

Women's Sexuality and Reproductive Rights through Animalistic and Mechanistic Images in Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*

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Abstract

The discussion of women's sexuality and reproductive rights is at the core of Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* (1972). The Canadian writer explores sex, contraception, pregnancy, giving birth and abortion through the female characters of Anna and the unnamed narrator. In dealing with these issues, Atwood employs images of machines and animals that are deeply rooted in Western culture's understanding of the female body to criticize and expose the exploitation and control of women in patriarchal societies.

Keywords: animals, machines, women's sexuality and reproductive rights, *Surfacing*.

La sexualidad y los derechos reproductivos de la mujer en la novela *Surfacing* de Margaret Atwood

Resumen

El tratamiento de la sexualidad y los derechos reproductivos de las mujeres es un tema central en la novela de Margaret Atwood *Surfacing* (1972). La contracepción, el embarazo, el parto y el aborto se exploran a través de los personajes femeninos de Anna y la narradora sin nombre. Al tratar estos temas, Atwood utiliza imágenes de máquinas y animales fuertemente arraigadas en la concepción del cuerpo femenino en la cultura occidental para criticar y exponer la explotación y el control de las mujeres en las sociedades patriarcales.

Palabras clave: animales, máquinas, sexualidad femenina y derechos reproductivos de las mujeres, *Surfacing*.

Written in the style of a mystery novel about a woman's search of her missing botanist father on a remote northern Quebec island in the company of her partner Joe and a married couple formed by David and Anna, *Surfacing* (1972) delves into key issues pertaining to women's sexuality and reproductive rights (Thakur 214; Feldman-Kołodziejuk 30-33). Through the two female characters of Anna and the unnamed protagonist providing the narrative perspective, Margaret Atwood explores sexual relationships, contraception, pregnancy, labor, and abortion. On dealing with these topics, the Canadian writer resorts to images of machines and animals that are deeply rooted in Western culture's understanding of the female body.

This paper discusses the mechanistic and animalistic iconography surrounding women's experiences with sex, contraception, pregnancy, giving birth and abortion in Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*. The study begins with an overview of the main metaphors used in the representation of the female body in Western cultures. This will serve as a framework to analyze those images of machines and animals informing the protagonist's and Anna's sexuality and reproductive rights. The conclusion summarizes Atwood's agenda behind the use of these images considering the author's strong feminist strain in her works as well as her social context, since abortion was still illegal in Canada at the time of the publication of *Surfacing*.

1. Metaphors for the female body in Western cultures

In the Western world, women's bodies have often been subject to metaphor (Ancheta 1-10; Clark 214; Hadd 165; Martin 12; Segal 115; Wohlmann 127-145). The female anatomy and its (reproductive) functions are often understood in terms of fauna (i.e., *pussy* for vagina), flora (i.e., *growing the seed* for pregnancy), natural elements (i.e., *moon time* for menstruation), foods (i.e., *apples* for women's breasts), objects (i.e., *a car* for the female body), dwellings (i.e., *a cave* for the womb), machines (i.e., *the biological clock* for a woman's fertile period), construction work

(i.e., *split body* for miscarriage), cleaning (i.e., *wiping* for abortion), and the language of managerial discourse (i.e., *management* and *regulation* for contraception), among many others.

Such imaginaries of the female body have important repercussions in the way people understand women's biological and social functions (García-Fernández 209-211). They can, indeed, influence and shape individuals' perceptions and attitudes towards women, since metaphors are firmly rooted in the ways in which we "perceive" and "construct" the world. Value-laden, ideologically charged and culturally motivated (Deignan 255; Goatly 15; Lakoff and Johnson 25), metaphors are cognitive mechanisms that provide conceptual frameworks to understand people's selves and experiences. As iconographic references, metaphors may force individuals to see something through a specific lens, often leading to a distorted vision of reality that may make people believe in and commit to certain actions, for, as Fairclough's states, "[w]hen we see the world with a particular metaphor, it then forms basis of our action... our perception of the world and behaviour will change according to the use of a particular metaphor" (67).

Seeing women's bodies as objects, foods, animals, flowers, buildings, machines, or factories, thus, may affect not only our understanding of the female anatomy, but also women's sexuality and reproductive rights. Research has emphasized the distorting and potentially harmful dimensions that certain metaphors have in the representation of menstruation, pregnancy, contraception, menopause, miscarriage, and abortion, both in medical and lay discourses (Littlemore and Turner 9-32; Martin 2-61; Wohlmann 127-147).

Plant images are among the most common representations of the female anatomy (Porteous 2). Turning a woman's body into a fertile soil allows for the explanation of conception, pregnancy, and labor as the seeding, growing, and blossoming of a flower. Pro-life advocates tend to rely on this naturalistic metaphor to attack abortion activists since they liken the termination of a pregnancy with the destruction of nature—with the religious overtones that posit God as the creator of all natural things. This symbolic flora, which subtly demonizes abortion, may deter women from terminating their pregnancies. Simultaneously, it can also stigmatize those females who decide to abort (Jamet and Terry 37).

Animals are a common source of metaphors for the female body too. Figurative fauna, such as *chick*, *kitten*, *cougar*, *tigress*, and the highly taboo *bitch*, tends to underscore women's biological role as mothers, their sexual desirability and activity. Apart from contributing to the objectification and sexualization of females (López-Rodríguez, "Of Women" 77-92; Nilsen 252-269), the identification of women with animals brings to the fore the exploitation of both "species" in patriarchal societies (Adams 12-38; Coviello and Borgerson 1-30). Furthermore, this zoomorphic categorization serves to frame (sexual) relationships in terms of hunting and fishing, ultimately giving man control over women's bodies. As a matter of fact, research has underlined how the representation of man as hunter/fisher and woman as prey often justifies and even promotes negative attitudes towards women, including sexual harassment and even rape (Bock and Burkley 262-272; Gunthmann 182-187; Rudman and Mescher 1-9).

Medical texts that explain the female reproductive organs in terms of a bureaucratic organization tend to describe menstruation and menopause negatively as a process involving failure and breakdown of central control (Martin 9-31). Similarly, when women's bodies are conceived as a factory or a machine producing desirable goods, that is, babies, menstruation is viewed as the generation of waste products, and debris whereas menopause as the closure of the manufacturing plant or the breakage of the machine (Anchetta 2-6). These images can certainly take a toll on women's self-esteem and body image on rendering them as useless when they do not beget children. This is particularly detrimental as they age or if they face fertility issues (Martin 9-32; Wohlmann 127-142). In fact, framing the infertile body as a defective machine (i.e., one that fails to achieve pregnancy) has been linked to stress and depression among women as well as to the manipulation of the body using biomedical technology. It has also been reported to affect women's choices regarding fertility treatments (Greil 112; Mezincka and Mileiko 36-38).

Within the mechanistic view, the female body can be depicted as a biological clock whose functioning is limited to a woman's timeline for having children (Weigel 5). Reflected in common expressions such as *the clock is ticking*, *hearing the tick tock*, *the clock is getting louder and louder* and *the clock is running near its end*, this metaphor puts pressure on

women to become mothers. Apart from reducing a woman's existence to her biological function of engendering babies, this clock metaphor also pushes women to seek biomedical technology, for it can *slow down* the effects of the passing of time on their bodies. In fact, studies have pointed out that females are more willing to freeze their eggs when presented with the picture of the biological clock (Yopo 765).

Health manuals and parenting guides often recur to the pregnancy-as-technology metaphor to illustrate women's conception, gestation, and labor. The description of the body of a pregnant woman as a technological device that requires instructions for its operation because it is not intuitive (Ancheta 1-3) but highly complex ultimately leads to an exhaustive control of females during their pregnancies and even to the medicalization of labor (Segal 97; Seikel 113). Besides, when applied to miscarriages, the pregnancy-as-technology metaphor implicitly blames women for the loss of their baby, for it presupposes their ignorance and inability with the functioning of their own bodies (Griscom and Volkman 3:12). On the other hand, presenting abortion through a technological lens is supposed to ease a woman's decision to terminate her pregnancy due to the dehumanizing effect attached to technological gadgets. After all, the mechanical and technological body imagery facilitates an unemotional and instrumental approach to the manipulation of the body using biomedical technology (Walker 788-800).

Another metaphor used to describe the female anatomy belongs to the business world (Roberts 817). Adopting a neoliberal economic approach, women's bodies are perceived as goods or commodities whose value depends on their generation of children. Hence, terms like *maximize*, *optimize*, *invest*, *benefit*, *gain*, and *lose* permeate the language of conception. This pecuniary view may certainly have negative effects on women who have no children since they are seen as worthless. Besides contributing to the commodification and exploitation of women's bodies, this commercial rhetoric has important repercussions for fertility treatments and surrogacy. In fact, women—and their partners—are more willing to spend money on assisted reproductive techniques when the female body is represented as a profitable business. In like manner, women may consider becoming surrogates when they envision their pregnancy as an investment (de Lacey 43-47).

A woman's body is often portrayed as an open space where the male needs to gain access. Seen in this light, contraception takes the form of different objects that block the entry. Hence, *putting a fence, a wall, a gate, a barrier, a lock, or a lid* figuratively explain how contraceptive methods work. Due to the simplicity of this metaphoric frame, women are more willing to take hormonal contraception, since they are less aware of the health risks associated with it (Walker 788-790).

Despite pertaining to different conceptual scenarios (i.e., machines, animals, nature, objects, foods, cleaning, construction, business, and bureaucratic organizations), the wide repertoire of metaphors traditionally used in the representation of women's bodies in Western cultures have important ideological implications that transcend the sole understanding of the female anatomy. In fact, these imaginaries reveal and shape society's expectations and beliefs about the role of women, including key issues related to their sexuality and reproductive rights.

Drawing from this repertoire of metaphors, Margaret Atwood creates a novel that brings to the fore the limitations and control imposed upon women and their bodies in the Western patriarchal world. *Surfacing*, indeed, abounds in images that connect the life experiences of Anna and the narrator with machines and animals.

2. Animalistic and mechanistic images related to women's sexuality and reproductive rights in *Surfacing*

In *Surfacing*, the staunch feminist activist Margaret Atwood re-appropriates well-known Western metaphors informing of the female anatomy to discuss women's sexuality, contraception, pregnancy, labor, and abortion. The Canadian writer interweaves the personal stories of the female characters of Anna and the protagonist unnamed narrator with images of machines and animals in order to explore their (sexual) relationships and (mis)treatment of their bodies in patriarchal societies.

Although Anna seems to be happily married to David, their relationship is actually highly toxic (Bhalla 3; Pina 94). David's patronizing attitude and absolute control over his wife—ranging from her physical appearance to their sex-making and even her contraceptive methods—transpires in the animal images that he uses to describe her.

Feeling stressed because she forgot to put on make-up to please her husband, Anna tells the narrator that David always wants her to look “like a young chick all the time, if I don’t he gets mad” (Atwood 45). Apart from reinforcing the stereotype of eternal feminine youth conveyed through a baby animal, the metaphor also suggests attractiveness and sexual desirability (López-Rodríguez, “From the Bible” 131). As a matter of fact, David employs the same image when making unwanted sexual advances to the narrator:

“How about it?” he said. “You wanted me to follow you.”
His fingers were squeezing, he was drawing away some of the power, I would lose it and come apart again, the lies would recapture. “Please, don’t,” I said.
“Come on now, don’t give me hassle,” he said. “You’re a groovy chick, you know the score, you aren’t married.”
(Atwood 67)

Yet, when faced with rejection, David targets several offensive animal metaphors at the protagonist, such as “tight-ass bitch” (Atwood 94) and “third-rate cold tail” (Atwood 96). These metonymic reductions centered around her rear unquestionably contribute to the sexualization of the narrator.

David’s animalization of women takes on a special significance in relation to his role as a hunter. Anna observes that “David thinks he’s a great white hunter” (Atwood 17), and, certainly, his violent behavior towards animals parallels his treatment of women. Punning on the phallogocentric erotic visual sense of *rod* as *penis*, David equates having sex with his wife to fishing while getting ready for still-fish: “Lie down, Anna,” he says, “I’m gonna use my own rod” (Atwood 31). Furthermore, both he and Joe engage in photography in ways that are intimately connected with the hunt. In fact, after cleaning a fish he has just caught, David takes pleasure observing its guts on a plate and decides to film it:

He regards the guts on the plate with interest... He goes for Joe and the camera and the two of them solemnly film the fish inwards, collapsed bladders and tubes and soft ropes, rearranging them between takes for better angles
(Atwood 84)

Later, he shifts the camera objective towards his wife, whom he asks to get naked for the movie *Random Samples* that he is filming with Joe during their trip: “we need a naked lady...we need a naked lady with big tits and a big ass” (Atwood 86). Threatening to take off Anna’s clothes if she refuses to comply with his commands—“Now just take it off like a good girl or I’ll have to take it off for you” (Atwood 88)—, in the end she complies and undresses in front of the camera: “Joe swivelled the camera and trained it on them like a bazooka or a strange instrument of torture and pressed the button, lever, sinister, whirr...” (Atwood 90). Aptly described as a weapon, the camera captures Anna, both in the photographic and predatory senses of the term, for, as Sontag observes, “a camera is sold as a predatory weapon...it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed” (14).

David’s reduction of Anna to the category of an animal is evident in his mental composition of the photographic scene with the juxtaposition of her naked body to the body of the dead heron (Vadilla et al 60): “You’ll go in beside the dead bird” (Atwood 99). Besides, the fact that David had previously placed the fish guts next to the carcass of the bird to shoot it—“A dead bird... We need that”, David said, “we can put it next to the fish guts” (Atwood 76)—intensifies the identification of Anna with (dead) animals. The corpses of the fish and the bird are, ultimately, an aesthetic delight for David just like his wife’s naked body (Sarkar 51). They are, to some extent, his trophies, a display of his supremacy over “other species” (Borrell 38-25; Kalpakli 795).

Later, when Anna is stripped off her clothes and about to dive into the lake, she is visualized by him as “a beetle”: “He set her down and stepped aside. Her arms, elbows out, struggled with the fastener like a beetle’s on its back” (Atwood 104). The fact that David had killed this insect with his camera while filming the dead heron—“I saw a beetle on it, blueback and oval; when the camera whirred, it burrowed in under the feathers. Carrion beetle, death beetle” (Atwood 76)—further reinforces Anna’s connection with dead animals. In addition, David’s cinematographic focus on the decaying corpses of the animals and their parts corresponds with Anna’s dismemberment through the camera lens: “I saw her cut in half, one breast on either side of a thin tree” (Atwood 99). The male gaze, then, contributes to the objectification and sexualization of Anna, whose forced nude shots verge on pornography. Through their camera,

David and Joe turn animals and Anna into consumable and disposable bodies, whose value is limited to men's (sexual) gratification.

David's (sexual) violence against his wife is similarly conveyed through images of animals. He recurs to the figure of a porcupine to suggest Anna's rape while fondling her: "He crawled over to her on all fours and rubbed his bristly burdock chin against her face and asked her how she would like to be raped by a porcupine" (Atwood 56). The narrator also sees Anna as an animal falling into a trap when she hears her painful screams as David penetrates her: "Then something different, not a word but pure pain, clear as water, an animal's at the moment the trap closes" (Atwood 112).

Animal images permeate the narrator's traumatic abortion. Her former married lover refers to their unborn child as an animal—"He said it wasn't a person, only an animal" (Atwood 185)—to ease the psychological pain produced by the termination of her pregnancy. This dehumanization, far from facilitating the abortion procedure, is projected onto the protagonist, who identifies with "a dead pig" (Atwood 80) while in the illegal clinic. This creature, associated with dirt and whose meat is used for human consumption, encapsulates, on the one hand, her feelings of disgust towards herself for allowing the abortion to take place, and, on the other hand, the exploitation of her body in consumerist patriarchal societies. The narrator's vivid description of the abortion procedure is reminiscent of the slaughter of a pig, as she affirms after the loss of the baby: "After the slaughter" (Atwood 95). The surgical tools include "knives" (Atwood 142) and "a fork" (Atwood 80) that are more likely to be used in a butcher's than in a hospital, as her use of "sliced off" suggests: "A section of my own life, sliced off from me" (Atwood 48). Likewise, the health-care practitioners operating her body resemble "butchers" (Atwood 80).

Casting the foetus as an animal leads the narrator to view her abortion in terms of hunting. She perceives her womb as "a burrow" (Atwood 145) meant to shelter and protect the baby, implicitly represented as a bunny, for this is a symbol of fertility and procreation. The termination of her pregnancy is, thus, depicted as the catching of the baby rabbit: "it was hiding in me as if in a burrow and instead of granting it sanctuary I let them catch it" (Atwood 144-145). Yet, this time, instead of presenting herself as an animal, the narrator has also become a hunter, for she has

agreed to the abortion (Feldman-Kołodziejuk 35-36): "I could have said no but I didn't, that made me one of them too, a killer" (Atwood 35).

Along with the slaughter and hunting of an animal, the vivisection of a frog informs the narrator's abortion. She envisions her unborn baby as a frog trapped in a jar—"I believe that an unborn baby has its eyes open and can look out through the walls of the mother's stomach like a frog in a jar" (Atwood 175)—, reminiscent of the caged amphibians in her brother's laboratory: "He kept [frogs] in jars" (Atwood 157). The fact that her brother used to experiment and even kill frogs mirrors how the protagonist felt during the abortive procedure. This scientific approach towards the female body is further reinforced with images of pickled cats evocative of her discarded embryo: "it was in a bottle curled up, staring out at me like a cat pickled" (Atwood 143) and "Pickled cat pumped full of plastic, red for the arteries, blue for the veins" (Atwood 114).

The protagonist's and Anna's bodies are often visualized as machines to explore contraception, sexuality, pregnancy, labor, and abortion. In a frank exchange about contraception, Anna and the narrator confess that they used to be on the pill but decided to quit due to the side effects it was having on their health. Whereas Anna got a blood clot in her leg, the narrator's vision became blurry. Minimizing these evident risks, David and health-care professionals still encouraged Anna and the narrator, respectively, to continue taking this contraceptive method.

"You on the pill?" Anna asked suddenly.

I looked at her, startled. It took me a minute, why did she want to know? That was what they used to call a personal question.

"Not any more," I said.

"Me neither," she said glumly. "I don't know anyone who still is any more. I got a blood clot in my leg. She had a smear of mud across her cheek, her pink face layer was softening in the heat, like tar.

"I couldn't see," I said. "Things were blurry. They said it would clear up after a couple of months but it didn't. It was like having vaseline on my eyes but I didn't say that.

“Anna nodded, she was tugging at the weeds as though she was pulling hair. “Bastards,” she said, “they’re so smart, you think they’d be able to come up with something that works without killing you. David wants me to go back on, he says it’s no worse for you than aspirin, but next time it could be the heart or something. I mean, I’m not taking those kinds of chances. (Atwood 66)

After recalling the latex smell of condoms during sexual intercourse, the protagonist sarcastically comments on the moon-shaped package of the pill. Probably hinting at the popular expression *moon time* standing for menstruation, which is based on the popular belief that predicted women’s period by observing the lunar phases, the narrator criticizes the pharmaceutical industry that experiments with women’s bodies while giving the impression that what it produces is actually nature-based. Her concluding remark comparing a woman’s body to “a chemical slot machine” not only aligns with the well-known mechanistic view of the female anatomy operated by and at the service of males, but it also suggests the idea of playing with women’s bodies:

Sex used to smell like rubber gloves and now it does again.
No more handy green plastic packages, moon-shaped so
that the woman can pretend she’s still natural, cyclical,
instead of a chemical slot machine (Atwood 68)

The body as a machine metaphor similarly illustrates the narrator’s fake pregnancy and labor, invented as defense mechanisms to overcome her traumatic experience with abortion (Gault 15). The protagonist’s pregnant body is experienced by her as an incubator (Atwood 114) that is controlled by her partner: “He measured everything he would let me eat; he was feeding it on me” (Atwood 114). This mechanistic view captures the narrator’s sheer lack of autonomy over her own body. In fact, all the decisions—from having a baby to taking care of it while in the mother’s womb—have been taken by her lover: “But I couldn’t have brought the child here, I never identified it as mine, I didn’t name it before it was born even the way you’re supposed to. It was my husband’s, he imposed it on me” (Atwood 114). Furthermore, this metaphoric transformation of the pregnant narrator into a machine that produces babies makes her body disposable once she has given birth: “after it was born, I was no more use” (Atwood 115).

The protagonist's alleged labor is also seen through a mechanical lens. She recalls being immobilized so that her body is fully controlled by specialists, appropriately portrayed as mechanics and technicians:

they shut you into a hospital, they shave the hair off you and tie your hands down and they don't let you see, they don't want you to understand, they want you to believe it's their power, not yours. They stick needles into you, so you won't hear anything...your legs are up in a metal frame, they bend over you, technicians, mechanics...practicing on your body, they take the baby out with a fork...After that they fill your veins up with red plastic (Atwood 80)

Her description of the medical equipment stands out for the coldness of the metals ("needles," "metal frame," "fork"), which, somehow, mirror the cold treatment given while giving birth.

The narrator's false mechanistic memory of labor camouflages her abortion. The fusion of these two experiences is made more evident in that both procedures objectify a pregnant woman, reducing her body to a machine (Feldman-Kołodziejuk 33). In fact, later in the narrative, after having sex with Joe, the protagonist imagines getting pregnant and giving birth. This time, however, her description of labor is obviously reminiscent of her abortion, as seen in the explicit reference to "the death machine": "Nobody must find out or they will do that to me again, strap me to the death machine, emptiness machine, legs in the metal framework, secret knives" (Atwood 117). The depiction of the abortion procedure is virtually the same as the process of labor. In both, women are restrained, placed in metal frameworks, and intervened by numerous people and tools.

The metaphor of the pregnant body as a machine similarly resurfaces when the narrator remembers how her former lover organized the termination of her pregnancy in an illegal clinic. He justifies the abortion by presenting her pregnant body as a defective machine in need of repair: "he arranged it for me, fixed me so I was as good as new" (Atwood 211). This technological approach, commonly used to dehumanize the death of the baby, further objectifies and sexualizes the protagonist's body. In fact, from the standpoint of his married lover,

after the abortive procedure, her body can be (sexually) used, for it is “as good as new” (Atwood 211).

The animalistic and mechanistic images permeating the innermost thoughts and experiences of the protagonist and her friend Anna show the commodification, objectification, and sexualization of their bodies. Whether engaged in (sexual) relationships with their male partners, seeking contraception, during pregnancy, labor, and even abortion, their bodies are rendered as (sexually) usable and, ultimately, disposable in male-dominated societies.

3. Conclusions

In *Surfacing*, Margaret Atwood employs metaphors of animals and machines deeply rooted in the collective imagination of the female body in Western cultures to expose the constant (ab)use that her female characters, Anna and the unnamed narrator, suffer at the hands of their male partners and of society in general. Adopting the dominant patriarchal view that animalizes and mechanizes females to render them as inferior and subservient to man’s (sexual) desires, Atwood condemns women’s deprivation of liberty in vital matters concerning their sexual and reproductive health.

Although published in 1972, *Surfacing* is still relevant today in the context of current debates on contraception, procreation, and abortion all over the world, particularly with the US Supreme court outlawing abortion in 2022, and a number of countries prohibiting the termination of pregnancy or even making it a crime (El Salvador, Brazil, Italy, Poland, Hungary, among others). Certainly, the right-wing revival of tradition-oriented populist governments has meant a regression in women’s (reproductive and sexual) rights. These governments neoconservative agendas, which foreground “family values” designed to control and confine women and girls to stereotypical gender roles, are an affront to women’s human rights and constitute gender discrimination. Given this prospect, it seems clear, then, that women’s bodies, their choices, and, therefore, their lives are at stake. Now, more than ever, *Surfacing* is a must-read.

Notes

¹ David's sexualization of Anna is evident in his remarks—"What I married was a pair of boobs" (Atwood 67), "She's got a neat ass. I'm really into the whole ass thing" (Atwood 83)—and behaviors—"Somebody break me out a beer." Anna brings him one and he pats her on the rear and says, "That's what I like, service" (Atwood 52) or "Goose Anna in the bum and three days later she squeals" (Atwood 74).

² See López Maestre's analysis of hunting metaphors in relation to the seduction of women.

³ According to Bhalla, the filming of nude Anna constitutes an episode of sexual violence where the camera symbolizes the phallus that rapes her (3).

⁴ Anna tells the narrator that David uses sex to punish her: "Then either he won't screw at all or he slams it in so hard it hurts" (Atwood 116).

⁵ Borrell states that "the novel's images of frogs, being released from jars or killed may be associated in the narrator's mind with her fetus" (50-51).

⁶ Significantly, in *Surfacing* the protagonist associates cats with suffering and killings. She is disturbed by her father's use of an expression involving skinning cats because she cannot understand the violence exerted upon animals: "it bothered me, I didn't see why they would want to skin a cat even on way" (Atwood 86).

⁷ This is based on the etymology of "menstruation," which stems from the Latin and Greek word for moon, *mene*. In the Ancient world, it was believed that the menstrual cycle synchronized with the lunar cycle ("Is There a Connection?").

⁸ The criticism and sarcasm conveyed through the picture of the moon that describes the package of the contraceptive pill is reinforced when considering all the lunar images connected with nature, pregnancy, and birth that appear in the novel (Feldman-Kołodziejuk 42). The protagonist recalls drawing a picture of a woman with a round moon stomach holding a baby during her childhood: "On the left was a woman with a round moon stomach: the baby was sitting up inside her gazing out" (Atwood 158). She also imagines giving birth naturally in a forest with a full moon shining over her: "This time, however, from the moment of conception to the very birth, she is going to have it her way, acting in accordance with nature: I lie down, keeping the moon on my left hand" (Atwood 161).

⁹ As opposed to this man-created mechanistic view of the female body, the protagonist envisions herself as a cat licking her kitten to describe the ideal natural birth: “The baby will slip out easily as an egg, a kitten, and I’ll lick it off and bite the cord, the blood returning to the ground where it belongs” (Atwood 110).

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Acknowledgements

This article has been financed through a research grant by the *Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council* of Canada (Grant number 756-2023-0001).

It is dedicated to my daughter, Helena. Thanks for being in my life.