donnie will keep feeling this alienation from

patriarchal discourse. He feels alien even from his own young male body: “He would like to get out of his own body for a while; he’d like to be somebody else” (24).

What should be highlighted is that the narrative of the whole short story is constructed not through an abstract authorial vision of the events, but by the perception of the very characters, which is one of the dialogically-structured features of the text. The portraits of the characters are never full. What matters is not how they look or behave like, but how they react to the world around them. According to Bakhtin, within dialogical narrative what matters is not “how the hero appears in the world, but first and foremost, how the world appears to the hero” (Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoyevsky’s Poetics 59). Perception, in the very nature of it, bespeaks interconnection as it demands at least two participants - a subject plus something or someone he or she is going to perceive. “To be means to communicate dialogically. When dialogue ends, everything ends. A single voice ends nothing and resolves nothing. Two voices is the minimum for life, the minimum for existence” (Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoyevsky’s Poetics.252).

The boys are supposed to pay for doing girl-watching. The waitresses, or it is better to say, the image of the waitresses is something buyable, it is something that can be sold and bought, and the money will go not to the girls, as we could guess, but to one of the boys again as Monty has made a business, *black market* out of it. The island represents the world where women belong to the sphere of objects, the only subjects there are men. Donny is the only one who does not feel belonging to the male discourse. It is a world, where, as Melanie Sexton put it, “shaping human perceptions, language turns women into objects” (10).

The reason why it is possible to call the situation of observation a dialogical element of the text is because it can be described as an example of abjection in Kristeva’s understanding of this term. The boys’ spying on the girls can be interpreted as abjection as by doing it the boys are undermining the girls’ privacy, they are invading their personal space. As far as Kristeva is concerned, abjection is one of the ways of setting a dialogue between a subject and an object. Abjection is an act that helps both parties to overcome the boundary between them and come

into communication. “Through that experience, which is nevertheless managed by the Other, “subject” and “object” push each other away, confront each other, collapse, and start again - inseparable, contaminated, condemned, at the boundary of what is assimilable, thinkable: abject”(Kristeva, Powers of Horror 18). According to Kristeva, abjection helps a subject and an object to become one, therefore she calls it “a new start”. It is a new start not only for merging of those concepts, it is a new life for a former object itself as abjection provides it with a possibility to reset, to get destroyed before reinventing itself and reaching a position of the subject. It is no accident that Kristeva calls abjection “a new start” and “a primer of feminine culture”: “The abject appears in order to uphold “I” within the Other. <...> Abjection is a resurrection that has gone through death (of the ego). It is an alchemy that transforms death drive into a start of life, of new significance” (Kristeva, Powers of Horror 18). This motif of reinvention will become a refrain within the collection *Wilderness Tips*.

The waitresses are reading a *True Romance* magazine. It is a magazine dedicated to the life-stories of unsuccessful, disappointed women, whose life happened to be a failure. These are the stories about divorces, rapes and all the worst things that can happen to a woman. Obviously, all these stories are typical trauma narratives. Interestingly, we deal with a trauma narrative within trauma narrative. Should we try to find out why Atwood decides to use this metafictional device, we have to start from the name of this short story. Atwood could have named her short story after the name of this magazine - True Romance. However, she does not do it, which means that a simple reference to the description of unhappy women’s lives is out of her intention. We should also pay attention to the fact that the very name of this magazine is ironical. Those stories cannot be described as romantic ones. This irony in the name of the magazine invites its readers to take a look at life as it is in reality. Women on the cover of True Romance look messy:

Every one of these magazines has a woman on the cover, with her dress pulled down over one shoulder or a cigarette in her mouth or some other evidence of a messy life. Usually

these women are in tears. Their colours are odd: sleazy, dirt-permeated, like the hand-tinted photos in the five-and-ten. Knee-between-the-legs colours. They have none of the cheerful primaries and clean, toothy smiles of the movie magazines: these are not success stories (11).

Therefore, one of the girls, Hilary, decides that it is better to call these stories not *True Romance*, but *True Trash* stories. By choosing Hilary's renaming as a name for the whole short story Atwood is suggesting to the reader that not only the lives of the heroines of True Romance magazine, but the lives of these waitresses as well can be described as *True Trash* stories. In *True Trash*, just as in other short stories of the collection, Atwood shows the characters caught in the moment of a significant crisis, the moment which will divide their lives into a before and an after. According to Bakhtin, it is another trait of a dialogical narrative. For the reason that a character is never depicted as a fixed image ("A man never coincides with himself. One cannot apply to him the formula of identity A=A" (Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics 59), the character is usually shown in a crisis state. Describing the way Dostoyevsky creates the image of the characters in his dialogic novels, Bakhtin points out that the person is always represented "on the threshold of a final decision, at a moment of crisis, at an unfinalizable - and unpredeterminable - turning point for his soul" (Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics 61).

But what exactly does the word "trash" refer to? If it is to describe the "not success stories", it encourages the reader to guess that Atwood describes the society within which an unhappy woman's life is considered as trash. It is a society within which if a woman does not show off her cheerfulness, she is not usable.

The story the girls are reading is about a girl from the countryside who does not study really well because she needs to make money so she sews dresses for rich women and has a part-time job in the store. There are two shoe clerks chasing after her. The girl lives with her divorced mother who wants her to choose one of the two shoe clerks to get married without "making a

terrible mistake, the way she did". Mentioning the fact that the girl's mother is divorced is not without a reason: marriage is presented from the very beginning of the story as something unreliable. The girl must make her choice and get married, as any woman who is made to play according to patriarchal rules if she wants to build a successful life. Getting married is presented as an obligatory stage in every woman's life. Nevertheless, getting married is not something the heroine wants to do, she is not sure about her feelings toward those shoe clerks, however, it is something she feels she must do.

Marriage has often been a trap for women, a state of imprisonment and sometimes brutality that they must endure, escape or eschew. That is to say, marriage has played a significant role in maintaining the wider regime of gender inequality, since it has been used to consolidate legal, economic, cultural, and symbolic oppression by confining women to a private sphere in which they are seriously disadvantaged (Chambers 6).

"The girl herself has planned to go to trade school and learn hospital management, but lack of money makes this impossible"(12). We see that the heroine had her own plans, however they happen to be undoable, therefore, the only way to climb the social ladder is to get married.

For the girl it is difficult to make a choice between the two men, therefore one of the reading girls suggests her to "try out both of them, to see which one's the best", on which another one replies that if she does it, she will be called "a Fallen Woman, capital F, capital W" (12).

Historically getting involved into any sexual connection without being married has always meant for a woman to be "a fallen" one. Simone de Beauvoir commented this as follows: "for women marriage was the only way to experience sex and motherhood without punishing social disapproval" (De Beauvoir 76). Not only marriage, but any communication with men happens to be dangerous - this is why Dirk who comes to the girl's house when her mother is gone is described by her as "an animal stalking its prey" (13).

The motif of imprisonment becomes a refrain within this short story. The waitresses are stranded on the island. The mainland is too far and they are not allowed to leave the island.

“But the waitresses will not be shipped back to the mainland until the end of summer: it’s too far for a day off, and they would never be allowed to stay away overnight. So here they are, for the duration” (16). What’s interesting is that there are nine of them. “There are nine waitresses. There are always nine. Only the names and faces change” (16). As we know, nine is the number of the muses. In ancient Greek the word “muse” means “thinking one”. The number of the girls is not the only signal which can refer the reader to the muses. As we know from mythology, the muses are connected to music, arts and intellectual sphere. During the whole short-story we see the waitresses only during some intellectual business - they either read, or discuss what they have just read. The waitresses are also related to art - while washing the dishes they sing. “While they work they sing. They’re missing the ocean of music in which they float during the winter” (17). “Joanne can improvise the alto harmony, which makes everything sound less scratchy” (18). Not all the girls sing, but those who are not good at singing are good at sports, for instance.

Mostly during the whole short-story the girls are represented as a united collective image. However, one of the “muses” is more individualized - Ronette. As in many Atwood’s works, the concept of naming plays a crucial role here as well. The names are not just names, they are more than simple words or tags, they can tell us the whole story of the character and describe its identity.

Such a close attention to names, words and language in general, encourages us to observe it through a Heideggerian perspective. According to Heidegger, the word is the only possible form of existence for any thing. The word is a mediator that provides a fleshless idea with a possibility to move from Being to Dasein (existence). To be said means to get born, to become alive and visible. One of the clearest examples of the Heideggerian view of the word was given by him in the lecture which was included into the collection “On the way to language”. In this essay the philosopher analyzes a poem by Stefan George “The Word”. The poem concludes with a line “Where word breaks off no thing may be.”. Heidegger interprets this line in the

following way: “Only where the word for the thing has been found is the thing a thing. Only thus is it. Accordingly we must stress as follows: no thing is where the word, that is, the name is lacking. The word alone gives being to the thing” (Heidegger 62)

Atwood’s understanding of the concept of word seems similar to the Heideggerian philosophy. Within her poetics a name is the main tool for defining the characters. Across the whole collection the characters lose, invent and reinvent their names, which helps them to find their ultimate identity. (In “Isis in Darkness” the heroine invents a pseudonym twice - Selena - for everyday life (we do not know her real life) and Isis for publishing her poems, in “Hairball” the protagonist starts her way being “romanticized Katherine and ends it as “pointed as a nail Kat”, at the very end of short story we see her nameless, etc.). “True Trash” is not an exception in terms of the names’ significance. When the waitresses are being introduced to the reader, the narrator mentions that all of them, except one, have nicknames. Ronette, the one who does not have any nickname, “has some mysterious, extra status. For instance, everyone else has a nickname: Hilary is Hil, Stephanie is Steph, Alex is Al; Joanne is Jo, Tricia is Trish, Sandy is San. Pat and Liz, who cannot be contracted any farther, have become Pet and Lizard. Only Ronette has been accorded the dignity of her full, improbable name” (19). Should we pay attention to Ronette’s description, we will see that the narrator uses such epithets as “mysterious”, “extra”, “improbable”, which highlight that this character does not fit her environment. She has some special knowledge. Although she is not more intellectual than the other girls, it looks like she knows something that the others do not. “In some ways she is more grown-up than the rest of them. But it isn’t because she knows more things. She knows fewer things; <...> But she knows other things, hidden things. Secrets. And these other things are older, and on some level more important. More fundamental. Closer to the bone” (19). This extra-knowledge happens to be Ronette’s ability to think outside of the box, to behave against the stereotypes and restrictions of the society she lives in and not to be ashamed of this behavior. Later the reader learns that Ronette is the one who had sex with Donny, a

fourteen-year old boy and gets pregnant. Despite the expectations of the society which does not accept an unmarried woman with a child, Ronette decides to keep the baby without telling anything to its father. When Joanne advises Ronette to make an abortion, the very word seems to her to be “a dark and mysterious word, connected with the States” (29). Throughout the whole collection the image of America represents an alien, dangerous and undiscovered land, which does not promise any good.

However, closing Ronette’s description the narrator adds: “Or so thinks Joanne, who has a bad habit of novelizing” (19). Consequently, the reader is not given any reliable narrator throughout the whole short-story. There is no one to be trusted, which is, again, a typical feature of trauma narratives. Nevertheless, due to this absence of any reliable teller the reader does not understand whose trauma he is being told about. The whole narrative is gappy, puzzling and broken, as if the writer chooses this way of writing on purpose in order to activate the reader’s potential and imagination. It is us who are supposed to make the story united and meaningful. Unlike the girls, the boys seem absolutely unremarkable - Joanne finds it difficult to remember them by names, she recognizes only few of them. The reader is given a description only of three of them, the ones who stand out, as it seems to Joanne, - Donny, Darce and Monty. Only coming closer to the end of the story the reader becomes able to realize that during the whole short story we were dealing with a double-focalized narrative. Obviously, we have no authorial narration here as the whole picture seems unclear till the very last sentence of the short-story. All the events are given through two characters’ perspectives - Joanne and Donny. Joanne is the focalizer through which the reader is being told about the girl’s life, while Donny - about the boy’s one. Both Joanne and Donny can be classified as those who misreport (Joanne) and underreport (Donny) as Joanne “has a bad habit of novelizing”, while Donny is simply unaware of such crucial facts of this story as Ronette’s pregnancy.

Throughout the whole short-story both Joanne and Donny feel that they do not match their environment. When Joanne finishes reading the story in *True Romance* (now she reads it on her

own as none of the girls wanted to join her), “she feels deprived”. What makes her feel deprived is the final image of that girl from the story who found her happiness in marriage with one of the two shoe-clerks. “Her life isn’t exciting maybe, but it’s a good life, in the trailer park, the three of them. The baby is adorable. They buy a dog. It’s an Irish setter, and chases sticks in the twilight while the baby laughs. This is how the story ends, with the dog”. Joanne feels excluded from this possibility to be happy this way. “She’s almost crying. She will never have a dog like that, or a baby either. She doesn’t want them, and anyway how would she have time, considering everything she has to get done? She has a long, though vague, agenda. Nevertheless she feels deprived” (23). Despite the fact she understands that starting a family is not the only way to become happy, she feels deprived as public opinion states the opposite. Therefore, she does not see any place in the future for herself. She is sure she will die young. “I will die before I’m thirty. She knows this absolutely. It’s a tragic but satisfactory thought. If necessary, if some wasting disease refuses to carry her off, she’ll do it herself, with pills. She is not at all unhappy but she intends to be, later. It seems required” (22). She recites to herself a quote from a poem that came up to her mind: “This is no country for old men” (22) and decides to change it to old women. She thinks she belongs to those old women for whom there is no place in this world.

Donny feels ashamed of belonging to the sphere of male rudeness. He does not like his young male body. He cannot get along with other boy’s rude jokes on the girls and it becomes the main reason for his conflict with the camp administration and other boys.

These plot-lines are kept separated till the flash-forward which comes straight after the episode where Joanne and Ronette are discussing Ronette’s pregnancy. In this flash-forward Joanne meets Donny eleven years later in the streets of Toronto. This is the moment when all the pieces of the puzzle come together for Joanne who has always been searching for a clear story, “a neat ending” (37).

The question is: why is the reader given the whole story through Joannes's perspective? The most obvious compositional decision would be to choose the narrator from the participants of the love-line - it would be clear enough if Atwood decided to make either Donny or Ronette the centre of the figural narrative. However, she decides to make Joanne responsible for gathering the pieces of the puzzle. Joanne is a third person for Donny's and Ronette's romance, she is an observer who was not involved into any traumatizing event. Then why is the narrative so gapped and broken as if it was a trauma one? The answer is that it is still a trauma narrative, however, the traumatized person here is neither Donny, who does not even know that he got Ronette pregnant, nor Ronette as she felt rather optimistic with her future. She calms down Joanne who worries about her: "I'm keeping it. Don't worry, my mom will help me out" (30). Moreover, the reader is not provided with Ronette's perspective, the character disappears from the story straight after this dialogue. Such a dramatic non-correlation between fabula and sujet is used in order to demonstrate to the reader that the main intention of the short-story was not simply to tell about the events, but to show how those events have formed an emotional feedback in those who were observing them. Bakhtin detected three main features of a dialogic narrative:

1. Relative freedom and independence enjoyed by the hero and his voice under the conditions of polyphonic design
2. Special placement of the idea in such a design
3. New principles of linkage shaping the novel into a whole (Bakhtin was developing his polyphony theory on material of Dostoevsky's novels).

Such a broken narrative which consists of the perspectives of two focalizers, flashbacks and flashforwards is a bright example of those "new principles of linkage" that Bakhtin was writing about. Narrative becomes not the framework which everything else in the novel or the short story must suit, but one of the means of ensuring creation of the personality's image, of something that Bakhtin himself was calling "The great Dialogue", which "is organized as an

unclosed whole of life itself, life poised on the threshold” (Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoyevsky’s Poetics 63).

That is to say, this is a story not about Donny and Ronette, but about Joanne’s comprehension of it.

It is Joanne’s and Donny’s dialogue which happens eleven years after the events that uncovers the truth. Dialogue happens to be the only way to restore the wholeness of history, it is the only way to discover some new knowledge. Commenting the Bakhtinian notion of dialogue, the French philosopher René Girard says: “I is not an object neighbouring with other “I-objects”. It is being created by means of relations with Other and it must not be considered outside the context of these relations” (Girard 150).

2. Playing creator of others to become creator of the self: intertextuality in M. Atwood's

“Hairball”

According to Carl Jung's definition, myth is something that “expresses characters and stories that are encoded into the human species in prehistory, and therefore expresses universal concerns” (Jung 42). Mythology has always helped humanity to understand how the world around us works and to define the place we take in it. As far as Jung is concerned, mythological images have always helped people to find the basis of their identity. According to Jung, myth helps one to make a journey into oneself, “to plunge into self in order to discover self” (Jung 42).

Nowadays there are hundreds different ways to define such a complicated philosophical concept as myth. The reason why we find it necessary to deal with the Jungian definition while observing the role of myth in the work of Margaret Atwood is that Jung highlights its role in self-recreation, in the reconstruction of individual and social identities. Referring her readers to a mythological background, Atwood not only provides an associative field of her text, but fosters new contexts to rethink the traditional meanings usually associated to these mythological allusions. Commenting on a question about frequently using folk and mythological reminiscences in one of her interviews, Atwood stated: «Myths mean stories, and traditional myths mean traditional stories that have been repeated frequently. The term doesn't pertain to Greek myths alone. Grimm's Fairy Tales are just as much myth or a story as anything else. But some get repeated so often in the society that they become definitive, i.e. myths of that society» (Appleton 2). Just as myth is used by the collective unconscious for recreating its own identity, Margaret Atwood uses mythological references to define personality of the character..

In the introduction to her work on the role of the myths, legends and fairy-tales in Margaret Atwood's novels and short-stories Sarah A. Appleton argues: “Atwood's writings are never simple revisions of its intertexts” (2). The connection between new-bearing original narrative

and referential myth is rather complicated. “In deconstructing her fairy-tale and mythic intertexts, allowing the muted or silenced subtext to speak, Atwood’s metanarratives consist of more than two narrative stand interwoven in dialectic with one another the frame narrative [...] and the embroidered intertexts usually heightened, exaggerated or parodical” (Wilson 31).

Intertextuality is one of the defining features of a dialogically-structured text. Moreover, poststructuralist theory of intertextuality which was developed by the French philological school (Kristeva, Barth, Genette) outgrew of Bakhtinian ideas. Kristeva started developing her theory of intertextuality in her early essay “Word, Dialogue, and Novel” by which she introduced the work of Bakhtin to western scholars. Kristeva explained: “Bakhtinian dialogism identifies writing as both subjectivity and communication or, better, as intertextuality. Confronted with this dialogism, the notion of ‘a person – subject of writing’ becomes blurred, yielding to that as ambivalence of writing” (Word, Dialogue, and Novel 39). Bakhtin’s theory of dialogue has changed the vision of poetic word. A literary text can no longer be seen as a monological statement produced by an individual solely and not dependent on such wider factors as language, cultural and literary tradition. Bakhtin demonstrated that the literary word should be seen “as an intersection of textual surfaces rather than a point (a fixed meaning), as a dialogue among several writings: that of the writer, the addressee (or the character) and the contemporary or earlier cultural context” (Kristeva, Word, Dialogue and Novel 36). Intertextual analysis provides us with a possibility to uncover the hidden cultural codes and to find the text’s place in a wider cultural context. As Kristeva claims, Bakhtin was the first theoretician to see that “any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another” (Word, Dialogue and Novel 37).

Atwood’s “Hairball” is a bright example of such a “mosaic” text that revises and rethinks the texts of the past. Despite the fact that this text almost directly refers us to the myth of Pygmalion and Galatea, it does not copy the mythical plot, but applies its semantics to the modern reality. This is what Bakhtin called “two paths merging within the narrative.” Kristeva

clarifies it: ‘When he speaks of “two paths merging within the narrative,’ Bakhtin considers writing as a reading of the anterior literary corpus and the text as an absorption of and a reply to another text” (Word, Dialogue, and Novel 39).

Kristeva became a pioneer in intertextual sphere of studies. She was followed by Gérard Genette who in 1981 distinguished five types of transtextual relationships:

- 1) Intertextuality – a relationship of copresence between two texts or among several texts (quoting, plagiarism, allusion)
- 2) Paratextuality – less explicit and more distant relationship that binds the text properly speaking, taken within the totality of the literary work, to what can be called its’ paratext (title, subtitle, intertitles, prefaces, etc.)
- 3) Metatextuality – the relationship most often labeled “commentary.” It unites a given text to another, of which it speaks without necessarily citing it, in fact even sometimes without naming it
- 4) Architextuality – a relationship that is completely silent, articulated at most only by a paratextual mention, which can be titular, but which remains in any case of a purely taxonomic nature (structurally-genred relationship between the texts)
- 5) Hypertextuality – any relationship uniting a text B (hypertext) to an earlier text A (hypotext), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary (parody)” (1 – 7).

According to Genette’s classification, “Hairball” may be considered as an example of a metatextual type of transtextuality. Although it refers us to the myth of Pygmalion by means of the images and characters’ system, it does not name it directly. Genette mentions that the texts belonging to this type have not been well-studied yet: “Extensive studies (meta-metatexts) of certain metatexts have naturally been conducted, but I am not sure that the very fact and status of the metatextual relationship have yet been considered with all the attention they deserve. That may be about to change” (4).

In this chapter we will demonstrate the metatextual structure of this relationship between text A (referring) and text B (referred) on the example of “Hairball” centering on the reference to the myth about Pygmalion and Galatea represented in it.

The narrative poem “Metamorphoses” by Ovid (1st century AD) is claimed to be the first written representation of Pygmalion’s myth, however it had existed within Greek mythological tradition for many centuries before. It is fair to mention that this myth created a special archetype for the world culture and provided hundreds of artists, sculptors and writers from different countries and even epochs with common background and a source of inspiration for their work. With the publication of “Pygmalion” by Bernard Shaw, the 20th century marked a new milestone in the history of literary adaptations of the myth. This famous play managed to add new connotations to the core of the classical mytheme and provided the readers of following generations with new possibilities of interpretations, particularly through a feminist approach. Since then it has become impossible to identify the reference to the myth of Pygmalion and avoid analyzing the relationship of male and female characters in terms of power.

One of the main problems presented in Atwood’s short-story “Hairball” is a problem of self-identification. The heroine is trying to find her place in this world, to realize who and what she is, to accept herself and to find out how to deal with this knowledge. The days the reader spends with Kat are presented as a process of resurrection. In the very first sentence of the short-story the narrator describes the starting point of the sujet as a “day of unluck, month of the dead”(Atwood 41) (meaning that Kat’s surgery which becomes the first event of the plot took place on the 13th of November). If we take a look at the last sentence of the short-story (“And temporarily without a name” (Atwood 56)) in terms of “life/dead” binary opposition, we can interpret it as a statement of Kat’s birth as soon as the only situation when a person does not have a name, not metaphorically speaking, is a new-born person. Later we will see that during the whole story Kat was playing the role of Pygmalion (here I use this name as a symbol

of a typically masculine need of a subject to rule over an object). The word “playing” is crucial here. Only in the end when she rejected this Pygmalion-masque has she been born just as Galatea who was turned to flesh and blood from marble by Aphrodite. Only after abandonment of this artificial role Kat finally starts being herself. Kat is trying to invent her own voice, to learn how to hear it. “When these (female) voices begin to be received, it becomes evident that women have not been silent while men have dominated discourse women’s voices are as insistent as men’s. The challenge is to learn to hear their unique voices with their stories so different from those entrenched in traditional male discourse and not to erase them as patriarchy has so insistently done. Women’s voices assert themselves with increasing authority against silence and pose a threat to patriarchal wholeness indeed” (Sexton 16).

The first fact that the reader learns about Kat is her having a cyst. The first characteristic of her body becomes its weakness. “The images of the fragmented body pose a threat to the unity of the ego” (Rao 44). A weak body represents a decaying spirit, disunited spirit, a soul that is searching for wholeness. However, the cyst is represented not as an alien object ruining Kat’s organism but as a fragment of her own body. The situation with hairball exemplifies the situation with Ger: it represents Kat’s first explicit attempt to objectify the world around her, an attempt to treat hairball as an object while presenting herself as a subject. It was important for her to own it. She asked a doctor to keep it for her. “It was hers, it was benign, it didn’t deserve to be thrown away” (42). It is worth stressing that Ger’s name enters the textual space for the first time just after the description of hairball. Kat is describing Ger as an object as well. Furthermore, not as an object, but as an object produced by her: “Body art. Her art. She’s done her job well; he’s finally sexy” (52). She is treating him as her “art”, as her “job”, playing this Pygmalion-role. Another point that we should pay attention to here is the fact that she is describing Ger in bodily terms highlighting his physical appearance, his sexuality, which sets another connection between Ger and hairball. However, while Ger is being described as an object, hairball is treated as a half-alive creature by Kat. Pathetic fallacy is the main trope used

by the narrator in the description of hairball. The narrator mentions that Kat is treating the hairball “as if the thing had a soul and wished her well” (42). Kat is comparing it to something that used to be alive – “a stuffed bear’s head or a preserved ex-pet” (42). It also seems to her that it has hair, tooth, nails, bones, fingers and toes. She asks the doctor whether she can consider it as her child that was not born and she does ignoring the doctor’s denials. Taking everything mentioned into account, we can conclude that Kat poses herself as a Pygmalion either to Ger, or to hairball. She needs to have an object under control by her side, to have her own Galatea. The question is why such necessity exists.

Gayle Lawson Moody who was observing the problems of selfhood in Margaret Atwood’s fiction claimed: “Sometimes women who refuse to be oppressed attempt to change their roles not by defining themselves but by moving into subject position” (109). In my opinion, this reading is a clear explanation of the Pygmalion-situation presented in “Hairball.” Death in the beginning (“day of unluck, month of death”) represents the death of Kat’s selfhood, it sheds doubt on her authencity. The surgery starts her searching for herself.

Transformation is at the center of this short-story. Kat’s life is all about transformation, which makes us think of carnivalization as one of the defining features of any dialogical text. As Kristeva puts it, “As composed of distances, relationships, analogies and non-exclusive appositions, it is essentially dialogical. It is a spectacle without a stage, a game, but also with daily undertaking; a signifier, but also a signified” (Word, Dialogue, and Novel 49). Turning to something else, denying her previous identity and attempts to invent a new one define Kat’s personal development. The brightest example of it is the history of inventing Kat’s present name, the history of moving from “romanticized Katherine” to “pointed as a nail Kat” (Atwood 44). Changing a name is highly significant for the heroine. The narrator pays so much attention to the name-changing situation due to the special understanding of the very concept of the name. Why name is becoming so important in terms of transformation of Kat’s identity? Speaking in Ferdinand de Saussure’s terms, a name cannot be limited only to the function of

signifier. Specificity of its nature is in the fact that it includes the functions both of signifier and of signified. The name represents an inseparable synthesis of the meaning and the expression of it. According to such understanding of the concept of the name, Kat's name does not just *name*, but defines her. The name becomes an explicit representation of her personality, the main tool of her self-defining. Therefore we can conclude that language becomes one of the semantic centers of the story. For Atwood's heroines it is impossible to find themselves without inventing their own language. In one of her interviews Atwood mentions: "Language is one of the few tools we do have. So we have to use it even though it's untrustworthy" (Hancock 209). Commenting on this claim, Melanie Sexton states that Atwood sees language as "the most powerful tool that has been used by patriarchal society in order to subjugate women. <...> Shaping human perceptions, language turns women into objects" (Sexton 10). That is what Kat is trying to fight against. Trying to invent her own language, in the beginning of her way Kat does not discover anything new, but plays those social roles invented by patriarchal society. Kat is learning to act as an active power, as a creator, as a Pygmalion. She sees Ger as an object: she not only transforms, "cuts" his name ("It was she who transformed him, first to Gerry, then to Ger" (44), but treats him as "her creation": "A lot of his current tastes <...> were once hers. In his new phase, with his new, hard, stripped-down name ending on the sharpened note of r, he is her creation" (44). Not only her relationship with Ger, but the sphere of her job is about transforming others as well. She is creating other people appearances, providing them with stereotypes of good-looks. "She had become a creator, she created total looks" (45). R.M. Weaver interprets it this way: "The readers of Kat's magazine, *Feline*, are kept off balance by being made to think that they have the power to transform themselves if they buy the right products" (76). Trying to control the world around her, Kat is trying to gain access to the power-sphere, to get authority. All this is a part of inventing a self-defining language. "Language is not a neutral medium but inextricably connected to power" (Sexton 13). However, the reader realizes along with Kat that these borrowed patriarchal models of behavior

do not work for her when she is dreaming about “Ger with a house and a small child” (Atwood 54) and about being the wife whose photo he has in a silver frame. According to Atwood’s vision, these models will never provide a woman with a feeling of happiness as soon as they are borrowed from patriarchy. “In order for women to become subjects in language, they must not usurp existing structures, but reinvent language” (Sexton 5). Kristeva names the women who have to borrow men’s language suffering women: “Estranged from language, women are visionaries, dancers who suffer as they speak” (*Oscillation Between Power and Denial* 166).

“The women say, the language you speak poisons your glottis, tongue, pollute lips. They say, the language you speak is made up of words that are killing you. They say, the language you speak is made up of signs that rightly speaking designate what men have appropriated. Whatever they have not laid hands on, whatever they have not pounced on like many-eyed birds of prey, does not appear in the language you speak” (Wittig 183).

Kat’s Pygmalion’s role happens to be the masque under which she is hiding her natural woman’s desires, her female “normality.” This desire to possess herself as an extraordinary woman is presented in the very beginning of the short-story when Kat is asking a doctor whether her cyst is abnormal and gets disappointed with his answer: “She would have preferred uniqueness” (42). She wants to have something abnormal within her body, to be unique as she sees a threat in being normal from a patriarchal point of view: “For a woman negotiating a world owned and managed by men, the greatest danger of all is her own desire to be desired” (Pringle 10). For Kat this danger in accepting the fact that she wants to see her picture in a silver frame on Ger’s desk, to have a house and children with them. However, this Pygmalion’s role does not “liberate a woman from psychological and financial dependence from men” (Rao 48). What is crucial to highlight here is the word “psychological.” Kat’s psychological dependence on Ger as an object of her traditional womanhood’s dreams is hidden in her unconscious. Creating such plot-element as a hairball, Atwood makes this metaphor visible, almost alive. Hairball represents the traditional part of Kat’s womanhood, complete with flesh

and blood. Financial dependence does not play a crucial role here, however, it is represented by the plot-line – Ger fires Cat; this becomes the trigger for their falling apart.

In one of the final scenes when we see Kat sitting on the floor talking to hairball, Kat finally realizes that a Pygmalion role is just a role that does not suit her. Kat admits that she has never wanted to be Pygmalion, it has always been an artificial masque that helped her to feel safe and independent. In this scene she dialogues with hairball addressing her womanhood for the first time through it. Seeing a hairball as an unborn child she accepts her desire of being a wife, a mother. “Hairball” is a bright example of how “Atwood advocates creating an experience that does not isolate the woman/mother and allowing women to choose to have children instead of forcing them to accept children as an inadequate substitute for a “career” or some kind of parasitic burden” (Moody 4). This acceptance brings Kat new knowledge, “dark and precious and necessary” (54). And this knowledge “cuts.” It is crucial to pay attention to this verb. The narrator chooses “cuts” instead of “hurts” or any other one not only to highlight the kind of pain that it brings to Kat but to make us remember the history of her name: “When she ran away to England, she sliced herself down to Kat” (44). In the note that she sends to Ger with a wrapped hairball we can see that now she cut “Kat” to “K”: “Love, K.” (56). “The story ends with Atwood’s characteristic word play in her depiction of the power of Kat’s “rage” to fuel her ongoing transformation from Kat to ‘K.’ ”(Weaver 77). Now this new knowledge cuts her to namelessness presented in the last sentence of the short-story: “She feels light and peaceful and filled with charity, and temporarily without a name” (56). This namelessness starts her new story, a story of a new life where she finally throws away all the masques and starts searching for her new identity.

Paradoxically, Kat’s playing the role of Pygmalion, flirting with this role of the subject, ended with her realizing the fact that she can actually be the subject, not to play the role of an active actor, not to pretend being a creator screaming “I gave you life!” (52) as she does with Ger, but

to become this creator, creator of her own identity, to give life, not to somebody else, but to herself.

3. Isis in Darkness: carnivalization as a mean for setting the Great Dialogue

While analyzing the specificity of dialogical narratives' composition and plot, Bakhtin detected a problem related to the issue of carnivalization². According to Bakhtin, the *topos* of carnival is one of the structuring devices not only for the composition of a dialogical text, but for culture as a whole as well. “The problem of carnival (in the sense of the sum total of all diverse festivities, rituals and forms of a carnival type) -its essence, its deep roots in the primordial order and the primordial thinking of man, its development under conditions of class society, its extraordinary life force and its undying fascination-is one of the most complex and most interesting problems in the history of culture” (Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoyevsky’s Poetics 122). What interests us most of all is its connection to literature: in which way and to what measure did carnival influence literature as such and a dialogical narrative, in particular - this is what Bakhtin called “problem of carnivalization”. He defined carnival as “syncretic pageantry of a ritualistic sort” (Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoyevsky’s Poetics 122) which has developed its own symbolic language - “this language cannot be translated in any full or adequate way into a verbal language” (Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoyevsky’s Poetics 122). Nevertheless, despite this fact, it can be translated into a language of artistic images - and this is exactly how it becomes visible in literary texts.

The reason why carnival is so relevant for dialogical narratives is that just as in a dialogical narrative, in a carnivalistic situation “Everyone is an active participant. <...> Its participants live in it, they live in a carnivalistic life. Because carnivalistic life is life drawn out of its usual rut, it is to some extent “life turned inside out”, the reverse side of the world” (Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoyevsky’s Poetics 164). Depicting such a carnivalistic life becomes one of the circumstances for creating a dialogical world in a literary text. Everlasting metamorphoses, shape-shifting,

² A huge part of Bakhtin’s work is dedicated to his attempts to map the significance of carnival as a cultural phenomenon for the history of humanity. He briefly touched this subject in “Problems of Dostoyevsky’s Poetics” and payed close attention to it in “Rabelais and His World”.

ritualization and metaphors depicting a circle of life and death are the tropes organizing a carnivalistic chronotope. All this is an integral part of “Isis in Darkness”’s system of images. Throughout the whole short story the reader faces the images of “women with two heads, men who got changed into flies” (68) (this is what young Richard sees in the afternoon movies when Selena disappears from his life for the first time), “tricky women and shape-shifting men” (68) in Selena’s poetry, “sluts” that look like “surreal butterflies emerging from cocoons of light” (70) and so on. Metamorphoses and animalistic images referring to humans are not the only features of carnivalistic discourse that we see in “Isis in Darkness”. According to Bakhtin, dreams, daydreams and scandal scenes are part of carnivalization as well (Problems of Dostoyevsky’s Poetics 164). In “Isis in Darkness” we have a detailed description of Richard’s dream of Selena, not so long before they meet again in 1970 when she entered his house.

Those nights, when he was lying in bed on the threshold of sleep, he would remember her or she would appear to him, he was never sure which; a dark-haired woman with her arms upstretched, in a long cloak of blue and dull gold or of feathers or of white linen. The costumes were variable, but she herself remained a constant. She was something of his own that he had lost (74).

Dreams are becoming the only possible way to save the image in Richard’s memory, bring it back to life over and over again, prevent it from getting lost. As Bakhtin points out, “Dreams, daydreams, insanity destroy the epic and tragic wholeness of a person and his fate: the possibilities of another person and another life are revealed in him, he loses his finalized quality and ceases to mean only one thing; he ceases to coincide with himself” (Problems of Dostoyevsky’s Poetics 117). By reconstructing Selena’s image in his dreams, Richard opens himself up and becomes ready to enter the dialogue. This is why carnivalization becomes a necessary mean for creating a dialogical text - “Carnivalization in literature makes possible the creation of the open structure of the great dialogue” (Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoyevsky’s Poetics 177).

Just as the previous short story, “Isis in Darkness” represents the narrator’s attempt to reconstruct a united story, to make the narrative whole again. An idea of gathering the pieces of the whole is implied already into the title of the short story. Isis is the main goddess in Ancient Egyptian mythology: her husband Osiris was killed by his brother, and Isis proceeds gathering the pieces of her husband’s body to make it whole again. Within the context of Atwood’s short story Isis is a pseudonym of the main heroine. Atwood shows us some carnivalesque within which real names are not that relevant as the invented ones. Later we will come back to the description of this pseudonym. Again, by breaking the main plot, Atwood challenges the reader’s activity and the power of his or her imagination. The narrative is puzzling: the short story starts with a description of Richard’s present, he is sitting at the desk reflecting on his past. After that we come back to the years of Richard’s youth, then suddenly several times come back to Richard’s present again. To sum up, Richard stops his attention on three periods of his life, all of them are marked by his meetings with Selena – his youth, when he first meets her in his twenties, approximately ten years later when Selena suddenly appears in his and his wife’s house, and the later years when he comes across her in the streets of Toronto. These three periods are presented not sequentially. It is up to the reader to reset a timeline of Richard’s life.

In “Isis in Darkness” we deal with a figural narrative. Everything that had happened previously is given to the reader from Richard’s perspective. The short story starts with a question which Richard addresses to himself: “How did Selena get here?” (59). The reader is confused from the very beginning of the short story for two reasons. Firstly, it has not been explained yet who Selena was. Secondly, it remains unclear what the word “here” refers to. Does it refer to Richard’s life in general or does it refer to the place where Selena finished her lifeway? The second sentence adds that this question keeps chasing Richard for a long time: “This is a question Richard is in the habit of asking himself” (59). If Richard keeps searching for an answer to this question, it means that every time he raises it, he fails to find an ultimate answer, he fails to reconstruct the puzzle of the narrative and to make it whole again: “He has a repertoire of answers” (59), but none of them seems

to satisfy him. This repertoire of possible answers consists of Richard's poetic visions of Selena's death.

Sometimes he pictures her drifting down towards the mundane rooftops in a giant balloon made of turquoise and emerald-green silks, or arriving on the back of a golden bird like the ones on Chinese tea-cups. On other days, darker ones like this Thursday – Thursday, he knows, was a sinister day in her calendar – she wends her way through a long underground tunnel encrusted with blood-red jewels and with arcane inscriptions that glitter in the light of torches. (59-60).

Richard reaps his poetic and rather abstract description by mentioning two concrete places that existed for real - Petrowsky's tomb and Mount Pleasant Cemetery. Afterwards Richard mentions that Selena would love the previous passage as she has always liked the synthesis of the banal and the numinous. "She once said that the universe was a doughnut. She named the brand" (60). Here we should mention that according to Ancient Egyptian mythology, Isis was a daughter of the god of the earth Geb and of the goddess of the sky Nut, which can be interpreted in the following way - the very origin of Isis is already an intersection of two opposite powers. When Richard comes to describing Selena's poetry, he mentions that she was writing about the Egyptian Queen of Heaven and Earth "gathering up the pieces of the murdered and dismembered body of her lover Osiris <...> not in the ancient Middle Kingdom of the Egyptians, but in flat, dingy Toronto, on Spadina Avenue", which means that her very poetry was based on oxymorons.

"The lock splits. The iron gate swings open. She emerges, raises her arms towards the suddenly chilled moon. The world changes" (61). Coming back to his abstract description, Richard provides the reader with a clear reference to the mythological scene where Isis is reviving Osiris. By mentioning her raised arms he forms a parallel to the wings of Isis with which she was usually depicted. According to Egyptian mythology, after making the first mummy from the gathered body of Osiris, Isis turned into the bird Hat, copulated with her husband and conceived their son Horus. An image of Isis, thus, represents the victory of life over death. Probably, this is one of the reasons

why Richard uses an epithet “one with unending life” to characterize Selena. Despite the fact she is gone now and had disappeared several times from his life, she will always be alive in his mind. She is the one who does not let his memories die, who brings them back to life again and again.

Unclearness is there from the very beginning of the short story. The concept of unknown is implied already in the title - the short story is called not just “Isis”, but “Isis in Darkness”: an image of darkness here represents the mysterious sphere of the unknown. The first sub-chapter starts with a question which challenges the reader to find an answer and ends with an affirmation that the suggested version of the events is only one of numerous possible ones: “There are other plots” (61). This sentence can be characterized as an example of aposiopesis – a rhetorical figure, wherein a sentence is left unfinished and the following is supposed to be suggested by the reader. However, we do not understand what plots are implied here. There are two options: either the narrator refers to Isis’s fate, as this sentence is followed by “It just depends on which mythology he is cribbing from” (61), (according to Ancient Egyptian mythology, in different parts of Egypt they believed in different variants of the story of Isis), or it refers to Selena’s life. Using the personal pronoun “he” in the second sentence provides us with a possibility to guess that there are different plots of Selena’s life after Richard that remain unknown to him. In this case the utterance “There are other plots” belongs to Richard’s perspective. What should be highlighted here is that both protagonists are literary persons. They meet for the first time at a poetic performance, where both of them were presenting their poetry. Despite the fact that Richard gave up writing poetry, he became a literary scholar. Literature has always played a crucial role in their lives, therefore they could not but keep this habit of novelizing. By trying to reconstruct Selena’s life, Richard attempts to build his own mythology around Selena’s image. As the reader moves on, he understands that Richard sees literature as a sphere of absolute knowledge. For him it defines not only the person and its characteristics (reflecting on his father, Richard remembers that the only thing he read was Reader’s Digest and bad paperback novels about the war, to which he adds - “so what did he know?” (63)), but the context in general (according to Richard memories, poetry was the main art in Toronto of

his youth: music was an art of less intellectual, cinema was an art of more intellectual young people, and “poetry was the way out then” (62)). Nevertheless, we can clearly see that Richard is a kind of person who tends to make everything seem more complicated than it is. The second sub-chapter starts with a sentence “A factual account exists” (60), which provides the reader with a fake hope that there is an objective trajectory of the events he or she will be given. However, pretty soon we realize that this factual account has never satisfied Richard. It strikes us as another feature of dialogical narrative. If we consider the text as a polyphonic one, we should remember that there cannot be any objective vision within it. Objective perspective can be presented only by means of an authorial narrative where the narrator knows everything about everyone. As Bakhtin makes clear “In a monological novel the one who knows, understands, and sees is in the first instance the author himself. He alone is an ideologist” (Problems of Dostoyevsky’s Poetics 82). While in a dialogic narrative, in contrast, the narrative consists of different subjective perspectives through which fictional space is shown to the reader. Bakhtin explains it the following way: “The truth about the world is inseparable from the truth of the personality” (Problems of Dostoyevsky’s Poetics 78).

Factually, Richard and Selena come from the same sort of area - old pre-Depression Toronto. We are also told that Richard wanted to leave it as soon as possible “because of limited versions of himself it offered to him” (60) - not because he did not suit this environment, not because he did not feel comfortable there, but because he wanted to have more options, more plots of his possible life which Toronto could not provide him with. Moreover, he hopes that Selena’s motivation was the same. The narrator adds ironically “He likes to think so” (60). It is also mentioned that while being a poet Richard gave up free verse, and the reason he did it was “it was too easy” (63). After giving up free verse he started writing sestinas and villanelles - the highly-structured poetic forms which are counted as the most difficult to be written. In connection to this we should also mention the way Richard characterizes Selena’s first appearing: ‘It was as if she’d materialized out of nowhere’ (65) - he keeps describing her as a creature that belongs to some mystique spiritual sphere. Interestingly, despite the fact he knows that Selena was not her real name, he never calls her Marjorie: “Richard

has learned this by mistake, in the course of his researches, and has tried in vain to forget it” (60).

Truth seems to never be enough for Richard. He keeps inventing his own versions of the events, building his own mythology.

The concept of death and renewal moves the whole short story, starting with a title dedicated to the goddess of renewal and ending with Selena’s death as a full-stop of the plot. The pathos of death and renewal, as Bakhtin called it, is another *topos* defining a carnivalistic narrative. The scholar reminds that all the images of carnival are dualistic - crowning/decrowning, king-slave, king-fool, pregnant-dead and so on. “They unite within themselves both poles of change and crisis: birth and death <...>, blessing and curse <...>, praise and abuse, youth and old age, top and bottom, face and backside, stupidity and wisdom. <...> This is a special instance of the carnival category of eccentricity, the violation of the usual and the generally accepted, life drawn out of its usual rut” (Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoyevsky’s Poetics 126). In “Isis in Darkness” Richard himself mentions rebirth several times. Firstly, he mentions that “he wanted to be transformed by her (Selena), into someone he was not” (70), which makes us think both of the metamorphoses and rebirth as in order to become someone he or she is not, one must stop his existence in his current form firstly. Secondly, he wanted to spend a night with her and to emerge reborn. For Richard Selena belongs to some sacral sphere of power capable to control death and renewal. Another interesting detail is that Richard and Selena meet three times - each in “another zero year”, “another year of nothing” (79) - 1960, 1970, 1980. “Selena was later to call it “the white-hot luminous egg/ from which everything hatches”, but for Richard <...> it signalled a deadend” (61). This is another example of carnival dualistic images. Selena associated those zero-years with rebirth and beginning, while for Richard it meant an end. What is worth stressing is that after all they switch their positions - Selena dies, however for Richard this dead-end becomes the beginning. In the end of the short-story Richard starts writing a book on Selena’s poetry trying to keep her alive this way. “Why does he write about her? She is his last hope” (82). Richard’s need for interpretation Selena’s poetry creates a special dimension in which memory keeps being alive. The form of philological analysis provides Richard

with an opportunity to make sense out of all the events of this story, to oversee everything that had happened to him and to reconstruct wholeness of his identity. As Kristeva put it, “Literature as such represents the ultimate coding of our crises, of our most intimate and most serious apocalypses” (Power of Horror 208). As soon as Richard had no possibility to be closer to Selena in reality, he tries to grasp this chance by writing a book about her. According to J. Sabol who was inspecting the questions of memory, history and identity in contemporary fiction, “Literature helps as it gives one a possibility to experience something which was not experienced in real life” (Sabol 10). Petar Ramadanovic claimed that this ability to allow not experienced experience makes literature a special form of art which helps one to overcome an experienced one. “What makes literature into the privileged, but not the only site of trauma is the fact that literature as an art form can contain and present an aspect of experience which was not experienced or processed fully. Literature, in other words, because of its figurative language, is a channel and a medium for a transmission of trauma which does not need to be apprehended in order to be present in a text” (Ramadanovic).

After all Richard becomes an Isis himself. By deciding to write a book on Selena’s poetry he tries to set something that Bakhtin called a Great Dialogue. As I. Sandomirskaya mentioned, Bakhtin himself saw writing as “a project of achieving a whole that is continually collapsing. A whole that is de-oeurved, un-worked, in-operative, in-effect, already lost before it has begun” (Sandomirskaya 285). The short story ends with the following passage: “He closes them and rests his forehead on his two fisted hands, summoning up whatever is left of his knowledge and skill, kneeling beside her in the darkness, fitting her broken pieces back together” (83). By mentioning “her (Selena’s) broken pieces, Richard turns us back to the allusion of the myth. Just as the Egyptian goddess was bringing together the pieces of her dead husband’s body, Richard brings together the pieces of his memories about Selena to keep her image alive in his mind. The very last phrase of the short story shows that now it is Richard’s turn to gather pieces of his life’s broken narrative to find out what it all was about.

4. The Bog body chronotope as a mean of constructing the time and space compositional level in “The Bog Man”

The plot of the fourth short story of the collection is based on a story concerning the last year's student Julie who has an affair with a married professor. However, the first sentences of the short story make the reader suspect that it is not a story of Julie's romance, but more likely about her perception of it. The theme of searching for the appropriate words strikes us already in the first passage of “The Bog Man”:

Julie broke up with Connor in the middle of a swamp. Julie silently revises: not exactly in the middle, not knee-deep in rotting leaves and dubious brown water. More or less on the edge; sort of within striking distance. Well, in an inn, to be precise. Or not even an inn. A room in a pub. What was available. And not in a swamp anyway. In a bog. *Swamp* is when the water goes in one end and out the other, *bog* is when it goes in and stays in. How many times did Connor have to explain the difference? Quite a few. But Julie prefers the sound of *swamp*. It is mistier, more haunted. *Bog* is a slang word for toilet, and when you hear *bog* you know the toilet will be a battered and smelly one, and that there will be no toilet paper. So Julie always says: *I broke up with Connor in the middle of a swamp* (87).

Here we see something that Bakhtin called “undirectional double-voiced discourse” (Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics 199). Julie's attempt to define the place where she broke up with Connor is marked by two perspectives - real version of the events (they broke up in a room in a pub) and her own romanticized version (they broke up in the middle of the swamp). Here we see that Julie prefers her own romantic version of defining the space where an event that happened to be significant for her took place. Further we will see that Julie is unable to define not only the place where her break up with Connor happened, but the place which this event has in her memory as well. The rhetorical repetition of the verb “revise” (“Julie silently revises”, “There are other things she revises as well”, “She revises Connor. She revises herself”

(87-8) highlights the fact that the story is governed by reflection and revision more than by simple retelling. As Anthony Purdy claims, “the story, of course, is never really about the affair itself, nor it is about the confused transactions of love, sex and power which take place between Julie and Connor. It is about memory and the passage of time, about our relation to our own past, its negotiated and constantly renegotiated presence in our daily life” (448).

Atwood’s choice of the title becomes one of the arguments proving this statement. The bog man becomes a metaphor for the past that keeps haunting one in the present. This topic of the revision of the past is manifested not only in the paratext, but in the time and space structure which is formed by means of the bog body chronotope. This is a term offered by Anthony Purdy in his work “Unearthing the past: the archaeology of bog bodies in Glob, Atwood, Hebeit and Drabble”. According to Purdy, the first bog body was discovered in 1950. Since then, every discovery of it has been accompanied by a text describing the bog body. Analysis of those texts demonstrated that they share some compositional features, which made Purdy think of a special chronotope bringing them together. It showed that observation of bog people helps to reestablish a connection between the humanity of the past and one of the present. As Purdy put it, “In other words, with their peculiar capacity to compress time, collapsing centuries into hours, and years into minutes, the bog bodies are profoundly, touchingly human and speak of a life, anchored in an everyday that was then but is also now” (447). Therefore, Purdy proposes to treat bog bodies as “a special chronotope, a site of temporal compression, a space in which one time comes alive within another” (Purdy 447). However, why does Purdy finds it useful to apply a Bakhtinian terminology for describing the bog man?

Here we should remember that the term “chronotope” was developed by Bakhtin and described in his essay “Forms of time and chronotope in the novel” (Bakhtin, Dialogic imagination: four essays 119 – 294). Bakhtin defined chronotope (literally “time space”) as “the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature”

(119). The scholar underlines that the most crucial feature of the chronotope is that time and space categories are not able to be separated from one another: “What counts for us is the fact it expresses the inseparability of space and time (time as the fourth dimension of space)” (119).

The bog man becomes the central image of the short story. According to Julie’s memories, it was discovered in Scotland, so she joined the expedition as Connor’s assistant and followed him there from Canada. Despite the fact they have already been there for several days, Julie has not seen the bog man yet as she did not want to. What is interesting is that she decides to see the bog man for the first time straight after finding a photo of Connor’s family in his wallet.

She didn’t bother then, but she’s bothered since. Tucked behind the driver’s license there’s the whole family group, in colour, taken on the lawn in summer: the wife, huge in a flowered dress and squinting; the three boys, with Connor’s red hair, squinting also; the dog, a black Labrador that knew better than to look at the sun, its tongue out and drooling. <...> She decides to walk out to the bog, to find Connor. She has not seen the bog before; she has not seen the bog man (93 - 95).

Facing the bog man changes something in Julie’s mind, in her perception of the world around her, of her place in it. Her reaction to it is surprisingly emotional:

For a moment, Julie feels this digging-up, this unearthing of him, as a desecration. Surely there should be boundaries set upon the wish to know, on knowledge merely for its own sake. This man is being invaded. But the moment passes, and Julie goes out of the tent. Maybe she looks a little green in the face: after all, she’s just seen a dead body. When she lights a cigarette her hands are shaky (96).

These “boundaries set upon the wish to know” is something that Julie will keep constructing in order to protect herself from the moment of realizing what hurt her so much in this story which will fail becoming an element of her past and which will haunt her for twenty years. By forming more new versions of this episode of her youth while retelling it again and again to her friends being adult Julie will keep constructing these “boundaries set upon the wish to know”

what it all really meant to her. Moreover, these boundaries represent not only boundaries between the versions of the events Julie has in mind, but also the boundaries between two words (discourses) that constitute an overall undirectional double-voiced discourse of the whole narrative of this short story. In the chapter dedicated to the analysis of Uncles we will pay more attention to the Bakhtinian classification of different types of discourses and difference between them.

After seeing the bog man Julie initiates an argument with Connor, although he did not give her a reason for it. While having lunch with their Norwegian colleague, after him mentioning his wife Julie makes a sarcastic remark: “So does Connor. Maybe the two of you can discuss your wives” (98). It precedes the night when Julie decides to leave Connor. Seeing the bog man becomes a trigger for Julie which encourages her to change her life. Referring to Bakhtin, Purdy argues: “As with any chronotope, the bog body is “the place where the knots of narrative are tied and untied, where time becomes, in effect, palpable and visible, it functions as the primary means for materializing time in space, makes narrative events concrete, makes them take on flesh, causes blood to flow in their veins” (Purdy 447). The bog body makes time visible. It is not without a reason that Bakhtin calls time a dominant principle of the chronotope: “Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible, likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history” (Bakhtin, Dialogic imagination: four essays 119). Looking at the bog man, Julie sees time, future time in which she does not see herself and Connor together. Although the reader is not told what Julie is thinking when she watches the bog man, it is clear that some insight is taking place there.

Moreover, the images of the three main characters (Connor, his wife and Julie) are presented in terms of bog bodies as well. If Julie’s and the wife’s images are becoming more defined with time, Connor’s image gets faded. The wife who used to be an abstract category for Julie before their trip to Scotland, now becomes defined and almost visible. “It’s astounding to her, the way this invisible wife has put on flesh, has gradually acquired solidity and presence. At the

beginning of her two months with Connor the wife was a negligible shadow. Julie wasn't even that interested in going through Connor's wallet to look for family photos while he was out of the way in the shower" (93). Twenty years later when she will start telling this story to her female friends, she will note that now she feels sympathy to the wife who "is no longer the menacing rival of the piece: Julie has now been a wife herself, and feels a sneaking sympathy" (105). Julie herself "has put on weight around the face, and her waist has solidified" (106), she became "more materialized". While Connor's image has almost disappeared: "Connor, however, loses in substance every time she forms him in words. He becomes flatter and more leathery, more life goes out of him, he becomes more dead. By this time he is almost an anecdote" (106). Both the bog man and Connor become "flatter" with time – Julie uses the same epithet for describing them. Moreover, when Julie describes them, she mentions that both of them were hurt. The bog man has cut-off feet and Connor experienced "damage she may have caused to Connor. She knows the damage was done, was severe, at least at the time; but how can it be acknowledged without sounding like a form of gloating?" (104).

While the story of Julie's and Connor's affair was taking place, Julie was trying to make it fit a "happily-ever-after" narrative pattern, another element of that part of double-voiced discourse which was invented by Julie. She was envious of the wife who "has the territory staked out. She has the home. She has the house, she has the garage, she has the doghouse and the dog to put into it. She has Connor's children, forming together with them a single invincible monster with four heads and sixteen arms and legs. She has the cupboard where Connor hangs his clothes and the washing machine where his socks whirl on washdays, ridding themselves of the lint they've picked up from the bathmats in the rooms he's shared with Julie. Motels are a no man's land: they are not a territory, they cannot be defended. Julie has Connor's sexual attention, but the wife has Connor" (94).

In the beginning of their trip she describes Orkney in a pastoral tone: "It was her first trip across the Atlantic Ocean; she wanted things to be old and picturesque. More important, it was

the first time she and Connor had been alone together for any length of time. She felt almost marooned with him. He felt it too <...>. The fields were green, the sun shone, the stone circles were suitably mysterious. If Julie stood in the centres of them and closed her eyes and kept still, she thought she could hear a sort of hum" (91-92). However, after seeing the photo of Connor's family and having an insight in front of the bog man Julie realizes that the real story does not fit this "happily-ever-after pattern", which means she needs a new one. R. M. Weaver argues: "Julie transformed him (Connor) into a superman and now must change him back into a real man, shorter, saggier, and needier than she remembers" (Weaver 80).

The next narrative pattern she tries on is a gothic one, another element of an overall polyphonic discourse. This is what we see in her description of her meeting Connor back in Toronto. Now when she is running away from him, wearing black (which is the main color of gothic aesthetics), and he is catching up, she sees him as a monster from a gothic novel:

She is truly frightened of him now, she's whimpering with fright. He's no longer anyone she knows; he's the universal child's nightmare, the evil violent thing, fanged and monstrous, trying to get in at the door. He mashes his face front-ways into the glass, in a gesture of desperation or a parody of a kiss. She can see the squashed tip of his nose, his mouth deformed, the lips shoved back from the teeth (104).

However, soon after this she realizes that she cannot treat Connor as "an ogre in the nick of time" (105) as "Connor was not an ogre. She had loved him, uselessly" (105). So a gothic pattern also is not the right one. Feeling unable to find appropriate words for this story as "It was too painful for her, in too complicated a way"(104), she blocks her memories about Connor for twenty years. And the main reason she does it is that "she did not know what it was about. Was it about the way she had been taken advantage of, by someone older and more experienced and superior to her in power? Or was it about how she had saved herself from an ogre in the nick of time?" (104). She unblocks this part of her memory only twenty years later when she has been married twice and had children. "Now that she has married again, she tells it

more frequently. By this time she concentrates on the atmosphere – the Scottish rain, the awful food in the pub, the scowling inhabitants of the town, the bog itself. She puts in the more comic elements: her own obsessive knitting, the long dangling sleeves, the lumpiness of the bed” (105). The image of Connor gets faded, now it is no longer a story about him and his wife, it is a story about Julie. This is one of the reasons why Weaver suggests that “In the Bog Man, Atwood offers to women a revision of the old conventional narrative patterns and new possibilities for their lives which indull the impulse to power, and the progressive narcissism that values identification with other women and puts women in the centre of their own stories” (Weaver 82).

She moved her image from the periphery to the center, however, she still has not found the appropriate words for forming her narrative. Now she tells it as an anecdote, in a comic way, which forms the third element of the polyphonic discourse the reader is given. This is another narrative mask that she is trying on. Purdy claims that telling this story “allows Julie to sacrifice both Connor and her younger self every time she tells the story and thereby take her place in the community of women, the network of symbolic exchange, without ever plumbing the depths of what really happened that summer” (450). Julie is still trying to form a narrative as she is struggling to find out what happened to be a trauma for her and how to articulate it. The only way to overcome trauma is to tell about it, to get it pronounced. Therefore, Kristeva called narratives “the cache for suffering.” According to Kristeva, “Narrative is the only way out. Narrative as the recounting of suffering: fear, disgust, and abjection, crying out, they quiet down concatenated into a story” (*Horror: An essay on abjection* 145). According to Cathy Caruth, telling about a traumatic event again and again helps a victim to find out what it was about and how to live further with this experience – this is why a traumatized person is haunted by the elements of the traumatic event in nightmares, for example. “Repetition is not simply the attempt to grasp that one has almost died, but, more fundamentally and enigmatically, the very attempt to claim one’s own survival” (Caruth 64). In Atwood’s novel *Surfacing* the protagonist

compares narratives to houses adding that “a paper house is better than none” (138). This is basically what Julie does by telling her story in a comic way – she constructs a paper house because it is better than none. This kind of shaping events “undoubtedly helps her to deal with a painful incident from her past and gives it significance of sorts, it leaves whatever repressed material there might be intact” (Purdy 450).

“The Bog Man” is a perfect example of something that Lanser called “a third level of reading which addresses the real reader, who is able to read beyond what is actually written” (Lanser 38). By searching for the way to articulate her perception of the events that happened to her, Julie resets the dialogue with her past as a part of her identity. As R. M. Weaver explains it, “Atwood uses her metafictional wizardry to negotiate the narrative gap between reality and perception in order to show women how to claim their own stories and thus take control of their own lives” (Weaver 78).

What matters to us most of all is that *The Bog Man* becomes a clear example of polyphonic discourse. Various narrative patterns which Julie tries on to articulate her past constitute sub-discourses, the sum of which forms polyphonic text that represents a wide range of possible visions and voices. A happily-ever-after, gothic, and anecdote narrative patterns represent the already existing ways of telling Julie tries to appropriate feeling unable to form her own interpretation. As the story is based on perception of past, chronotope is becoming a necessary mean for interpreting relations between time, space, and narration in polyphonic text.

5. Dialogue with the other as a dialogue with the self in “Death by Landscape”

Reflecting on the representation of an idea in a dialogical text, Bakhtin pointed out that unlike the monological one, there cannot be any authoritative position which would be able to provide the reader with an absolute knowledge of what had happened. “In a monological novel: the one who knows, and sees is in the first instance the author himself. He alone is an ideologist” (Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoyevsky’s Poetics 59). “Death by landscape” is a clear example of the dialogue which, according to Bakhtin, defines personality: “The genuine life of the personality is made available only through a dialogic penetration of that personality, during which it freely and reciprocally reveal itself”(Problems of Dostoyevsky’s Poetics 59).

The story is based on the main heroine’s remembering of an event from her childhood: once in July, when Lois was attending a summer camp, her best friend Lucy was gone missing, since then her body was not found. After Lucy’s disappearance Lois was asked to describe that day again and again to the police and to the camp administration as everyone needed an understandable story, a logical explanation of that mysterious event. Closing her retrospection of the events in Manitou Camp, Lois mentions that “she could see Cappie’s, [the head of the camp] desperation, her need for a story, a real story with a reason in it; anything but the senseless vacancy Lucy had left for her to deal with. Cappie wanted Lois to supply the reason, to be the reason” (126 - 127). However, there was no reason, there was no story. Atwood constructs an open narrative which consists more of questions than of answers.

The first element that confuses the reader is the title. Instead of calling the short story “Death by Nature”, Atwood decides to use the word “landscape” which implies representation and perception. Deborah Raschke claims: “Power of representation is essential to this story. After all, it is landscape that kills, not nature itself” (65). Moreover, by combining the words “death” and “landscape” in the title Atwood creates an image of nature as of an evil, threatening power. Teresa Gilbert states: “Atwood’s title implies that landscape can actively kill, in other words, that it can be a malevolent monster which destroys people rather than a nurturing mother”

(Gilbert 88). The first paragraph of the short story opens with Lois's expression of relief encouraged by her moving from a country house to an apartment. Living in the house meant being closer to nature. "She is relieved not to have to worry about the lawn, or about the ivy pushing its muscular little suckers into the brickwork, or the squirrels gnawing their way into the attic and eating the insulation off the wiring, or about strange noises" (109). The grass, ivy and the squirrels – all this represents threatening, uncontrolled power which needed to be dealt with. In Lois's mind nature exists as antonymous to the concept of safety. "This building has a security system, and the only plant life is in pots in the solarium" (109). She can feel safe only when these wild elements can be put under control. She is also glad that here she can place her collection of paintings all together on one wall.

Lois comes back to the description of the paintings in the end of the short story. This is how Atwood creates a framed composition with a frame made of the description of the paintings and the main body dedicated to the events in the camp. This compositional frame is marked by the reference to the Group of Seven, a group of Canadian artists whose works Lois collects. "Lois has two Tom Thomsons, three A. Y. Jacksons, a Lawren Harris. She has an Arthur Lismer, she has a J. E. H. MacDonald. She has a David Milne". The first artist whom she mentions, Tom Thomson, was not a part of the Group of Seven, though. Then, why did he strike Lois's attention, or, why did Atwood find it important to mention his name in the short story? Tom Thompson was the one who inspired the Group of Seven, an artist who, just as Lucy did, disappeared without a trace. According to the study of Deborah Raschke, both Tom Thompson and Lucy disappeared in Algonquin Park: "it is Algonquin Park, located approximately 170 miles (300 kilometres) north of Toronto, that is most likely the site of Lucy's disappearance. A rugged topography of a 7,000-square-kilometre wilderness that harbours both deciduous trees and conifers, Algonquin Park sports hundreds of lakes that spill into other lakes, spruce bogs, and cliffs (Algonquin) - very much like the wilderness depicted in the travelogues that Lois peruses of the country where she spent that fated summer" (Raschke 68). His mysterious

disappearance transformed Tom Thompson into a legend. He, who dedicated his life to depiction of lifeless landscapes, has become a part of it himself. “Tom Thompson, the historical person, has been transformed into a corporal (and pigmented) site of inscription, of a spectral body on which Canadian biographers, autobiographers, art historians, visual artists, poets, playwrights, novelists, song writers, and film makers write their versions of his identity – private and public, individual and national” (Grace 8). Just as the police and the head of Lois’s camp, all those people needed to have an explanatory story and tried to create one.

Another interesting fact is that Lois’s collection does not include any works by Fred Varley, Frank Johnston and Frank Carmichael, three other members of the Group of Seven. What seems to be a reason for this exclusion is that these artists were producing portraits mostly. “Their primary focus is something other than the landscape that Lois and Lucy “paddled through” during “that distant summer” (Raschke 71). Unlike these artists, all included ones were searching for the way of Canada’s identification by creating their soulless landscapes. Unlike the European artists who depicted comfortable, manageable nature, with which people are in harmony, the Group of Seven created images of savage, uncontrollable, ignoble wilderness. They were showing “a place where one can become lost, even die” (Mackey 127). That need for Canadian identification implied opposing Canada to the colonialist society. If America, for instance, may be read as representing white, male, upper-classed civilization, then Canada may be considered the sphere of feminine, the colonized, the racialized wilderness, where Lucy, being American, disappears.

However, within a Canadian cultural tradition femininity represented weakness. Therefore, the girls in Manitou Camp were taught to act as the boys. Although they do some crafts as well, most of the camp activities are masculine – they play war, pretend being Indians, go for canoe trips, and even change their names to make them sound more masculine-like (Cappie, Skip, Scottie). “At these camps you learned to swim well and sail, and paddle a canoe, and perhaps ride a horse or play tennis. When you weren’t doing these things you could do Arts and Crafts”

(111). When they go for their canoe trip, Cappie encourages them to “be good in war” and “bring many scalps” (118). A canoe trip becomes an initiation journey. “In Camp Monitou they make up male initiation journey for girls: and male initiation is more than learning attitude” (Raschke 76). According to Mircea Eliade, “it is passing from the profane into the sacred that requires the death of the self associated with its previous world. It means learning to regard the woman as inferior, as the uninitiated, and as the profane” (Eliade 9-10). Let us briefly explain why we find it useful to imply the terms “sacred” and “profane” to the description of woman’s position in society. Trying to define such an abstract concept as “sacred” in the introduction to his work *The Sacred and the Profane* Mircea Eliade states that “the sacred is the opposite of the profane”. To clarify the division between the sacred and the profane the anthropologist suggests the following example. A stone and a tree as they are belong to the profane world. However, as soon as they are proclaimed as the sacred objects, they stop being just a stone and just a tree, they start referring to something else. “A sacred stone remains a stone; apparently (or, more precisely, from the profane point of view), nothing distinguishes it from all other stones. But for those to whom a stone reveals itself as sacred, its immediate reality is transmuted into a supernatural reality” (Eliade 12). In order to enter the sphere of the sacred the stone must die as a stone, as an object belonging to the profane sphere. Only after this death it can get reborn as a part of the sacred sphere. Male initiation rites were aimed at moving the young men from the profane to the sacred sphere. Initially the women a priori belonged to the sphere of profane and had no right to move to the sacred sphere. Therefore, by organizing an imitation of male initiation rituals for girls Camp Manitou created for girls an illusion of entering the sacred sphere: if they could not afford it in real life, at least they could play it as a game in the summer camp.

Lucy disappears just after having her first period. She burns her used sanitary napkin as a sign of rejection of her will to become a woman. “Lois is not sure why they did this, or whose idea it was. But she can remember the feeling of deep satisfaction it gave her as the white fluff

singed and the blood sizzled, as if some wordless ritual had been fulfilled” (116). “Whatever transformation occurs is connected to a kind of puberty initiation, one signaling entry into a prescribed sexuality that proclaims a fundamental distinction, between male and female, with boys learning boy rules and girls learning girl rules” (Raschke 75).

Social hierarchy within the camp’s life is based on the totem-stages:

1. Chickadees
2. Bluejays (traditionally connected to the trickster figure, represent playfulness, which makes a link with a gender-twist motif)
3. Ravens (According to native Canadian folklore, the raven achieves transformation by stealing. The raven also decides who will and who will not return to life) (Lucy disappears when the girls enter this stage)
4. Kingfishers.

The raven’s feature to achieve transformation by stealing can be interpreted as the camp girls’ will to achieve a subject position by stealing male models of behaviour. As the ritual of initiation implies death of previous identity, Lucy fails getting “reborn” on the new stage because of her entering the sphere of womanhood. Being incapable to appropriate the parameters of masculine world as she has already become a woman, Lucy becomes a part of this threatening feminine wilderness which was depicted by the Group of Seven landscapes. It provides Deborah Raschke with a possibility to claim that “Death by Landscape” is “a story about [the] erasing of female subjectivity” (77). The name of the last totheme-stage is a clear anagram of the Fisher-king, whose figure represents renewal of the waste land and new life after death. However, Lucy disappears before they enter this stage, so the story does not end with any kind of renewal. Camp Manitou taught the girls to forget their femininity. “Lois thinks she can recognize women who went to these camps, and were good at it. They have a hardness to their handshakes, even now; a way of standing, legs planted firmly and farther apart than usual; a way of sizing you up, to see if you’d be any good in a canoe – the front, not the back.

They themselves would be in the back. They would call it the stern”(111). Hardness in shaking hands, farther than usual planted legs – even their appearance is described in masculine terms. What is worth attention is that “in “Death by Landscape” Atwood places gender problems in a same-sex context that goes beyond the mother-daughter and father-son relationships that she had explored earlier” (Nischik 178). Just as the Group of Seven artists depicted terra nullius, a land in which aboriginal people were erased, Atwood depicts the world in which females as subjects are trying to erase themselves.

When the reader enters the closing part of the compositional frame, he is told that Lucy does not remember some crucial events of her life.

She can hardly remember, now, having her two boys in the hospital, nursing them as babies; she can hardly remember getting married, or what Rob looked like. Even at the time she never felt she was paying full attention. She was tired a lot, as if she was living not one life but two: her own, and another, shadowy life that hovered around her and would not let itself be realized – the life of what would have happened if Lucy had not stepped sideways, and disappeared from time (127).

She feels like the only day of her life she remembers in detail is the day of Lucy’s disappearance. Holmgren Troy explains that this event should be read as a traumatic one: “the use of third-person pronoun instead of first-person singular in a short story that is so thoroughly focused on and focalized through one main character can be read as emphasizing the isolation brought on by trauma. <...> Traumatic memory often isolates people who are subject to it and cuts them off from their social context” (Holmgren Troy 87). What Lois misses most of all is not Lucy as a person or her friend, but as an image of her own femininity that she was made to reject. “The ghost of Lucy can be interpreted as the fragment of Lois’s own self which has split off” (Gilbert 98). Now she will forever associate nature with some cruel and threatening sphere where she lost a part of her identity and where she could have got lost herself. According to Cathy Caruth, “what returns to haunt the victim, these stories tell us, is not only the reality of

the violent event, but also the reality of the way that its violence has not yet been fully known” (Caruth 6). Lois tries to imagine Lucy’s body in some definite place: “But a dead person is a body; a body occupies space, it exists somewhere. You can see it; you put it in a box and bury it in the ground, and then it’s in a box in the ground. But Lucy is not in a box, or in the ground. Because she is nowhere definite, she could be anywhere” (128). She needs these landscapes for the same reason – she needs to place a lost part of her identity somewhere in order to believe that there is still a chance that it is alive. “Ruminating on this landscape where Lucy disappeared <...> Lois longs not only for Lucy, but also for what Lucy represents in herself: the possibility of rebellion, of wilderness, of a connection to nature that is not a part of patriarchal myth”. Thus, coming back to the title of the short story, we can presume that the reader will not simply be told about Lucy’s death, but of a feminine part of Lois’s identity.

Lois becomes able to set a dialogue with herself only through her attempt to set a dialogue with Lucy by means of the landscapes on her wall. Lucy becomes a guarantor for Lois’s existence. While formulating his theory of a dialogical novel, among the predecessors who have influenced his vision of it, Bakhtin mentioned Vyacheslav Ivanov, a Russian philosopher of the beginning of the 20th century. Ivanov was one of the first thinkers who noticed that Dostoyevsky’s novels were structured in some special way, the way Bakhtin would call “dialogical”. Trying to find an appropriate formula to define such a new structure of the narrative, Ivanov changed a famous Descartes’s saying “Cogito ergo sum”(I think, therefore, I am) and rewrote it the following way - “Es ergo sum” (You are, therefore, I am). “ “Es ergo sum” means not “you are being explored by me as a being”, but “your existence is being experienced by me as my own”, or: “by means of your existence I am exploring myself as a being”. Es, ergo sum” (Ivanov 419).

Coming back to Atwood’s short story, we can see that the persistence of Lucy’s image’s in Lois’s memory provides her with an ability to outlast her own existence. Her present identity is fully defined by this tragic event from her childhood. By trying to figure out what happened to

Lucy, Lois tries to figure out what happened to herself if all her life became dependent on this event. This everlasting dialogue with Lucy, or, it is better to say, with Lois's image of Lucy, becomes the core of her existence and forms her personality and her perception of the world around her.

6. “Uncles” as a combination of hidden internal polemic discourse and polemically colored biography

“Uncles”, the sixth short story of the collection, is based on the story of a self-made woman who was able to build a successful career, but for some reason did not manage to become independent from men’s approval. The reader is shown the protagonist’s way starting from her childhood with an absent father and ending with a position of one of the most famous journalists in Canada. Despite the fact that an image of Susanna becomes a bright example of a successful woman who could reach everything on her own, what occupies the center of the short-story is her weakness, her necessity to have her achievements evaluated by a man.

I would argue that the dialogue we will observe below is a concentrated description of the main short story’s conflict. When Susanna reaches the peak of her career, a colleague of hers from the newspaper where she started working as a journalist calls her and invites her to take part in his radio programme to make a talk about the post-feminism epoch which, as far as he is concerned, the society has entered. However, Susanna reminds him that she already did a whole series on this topic two years ago. Percy explains that “This would be a different angle. It would be – now that the women’s movement has accomplished its goals, isn’t it time to talk about men, and the ways they’ve been hurt by it?” (150). To which Susanna replies: “Percy,” she said carefully, “where do you get the idea that the women’s movement has accomplished its goals?” (150). As the story moves on, the reader realizes that it has always been “time to talk about men”, therefore the women were deprived of the narrative frame which would provide them with a possibility to talk about themselves as the successful subjects of the society. The only developed narrative frame within which they have always been visible is the one where they occupy the position of an oppressed victim. Such disability to make herself visible as a successful woman explains why at the end of the short story the reader sees her broken, crying in the bathtub feeling “the smallest”, “the youngest” in the world where success by default was something that belonged to men, who were “bigger”(154). Even though the

reason of her stress was another man whose opinion Susanna trusted, she tries to calm herself down by asking for another man's appreciation: "Do you think I'm a nice person?" she said, while he cradled her and stroked her hair. She no longer trusted herself to know how he felt about her" (155). Her opinion about herself has always depended on how the men felt about her, this is why she has always needed their evaluation of everything she did in her life to accept it as something valuable. "The question we are left with in typical Atwoodian fashion is how this reversal has taken place. How can a woman with so much power, so much mastery, be remanded almost instantly to the position of a naughty little girl, "a show-off", "an obnoxious brat" (Cohn 143).

In this rather abstract introduction to this chapter I have tried to formulate the main conflict that occupies the semantic centre of "Uncles". I will now demonstrate by which narratological means Atwood presents this problem and which role dialogism plays here.

The short story opens with a flashback to Susanna's childhood, in particular to the scene where she did a tap dance on a cheese box. Should we pay close attention to the description of this episode, we will notice that there are some parallels between Susanna and the objects around her: she dances on a cheese box which is decorated to look like a drum. "The cheese box was cylindrical and made of wood, and decorated with white crêpe paper and criss-crossed red ribbons to look like a drum" (133). Just after the description of the drum the reader faces the description of Susanna's appearance: "Susanna wore white socks and shoes and a red hair-ribbon, and a white sailor dress with red braid painstakingly stitched around the square collar by her mother" (133). Susanna, just as a drum, is "decorated" in red and white colors, with red ribbons. Both Susanna and a drum are used for entertainment. What should be highlighted is that the narrator notes that there were two other drums, but those were decorated in blue, therefore they were used by other girls because Susanna did not suit them: "There were two other cheese boxes with girls on them, but their decorations were blue" (133). From the very beginning of the short story Atwood starts describing the world in which women are seen

as means of entertainment, objects which are supposed to fit the environment and not to show off.

Susanna dances on the tune “Anchors Aweigh” - a military song which was used to encourage sailors before coming home. What should be stressed is that the audience does not find it weird that the girls are dancing for a military song about men. This lack of surprise can be explained by the fact that the narrative pattern could be some girls’ song, within which females, even young girls, could express themselves, simply did not exist. However, the narrator makes an excuse: “Everything for girls was military that year, because it was still the war” (134). Nevertheless, the songs, the lyrics of the songs which were created during the war, did not include an attempt to make women subjects of them, to show the heroines’ feelings or fates. Susanna remembers the pictures of women in the magazines wearing sailors’ uniform: “In the magazines there were pictures of women in white navy-cut shorts and middy blouses tied so that their tummies showed, and sailor hats cocked on their heads, looking sideways out with pert, impudent expressions, or with surprised pouts” (134). What matters is not a simple mentioning of women wearing male uniform, but the reaction on it: “These women, and these outfits, were said to be cute as a button, which was what was said about Susanna also” (134). The semantic centre of cultural tradition within which Susanna was growing and becoming defined as a person was occupied by men. From the beginning of her life Susanna has seen herself as a part of a “weaker” social field which has always needed to be evaluated by men who have always been “bigger” (154), as she defines them in the end of the story. This is why even though Susanna does not understand why “these women, and these outfits, were said to be cute” (134), she knew that the word “cute” was an equivalent of an A-grade in this male evaluation system: “She knew when something good was being said about her” (134).

Starting from her childhood, Susanna knew that it was the men who counted in this world. In the description of one of the Susanna’s family evenings we see that she tries to avoid her aunt’s

and mother's company because she prefers spending time with her uncles. Despite the fact the aunts "hugged and kissed Susanna" (134), while "the uncles said little and did not hug or kiss", "Susanna wriggled away from the aunts and ran to be taken out of the auditorium in glory, swinging like a monkey between two of the uncles. It was the uncles that counted" (134). Uncles are becoming the first benchmark for Susanna. After the uncles' death this benchmark position will get occupied by Percy, Susanna's colleague who helped her to build her career, and finally by her husband Emmet. All of them, in turn, substitute the initial benchmark which Susanna did not have – an absent father. As Jesse Cohn suggests, the father is supposed to provide a child with an appropriate coordinate system which will help to regulate his or her behaviour. As soon as Susanna's father was absent, during all her life she tried to pass his functions to the men who surrounded her. This is why Jesse Cohn claims that "the story progresses through a series of substitutions" (138).

The girl's uncles are becoming a metonymy for Susanna's dependence on the others' opinion which forms her own opinion about herself.

According to Bakhtin, such a life based on a sideward glance at another's opinion can be described only by means of a special discourse. In his work *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics* Bakhtin presented his classification of different types of discourse which is aimed at analyzing dialogical texts and distinguishing them from monological ones. We find it necessary to present it schematically here in order to explain to which discourse type the narrative of Atwood's "Uncles" belongs to and why it should be considered as a special type of narration.

I.Direct, unmediated discourse directed exclusively toward its referential object, as an expression of the speaker's ultimate semantic authority

II.Objectified discourse (discourse of a represented person)

- a. With a predominance of sociotypical determining factors
- b. With a predominance of individually characteristic determining factors

III. Discourse with an orientation toward someone else's discourse (double-voiced discourse)

1. Unidirectional double-voiced discourse:

- a. Stylization;
- b. Narrator's narration;
- c. Unobjectified discourse of a character who carries out (in part) the author's intentions;
- d. *Ich-Irziihlung*

2. Vari-directional double-voiced discourse:

When objectification is reduced, these tend toward a fusion of voices, i.e., toward discourse of the first type.

- a. Parody with all its nuances;
- b. Parodic narration;
- c. Parodic Ich-Erziihlung;
- d. Discourse of a character who is disintegrate into two discourses (two parodically represented; voices) of the first type.
- e. Any transmission of someone else's words with a shift in accent

3. The active type (reflected discourse of another)

- a. Hidden internal polemic;
- b. Polemically colored autobiography
- c. Any discourse with a sideward are possible here, as well as various glance at someone else's word;
- d. A rejoinder of a dialogue;
- e. Hidden dialogue

We will not consider the two first types as they represent monological texts. As we are dealing with dialogical narrative, we will be interested in discourse with an orientation toward someone else's discourse (III – in the table), which in turn includes unidirectional double-voices discourse, vary-directional double-voiced discourse, and the active type.

As we can see from the description of the types, Bakhtin distinguishes passive and active types of double-voiced discourse. It is worth explaining the difference between these two types in order not to miss-classify the narrative type *Uncles* belongs to.

Unconditional and vary-directional double-voices discourses imply copying the word of another, telling about this word without mixing it with your own word. In those kinds of discourse the narrator or the character does not reflect on this word of another, although he can orient his attention on it and cite it. In the active type the narrator reflects on the word of another which actively influences his own word and restructures it. As Bakhtin explains this phenomenon, “an element of response and anticipation penetrates deeply inside intensely dialogic discourse. Such a disclosure draws in as it were, sucks in to itself the other’s replies, intensely reworking them” (Problems of Dostoyevsky’s Poetics 197). And this is definitely what we see in “Uncles” because Susanna as the main focalizer cannot distinguish between her own voice and the other’s opinion on which she has depended since her childhood. The voices of others have already mixed with her own consideration of herself, so inseparably that the reader can hardly see any traces.

Now it is time to find out to which kind of active type of discourse the *Uncles*’ narrative belongs. Bakhtin distinguishes 5 kinds of active discourse:

- 1) Hidden internal polemic
- 2) Polemically colored autobiography and confession

3) Any discourse with a sideward glance at someone else's word

4) A rejoinder of a dialogue

5) Hidden dialogue

We are mostly interested in the first two kinds. Internally polemical discourse is defined as “the word with a sideward glance at someone else’s hostile word. It is extremely widespread in practical everyday speech as well as in literary speech, and has enormous style-shaping significance. <...> Such speech literally cringes in the presence or the anticipation of someone else’s word, reply objection. The individual manner in which a person structures his own speech is determined to a significant degree by his peculiar awareness of another’s words, and by his means for reacting to them” (Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoyevsky’s Poetics 196). As an example of hidden internal polemic Bakhtin presents the case of Makar Devushkin, the protagonist of Dostoyevsky’s “Poor folks”. As it seems to us, there is a clear parallel between this character and Susanna from Atwood’s *Uncles*. Commenting on Devushkin’s perception of the world around him, Bakhtin claims that “His affirmation of self sounds like a continuous hidden polemic or hidden dialogue with some other person on the theme of himself. <...> The hero’s self-awareness was penetrated by someone else’s consciousness of him, the hero’s own self-utterance was injected with someone else’s words around him” (207 – 209). All this could be undoubtedly said about Susanna’s self-identification. Further we will come back to the specific examples from the text proving this similarity.

The second kind of the active type is polemically colored autobiography and confession. As an example of this kind Bakhtin suggests the protagonist of “The Notes from Underground” by Dostoyevsky. Although in “Uncles” we are not dealing with first-person narration, nor we have a chronologically structured autobiography, the protagonist coincides with the focalizer, consequently the reader is invited to reconstruct Susanna’s biography through her own vision of her life.

Thus we can make a conclusion that the narrative of “Uncles” combines two kinds of active type of discourse: hidden internal polemic and polemically colored biography. It is not without significance that a combination of two or more kinds of discourse is typical for a dialogical text. Further we will demonstrate the examples of using hidden internal polemic and polemically colored biography in “Uncles” and what function these kinds of discourse perform in the text.

Hidden internal polemic

The opening of the short story which we have already briefly analyzed represents some features of hidden internal polemic. Should we come back to the paragraph where Susanna reflects on being called “cute as a button” (134), we will already identify the sideward glance to the others’ opinion which starts forming Susanna’s perception of herself: “These women, and these outfits, were said to be cute as a button, which was what was said about Susanna also. Susanna didn’t see what was so cute about buttons. She found them hard to do up. But she knew when something good was being said about her” (134).

Although the reader does not hear Susanna’s voice yet, he sees this situation of self-evaluation with the character’s eyes, and the fact that Susanna pays attention to it and still remembers it demonstrates the significance this episode of her childhood has for her.

Uncles’ description also demonstrates a tinge of polemics which is inherent in the first kind of discourse. While describing the uncles’ appearance, Susanna uses the following adjectives: “balding” (not bald), “comfortable”, “big” (not fat) (134). Moreover, she provides the following remark which is worth our attention: “They were big men. You did not say “fat” about men. They were strong, too” (134). This addition “you did not say “fat” about men” represents the discourse of the other. Who is this abstract “other”? Probably, the society that has developed some narrative rules for describing men: you can call them strong and big, but not fat. Susanna will keep following this rule even in her adulthood. When Susanna meets Percy, a man from the newspaper who will influence her life significantly, she will interrupt her

male colleague who will call Percy a “Vedge”, which was his nickname in the firm basically, with the following remark: ““Don’t be so mean,” Susanna said when she first heard his nickname. “He’s not fat. He’s just *big*. ”” (142). Here we see, firstly, that Susanna describes Percy using the same terms she used for describing her uncles who substituted an absent father, in turn, secondly, with this answer she demonstrates to what extent the other’s discourse has mixed up with her own voice.

The porch where the uncles usually sat drinking beer was a men’s territory. Susanna was the only female who could show up there. Starting from her childhood we see her challenging the borders, “invading” the others’ territory. Susanna’s mother and her aunts did not appear there: “Mostly Susanna’s mother stayed in the kitchen, doing the dishes along with the aunts, which in Susanna’s opinion was where they all belonged” (135). The only reason why the mother could come to the porch was to remind Susanna not to bother her uncles: “Once in a while Susanna’s mother would make an appearance on the porch. “Susanna, don’t show off,” she would say, or, “Susanna, don’t pester your uncles” (135). These warnings became the components of the others’ discourse that started mixing with Susanna’s voice forming a hidden internal polemic. All her life will become a battle between her desire to get realized and listening to the voice that will keep telling her “Don’t show off”. After being betrayed by Percy who wrote an accusatory piece in his memoirs about her when she became more successful than him, the voice advising not to show off will become louder, she will cancel an interview where she was supposed to perform as a guest, she will not come to work. The only desire she will have will be to hide from everyone. According to Bakhtin, the situation when the other’s discourse becomes more visible than an initial one is also typical of hidden internal polemic.

Another component of the other’s discourse was the aunts’ answer which they kept repeating addressing Susanna’s mother: “She could get a job” (136). As a war-widow, Susanna’s mother did not work as she needed to raise a small daughter on her own. Despite the fact this

accusation belonged to the other's discourse, it has formed an initial discourse, let us call it Susanna's own voice, her own position that led her to becoming a successful self-made woman. The next example of hidden internal polemic in the description of Susanna's childhood is the uncles' pieces of advice on how she should behave in life. One uncle reminds her that "she had a head on her shoulders and ought to use it" (139). Another, the banker, said "that a knowledge of double-entry bookkeeping never hurt you in any line of work, and showed her how to do it" (139). And the third says that she should not get married too soon. These directives are becoming the guidelines for Susanna in her adulthood. Later on, we see how she will follow them and how these elements of the other's discourse will become inseparable from her own one.

When Susanna comes to describing the last years of high school, she claims that she "performed well" (139). Straight after this we read - " "performed well" - was what the uncles said" (139): another clear example of the way Susanna applies the authorities' words about her to her own self-description.

Such applying the others' words to self-description will become Susanna's habit – the reader will see this again in the description of the protagonist's column about women: "Her column was fresh and breezy. These were the adjectives Percy applied to it. Informal and witty, but with punch" (146). Again, her work is described not by her own opinion about it, but by Percy Marrow's one, a person who has become the first substitution of the now dead uncles, another authority, whose evaluation of her, as Susanna thought then, she could trust.

The more successful Susanna becomes, the less Percy communicates with her. They stop having lunches together, which they normally used to do. He stops calling her and sharing some gossip with her. Percy appears in her life again some time later asking Susanna to write an article for the newspaper. In this conversation Susanna addresses him as "Vedge", by mistake, for the first time. " "Oh Vedge – oh Percy, I couldn't." Now I've torn it, she thought. I've called him *Vedge*" (151). By addressing him with his nickname which no one has ever

done in person, she breaks the boundaries which were set between them. By doing this she demonstrates that his voice stopped sounding in her head permanently, his discourse stopped being a part of her own discourse, she demonstrated her ability to be separated from his assessment. This becomes the reason why just after this talk Percy decides to destroy Susanna's reputation by writing a memoir about her. Percy's memoir destroys not only her reputation, but her attempt to feel self-confident and independent from the others' opinion. It takes her back to the point when she needs someone else's approval to make sure that she has a right to live. Here comes the scene when Susanna breaks in tears and asks her husband Emmet if she is a nice person. Her authority system is broken – the father is missing, the uncles are dead, and Percy betrayed her: she does not know whom she can trust anymore. Because of the fact that her own discourse was initially formed by the others' discourses and the boundaries between them were faded, she finds it hard to reconstruct her own voice, to find out where it ended and where the others' began.

Polemically colored biography

The examples of this kind of discourse are not as numerous as the example of the previous one, however, they are still discernible in the text and we find it necessary to point them out.

We will repeat that despite the fact we have no *Icherzählung* in *Uncles*, the protagonist is the main focalizer, therefore the reader is shown some elements of her biography which are known only to her. Commenting on the role of childhood stories in Atwood's prose, Janice Rieman states: "There exists an element of the unknown in the reasons behind the telling of childhood stories, that only the teller can ever know what sharing these memories means" (Rieman, 196).

One of such episodes is a scene from Susanna's childhood when she starts bringing flowers to her father's photo every day. She invents this ritual driven not by love, but by the fear that her dead father will find out that she does not love him. It should be stressed that Susanna associates her dead father with God as she presumes that they both belong to the same sphere:

by this logic, her dead father, just as God, can read her thoughts – and this is what she is afraid of most of all.

The flowers were because she didn't love him, but was terrified he would find out. She didn't want him reading her thoughts, as it was well known God did; so why not dead people, who were in the same place? (138).

Here Susanna tries to reconstruct the discourse of her dead father: "He hated it that he was dead, and Susanna herself was still alive" (138), and this invented discourse mixes with her own one. Although she could not know his real thoughts, even if a dead person could have any, she thinks that she is aware of them. This is a typical feature of the way the Man from Underground, the main Bakhtinian example of polemically colored autobiography, constructs his narrative. "All is its extreme and acute dialogization: there is literally not a single monologically firm, undissociated word. From the very first sentence the hero's speech has already begun to cringe and break under the influence of the anticipated words of another, with whom the hero, from the very first step, enters into the most intense internal polemic" (Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics 127).

The image of the father represents some dark eschatological judging power for Susanna which she is afraid of. In childhood she has nightmares about his returning: "She had several nightmares about it, this return: a long shadow coming in through her bedroom door, a pair of baleful eyes. He might not like her" (138). An absent father becomes the empty center of her self-assessment. As this position was initially absent, during all her life Susanna experiences a lack of self-confidence and tries to fill this empty space with acquired substitutions represented by uncles, Percy and her husband. Susanna makes their voices the parts of polemically colored discourses that she constructs, even if these voices are invented by herself.

By showing the uncles' death to the reader through Susanna's eyes the narrator points out that without these voices Susanna's world would be silent: "They all died suddenly, of heart attacks, and for a time Susanna felt the world had gone deaf" (140). We could suggest that the

world had gone deaf for the time during which Susanna could not find an appropriate substitutions to the uncles. When Percy appeared in her life, the world started speaking again – now it was his voice that she listened to.

To sum up, in this chapter we demonstrated that the narrative of “Uncles” is a typical example of the active discourse type of dialogical text, according to Bakhtinian classification of possible discourses. In turn, it combines two kinds of the mentioned type – hidden internal polemic and polemically colored biography. This possibility to analyze Uncles as an example of active type of discourse provides us with another argument to claim that the whole collection should be considered as a dialogical text.

7. Macro- and micro-dialogues as means of idea representation in “The Age of Lead”

An entire chapter of the main work in which Bakhtin describes the concept of the dialogical novel is dedicated to the very notion of ‘idea’ and the way it can be represented in it. Summing up the scholar’s reflections, we will emphasize three characteristics of an idea in a dialogical text:

- 1) The idea can exist and develop only within communication with the ideas of others: “The idea begins to live, that is, to take shape, to develop, to find and renew its verbal expression, to give birth to new ideas with the ideas of others. <...> Like the world, the idea wants to be heard, understood and “answered” by other voices from other positions” (Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoyevsky’s Poetics 88)
- 2) The idea is inseparable from its carrier: “The truth about the world is inseparable from the truth of the personality” (78)
- 3) The idea is never declared explicitly.

By analyzing “The Age of Lead” we will demonstrate how the idea is represented in a dialogical text in practice and by which means Atwood expresses the idea, taking into account the third characteristic mentioned.

As far as we are concerned, the main tool of expressing the idea in “The Age of Lead” is the text’s structure. Atwood constructs a double-voiced narrative. Further we will try to demonstrate it schematically to make our statement more visible and clear.

Jane is watching a TV-program about Franklin expedition (Present Tense)



Flashbacks to the times when Vincent was alive
expedition

Franklin

Vincent died from some unknown virus which has
probably occurred because of ecological problems

The members of the
expedition got
lead-poisoned and
died

The main idea



By moving the progress forward, humanity destroys the environment and leads itself to death

I will explain the meaning of the scheme later on. I have decided to interpret the text as a double-narrative for the reason that the story about Franklin expedition which is included in the plot should not be considered as an embedded novella. The short story starts with a scene where Jane, the protagonist, is watching television. She is watching the program dedicated to the discovery of the frozen dead man who apparently was a member of the famous Franklin expedition. Throughout the whole short story the narration switches between showing the events of Jane's life and the programme Jane is watching on TV. Despite the fact the layer in which Jane is watching TV serves as a frame-narrative, these two elements of discourse, the story of Franklin expedition and the story of Vincent death are equally relevant, therefore they do not correlate as a main and a minor sub-plot. They construct a meta-narrative dialogue with each other, they influence one another and become the main mean of the implicit expression of the text's idea. Our goal is to demonstrate how the idea of pollution as a way to death is presented in both parts of the narrative.

Firstly, we need to provide some information about Franklin expedition. In 1845 British ships "Terror" and "Erebus" led by an explorer named John Franklin departed to the Canadian Arctic searching for the direct way that connected England to India. All 129 members of the expedition, including its leader, got lost. What should be underlined is the fact that the story of Franklin's expedition has immediately become an inseparable part of Canadian folklore. It has encouraged hundreds of songs, legends, poems and tales. The researcher Victor Kennedy, who analyzed three texts dedicated to Franklin's expedition, tried to find out "why Canadians celebrate it as a national enigma" (Kennedy 194). As V. Kennedy claims, this story strikes Canadians as it is about a "forbidden", "tabooed" *topos* – the Canadian North. Despite the fact that there are so many legends and creative works about it, not so many Canadians have really been there, and this is the reason why it interests them so much.

Secondly, as we have already seen it while analyzing "Death by Landscape", the motif of

someone disappearing without leaving a trace plays an important role in the formation of Canadian cultural tradition. As a country national identity of which was trying to be erased by colonialist societies for so many years it keeps reproducing this concept of being erased with no trace left again and again in its cultural tradition.

Thirdly, Franklin expedition story is about breaking connections with the ancestors. The members of expedition forgot the predecessors' precautions about the dangerous and mysterious North, went there and disappeared.

Moreover, 150 years ago the scientists found out that the reason why the members of the expedition died was lead-poisoning which occurred because of using the tin-cans which had just been invented in that moment.

What is interesting is that the reader is given a description of the dead member of the Franklin expedition with no introduction. We do not know yet that this body is shown on the TV-programme which Jane is watching. This is another argument proving that this part of double-voiced discourse cannot be called a secondary one. In this description Atwood comes back to the bog man chronotope which we have already analyzed in chapter four. We remind that this chronotope serves as a mean to depict compressed visualized time and makes memory, as the main mean of connection between past and present, visible.

What is significant is that these two parts of the double-narrative do not exist separately, but they are interrelated, starting from Jane's perspective. The first parallel which can be noticed by the reader is set between the images of the frozen dead man and Vincent. Both Vincent and the member of the expedition were young when they died. "The man they've dug up and melted was a young man. Or still is: it's difficult to know what tense should be applied to him, he is so insistently present" (159). The last sentence of the quote could also be applied to the description of Vincent's image which Jane has in her mind in the present moment. Although Vincent has been dead for many years, he remains present in Jane's perception of life: she thinks about the phrases he used to say ("*Laugh, I thought I'd die*, Vincent used to say, a very

long time ago, in a voice imitating the banality of mothers; and that's how it's getting to be" (160), "What you *sees* is what you *gets*, as Vincent also used to say, crossing his eyes, baring his teeth at one side, pushing his nose into a horror-movie snout. Although it never was, with him" (160 – 161)), she imagines how he would react on the situations she faces. For these reasons it also seems to Jane difficult to know what tense should be applied to him.

Moreover, in the description of the dead man it is mentioned that he was the first to die, again – just as Vincent among other people from Jane's life. Even their mothers whom they have always considered as old ones were still alive when Vincent passed away.

Another parallel between dead members of Franklin expedition and Vincent is their mysterious death. Initially everyone thought that Franklin expedition disappeared with no trace left. This frozen dead man was found only 150 years after the expedition's disappearance. "It took ten years before anyone knew even the barest beginnings of what had been happening to them" (161). The reason of Vincent's death also remained almost unclear. When Jane comes to visit him in the hospital a week before his death, she notes: "He was in for the unspeakable, the unknown. He was in for a mutated virus that didn't even have a name yet" (171). This unnamed virus did not respond to treatment so it was killing 43-year-old Vincent slowly. However, later we find out what actually killed the members of the Franklin expedition – it was lead. Not so long before the expedition the conserve cans were invented and the expedition tried to use them. "It was the tin cans that did it, a new invention back then, a new technology, the ultimate defense against starvation and scurvy"(174). All expedition got lead-poisoned. As V. Kennedy comments on it, they were killed by something that was supposed to save them (Kennedy 200).

Description of the reasons of the Franklin expedition's death ends with the following sentence: "It was what they'd been eating that had killed them" (174), which again makes us come back to the hospital room where Vincent is dying. At their last meeting Jane asks him crying: " 'But what *is* it?' she said. 'Have they found out yet?'" , to which Vincent replies half-joking: " 'Who knows?' he said. 'It must have been something I ate.' " (173). As V. Kennedy explains the

reason of the Franklin expedition members' death, "The implication is that there was no single element to blame, that the whole enterprise was doomed, that Franklin and his men had bitten off more than they could chew, although the lead poisoning is seen as the main cause" (Kennedy 195). Lead represents a danger that should not be forgotten, overestimating the opinion about human beings' place in the world. Comparing Atwood's short story with John Wilson's novel *North with Franklin: the Lost Journals of James Fitzjames*, V. Kennedy cites the following passage from the captain's diary:

It is a failure because we come here in arrogance thinking that we can dominate nature. We cannot. We are at its mercy and it can snuff us out as easily as we can extinguish a candle. Any attempt to defeat nature, to overcome it, is doomed. Even if nature allows us a few moments of victory, ultimately we are doomed. (248).

By referring to Franklin expedition in this short story Atwood reminds that people's desire to progress alone while treating the planet as if it were an unlimited resource inevitably leads to death. This is how the main idea of the text is expressed in the Franklin expedition's part of the narrative.

In Jane's and Vincent's story an unknown virus becomes the equivalent to lead in Franklin's expedition. In this part of double-discourse it represents the price which particular individuals sometimes have to pay for general irresponsibility of humanity which destroys the environment. It is shown as one of the consequences Vincent and Jane were taught to be afraid of. During all their lives they were trying to get freed from this fear:

Consequences: the weightiness of the body, the growing flesh hauled around like a bundle, the tiny frill-framed goblin head in the carriage. Babies and marriage, in that order. This was how she understood men and their furtive, fumbling, threatening desires, because Jane herself had been a consequence. She had been a mistake, she had been a war baby. She had been a crime that had needed to be paid for, over and over (163).

For Jane's mother consequences are babies born out of marriage (it explains the remark "in that

order”), men and their “threatening desires”. This fear of consequences has formed Jane’s perception of the world around her. This feeling of a crime that needed to be paid for has become the core of her identity. This is why she admires Vincent with his unlimited freedom, this is why she sympathizes with the members of Franklin expedition whose curiosity was stronger than fear of consequences.

The first scene to characterize Vincent is an episode from the times of their high-school when during a history class Vincent said loud that he does not “give a damn about Franklin” (162) (and his expedition). Jane remembers: “It was hard for the teachers to keep Vincent in line, because he never seemed to be afraid of anything that might happen to him” (162). The next features we learn about Vincent show him as a free young man as well: “He went where he liked, and nobody owned him”, “He made fun of everything” (163) (he will try to make fun even of his own death because for him seriousness is associated with restrictions). Seriousness is something they both are making fun of parodying their mothers:

‘I pinch and I scrape and I work my fingers to the bone, and what thanks do I get?’ Vincent would say peevishly. ‘No help from you, Sonny Boy. You’re just like your father. Free as the birds, out all night, do as you like and you don’t care one pin about anyone else’s feelings. Now take out that garbage.’ <...>

‘It’s love that does it to you,’ Jane would reply, in the resigned, ponderous voice of her mother. ‘You wait and see, my girl. One of these days you’ll come down off your devil-may-care high horse.’ (165).

For Jane this concept of consequences and her mother’s serious tone are associated with the movement of falling: “In her mother’s account of the way things were, you were young briefly and then you fell” (163). The image of Jane’s mother is drawn through several falling metaphors: an overripe fallen apple, fallen arches, a fallen womb, teeth and hair that are falling out after having a baby (163). This seriousness is described in terms of gravity, Jane is taught that it is something that makes you be down-to-earth. After making fun of her mother’s words

Jane herself imagines love descending out of the sky: “As Jane said this, and even though she was making fun, she could picture love, with a capital L, descending out of the sky towards her like a huge foot” (165). She compares love to a steamroller – something that makes you flat, raze you to the ground. Moreover, every new boyfriend Jane had her mother considered as “a potential agent of downfall” (163).

To Jane Vincent represents an attempt of rising contrary to an everlasting falling she was made to feel. Together they create a carnivalized image of life as life seems to them too serious.

Jane and Vincent did not exactly go out together. Instead they made fun of going out. When the coast was clear and Jane’s mother wasn’t home, Vincent would appear at the door with his face painted bright yellow, and Jane would put her bathrobe on back to front and they would order Chinese food and alarm the delivery boy and eat sitting cross-legged on the floor, clumsily, with chopsticks. Or Vincent would turn up in a threadbare thirty-year-old suit and a bowler hat and a cane, and Jane would rummage around in the cupboard for a discarded church-going hat of her mother’s, with smashed cloth violets and a veil, and they would go downtown and walk around, making loud remarks about the passers-by, pretending to be old, or poor, or crazy. It was thoughtless and in bad taste, which was what they both liked about it. (165 – 166).

We found it necessary to cite the whole paragraph as it is full of the examples of carnivalization. As we have already demonstrated in the analysis of “Isis in Darkness”, carnivalistic life is one of the means of creating a great dialogue: “Everyone is an active participant. <...> Its participants live in it, they live in a carnivalistic life. Because carnivalistic life is life drawn out of its usual rut, it is to some extent ‘life turned inside out’, the reverse side of the world” (Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoyevsky’s Poetics 164). Carnival helps its participants to become the active subjects of their lives, it opens the world and helps the participants to abandon everyday restrictions and prohibitions. However, Jane is able to make fun of all this seriousness of the world only when Vincent is around. Without him she keeps feeling falling.

When he dies and disappears from her life, she feels caught in this cage of seriousness again. This is why all kinds of relaxing she considers as “the ways of escape”. Vincent was her main mean of connection to the world of freedom. “ ‘No belts, no pins, no pads, no chafing.’ It was from an ad for tampons, but it was also their leitmotif” (166). The very fact that they chose a phrase from the tampons ad to become their motto is a kind of carnivalization. This carnivalizing of everyday life becomes a way of escaping out of the world of consequences and precautions: “It was what they both wanted: freedom from the world of mothers, the world of precautions, the world of burdens and fate and heavy female constraints upon the flesh” (166).

This desire to look beyond explains why Jane sympathizes with the members of the Franklin expedition. “The idea of exploration appealed to her then: to get onto a boat and just go somewhere, somewhere mapless, off into the unknown. To launch yourself into fright; to find things out” (162). Jane sees something “noble” and “daring” in it. She compares Franklin’s curiosity with forbidden teenagers’ desires – having sex in high school, drinking great amounts of alcohol, trying drugs. There is something dangerous about it and this is why they attract all: “despite all of the losses and failures, or perhaps because of them” (162).

Another parallel between the two parts of double-narrative is their connections to the title. We should emphasize that the title refers not only to the middle of 19th century when the Franklin expedition took place, but also to 1980s in Toronto – the period of the protagonist’s life when she lost Vincent. Before coming to the description of that period the reader is briefly showed 1970s. While years of Jane’s adolescence are described in details and this description occupies more than a half of the short story, the events of 1970s are retold in a couple of pages by simple sentences. In the 1970-s Jane had to become adult and, consequently, serious, although it did not happen to Vincent. This difference in their attitudes toward things is clearly demonstrated by their reactions on sex they had with each others:

Sex with him was more like a musical workout. He couldn’t take it seriously and accused her of being too solemn about it. She thought he might be gay, but was afraid to ask him;

she dreaded feeling irrelevant to him, excluded (170).

Here we see that Vincent remained a young sarcastic teenager inside, while Jane started worrying about some other, “serious” things, such as feeling irrelevant and excluded.

The age of lead comes straight after the seventies. Jane describes this period as decay:

There were too many people, too many poor people. You could see them begging on the streets, which were clogged with fumes and cars. The cheap artists’ studios were torn down or converted to coy and upscale office space; the artists had migrated elsewhere.

Whole streets were torn up or knocked down. The air was full of windblown grit.

People were dying. They were dying too early (171 – 172).

Fumes and cars, air full of windblown grit – this is what seems to Jane the reasons of the atmosphere of death. The more people move in general progress, the less they appreciate nature, which leads them to death. Obviously, the last two phrases refer not to all people in Toronto of 1980s, but more likely to Vincent, the main person in Jane’s life. She starts counting all people from her circle who died in that period. However, in contrast to Vincent, they all knew the reason of their death – bone cancer, aids, pneumonia, heart attack. Nevertheless, Jane sees all these diseases, including Vincent’s unknown one, as the links in one mysterious chain: “It was as if they had been weakened by some mysterious agent, a thing like a colourless gas, scentless and invisible, so that any germ that happened along could invade their bodies, take them over” (172). Just as the members of the Franklin expedition, they all became the victims of something that could not be put under control. Jane started seeing danger everywhere. She became too afraid of the consequences:

Jane began to notice news items of the kind she’d once skimmed over. Maple groves dying of acid rain, hormones in the beef, mercury in the fish, pesticides in the vegetables, poison sprayed on the fruit, God knows what in the drinking water. She subscribed to a bottled spring-water service and felt better for a few weeks, then read in the paper that it

wouldn't do her much good, because whatever it was had been seeping into everything.

Each time you took a breath, you breathed some of it in. She thought about moving out of the city, then read about toxic dumps, radioactive waste, concealed here and there in the countryside and masked by the lush, deceitful green of waving trees (172).

The part of the narrative which describes the story of Jane's life demonstrates that there is no escape from the consequences of people's irresponsible attitude towards nature. The story of Vincent's death is an example of the price that particular individuals have to pay for what humanity in general has done. The conclusion she reached for herself after Vincent's death was the following: "There were consequences after all; but they were the consequences to things you didn't even know you'd done" (173 – 174).

The short story ends with the description of the street Jane lives on which keeps being filled by garbage:

Increasingly the sidewalk that runs past her house is cluttered with plastic drinking cups, crumpled soft-drink cans, used take-out plates. She picks them up, clears them away, but they appear again overnight, like a trail left by an army on the march or by the fleeing residents of a city under bombardment, discarding the objects that were once thought essential but are now too heavy to carry (175).

By coming back to the present tense in the final and ending the short story with this description, Atwood depicts a hopeless situation of men's and the planet's relationship. Describing the waste which occurs over and over again, the writer shows that any attempts to cancel the consequences of what we have already done are meaningless.

Such an expression of the main idea constructs the micro-dialogue which comes into communication with the second part of the narrative represented by the Franklin expedition's story. Coming into interaction, they form a macrodialogue, which becomes the way of

expressing the idea of the text. In her fiction Atwood tries to depict a full image of life as it is, in all its complexity and inconsistency. This is why impossible it is to reduce the message to one explicitly given construction. Despite the fact both parts of the narrative have their separate conclusions, the reader is able to understand them only when they come into interconnection. This interconnection is what we have called a macrodialogue.

8. “Weight” as a transformation of Menippea, the main predecessor of a dialogical text

Observing the literary genres that preceded a dialogical novel, Bakhtin pays close attention to the Menippean satire, or, as he calls it, Menippea. As Hilde Staels makes clear, the Menippea “was introduced to Athens after the rise of tragedy, at the beginning of the fifth century B.C.E. Bakhtin also refers to it as “the fourth drama,” because it comically reworks, through “parodie travesty,” the tragic trilogy preceding it. The satyr plays of the playwrights Sophocles, Euripides and Aeschylus, amongst others, were meant to parody the preceding tragedies” (Staels 100). This genre was named after the Greek philosopher of the third century BC, Menipp, who “fashioned it into classical form” (Bakhtin Problems of Dostoyevsky’s Poetics 112). Bakhtin provides the following examples of Menippeas: “Pumpkinification” of Seneca, “The Metamorphoses (The Golden Ass)” of Apuleius, and “The Menippean Satires” of Lucian. According to Bakhtin, Menippea is to be considered the most important predecessor for a dialogical text. Therefore, if the text has some Menippean elements, it may be considered as a dialogical one. We cannot claim that “Weight” by M. Atwood is a typical example of a classical Menippea. However, it would be naive to state that Menippea survived through literary evolution with no changes. As any genre, it has developed and interacted with other genres. Although it does not satisfy all 14 criteria listed by Bakhtin, M. Atwood’s short story suggests what a postmodern Menippea could look like. In this chapter we will demonstrate which characteristics of Menippea are present in M. Atwood’s “Weight” and to what extent they influenced its dialogism.

1. “The specific weight of the comic element”.

As Bakhtin pointed out, “as compared with the Socratic dialogue, the specific weight of the comic element is generally increased in the Menippea, although this vacillates significantly in the diverse varieties of this flexible genre” (Bakhtin Problems of Dostoyevsky’s Poetics 114). The plot of “Weight” is based on a story of the protagonist’s best friend who was dismembered by her own husband, who encouraged the narrator to found an organization that would help

battered women. Despite the fact that under no circumstances could “Weight” be considered as a comic story, the comic element and laughter play a crucial role in it. The protagonist uses humor as a kind of protection from inner suffering which she keeps going through after her best friend’s murder. It seems there are no tabooed topics on which she cannot apply her sense of humor: she jokes on suicide, on the way Molly was killed. Her speech is full of puns, sometimes she even rhymes them. Here are some of the examples. Reflecting on her lack of will to live, she notes: “Some days, I think I’m not going to make it. I will have a hot flash, a car crash. I will have a heart attack. I will jump out of the window” (179). By adding a rhyme “a hot flash/ a car crash”, the narrator contaminates the high, serious topic of suicide with a lower, humorous slant. The plot starts developing from the scene where the protagonist, whose name the reader is not given, is having a dinner with a potential sponsor who is about to donate money to her fund. She unconsciously makes a parallel between this man and Molly’s murderer. Probably, it can be explained by the fact that since then she associates any man with a threat and danger:

I wonder if this other man, sitting so cautiously across the tablecloth from me, has a workbench in the cellar too. He doesn’t have the hands for it. No calluses or little nicks. I don’t tell him about the claw hammer, or about the arms and legs hidden here and there around the province, in culverts, in wooded glades, like Easter eggs or the clues in some grotesque treasure hunt. I know how easily frightened such men can be by such possibilities. Real blood, the kind that cries out to you from the ground (180).

The last sentence of this paragraph contains another rhyme, blood/ground, which seems even more inappropriate to the topic she is raising. Even the jokes which are given explicitly in the text in the dialogues with other characters are cruel:

‘What’s brown and white and looks good on a lawyer?’

I’ve heard it. ‘I’ll bite. What?’

‘A pit bull.’

‘Oh, that’s terrible. Oh, you are awful.’” (181).

When Molly was alive, they had a joking tradition of making up some funny puns from serious words. For example, when Molly said that her husband was accusing her of having affairs at work, the protagonist replied:

‘He’s paranoid,’ I said.

‘*Paranoid*,’ said Molly. ‘A wide-angle camera for taking snapshots of maniacs.’ She put her head down on her arms and laughed and laughed’ (191).

Moreover, it looks like the narrator does not consider Molly as a dead person. She cannot accept her belonging to the sphere of the past. For her she is still alive. She keeps talking to her in her mind, she keeps playing this pun-game, although without Molly now: “Here’s one for you, Molly: *menopause*. A pause while you reconsider men” (185). The game implies making up some new meaning of the words that already exist whose actual meaning is not as pleasant as the made up ones.

“*Battered women*. I can see it in lights, like a roadside fast-food joint. *Get some fresh*. Sort of like onion rings and deep-fried chicken. A terrible pun. Would Molly have laughed? Yes. No. Yes.

Battered. Covered in slime, then dipped into hell. Not so inappropriate, after all” (188). This pun-game becomes a metaphor for the protagonist’s life. By joking all the time she tries to invent some new, more pleasing meanings for the tragic events that have already taken place. Being unable to accept the truth, which is seen in the protagonist’s replique “Dismemberment. The act of conscious forgetting. I try not to think of Molly like that. I try to remember her whole” (192), she is making up some funny meanings of them.

This employment of humor can be compared to the role it played in Menippeas. The authors of Menippeas were treating topics of tragedies using low registers. Humorization served as a tool

of demythologization: “Ancient satyr drama primarily parodied the tragic heroization of epic heroes by creating a comic double, which explains the emergence of popular figures such as comic Odysseus, who was topped in popularity by comic Hercules/Heracles” (Staels 102).

2. “The creation of extraordinary situations”.

Another Menippean characteristic that can be found in “Weight” is the fact that the plot is based on an extraordinary situation – the dismemberment of a wife by her own husband. Bakhtin explains that the author of Menippeas needed to create extraordinary situations in order to provoke and test “the truth”: “We emphasize that the fantastic here serves not for the positive embodiment of truth, but as a mode for searching after truth, provoking it, and, most important, testing it” (Bakhtin Problems of Dostoyevsky’s Poetics 114). This led the authors of Menippeas to the necessity of mixing different genres. “Very often the fantastic takes on the character of an adventure story; sometimes it assumes a symbolic or even mystical-religious character (as in Apuleius). But in all these instances the fantastic is subordinated to the purely ideational function of provoking and testing a truth” (Bakhtin Problems of Dostoyevsky’s Poetics 114).

Although “Weight” does not contain any fantastic elements as classical Menippeas, it does contain the elements of an adventure story mentioned by Bakhtin. To be more precise, the plot is based on the detective story. The plot is based on the story of the husband killing his wife. As in a typical detective story, the narrative is puzzling. It stages the relations between *fabula* and *sujet* which are typical of detective narratives. The chronological chain of the events is broken and till the very end of the short story the reader does not know that it was Molly who was murdered by her husband and that Molly was the narrator’s best friend. The typical example of including the detective story’s elements into the dialogical text is given in Dostoyevsky’s “Crime and Punishment” which was also analyzed by Bakhtin in his *Problems of*

3. “Organic combination of the symbolic and *crude slum naturalism*”.

Another characteristic of Menippea, developed by Bakhtin, is “the organic combination within it of the free fantastic, the symbolic, at times even a mystical-religious element with an extreme and (from our point of view) crude slum naturalism” (Bakhtin Problems of Dostoyevsky’s Poetics 115). What matters for us the most in this list is the symbolic and a mystical-religious element. In “Weight” this plan is represented by the reference to one of the most widespread *topos* in the world’s mythologies – the dismemberment of the god. It is not without a reason that Atwood decided to choose this kind of death for her character. In the beginning while describing her organization aimed at helping battered women the narrator mentions: “It’s named after a lawyer who was murdered by her husband, with a claw hammer” (180). In the end of the short story the narrator adds: “It was a week later that the arms and legs started turning up. <...> He claimed amnesia, at first. *Dismemberment*. The act of conscious forgetting. I try not to think of Molly like that. I try to remember her whole” (192). Even while describing her best friend’s murder the narrator comes back to this pun-game, trying to rethink such a terrifying word as “dismemberment.” Dismemberment directly refers to such mythological semantic centers as the dismemberment of Dionysus by the Menades and the dismemberment of Osiris by his brother Set. According to Vyacheslav Ivanov, whom we have already mentioned as one of the main predecessors of Bakhtin, the myth of Dionysus’s dismemberment has formed a core of future Christian culture and has become a center of cosmogonic mythology of that period. Vyacheslav Ivanov dedicated his work *Dionys I Pradionysiistvo* to an analysis of all the cultural sources of the Dionysus’s cult and its variations in different world cultures. Although we find it impossible to formulate Ivanov’s ideas in a couple of sentences, we will shortly mention that in general the myth about dismembered Dionysus represents the everlasting replacement of life and death and the necessary integration of spiritual and material

spheres.

Coming back to M. Atwood, we will underline that what matters for us is that by placing a talk about the protagonist's murdered best friend with a reference to the myths of dismembered gods (Dionys Dismembered, Osiris and so on) in a restaurant, the writer combines the philosophical sphere with the *crude slum naturalism* which Bakhtin was writing about. The situation within which this conversation emerges is too casual for such topic. The narrator feels it and struggles to articulate what had actually happened to her friend and why she decided to found this organization.“ The adventures of truth on earth take place on the high road, in brothels, in the dens of thieves, in taverns, marketplaces, prisons, in the erotic orgies of secret cults, and so forth. The idea here fears no slum, is not afraid of any of life's filth. <...> The organic combination of philosophical dialogue, lofty symbol-systems, the adventure-fantastic, and slum naturalism is the outstanding characteristic of the menippea, and it is preserved in all subsequent stages in the development of the dialogic line of novelistic prose right up to Dostoevsky” (Bakhtin Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics 115).

4. “The menippea is a genre of "ultimate questions."

Comparing menippea to the Socratic dialogue, Bakhtin points out that in menippea we see no more “academic”, purely philosophic reflections and arguments. “Under menippean conditions the very nature and process of posing philosophical problems, as compared with the Socratic dialogue, had to change abruptly: all problems that were in the least "academic" (gnoseological and aesthetic) fell by the wayside, complex and extensive modes of argumentation also fell away, and there remained essentially only naked "ultimate questions" with an ethical and practical bias” (Bakhtin Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics 115). Although Atwood refers to ancient Greek or, probably, Egyptian mythology, the problem she rises in “Weight” is strictly practical and up-to-date. She talks about domestic violence and the way it haunts not only its direct victims, but also those who witness it. Dismemberment as “an act of conscious

forgetting”, as the narrator defined it in her last pun, is not what happened to Molly, but what happened to the narrator who struggles to accept the tragic event that happened to her and tries to move it to the sphere of laughter.

5. Blurring of boundaries between the dead and alive worlds

As Bakhtin pointed out, the development of menippea was marked by the appearance of three-planned construction: “action and dialogic syncrisis are transferred from earth to Olympus and to the nether world” (Bakhtin Problems of Dostoyevsky’s Poetics 116). What counts for us is that the appearance of such a three-planned construction encouraged the emergence and development of a special sub-genre – dialogues of the dead. In “Weight” the boundary between the world of the dead and the world of the living is almost completely blurred. The protagonist cannot accept Molly’s death and keeps talking to her in her mind as if Molly was still alive. In the beginning of the short story although she does not address Molly directly, she tries to imagine Molly’s reaction on what is happening to her at the moment. Here is the protagonist’s first reaction on the joke made by the man she is having a dinner with: “Would Molly have found this joke funny? Probably. Certainly, at first” (181). As the story moves on, her appeals to Molly become more direct. Addressing Molly directly, she offers her a new pun for their game: “Here’s one for you, Molly: *menopause*. A pause while you reconsider men”. (185). Soon the reader is shown another direct appeal to Molly: “Molly, I let you down. I burned out early. I couldn’t take the pressure. I wanted security. Maybe I decided that the fastest way to improve the lot of women was to improve my own” (187). The epilogue provides the reader with the brightest example of blurring of the boundaries between dead and alive. There the narrator tells the reader her plans for tomorrow as she will have a day-off: she will go jogging to the cemetery. Although it will not be the cemetery, where Molly is buried, the narrator says she will find any tomb and pretend it is hers.

I'll pick out a tombstone where I can do my leg stretches, and I'll pretend it's hers.

Molly, I'll say. We don't see eye to eye on some things and you wouldn't approve of my methods, but I do what I can. The bottom line is that cash is cash, and it puts food on the table (193).

Moreover, here she is not only addressing her directly, but also reconstructs her reply for the first time in the short story, she transforms her monologue to the dialogue: "*Bottom line*, she will answer. What you hit when you get as far down as you're going. After that you stay there. Or else you go up" (193).

6. Moral-psychological experimentation.

"In the menippea there appears for the first time what might be called moral-psychological experimentation: a representation of the unusual, abnormal moral and psychic states of man-insanity of all sorts (the theme of the maniac), split personality, unrestrained daydreaming, unusual dreams, passions bordering on madness, suicides, and so forth" (Bakhtin Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics 116). This parallel between menippea and "Weight" does not even need to be explained. The short story is based on a 1st-person narration, where the narrator, who is on the brink of insanity as she talks to her dead friend all the time and definitely has suicidal thoughts, tells us a story about a maniac who had killed his own wife. As Bakhtin explains it, these abnormal states of mind help the menippean characters to "lose their finalized quality to cease to mean only one thing, to cease to coincide with themselves" (Bakhtin Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics 117).

7. Elements of social utopia

Even though in "Weight" we are not given any fantastic description of the journeys to unknown land as in a classical Menippea, we know that the protagonist dreams of founding an organization which would be able to protect all women from any kind of violence - "a shelter

for battered women. Molly's place, it's called" (180). Even though the text does not contain any direct references to this genre, the very idea of creating the world with no violence in it could be considered as an element of social utopia.

8. Employment of different genres and mix and mixing of prose and poetic speech.

" Characteristic for the menippea is a wide use of inserted genres: novellas, letters, oratorical speeches, symposia, and so on; also characteristic is a mixing of prose and poetic speech. The inserted genres are presented at various distances from the ultimate authorial position, that is, with varying degrees of parodying and objectification" (Bakhtin Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics 117).

The story of Molly's murder can be considered as an inserted novella which the narrator fails to tell during the dinner to the sponsor, but she tells it to the reader. As for mixing of prose and poetic speech, we have already analyzed use of the rhyme ("a hot flash/ a car crash", "Real blood, the kind that cries out to you in the ground") in the beginning of this chapter, in the paragraph dedicated to the comic element. As we said, the use of rhyme helps the narrator to approach semantically serious topics in a lower humorous ay. "Verse portions are almost always given with a certain degree of parodying" (Bakhtin Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics 117).

9. "The multi-styled and multi-toned nature of the menippea"

Use of inserted genres, mixing of prose and poetic speech, combining philosophic references with crude slum naturalism inevitably results in "the multi-styled and multi-toned nature" of "Weight", which was demonstrated by all the points above. " The presence of inserted genres reinforces the multi-styled and multi-toned nature of the menippea; what is coalescing here is a new relationship to the word as the material of literature, a relationship characteristic for the entire dialogic line of development in artistic prose" (Bakhtin Problems of Dostoyevsky's

Poetics 117). Thus, all the analysis we have made in this chapter allows us to see in which way Menippea has prepared a foundation for the future dialogical texts.

10. Menippea as a diary of antiquity

Another characteristic of Menippea mentioned by Bakhtin is “its concern with current and topical issues” (Bakhtin Problems of Dostoyevsky’s Poetics 117). He calls it a “journalistic genre of antiquity”. The scholar compares the satires of Lucian with Dostoyevsky’s *Diary of a Writer* as they served as a mean of fixation of everyday life and its important issues. The use of the first-person narration in “Weight” provides Atwood with a possibility to show us a fragment from the narrator’s diary, to show what bothers her, what has formed her perception of the world around her and how she is dealing with it.

11. Presence of sharp contrasts and oxymoronic combinations

As Bakhtin claims, “the menippea is full of sharp contrasts and oxymoronic combinations: the virtuous hetaera, the true freedom of the wise man and his servile position, the emperor who becomes a slave, moral downfalls and purifications, luxury and poverty, the noble bandit, and so forth. The menippea loves to play with abrupt transitions and shifts, ups and downs, rises and falls, unexpected coming together of distant and disunited things, mesalliances of all sorts” (Bakhtin Problems of Dostoyevsky’s Poetics 118). As far as we are concerned, the husband murdering his wife could join this list of oxymoronic examples. Since traditionally marriage is seen as an act of becoming profoundly whole, dismemberment of one’s spouse can be considered as a contradiction to it.

12. Presence of scandal scenes

Despite the fact the plot-frame does not contain any scandal scenes as it shows us a calm conversation in the restaurant, the core of the Molly’s story is a scandal scene – a husband murders his wife. As Bakhtin explains it, “very characteristic for the menippea are scandal

scenes, eccentric behavior, inappropriate speeches and performances, that is, all sorts of violations of the generally accepted and customary course of events and the established norms of behavior and etiquette, including manners of speech" (Bakhtin Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics 117). Murdering one's own wife undoubtedly represents the violation of the generally accepted norms of behaviour Bakhtin is talking about.

Concluding our comparison of "Weight" with a classical Menippea, we will state that Atwood's short story suits 12 out of 14 characteristics of Menippea described by Bakhtin. It does not satisfy the following criterias: presence of experimental fantasticality and freedom of plot and philosophical invention. Absence these elements of Menippea can be explained by Atwood's writer's choice. Moreover, as we have already argued in the introduction to this chapter, the genre could not survive through so many centuries of literary evolution without being changed. A possibility to compare "Weight" to the Menippea provided us with a chance to see the evolution of the dialogical text, to see what characteristics of its predecessors have remained and what happened to be useless.

9. The concept of *heteroglossia* in “Wilderness Tips”

In “Wilderness Tips”, the short story which gives the name to the whole collection, Atwood depicts the concept of wilderness as the core of Canadian cultural myth. It is a story about three sisters, Portia, Prue and Pamela, their elder brother Roland, and George, a Hungarian exile who is married to Portia. By using heteroglossia Atwood demonstrates how the characters with different social and cultural background experience wilderness and manage it. In this chapter we will demonstrate how heteroglossia is a very useful concept to interpret the different characters’ reactions to wilderness.

1. Heteroglossia as a method of showing different perspectives of Wilderness

Before coming to the definition of “heteroglossia”, the term suggested by Bakhtin in his work “Discourse in the novel”, we would like to state why we find it useful to apply it to our discussion of “Wilderness Tips.” Throughout the whole collection language is the topic the protagonists keep reflecting on and arguing about. It is the privileged mean of self-identification and structuring the world picture. As Coral Ann Howells states, “Atwood’s fiction draws attention not only to the ways in which stories may be told, but also to the function of language as symbolic representation and as agent for changing our models of perception” (8). The story “Wilderness Tips” is a concentrated example of language’s central position. George, who is still working on improving his English, keeps asking questions about the meaning of some words (“What is frass?” (203); he was reading woman magazines to improve his English as they had pictures). Pamela, who is a university professor, is curious why language functions so strangely sometimes: ““Why is ‘news’ plural? Why don’t we say olds?”” (202), etc. The very title of the short story is linguistically ambiguous. When George sees this title for the first time, he is confused. He fails to understand whether it is a noun with a verb or two nouns. We will come back to the title later.

Now we can move on to the notion of heteroglossia.

Bakhtin states: “Language – like the living concrete environment in which the consciousness of

the verbal artist lives – is never unitary. <...> Actual social life and historical becoming create within an abstractly unitary national language a multitude of concrete worlds, a multitude of bounded verbal-ideological and social belief systems, within these various systems (identical in the abstract) are elements of language filled with various semantic and axiological elements and each with its own different sound” (Dialogic Imagination 288). Bakhtin called heteroglossia these different dimensions of language which may be present in one text. According to the scholar, heteroglossia is the main mean of constructing double-narrative, which we have already touched in the Chapter 7. Bakhtin explains: “Heteroglossia, once incorporated into the novel (whatever the forms for its incorporation), is another’s speech in another’s language, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way. <...> In such discourse there are always two voices, two meanings, and two expressions. <...> Double-voiced discourse is always internally dialogized” 324). We will now demonstrate what voices Atwood pushes together to form heteroglossia in “Wilderness Tips.”

The first voice the reader is given in “Wilderness Tips” is Prue’s who is looking at her reflection in the mirror. ““It’s the forties look,” she says to George, hand on her hip, doing a pirouette. “Rosie the Riveter. From the war. Remember her?” (197). Although the speech itself is not characterized by funny elements, the gestures characterize it as part of a parodizing discourse. This half-joking intonation will become the main characteristic not only of Prue’s speech, but of her behaviour in general as we will see later on. Just after this question, the reader is shown George’s inner perspective in which he remembers what he was doing in the forties: “He spent the forties rooting through garbage heaps and begging, and doing other things unsuitable for a child” (198). What matters for us is the remark he adds to his memories: “He does not consider telling any of this to Prue” (198). George identifies this episode of his memories as something that would seem alien for Prue’s half-joking discourse as it has nothing to do with easiness and laughter. Instead of sharing his thoughts he makes her a compliment: ““You weren’t born then,” he says” (198). This compliment, in contrast, absolutely fits her

kind of discourse.

Prue lowers the sunglasses to the end of her nose and looks at him over the plastic rims.

‘George, you are totally shameless,’ she says. ‘You always were.’ She gives him an innocent smile, a mischievous smile, a smile with a twist of real evil in it. It’s a smile that wavers like a gasoline slick on water, shining, changing tone (198).

The description of Prue’s smile, which is in the same time innocent and “a smile with a twist of real evil in it” provides us with another reason to characterize Prue’s half-joking discourse as the one which belongs to the trickster. Prue’s actions which the reader learns about as the plot moves on prove this hypothesis: we learn that Prue has been George’s lover through all his marriage with her sister Portia of whom she has always felt jealous. There is one more important addition: “This smile of Prue’s was the first interesting thing George stumbled over when he hit Toronto, back in the late fifties” (198). Probably, this belonging to the trickster’s sphere became the factor which attracted George most of all as he was a trickster himself, an immigrant from Hungary who married Portia not for love, but because he wished to owe Wacousta Lodge and to have someone who would pick up the things after him. We will expand this point when we move to describing George’s discourse. Before leaving George, Prue says: ““It’s lunch-time. That’s what I came to tell you” (199). The reader identifies this as a lie as he was shown Prue flirting with George, which more likely looked like her reason for coming. However, we are given George’s thought on what Prue has said: “For once in her life, Prue is telling the truth” (199). The addition “for once in her life” characterizes Prue as a liar. Even in her childhood she acted as a liar towards other brothers and sisters:

Prue, for instance, is a blithe liar. She always has been; she enjoys it. When they were children she’d say, ‘Look, there’s a big snot coming out of your nose,’ and Portia would run to the washroom mirror. Nothing was there, but Prue’s saying it made it somehow true, and Portia would scrub and scrub, trying to wash away invisible dirt, while Prue doubled over with laughter. ‘Don’t believe her,’ Pamela would say. ‘Don’t be such a

sucker.' (215).

Throughout the whole short story, she either jokes or lies. In her next appearance, she makes another joke: “ ‘George likes old stuff,’ says Prue, coming in with a platter of food. She’s put on a man’s white shirt over her kerchief arrangement but hasn’t done it up. ‘Lucky for us ladies, eh?’” (202). Should we pay attention to what she is wearing in this scene, it is a man’s shirt. For each character wilderness means different things. Prue’s trickster’s position enables her to appropriate for herself means which are typically alien to her in order to survive in the wild circumstances created by the dominant culture. It could be read as the mimicry of the male discourse, an attempt to appropriate its power by reflecting it. At the end of the short story Prue accuses Portia of having all the best all the time. Among the three sisters she is the one who wants to have it all. The reader is told that she is the one who is always “the first with trends – the first white kitchen, the first set of giant shoulder pads, the first leather pants suit have been hers over the years” (203), which shows that has always wanted to be the first. Despite the fact she cared about the trends, she wanted Wacousta Lodge to remain unchanged: “She wants everything on this peninsula to stay exactly the way it always has been. <...> Wacousta Lodge is a little slice of the past, an alien past” (203). Just as George, who wants to save it as it was as he feels privileged to be a part of this big past, Prue wants to keep it as it has always been, which states another parallel between these characters and explains why they kept being the closest people in this family throughout their lives. Moreover, they both cared about freedom more than others. The reader is given the following example: George always knows when one of Prue’s marriages is coming to the end - “the phone at his office would ring and it would be Prue, saying, “George. I can’t do it. I’ve been so good, but I just can’t go on. He comes into the bathroom when I’m flossing my teeth” (204), which demonstrates how much she cares about having her personal space and privacy. What is more, Prue has always wanted to protest against sacrilegious Wacousta Lodge. Firstly, she was the one who brought George, an alien exile from Hungary, here. Secondly, she wanted to have sex with him there, in Wacousta Lodge as a sign

of her protest:

Prue landed them on a rocky point, led him up among the trees. She wanted him to make his usual rakish, violent, outlandish brand of love to her on the reindeer moss and pine needles; she wanted to break some family taboo. Sacrilege was what she had in mind: that was as clear to him as if he'd read it (205).

However, nothing of this worked as it did not correlate with George's plan on "invading" Wacousta Lodge. He decided to marry Portia, the youngest sister, and by doing it – to marry Wacousta Lodge, without breaking any taboos and showing disrespect to this place which he treated as a sacral territory as well.

In the overall heteroglossia of the text Prue represents a female trickster's discourse who tries to appropriate a dominant position in managing wilderness.

A male version of the same trickster's discourse is presented by George. George appears in Wacousta Lodge as a mysterious alien exile from Hungary who does not belong to this territory. No one knows his real name. The first characteristic of this character the reader is given is that George is not his real name, his real name remains unknown. No one knows when exactly, how and why he came to Canada. Just as Prue, it is difficult to put him under control: "The ashtray beside him overflows with butts: many women have tried to cure him of smoking; many have failed" (198). He is a liar as well, however, he is more cautious in his lies: "'You weren't born then,' he says. This isn't true, but he never misses the chance to bestow a compliment when there's one just lying around. What does it cost? Not a cent, which is something the men in this country have never figured out." (199). First description of his appearance is also given in trickster's terms – he is compared to a snake: "At that time he was young, thin as a snake, with a dangerous-looking scar over one eye and a few bizarre stories. A collectible" (198). The epithets used in this portrait – dangerous-looking, bizarre, present him as an alien threatening subject, He is wilderness himself. It seems that nothing seems difficult to him:

George takes one more look at the paper. Quebec is talking Separatism; there are Mohawks behind the barricades near Montreal, and people are throwing stones at them; word is the country is falling apart. George is not worried: he's been in countries that were falling apart before. There can be opportunities (199).

Paradoxically, he is at the same time brave and cautious. His cautiousness was underlined even in description of the scene of him killing three people: "He once shot three men himself, though only two of them were strictly necessary. The third was a precaution" (203). In contrast to Roland, who was only playing a game of killing Prue with an ax, George was actually killing men. He represents some frightening wild power. Probably, it became one of the reasons why it was George and not Roland who belonged to this place, who finally took Wacousta Lodge. Prue sees him as "a barbarian in a Roman Triumph" (204). The following portrait is given to the reader in the scene when Prue brings him to Wacousta Lodge for the first time to introduce him to the family: "His English was not good, his hair was too glossy, his shoes too pointed, his clothes too sharply pressed. He wore dark glasses, kissed hands" (204). This description is aimed at creating an image of a person who does not suit this conservative Canadian environment at all. The reader is shown that his bad English and dirty clothes do not suit the expensive interiors of Wacousta Lodge at all. Moreover, when Prue introduces George to her mother, she mentions: "He's come up here to see wild animals" (204), which sets another parallel between him and wilderness. His plan for appropriating Wacousta Lodge is called "a plan of attack" (205), although, as a typical trickster, he does not act aggressively. Instead, he kisses everyone's hands, shows as much respect to this place as he can. He builds an accurate strategy of reaching his goal: "That evening at dinner he neglected all three of the daughters in favour of the mother: the mother was the guardian; the mother was the key" (205). George becomes the one who is the most interested in the history of the place. She asks the sisters to show him the book it is named after. In this scene he sees the title which gives the name not only to this short story, but to the whole collection. The reader is told what George has in his

mind when he sees the words "Wilderness Tips" for the first time. He does not understand whether it is a noun with a verb or two nouns. He starts reading it and realizes that the things described here are familiar to him, even though the book gives the pieces of advice on how to survive in the wilderness. "The book itself told how to do useful things, like snaring small animals and eating them – something George himself had done, though not in forests – or lighting a fire in a rainstorm" (207 – 208). What matters to us is what attracted George in this book most of all. Although the book is written with romanticized language, what interests George is its topic – survival. As R. Weaver suggests, "It is not words like "honor and courage," however, that come to mind when he remember his past, it is the word "survival." In a sense, through his refusal to romanticize Canadian tradition as Roland does, George deconstructs the vocabulary of Wilderness Tips and deromanticizes it, until even Roland realizes that in the end, George will own Wacousta Lodge" (96). When George visits Wacousta Lodge for the first time, he says that he wants to marry it. George considers the sisters as the parts of the place which he wants to possess completely. Probably, it becomes the reason why he finally sleeps with Pamela whom he even does not like – she becomes the last element of the puzzle he needs to put together.

After demonstrating Prue's and George's parts of the discourse, we find it necessary to mention that although they both represent trickster's discourses, their combination represent something Bakhtin called social heteroglossia as the characters belong to different social classes and have different cultural backgrounds, which explains the differences in their speech and behavior. Moreover, belonging to different gender here should not be underestimated.

Another male character whose response to the wilderness we are shown is Ronald's. Let us now analyze this character's discourse in its connection to the discourses of others. The first time we hear about Roland concerns his reaction to George's first appearance in Wacousta Lodge: "George leaned over to kiss the mother's sun-freckled hand, and his dark glasses fell off into the lake. The mother made cooing sounds of distress, Prue laughed at him, Roland

ignored him, Pamela turned away in irritation” (204). As we see, Roland ignores George – from the very beginning of their relationship Roland considers George as someone who is not worthy of his attention. What is worth our attention is how Atwood switches the focalizers in this short story. The reader fails to identify the protagonist as the point of view keeps being changed. In the beginning we were given Prue’s and George perspective, then after the description of the lunch the reader joins Roland who goes to his chopping, and chopping happens to become the second characteristic of his portrait. At first, it could seem strange that the character who represents conservative Canadians has chopping as a hobby. However, soon the reader realizes that chopping for Roland is a type of sublimation of his anger at George and the sphere he represents. Roland likes having everything under control: “He dislikes machine noises, but they’re easier to tolerate when you’re making them yourself, when you can control them. Like gunshot” (211). We should underline that Atwood inserts the elements of Ronald’s own discourse in the description of his attitude to chopping. Bakhtin calls this type of discourse’s organization – a hybrid construction. The scholar explains: “What we are calling a hybrid construction is an utterance that belongs, by its grammatical (syntactic) and compositional markers, to a single speaker, but that actually contains mixed within two utterances, two speech manners, two styles, two “languages”, two semantic and axiological belief systems” (Bakhtin *Dialogic* 304 – 305). The description of Roland’s chopping can be treated as a hybrid construction as, despite the fact we are dealing with a third-person narration, we are shown Roland’s own thoughts thanks to internal focalization. His desire to have everything under control explains his cautiousness: “Not that Roland shoots. He used to: he used to go out for a deer in season, but now it’s unsafe, there are too many other men doing it – Italians and who knows what – who’ll shoot at anything moving” (211). We are given another example of a hybrid construction as the addition “Italians and who knows what” undoubtedly belongs to Roland’s discourse. Chopping wood is the only action that makes him feel alive. Roland represents the “dead” part of Wacousta Lodge which is never ready for any changes.

When George appears there for the first time, he mentions that they, the inhabitants of Wacousta Lodge, were not ready for him. Roland was one of them. From this point of view, George represents a threat for Roland. Roland also is a romanticized character. Firstly, his very name is a clear reference to Roland, the protagonist of *La Chanson de Roland*, the most famous heroic poem. Secondly, he does not hunt anymore as he does not want to hurt someone unarmed, just as a real knight. He is sensitive, although he tries not to show his feelings: "He never talks about these feelings. He knows they would be held against him at his place of work, which he hates. His job is managing money for other people" (211). He hates his job as it is too prosaic for him. He looks at the world around him through archaic categories. When he describes what he saw on the road, he compares the tents to the tents of Goths, Vandals, Huns and Magyars – and these are the people Roland associates George with: "Acres of treelessness, of new townhouses with little pointed roofs – like tents, like an invasion. The tents of the Goths and the Vandals. The tents of the Huns and the Magyars. The tents of George" (211). He sees George as a barbarian, an invader who came here to occupy his homeland. The brightest example of the reasons of the confrontation between George and Roland is their interpretation of the book which gave the name to the short story they are fighting for. As R.M. Weaver explains it, "Atwood portrays differing responses to this book by Roland and George. For Roland, *Wilderness Tips* signifies his lost youth and lost ideals as well as his fear of the wild. Middle-aged now, he remembers its mythical power: "How old had he been--nine? ten? . . . It was the summer he wanted to be an Indian because of *Wilderness Tips* (207). Roland was caught up in the book's myth of the noble savage: "There was a lot about the Indians, about how noble they were, how brave, faithful, clean, reverent, hospitable, and honourable." (91). This misunderstanding transforms Roland into Roland the Furious and makes him imagine that he is splitting not wood, but George's head: "Down comes his axe on the head of George, which splits in two" (212). Even the image of Indians got romanticized in his imagination: "There was a lot about the Indians, about how noble they were, how brave, faithful, clean,

reverent, hospitable, and honourable” (212). He liked even the formulations of this 1905 book: “Even these words sound outmoded now, archaic. When was the last time Roland heard anyone praised for being *honourable*?” (212). This is why he got disappointed when he saw real Indians for the first time:

Driving up yesterday, he’d passed a group of actual Indians, three of them, at a blueberry stand. They were wearing jeans and T-shirts and running shoes, the same as everybody else. One of them had a transistor radio. A neat maroon mini-van was parked beside the stand. So what did he expect from them, feathers? All that was gone, lost, ruined, years and years before he was born (214).

As we see, George and Roland represent two opposite discourses and their confrontation is more than personal. We will come back to George’s discourse later in the chapter. As Bakhtin was explaining the concept of social heteroglossia, “Oppositions between individuals are only surface upheavals of the untamed elements that play on such individual oppositions, make them contradictory, saturate their consciousness and discourses with a more fundamental speech diversity” (*Dialogic* 326).

After presenting George’s discourse, Atwood switches to Portia. Although, the reader is already moving towards the end of the story, s/he does not know much about George’s wife yet. The only detail concerning Portia the reader was given was George’s memory about the day they met:

George leaned over to kiss the mother’s sun-freckled hand, and his dark glasses fell off into the lake. The mother made cooing sounds of distress, Prue laughed at him, Roland ignored him, Pamela turned away in irritation. But Portia – lovely, small-boned Portia, with her velvet eyes – took off her shirt without a word and dove into the lake. She retrieved his dark glasses for him, smiling diffidently, handing them up to him out of the water, her wet hair dripping down over her small breasts like a water nymph’s on an Art Nouveau fountain, and he knew then that she was the one he would marry. (204 – 205).

As we see, most of the short story is based on hybrid heteroglossial constructions. An addition – “lovely, small-boned Portia, with her velvet eyes” alone with the expression of George’s idea to marry Portia belong to George’s discourse inserted into the narrator’s speech. George sees Portia as the best candidate to get married with among all three sisters as she is the one who could play the role of a servant for him, she would be a pleasant addition to Wacousta Lodge: “A woman of courtesy and tact and few words, who would be kind to him, who would cover up for him; who would pick up the things he had dropped” (205). Moreover, the only gesture Portia does until the final is offering George a sandwich. Before having Portia as a focalizer the reader is presented her description through Roland’s perspective. He does not understand why Portia married him. To Roland it seems that George was more suitable for Prue.

Portia has always been his favourite sister. She was the youngest, the baby. Prue, who was the next youngest, used to tease her savagely, though Portia was remarkably slow to cry. Instead, she would just look, as if she couldn’t quite figure out what Prue was doing to her or why. Then she would go off by herself (212).

Innocence and even ignorance become Portia’s main characteristics in descriptions of others. To George and to Roland it seems that she does not understand what is going on around her, however, when Portia takes the position of focalizer the reader is shown another side of the picture.

Throughout the whole short story, until the final part, Portia’s image is presented in terms of a passive object. Should we pay attention to the first two pages after Portia’s becoming a focalizer, we will see that even talking about herself she uses the passive voice more often than the active. At the beginning of this part we see Portia lying on the bed having a nap: “The nap was enforced on her once, by her mother. Now she just does it” (215). Even her habits are enforced by others. She does not ask George many questions even though she does not know much about him. She prefers making up stories about him herself than to ask him about the truth. “To question him would turn her cynical and hard. She would rather be kissed; she would

rather be cherished. She would rather believe” (215). What is worth our attention is that in the first two cases Portia uses the passive constructions “be kissed” and “be cherished”, however, in the last sentence of this paragraph there is a sudden switch to the active voice. The sentence “she would rather believe” shows us a new side of Portia’s personality – it poses her as a passive trickster. Suddenly, the reader finds out that she understands what goes on around her, but she has some hidden reasons to pretend being naive. The next sentence confirms this guess: “She knew about George and Prue at the beginning, of course” (215). Moreover, further the reader is given another argument which provides him with a chance to see Portia as a trickster: “Portia wanted to do things the way Prue did” (216). Portia understands that the only way to tame the wilderness, which for her is embodied in the figure of George, is to act like a trickster. However, she feels too young to act as Prue does: “But she was too young; she didn’t have the knack” (216). This is why she chooses her own way of being a trickster – pretending naiveté. What is even more interesting is that Prue will not remain Portia’s ultimate role model – soon after this she will want to be like Pamela:

Once she wanted to be more like Prue, but now it’s Pamela. Pamela, considered so eccentric and odd and plain in the fifties, now seems to be the only one of them who got it right. Freedom isn’t having a lot of men, not if you think you have to. Pamela does what she wants, nothing more and nothing less (216).

Portia sees Pamela as a wise woman who knows how to get everything she wants and to remain free. The end of the short story where Portia sees Pamela having sex with George demonstrates that Pamela happened to be the wisest trickster among all three sisters. We will come back to Pamela’s image when we come to the description of her discourse.

When Portia looks at the mirror after having a nap, she sets a dialogue with her great-grandfather. As we have already mentioned it in the previous chapters, a changed state of mind and dialogues with the dead are the typical tools of the construction a dialogical text:

Her great-grandfather watches her in the mirror, disapproving of her as he always has,

although he was dead long before she was born. "I did the best I could," she tells him. "I married a man like you. A robber king." She will never admit to him or to anyone else that this might possibly have been a mistake (218).

By addressing her dead great-grandfather, Portia addresses herself trying to persuade herself that her decision to marry George was not a mistake.

Portia starts looking for George, but she cannot find him anywhere. So she asks Prue if she knew where he could be. This is the scene of Portia's and Prue's argument, which becomes another proof of the fact that no one in this family can see Portia as an active subject. Prue asks Portia if she stays with George for money. Portia replies that George did not have anything when they got married. Here is Prue's answer: "'When *he* married *you*, you mean,' says Prue. 'When Mother married you off. You just stood there and let the two of them do it, like the little suck you were.'" (219).

Prue's answer becomes something that wakes Portia up:

Portia wonders if this is true. She wishes she could go back a few decades, grow up again. The first time, she missed something; she missed a stage, or some vital information other people seemed to have. This time she would make different choices. She would be less obedient; she would not ask for permission. She would not say 'I do' but 'I am.' (219 – 220).

For the first time in her life she starts thinking of moving to the active position and giving up her pretending to be naive. After this conversation with Prue she sees George with Pamela and goes into the lake. We need to say that diving into the water can already be considered as an intertextual reference to Atwood's novel *Surfacing* where in the moment of diving into the water the protagonist becomes able to find and articulate her identity. What is happening to Portia in this scene is almost the same. The description of diving is abstract and obscure: "She wades into the lake, slipping into the water as if between the layers of a mirror: the glass layer, the silver layer. She meets the doubles of her own legs, her own arms, going down" (221). The

water is compared to the mirror – by diving into the lake, Portia dives into her real self, this is why she sees there “the doubles of her own legs, her own arms.” As all the heroines of the previous short stories of the collection, finding her real identity requires zeroing and going back to the start: “She is herself at fifteen, herself at twelve, herself at nine, at six” (221). Through denying her previous role Portia gets able to become a speaker herself. What she imagines is a sinking liner and herself naked running through the ballroom screaming: “ ‘Don’t you see? It’s coming apart, everything’s coming apart, you’re sinking. You’re finished, you’re over, you’re dead!’” (221). However, the last paragraph of the short story shows us that this moment of diving did not become an event in Lotman’s understanding of this term: “She would be invisible, of course. No one would hear her. And nothing has happened, really, that hasn’t happened before” (221). Portia remains invisible and keeps denying her perception of the world around her as an apocalypse which she depicted in her unconscious.

The last figure whose discourse we need to observe in this chapter is Pamela, the oldest sister. In the beginning we are shown Pamela through George’s vision who describes her as a “dry-faced, the eldest” sister (201). Pamela’s first sentence in the short story is her reply to George’s attempt to open a conversation “ ‘Isn’t the weather marvellous?’” (201). Pamela answers: “ ‘If you like postcards,’ she says. ‘At least it’s not snowing.’” (201). Already in her first utterance Pamela performs as a snob, the one who tries to diminish George’s discourse. As R.M. Weaver maintains, “Pamela seems to adopt Luce Irigaray’s linguistic strategy for women’s survival within a language system that is foreign to them: "one way of disrupting patriarchal logic. . .is through mimeticism, or the mimicry of male discourse" (qtd in Moi 139). Irigaray proposes that such imitation is a powerful method of "undermining patriarchy," especially when performed by a woman fully conscious of her position within the power system of language and fully conscious that all she can do to counter its alienating effects is to mirror it or reflect it back on itself” (94).

What is worth our attention is that just after this the narrator mentions that recently Pamela

was announced as a Dean of Women, and George does not understand what it actually means. He looks up this word in the dictionary. “The Oxford dictionary has informed him that a dean might be the head of ten monks in a monastery, or “as tr. med. L. *decanus*, applied to the *teoding-ealdor*, the headman of a *tenmannetale*.”(201). Relating Pamela to the head of the monks represents George’s ironical discourse. Despite this fact, George pretends not to take Pamela serious, he wants to sleep with her as he has “an antropological interest in her” (202). He also thinks “she has no bottom at all” (201), which presents her as an unknown, unpredictable person, which will be proved by the final of the short story.

Pamela is always reflecting on the words she and all others around use. When Portia asks George if he read any news in the newspaper, Pamela wonders: “ ‘That paper’s a week old. Why is ‘news’ plural? Why don’t we say ‘olds’?’” (202). When she sees George for the first time, she corrects his English when he calls Portia a host, not a hostess. When George spills coffee and calls himself an oaf, Pamela wonders again: “ ‘If the plural of ‘loaf’ is ‘loaves,’ what’s the plural of ‘oaf?’” she says. “Why isn’t it ‘oaves?’” (209). Although George understands that this question is not addressed to him, but more likely to herself, he considers it as a flirt. Pamela’s linguistic reflections, her using obscure phrases and words make George be curious about her. Pamela invites him to go canoeing and adds: “ ‘This lake is full of hidden rocks. It can be dangerous. But I’ll take care of you’” (210). A lake full of hidden rocks – this is what Pamela is to George, she is dangerous, this is why he gets interested in her. “Pamela’s authoritarian use of language, her intellectualizing and her metaphoric leaps, are all evidence, as well, of Atwood's awareness of women's duplicitous position within the power system of language” (Weaver 95).

After taking part in these two or three short conversations Pamela disappears from the short story till the final part. She remains the most mysterious person not only for George, but also for the reader. What is more interesting is that Pamela is the only character who does not perform as a focalizer throughout the whole short story. The reader is not shown how she sees

the world and what she thinks about. Even in the finale her name is not mentioned explicitly. Portia just hears that there are two persons in the boathouse, it is dark so she cannot see who is there. As the reader is shown this episode through Portia's perspective, he can only guess by process of elimination that the only persons who can be there are George and Pamela. Even though Pamela did not act as a trickster towards George, she became the one who got him. Probably, this is why she became a role model for Portia who wanted to be as free and self-confident as Pamela. Her strategy of managing the language and praising herself upon George became the most successful one among other sister's strategies.

By switching the focalizers and creating several separate discourses which come into interaction with each other Atwood creates a heteroglossia that structures a three-dimensional picture of the specificity of personal relations and postcolonial reflection in one family. The reader is shown the perspective of a Canadian conservative who is bothered by the idea of losing his heritage, the attempts of an enthusiastic immigrant to appropriate this new to him land and all the wealth it can provide him with, the problems of women who suffer from playing secondary roles both in life and in their own family.

This interaction, this dialogic tension between two languages and two belief systems, permits authorial intentions to be realized in such a way that we can acutely sense their presence at every point in the work. The author is not to be found in the language of the narrator, not in the normal literary language to which the story opposes itself <...> - but rather, the author utilizes now one language, now another, in order to avoid giving himself up wholly either of them; he makes use of this verbal give-and-take, this dialogue of languages at every point in his work, in order that he himself might remain as it were neutral with regard to language, a third party in a quarrel between two people (although he might be a biased third party) (Bakhtin *Dialogic* 314). Even though Bakhtin observes a classical dialogical situation here with two included parties, we should say that in *Wilderness Tips* Atwood goes further and creates a universe structured by multiple perspectives.

10. “Hack Wednesday” through the perspective of M. Buber, the main forerunner of Bakhtin’s dialogical theory

One of the philosophers who influenced Bakhtin’s dialogical theory was a German thinker, Martin Buber. He was one of the first philosophers of the 20th century who switched his attention from gnoseological problems to the concept of interaction between people. According to Buber, dialogue must be considered as an ontological core of our existence. In 1923 Buber publishes his book “I and Thou” which became the philosophical foundation for Bakhtin’s *Problems of Dostoyevsky’s Poetics*, where the Russian scholar will show how to apply Buber’s conclusions to the sphere of literary theory.

At the beginning of each new paragraph of this chapter we will outline the main theses of M.Buber’s “I and Thou”, after which we will explain why we find this book necessary to analyze the last short story of the collection through the ethical perspective of dialogism theory.

In “Hack Wednesday”, the last short story of the collection, Atwood shows us a fragment of the life of a middle-aged journalist who is not really satisfied with it. As R.M. Weaver sums up, “Facing the onrush of time as a new century looms larger, Marcia must deal with the gradual failing of her aging body and the gradual sickening of the planet: "She notices she is no longer thinking in terms of if - only of when. She must watch this tendency to give up, she must get herself under control (237)” (115).

What strikes our attention is that the main quality of Marcia’s personality is her ability to sympathize with everyone and everything around her, which in fact helps her to survive. In this chapter we would like to observe Marcia’s interaction with other characters of the short story through Buber’s dialogical theory. In contrast to Bakhtin, Buber did not try to prove his arguments with literary examples as he was not a literary scholar. We will take Buber’s arguments as a base for literary analysis which is aimed to demonstrate what role the protagonist’s ability to sympathize plays in her life and to what extent it can be

explained by a dialogical theory.

1. According to Buber, one subject cannot exist in isolation. A subject needs to come into interaction with another, otherwise its existence will not be full: “I perceive something. I am sensible of something. I imagine something. I something. I feel something. I think something. The life of human beings does not consist of all this and the like alone” (4).

At the beginning of the short story the reader already sees that Marcia’s worldview is closely connected to people with whom she interacts or used to interact along with the opinions of others. “Marcia’s mother used to tell her that she should always wear clean panties in case a bus ran over her, because other people might see them as her corpse was being toted off to the morgue. It wasn’t Marcia’s potential death that loomed uppermost in her mind, it was the state of her panties” (225). Firstly, Marcia, even being adult, remembers about her mother’s precautions, which states that she finds the others’ opinions important. It also proves Buber’s point about the fact that dialogue guarantees remaining in the present as it demonstrates that Marcia’s childhood experience is a part of her present. Secondly, Marcia mentions that what frightened her mother most of all is not death, but what people would say about her. Further the narrator will note that this preoccupation of the others’ opinion is a typical postcolonial feature: “It embodies the supposed Anglo-Canadian prudery, inhibition, and obsession with public opinion, and as such has mythic force” (226).

The brighter example from the text which proves that Marcia as a subject cannot exist in isolation is the very beginning of the short story which is occupied by a description of Marcia’s dream where she has a baby: “She is suffused with love, and with longing for it, but then she thinks, Now I will have to take care of it” (225). This necessity to take care of someone else, despite the fact Marcia finds it frustrating, drives Marcia’s conscious life. She takes care about her cat, she wants to help homeless Indians. The next point will provide us with a possibility to show how and with whom Marcia interconnects.

2. Buber distinguishes three spheres in which the subject can set the dialogue. He calls them “the spheres in which the world of relations arises” (6):

a) I and Nature: “There the relation sways in gloom, beneath the level of speech. Creatures live and move over against us, but cannot come to us, and when we address them as Thou, our words come to the threshold of speech.”

Marcia’s relation to her cat is a bright example of Buber’s first sphere in which relations arise. In the beginning of the short story the cat tears the glass kitchen door asking to be let in. It irritates Eric, Marcia’s husband, who says: “One of these days I’m going to kill that beast,” (227). Here are Marcia’s reactions concerning the cat: ““You poor baby!”, “It’s confused,” “Were you cold out there? Did you freeze your paws?” (227). Despite the fact the cat is lazy and demands much attention, Marcia, in contrast to Eric, still loves it. It can be explained by her ability to set the dialogue with nature which Buber writes about. Moreover, in his work the scholar himself presents an example with a cat in order to explain how this stadium of setting the dialogue works. Buber argues that despite the fact the cat being an animal belongs to the sphere of “it”, it wants to come into contact with us, the subjects, which creates an illusion of dialogue. Buber explains, despite the fact it is not dialogue yet, it is the first step that precedes it. Therefore, those who are unable to set a prototype of the dialogue with nature in motion, will find it hard to set the dialogue with other subjects as well.

b) I and men: “There the relation is open and in the form of speech. We can give and accept the Thou”.

Should we come to analysis of the lexics Marcia and Eric, her antagonist in terms of abilities to set the dialogue, use, we will see that Eric, who uses profanity and aggressive slang somehow shuts off himself from the dialogue in a broad meaning of this term. He calls one of the politicians ““Ass-licking suck,” (227), he calls the cat “the damn thing” (227) and so on. Marcia, even when the reader is given her inner perspective, uses

exclusively normative literary language. She sympathizes not only with cat, but also with the homeless people whom she sees outside on her way to work. “Three of the city’s homeless are staked out inside the door. All are young men; two of them are Native Indians, one isn’t. The one that isn’t puts the twist on Marcia for some change. He says he just wants to eat, which seems to Marcia a modest enough wish: she knows a lot of people who want a good deal more” (230). She does not blame them, but tries to find out the reasons of their suffering. She guesses: “They’ve had it with this city, they’ve had it with suicide as an option, they’ve had it with the twentieth century. Or so Marcia supposes. She doesn’t blame them: the twentieth century has not been a raving success” (231).

c) I and intelligible forms: forming, acting, thinking

Another episode which shows us Marcia’s necessity to sympathize with everyone around her is her habit to imagine men in their childhood. While having a conversation with her colleague Gus in the restaurant, she tries to imagine him as a boy:

She looks at him, shining as he is with naughty pleasure, and all of a sudden she sees what he would have been like as a small boy. A ten-year-old. With that grin, he would have been the class joker. Nobody would have got the better of him, not even the bullies. He’d have known everyone’s weak place, where to get the knife in. How to protect himself (241).

By trying to understand Gus’s aggression towards their boss, Marcia goes deeper and suggests that it is a childish wish to be protected that encourages Gus to behave this way.

She does the same procedure with their boss Ian Emmiry, who has a nickname, Ian the Terrible. Nobody in their newspaper likes him as he behaves as a tyrant towards the workers, but Marcia tries to imagine what a boy he was to find a way to forgive him for everything: “She has even seen Ian the Terrible, a stolid, plodding boy who must have known others thought of him as dull; she has seen him studying hard, hoping in vain for a best friend, storing up his revenges. It has helped her to forgive him, somewhat.” (242).

3. As Buber points out, the communication “I-You” requires moving the second participant of the communication from the sphere of objects to the sphere of subjects. That is to say, by addressing the second participant directly, we acknowledge him as an equal: “If I face a human being as my Thou, and say the primary word I-Thou to him, he is not a thing among things, and does not consist of things” (8). Buber claims that experiencing means treating another as an object, which implies the impossibility to set the dialogue in motion. According to the philosopher, to experience the other’s existence is not enough for setting the dialogue: “I do not experience the man to whom I say Thou. But I take my stand in relation to him, in the sanctity of the primary word. Only when I step out of it do I experience him once more. In the act of experience Thou is far away” (9). Setting the dialogue demands the cessation of experiencing and involving into active ambiguous relations.

Marcia manages to perceive all people around her as subjects. This ability puts her into confrontation with some stereotypes. For example, on her way to work Marcia buys a magazine called “What Men Really Think”: “It’s all about sex, of course. Marcia has news for them: the sum total of what men really think is quite a lot bigger than that” (231). Her freedom of stereotypes encouraged by real interactions with real men helps her not to categorize men as an overall mass which cares only about sex, it helps her not to categorize at all. We will expand this idea in the point dedicated to dialogism and ideology.

What is also worth our attention is that Marcia, in contrast with her husband Eric who leads a sheltered lifestyle, is very social and communicative. Despite the fact that she works as a journalist on contract and could write at home, she prefers coming to the office as she likes feeling a part of the journal community: “Marcia could have a computer at home if she liked. Also, she could bring in clean copy. But she wants to come down here. She wants to see what’s going on. She wants the gossip” (234).

Moreover, what she writes about concerns social issues: “social issues, problems that may

come up: caring for the aged at home, breast-feeding in public, bulimia in the workplace” (234). She writes not about some general topics or tendencies, but about concrete problems of concrete persons. Coming back to Bakhtin’s theory, we should remember here that one of the main arguments of it was that dialogue always occurs from the interconnection of two particular individuals, it is a result of a movement from the particular to the general, not the way other way around. The individual is the center of it. And this is how Marcia describes her work: “She interviews people, she writes from the particular to the general; she believes, in what she considers to be an old-fashioned, romantic way, that life is something that happens to individuals, despite the current emphasis on statistics and trends” (234).

Here we should come back to Eric and the description of his despair. “His despair is not focused on any one thing; it’s general, like the increasingly bad city air. He doesn’t say much about it, but Marcia knows it’s there. Every day she fights against it, and breathes it in” (236). If the dialogical sphere is characterized by precision and positiveness, the monological one, represented by Eric and Ian, is characterized by generality and negativity.

4. Dialogue can occur only in the present: “True beings are lived in the present, the life of objects is in the past” (12).

The issues Marcia focuses on in her column are always up-to-date. “Lately things have taken a grimmer turn in Marcia’s column: there’s been more about such things as malnutrition in kindergartens, wife-beating, overcrowding in prisons, child abuse. How to behave if you have a friend with AIDS. Homeless people who ask for hand-outs at the entrances to subway stations” (234). Her dialogical interconnection with the world around her helps her to hear the beat of modernity, to be a part of the actual present moment and to be useful for it, although her boss calls her style “hysterical”. The use of this epithet within Ian’s discourse characterizes him as a person who is isolated from the real world around

him. Moreover, historically the word “hysterical” happened to be the main patriarchal tool for moving a strong woman to a peripheral position. Normally this word is not applied to men. Ian also uses the word “soppy” to describe Marcia’s way. The fact that she cares about people around her and tries to help them to solve the problems they have encourages her boss to find it too sentimental, which again shows his inability to look at the world with the eyes of another and to see it the way another sees it. T. Dlugach explains Buber’s philosophy in this way, “One should try to discover in himself a desire to consider everything that surrounds you as your friend without whom your existence is not only not full, but even impossible” (194). This is how Marcia, in contrast to Ian and her husband, perceives the world around her. When Ian brings her hate mail, he adds: “ ‘A lot of people don’t think taxpayers’ money should be spent on drugs.’ ” (235), on which Marcia replies silently: “ ‘It’s not *drugs*,’ says Marcia irritably, ‘it’s public health.’ ” (235). What Ian sees as drugs, here we should take into account semantic ambiguity of this word, Marcia sees as means of fighting for public health. As we see, open to the dialogue Marcia and isolated Ian represent two different visions of the world around them, one belongs to the positive field, the other – to the negative.

6. Any ideology kills the dialogue. “The relation to the Thou is direct. No system of ideas, no foreknowledge, and no fancy intervene between I and Thou” (Buber 11).

This point is definitely connected to the binary precise/general which we have already touched above, however, it needs to be explained in detail.

As we have already pointed out in the example with the magazine about men, dialogism cannot deal with stereotypes, it inevitably disqualify them. As it occurs as far as the individual is concerned, it cannot go together with any kind of categorization.

Another example which shows Marcia’s inability to categorize is presented in the episode where she explains what she writes about. Her column is called “Lifestyles”.

‘Lifestyles’ was the eighties; the nineties are coming, and already steps are being

taken to differentiate the decades. Summings-up clutter the papers, radio and television are droning earnestly on about what the eighties meant and what the nineties will mean. People are already talking about a seventies revival, which puzzles Marcia. What is there to revive? The seventies were the sixties until they became the eighties. There were no seventies, really (234 – 235).

Marcia does not see the point in making up artificial categories which could distinguish the periods from one another. This tendency to see time as a chain of decades-blocks does not correlate with a dialogical vision of time and space as interwoven dimensions. This attempt to categorize time seems to Marcia meaningless as it is an attempt to monologize it. Time is too complicated a concept to be put in such a plain scheme.

The main character who is obsessed with ideologies is Eric. What he ideologizes first of all is his Canadian identity. He refuses to eat food produced in the USA, he tries to live as the pioneers. When Marcia goes to the restaurant with Gus, she feels glad that she can finally eat imported food as Eric does not let her eat it at home: “Here she can eat imported food without feeling like a traitor. She intends to order blood oranges if she can get them. Those, and garlic soup. If Eric cross-examines her later, her conscience will be clear” (237). Eric refuses using toilet paper. Instead of it he cuts newspapers and explains: “‘The pioneers did it,’ says Eric. ‘There was always a mail-order catalogue, on farms. There was never toilet paper.’” (244). However, Marcia suspects that this time the pioneers are not the reason: ‘That was different,’ says Marcia patiently. ‘They had outhouses. You just like the thought of wiping your bum on all those company presidents.’ Throughout the whole short story the reader is shown that Eric is not coherent in his “ideology”. Although he pretends that he tries to save his Canadian identity, he thinks of moving to some other country: “Sometimes he talks about moving – to some other country, somewhere with more self-respect, or somewhere warmer. Or just somewhere else. But where? And how could they afford it?” (236).

At the beginning of the short story the reader is told about another strange habit of Eric's. "Ca-Sissies is Eric's name for CSIS, which really means Canadian Security Intelligence Service. Ca-Sissies taps his phone, or so Eric believes. He teases them: he'll phone up one of his pals and say words like "sabotage" and "bomb," just to activate the tapes. Eric says he's doing Ca-Sissies a favour: he's making them feel important." The very formulation "making them feel important" demonstrates that actually Eric does not find this 'them' important, although it is a state organization which he is supposed to respect if he claims himself to be a patriot.

In the end the reader realizes that all this is not about some ideology, it is likely about Eric's general despair, to which this monological perception of the world has led him.

5. The only way to identify yourself is to set the dialogue with another: "I become through my relation to the Thou; as I become I, I say Thou: All real living is meeting" (Buber 11). Through setting the dialogue with the world around her Marcia goes deeper into herself, trying to find out the reasons of her unhappiness. Even though this statement about her unhappiness is not given explicitly in the text, Marcia keeps searching for some change – she thinks of starting an affair, she dreams of having another baby. Having analyzed the dialogues Marcia sets in motion, we see that each time she starts a conversation, she wants to finish it with a compromise.

When Ian brings her hate mail and says that people do not want the tax-payers' money to be spent on drugs, Marcia makes up a sharp and wit reply, but she does not pronounce it out loud as she does not want to start an argument. "Even to herself she sounds like a child talking back. In Ian's mind another little black mark has just gone on her chart. Up yours, she thinks, smiling brightly. One of these days she'll say something like that out loud, and then there will be trouble" (235).

When Marcia hears Eric's senseless answer about the pioneers and the toilet-paper, she decides not to continue this talk: "She will not push him on the toilet-paper issue. She'll let

him enjoy himself for a few days, or until the first overflow. Then she will simply change things back" (244).

When Eric says that men need to eat meat more than women, Marcia wants to reply, but she does not do it again. "Marcia could say something about that, but does not wish to mention such blood-consuming bodily functions as menstruation and childbirth at the dinner table, so she refrains" (245).

Marcia's inability to express her position in those cases when it can turn the conversation into an argument can be explained by the influence a monological world view has on Marcia's dialogical perception of it. Being unable to reflect its aggression, Marcia isolates herself refusing to answer back. This is why in the final scene we see her crying, having only the cat by her side. She herself cannot articulate the real reason of crying: "She will cry because the children are no longer children, or because she herself is not a child any more, or because there are children who have never been children, or because she can't have a child any more, ever again. Her body has gone past too quickly for her; she has not made herself ready" (247). This is a fragment of Marcia's thoughts on Christmas Eve. By using the future tense in the final section of the story, Atwood shows that Marcia is aware of what her future will be like, it seems too predictable to her. Nevertheless, the last paragraph of the short story starts with the two following sentences: "It's all this talk of babies, at Christmas. It's all this hope" (247). Child as a semantic center of the final paragraphs of the collection belongs to the associate field of renewal. The story ends on Christmas day, which promises rebirth. By ending the last short story with this image Atwood moves the reader back to the end of the first short story of the collection which ends with a sentence "But it would not be an ending, it would only be the beginning of something else" (37).

By choosing to use this frame Atwood provides the reader with a possibility to interpret the women's stories she has shown in an optimistic way, to see those threshold situations the

protagonists faced not as an end, but as a departure point, and, as R.M. Weaver put it, to see these stories as “the models for women to live by” (121).

Conclusion

As we have stated in the introduction, the goal of this work was to demonstrate that the collection of short stories *Wilderness Tips* by M. Atwood can be read profitably as a dialogical narrative as some categories developed by M. Bakhtin are absolutely essential for the analysis of some specific features of this text.

In the first chapter we demonstrated that the first short story of the collection shows what role the concept of perception plays in constructing a dialogical narrative. Our analysis of “True Trash” has also demonstrated to what extent trauma and dialogical types of narrative can be interconnected.

In chapter two we have observed the role of intertextuality in a dialogical narrative. We have applied the ideas of poststructuralist theory of intertextuality, developed by French philological school, to the analysis of Atwood’s “Hairball.” In thus doing, we pointed out the direct connection between Bakhtin’s dialogical theory and the theory of intertextuality which outgrew of it. According to Genette’s classification of types of transtextual relationships, we found out that “Hairball” is a bright example of a metatextual type of transtextuality. This way of revising the myth of Pygmalion and Galatea provided Atwood with a possibility to create a special form for talking about problems of women’s self-identification.

In our analysis of “Isis in Darkness” we have demonstrated why the concept of carnivalization, developed by Bakhtin, is considered as one of the main tools for structuring a dialogical narrative.

In chapter four we demonstrated what role the bog body chronotope – a term suggested by Antony Purdy, who in turn based his idea on Bakhtinian terminology – played in the compositional and semantic levels of “The Bog Man.” As our analysis has shown, the bog body chronotope is a special kind of time and space organization which provides the author with a possibility to presentify the past.

In chapter five we found out that “Death by Landscape” could be considered as a dialogical

narrative for two reasons. Firstly, Atwood sets the connection between the main plot story of a Canadian girl whose friend disappeared with no trace and the real story of Tom Thompson's disappearance. Secondly, the persistence of Lucy's image in Lois's memory provides her with an ability to outlast her own existence. By trying to find out what happened to Lucy, Lois tries to understand what happened to herself when she lost her. This becomes a bright example of what Vyacheslav Ivanov, one of the main predecessors of Bakhtin's dialogical theory, suggested to describe with a formula "Es ergo sum."

In chapter six, according to Bakhtin's classification of different types of discourses that can be presented in a dialogical text, we argued that the narrative of "Uncles" combines elements of hidden internal polemic and polemically colored discourse as this short story describes a life based on a sideward glance at another's opinion.

In our analysis of "The Age of Lead" we have detailed the way in which an idea can be represented in a dialogical text by means of the combination of two micro-dialogues.

In the following chapter we suggested that "Weight" could be considered as a Menippea, which, according to Bakhtin, has become one of the closest predecessors of a dialogical text as a genre. Although Atwood's "Weight" cannot be called a classical Menippea, it satisfies 12 out of 14 criterias developed by Bakhtin and demonstrates the evolution of this genre. It shows us to what extent this genre has changed throughout centuries of literary evolution, which features of it remained and which happened to become useless for postmodern prose.

In chapter nine we have employed the concept of heteroglossia as a method of showing different perspectives on the "wilderness." Using heteroglossia provided Atwood with a possibility to create a three-dimensional picture of the specificity of personal relations against the background of a postcolonial reflection in one family.

In the last chapter of our work, in order to demonstrate the universality of Bakhtin's dialogical theory we moved our attention to the sphere of philosophy and hermeneutics. We took Martin Buber's, the main philosopher's who had influenced Bakhtin's dialogical theory, arguments as

the basis for literary analysis of “Hack Wednesday” to demonstrate what role the protagonist’s ability to sympathize plays in her life and to what extent it can be explained by a dialogical theory.

To sum up, we should mention that this work represents the first attempt to apply the notion of dialogism to a short story collection. Despite the fact Bakhtin initially claimed that the novel is the only genre able to contain a dialogical narrative, we have demonstrated that the fact that short stories allow us to apply such categories as a chronotope, menippea, carnivalization, hidden internal polemic, unidirectional double-voiced discourse, etc., provide us with a right to argue that this genre can be considered as a dialogical one as well. Moreover, the universality of Bakhtin’s theory, as we have demonstrated, may be applied not only to Russian realist prose of 19th century, but also to postmodern Canadian fiction.

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