

Atwood's distinctive approach in her poetry

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Atwood employs a highly unconventional style in her poetry to lead readers towards a fresh perspective. Her earlier works reflect her skepticism towards the mundane reality filled with misleading appearances and superficial emotions. In contrast to this fragile world, she aims to illustrate to her audience the importance of embarking on a 'journey into the interior.' She asserts that "It is only through descents into the psyche and the rediscovery of the primitive and mythic dimension of both mind and world that one can experience wholeness." Thus, Atwood is prepared to embark on a daunting quest for self-identity. Consequently, her poems delve into philosophical depths, reflecting the poet's intention to maintain an 'I-thou' relationship within herself.

This paper seeks to explore the various aspects of this relationship and the evolution of the poet's inner journey. Mikhail Bakhtin, in developing his 'Philosophical anthropology', endeavors to create a coherent aesthetic theory, particularly focusing on the nature of the creative act. In doing so, he is driven to establish a general understanding of human existence, where the 'other' plays a crucial role. Bakhtin asserts that it is impossible to envision any being that does not exist in relation to the 'other'. He states:

In our lives, we continuously evaluate ourselves through the perspectives of others; we strive to grasp the fleeting moments of our own consciousness and consider them through the lens of another. In essence, we vigilantly and deeply perceive the reflections of our existence within the consciousness of other individuals. There are aspects of consciousness that exist outside of it but are still essential for its wholeness. Bakhtin claims that it is impossible for us to fully comprehend ourselves; the 'other' is crucial, even momentarily, for perceiving the self. Bakhtin's idea of the 'other' can effectively be applied to Atwood's poem to explore the fundamental dialogic principle at play.

Atwood's first major book of poetry, the *Circle Game* shows her maturity, "the authority and control, now recognized as integral to the Atwood voice as well as the distinctive aural-visual dynamic of the style, and Pher intense preoccupation with the double aspect of life".

The collection's opening poetry, "This is a Photograph of me," highlights the crucial aspect of the "I-thou" relationship, which is the adjustment of perceptions. Since the photograph was shot a while ago, it has lost its luster and figures. The poet herself searches for us and guides us through the blurry contours of the photograph, pointing out the landmarks for us, until she reaches a lake surrounded by low hills. At that point, the poem abruptly reverses; the next twelve lines, which are enclosed in parenthesis, instantly change our perspective from the familiar to the unfamiliar. In the picture, the poet leading the tour abruptly becomes unsettling and declares:

The photo was taken the day after I drowned. In the center of the picture, I am below the lake's surface. Like the poet, the reader is suddenly brought back to reality when he is asked to look into the lake of the unconscious to identify the Jungian "shadow.". A different interpretation is presented to the reader, implying that the "you" in the poem is actually the "other" of the poem's "I" rather than the reader; the photograph's ambiguous surroundings symbolize the "mindscape," while the image itself is the self's image with its ever-changing outlines. According to Sherril Grace, the poem challenges our perception right away, "prompting us to recalibrate our vision, to discover the source of this specific voice."

It's not just about adjusting to the outside world; it's also about adjusting within. Put differently, recognizing the "other" ultimately results in a circle game. "The Circle Game" contrasts the dishonest inner game that "I" and "you" play with the innocent children's game of the outside world. The "I" and "you" appear to be trapped in a "Claustrophobic entrapment," neither prepared to separate from one another nor willing to adapt, while the kids lose themselves in their circle game and are oblivious to their surroundings. The poet is amazed by the kids' focus while they play.

their eyes fixed on the empty moving spaces just in front of them

The "I" wants to break free from the circle game because the traffic is too heavy. It would stop at nothing to escape this constantly observing "Other.". As Sherrill Grace correctly notes, "this title poem's growing sense of defeat and impasse climax.". The poem illustrates how people misjudge the roles they play and the games they play with themselves, which is equivalent to lying to oneself. The concept of the essential Jungian "Shadow" is communicated through the pictures of rooms, mirrors, and circles.

"Camers" takes advantage of the photograph image once more, but in a different way. The "I" is growing up and is well aware that the "other" is pursuing its "Organized moment"; its glassy eye can no longer deceive the "I.". There are still traces of the earlier, bewildered "I.". However, the "I" has discovered a few ways to get out. Furthermore, the "I" from the insane, boring circle game is swept away by an unidentified gush of spirit, similar to the wind of the "elgonyi" tribe. The "I" is swiftly transported to an unseen location; the tiny black . that is approaching the horizon at nearly the speed of light is me.

Finally, the "I" is free, and its journey has started. The poem concludes without a period, implying the eternal, never-ending journey of the "I.". However, being a speck in the cosmic wilderness signifies losing one's entire identity. However, since it must carry out the interior journey, it cannot afford to lose its identity at this time.

The landscape metaphor proposed in the first poem is expanded upon in "Journey to the Interior.". The poet finds it easier to withdraw from the "other" as a cosmic expansion and embark on an internal journey with its challenging paths and traps. "Explores the labyrinth of the self," the speaker says. only to find herself trapped in the last, most perilous circle. Despite the fact that it is her own country, whose topography she may not be familiar with, she feels incredibly at ease as she sets out on her meandering path. She is distracted by minute details and unrelated information. She sometimes fears that she will be trapped in a state of

uncertainty once more, forcing anyone who enters to give up hope. There is no assurance that she will return safely, and there is no help to guide her in the correct direction. Nevertheless, the "I" is confident in itself despite all the obstacles.

I have to maintain my composure no matter what I do. Compared to other environments, I am aware that it is easier for me to get lost here indefinitely. The poet "explores the fallibility of human perception and the concomitant changer of the egocentric self" in the majority of the collection's poems, which center on the conflict between opposites. Man limits and distorts life, turning it into an endless circle game. It is vital to break free from this boring cycle, but it is also risky. To find "a place of absolute unformed beginning," to be an amphibian, to wade in the saltish waters, and to touch the shores of our own land, however, one must embark on an internal journey. 'The Settlers' provides the comfort of being a child again.

It's true what Sherrill Grace says: "These simple images of happy children at once with nature offer an alternative vision to the earlier traps of self and reason. Horses graze inside this fence of ribs, and children run across the fields of our open hands with green smiles (not knowing where)". However, it is also important to remember that the songs of innocence must inevitably turn into songs of experience, which brings us back to the cramped limbo-game. The I-Thou's action song "The ring-o, ring-o roses" must continue as long as there is miscommunication and a lack of flexibility between the two.

The "I-Thou" pattern is carried over into the "Nine to Untitled poems 12," which define the psychopathology of daily life, make the inaudible conversations of the mind audible, and transform space as a function of time. It appears that the only thing that is certain is uncertainty. The "leit-motif" of these poems is "relationship.". Relationships express a wide range of emotions, including love, friendliness, disgust, wonder, and even awe. They can be familiar or intimate. Explorations of the relationship between the "I" and the "other" occasionally have a tendency to become rhetorically obscure due to excessive thought condensation, but even this obscurity seems to serve a purpose in that it highlights the subtlety of poetic expressions as well as the complexity of human relationships. To put it briefly, they document an internal quest for self-identity.

A sort of prufrockian declaration opens the first poem in the series. The atmosphere is one of annoyance. Relationships, whether formal or intimate, are always fraught with conflict and frustration because existence is impossible without them. The poem appears to examine a close relationship between the "you" of the inner world and the "I" of the outside world. The "other" of the "I" is the "you.". It appears that the effort to alter the "other" was ultimately unsuccessful. The tone and the urge suggest something significant, even though the poem does not specify the kind of change that is desired. Instead of attempting to alter the "other" any further, the poet would prefer to transform herself into an impossibility, such as a shrub or bark. The poet's efforts to alter the "other" are demonstrated by the cataloguing of the impossibilities. She even claims that she is ready.

Despite the expressed feelings of disgust and frustration, the key point to consider is that 'love', in the final analysis, serves as the fundamental element for accepting the 'other' as they are. This should not be mistaken for the self-indulgent Narcissistic Love; rather, it is a love that embraces the needs of the 'other' and, at best, achieves a half-hearted reconciliation. The resilient and bold 'I' engages in a struggle with the even tougher 'other', leading to a frustrating acceptance. According to Bakhtin, the 'other' represents the basic principle of the cosmos. An individual must recognize their 'Other' and involve themselves in a dialogue with it. This dialogical approach ultimately fosters self-examination and acknowledgment of 'Being'. It is an ongoing journey. Engaging in dialogue implies entering into conflict, and without such conflict, advancement is unattainable. Initial acceptance paves the way for surrender, which is ultimately to the supreme 'I'. It is important to note that this concept is echoed in the Bhagavad Gita. A crucial aspect to observe in the first poem is the poet's awareness of gender. Only when she transcends this inhibition does she experience a state of bliss, as articulated in the ninth poem. For a brief moment, the poet is liberated from the tormenting constraints of her 'other' self, which denies the desires of the 'I'. The 'I' humbly admits, 'This is not something I wanted'. However, there lies an expansive, incredible, and limitless 'Sky', filled with both threats and promises, enticing the 'I' to revel in its vastness. The entire inner landscape appears to be laden with formidable boulders, of which the poet has only recognized a 'Precipice'. Once more, the poet finds herself in a dilemma, torn between accepting the freedom of the 'other' or the joy presented by the precipice. Her entire voice is now enveloped in the vastness; this experience cultivates an inner strength and an unyielding will within her. This marks her moment of liberation, her awakening, as her 'other' now lies dormant. She chooses to embrace the vastness that awaits, signifying her moment of transcendental awakening and the beginning of her inner journey.

Similar to the poems in *The Circle Game*, the concluding line of the poem lacks a full stop. This implies that her genuine journey from innocence to experience has merely begun, and she has a long way ahead. Atwood's depiction of 'expanse,' filled with boulders, suggests the necessity of putting the 'other' to rest in order to evade its malevolent grasp. The cautionary note is that the demon remains dormant only temporarily and is expected to awaken with increased strength and energy.

Notes

1. Margaret Atwood, *An Anthology of Canadian Literature in English, Vol. I* (ed.), Russell Brown & Bonna Bennett (Toronto: OUP, 1982), p. 454.
2. Quoted by Tzvetan Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principal*, tr. Wlad Godzich, (Minnesota: University Press, 1984), p. 94.
3. *The Circle Game*, (Toronto House of Annansi Press Limited, 1978). Hereafter called CG.
4. Sherrill E. Grace, "Introduction", *The Circle Game*, p. 10.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Referred to by G.G. Jung, "Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious," *Twentieth Century Criticism*, ed. William J. Handy and Max Westbrook, (New Delhi: Light and Life Publishers, 1974), p. 215.

8. Sherrill Grace, Circle Game, p. 12.
9. Ibid., p. 14.
10. 'Migration: C.P.R.' Circle Game, p. 65.
11. Ibid., p. 14.
12. New American and Canadian Poetry. ed. John Gill (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), pp. 9-16.
13. Second Words. Quoted in An Anthology of Canadian Literature in English, Vol. I, ed. Russell Brown and Donna Bennett (Toronto: OUP, 1982), p. 455

