"It always Takes a Long Time/to Decipher Where You Are": Uncanny Spaces and Troubled Times in Margaret Atwood's Poetry

Eleonora Rao

Department of Humanities, University of Salerno, Fisciano, 84084 Italy; erao@unisa.it

Abstract: The focus is on Atwood's most recent poetry collections; *Morning in the Burned House* (1995) and *The Door* (2007), in addition to the prose poems volume *The Tent* (2006). They have in common, albeit with a different emphasis, a preoccupation with mortality and with the writing of poetry itself. They also share a special concern for space. This reading considers space and landscape to function as metonyms. Space here is far from being passive; instead it is constantly in the process of being constructed. The disorientation that the poetic personae experience in these texts follows a labyrinthine pattern where heterogeneity and multiplicity in the sense of contemporaneous plurality prevail. In this perspective, the identity of a place becomes open and provisional, including that of a place called home.

Keywords: contemporary poetry; space and place; liminality

> You remember this. No, you dreamed it. Your dream was of choking, and sinking down, and blankness. You woke from your nightmare and it had already happened. Everything was gone. Everything, and everyone—fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, the cousins, the tables and chairs and toys and beds—all swept away. Nothing is left of them. Nothing remains but the erased beach and the silence (Atwood 2006b, p. 149).

The "nightmare" described by Margaret Atwood in her 2006 collection of poems, short prose poems, and fictional essays *The Tent* plays heavily on the Freudian *Unheimliche*—"the uncanny"—evoking the speaker's most intimate fears of sudden, inexplicable loss of home and the familiar. Deriving its terror, not from something external and alien, but rather from the strangely familiar that defeats one's efforts to separate one's self from it, the uncanny transforms the homely into the unhomely, and its remit includes the intellectual uncertainty. This nightmarish anguish indicates disorientation: something disturbing, eerie; it suggests a subject haunted by the past as well as by the present. Here, as elsewhere in Atwood's texts, as Kathryn VanSpanckeren remarks: "home, ownership, identity, even one's work . . . are revealed as the mind's trick, empty constructs over which the self has no final control" (Van Spanckeren 2003, p. 108).

This article focuses primarily on Atwood's most recent poetry collections, *Morning in the Burned House* (1995) and *The Door* (2007), in addition to the prose poems of *The Tent* (2006), while also considering some of Atwood's other works. These volumes share a preoccupation with mortality, which is frequently bound up in Atwood's work with a self-reflexive concern with the processes of writing poetry. Examining recurring and related anxieties around home, place, time, and modernity, this essay is concerned with the manner in which ideas of mortality and creativity are linked with representations of space and place in Atwood's poetry. In particular, these preoccupations relate to representations of threatening and uncanny spaces, and—using Zygmunt Bauman's definition, discussed below—with uncertain times.

Where traditional notions of space see it as a kind of stasis, recent developments in literary geography have shown, as Barbara Piatti and Lorenz Hurni put it, that "geography never becomes a simple backdrop within the fiction; the different settings in the quarters have almost protagonistic qualities" (Piatti and Hurni 2009, p. 340; Massey 1998). Place and space thus surface as more than solely a "background complication", as influential geographer Edward Soja remarks (Soja 2010, p. 19). Instead, locations turn into actors, both underwriting the story, and playing their part on the page. In this light, the geographical plot becomes a key driver of the fictional plot.

The attention to unbounded and bounded space inevitably raises questions of home, whether imagined or real. "Home", as a domicile summons geographies of settlement or a residence where a sense of self, place, and belonging is shaped, articulated, and contested. As Madan Sarup notes, a sense of place or belonging usually gives a person stability (Sarup 1994). In Atwood's poetry, however, the question of what precisely makes a home is not so straightforward. The poems in *Morning in the Burned House*, for example, are preoccupied with the insecurities of "home", the identity of which becomes open and provisional. The security seemingly offered by "home" is rapidly eviscerated, as the title poem suggests. "In the burned house I am eating breakfast/You understand: There is no house, there is no breakfast/yet here I am" (Atwood 1995a, p. 126). Elsewhere in the collection, an uncanny image of the restless subject wandering the house alone at night recurs: "Everyone has deserted you" (Atwood 1995a, p. 6). While in the poem "Waiting", familiar "smells of cooking dinner" cannot assuage the sense of gripping fear, or of impending tragedy: "you crouched on the hardwood floor … listening to the radio, news of disasters/ that made you feel safe" (Atwood 1995a, p. 9).

The manner in which the everyday world can become suddenly menacing is a recurring theme in Atwood's oeuvre. Anxiety and the sense of the precariousness of home appears, for example, in the short story cycle *Moral Disorder* (2006), in which the protagonist experiences a nightmarish sensation, similar to that of the wondering protagonist in *Morning in the Burned House*, that despite the seeming security and stability of her circumstances, her dreaming self" continues to wander, aimless, homeless, and alone. It cannot be convinced of its safety by any evidence drawn from my waking life" (Atwood 2006a, p. 101).

Atwood's earliest work proposes similar images. Discussing Atwood's juvenilia, Sherrill Grace remarks that these texts "deal with the absolutely ordinary, everyday world of safe, predictable reality. And yet, as so often happens in the later work, this ordinary, safe world has cracks, doors, and windows that open suddenly to reveal unimaginable horrors or devastating truths" (Grace 1997, p. xi). In both early and late works, rationality and reassurance can recede abruptly and give way to secret or unconscious fears. These crevices reveal unpredictability, fragility, uncertainty, and the absence of truth, a familiar concern in Atwood (see Howells 2005, 2006; Gorjup 2006). In the texts discussed here, persistent anxieties and fears belie representations of the everyday, the ordinary, and the seemingly secure spaces of home.

The critical discussion of these texts will show how human fear is rooted in an inability to manage life and the associated feelings of defencelessness and insecurity that such a situation brings. Liquid fear is a fear without apparent source, a derivative fear that results from the interiorisation of "a vision of the world that includes insecurity and vulnerability" (Bauman 2006, p. 3); such a condition, Bauman notes, "even in the absence of a genuine threat" (Bauman 2006, p. 3) will produce a reaction appropriate to the presence of real danger. The disorientation the poetic personae experience occurs in a destructed space that resembles a labyrinth, as for example, in *The Tent*. Space here serves important roles: it can be a focus of attention, a bearer of symbolic meaning—at times frightening, or utterly devoid of meaning, an object of emotional investment, a means of strategic planning, a principle of organization, and a supporting medium.

1. Seeking an Untenable Security

In addition to anxieties around place, the insecurities confronted by the protagonists of Atwood's poetry are heightened by the sense of living in what Zygmunt Bauman has termed "liquid times",

or "liquid modernity". In "liquid times", the promise of a better and happier future does not hold, and the nineteenth-century trust in progress fails or is, at least, exposed to "cracks" and "fissures" (Bauman 2000, p. 133). As Bauman argues, modernity has "spectacularly failed" (Bauman 1991, p. 17) in its promise to bring the clarity and transparency of reason to our existence. Indeed, we have become only more aware of the self-defeating nature of the project of modernity, of the unalterable contingency of human life, and of the inevitable ambivalence of our myriad choices, life-projects, and identities. In an era that Bauman terms "liquid", uncertainty and insecurity prevail. "Liquid life" and "liquid modernity" are both characterized by a strong sense of precariousness. Bauman uses the German word *Sicherheit* and its contrary *Unsicherheit,* since the first contains in itself a complex phenomenon that English needs at least three terms to convey—that is, "security, certainty, and safety" (Bauman 1999, p. 17).

Liquid modernity hosts a collection of paradoxes. As our abilities, tools, and resources develop, allowing us to stretch ever further into space and time, so our fears of their limitations deepen. The most technologically advanced generation in history is also the generation most troubled and haunted by its sense of helplessness and insecurity. The influential French sociologist, Robert Castel, has explained the ambient fears and securitarian obsessions. In his study of the contemporary insecurity-fed anxiety of developed nations, Castel stresses that we "live undoubtedly in some of the most secure societies that ever existed". Yet, despite the "objective evidence" that today's societies are the more inclined to feel threatened and insecure, more liable to panic, and more fanatical about security (Castel 2003, p. 5). Consequently, the social universe "has been organized around an endless pursuit of protection and a frantic search for security" (Castel 2003, p. 6).

In his seminal studies, Bauman argues that fear is a product of globalization. The openness of a global society has developed a negative counter effect: vulnerability. "A society that is 'open' is a society open to the blows of 'fate'" (Bauman 2007, p. 7; 2005). It has brought about an obsession with the tightness of its frontiers, and the security of the individuals living inside of them. Therefore, the predominant feeling becomes that of fear: "in the absence of existential comfort people tend to settle for safety, or the pretence of safety" (Bauman 2007, p. 10). According to Bauman, Freud's thesis that human beings had traded freedom for security has been reversed; now we have traded security for freedom.

Recent research on contemporary discourses of securitization has underscored the frequency with which security and surveillance devices are introduced whenever everyday life is threatened. "Having reframed social problems as security risks, securitization (Wæver 1995) produces its own nomenclature, so that now to speak of social problems it is necessary to do so in the constituent terms of the 'security society'" (De Lint 2011, p. 264). Seeking a secure port, a safe refuge, be it one's own home or one's country, is a common aspiration. In *Liquid Times* Bauman remarks, "To put it in a nutshell, we dream of a reliable world, one we can trust. A secure world" (Bauman 2007, p. 95). In the "liquid modernity" of contemporary life, however, "the shelters have porous walls, pierced all over by countless wires and easily penetrated by ubiquitous airwaves" (Bauman 2000, p. 155), which adds to our sense of being defenceless and unprotected (see also (Rao 2009, 2006)).

These contemporary concerns with security and threat echo throughout Atwood's most recent poetry. Similar images of porousness and dangerous exposure recur in *The Door*. "Bear lament" vividly describes a tension between the desire for protection and the coexistent lack of a shelter. The poem's scenario is one of unease, uncertainty, dislocation, precariousness, and possibly danger. The poetic persona longs to "crawl inside a bear" for protection. "Once" upon a time this was a viable option, an available refuge "in a crisis . . . But no / not any more" (Atwood 2007, p. 57). The speaker now is doomed to remain bare and exposed to "all the sharp and lethal / shrapnel in the air, and then the other million / cuts and words and fumes / and viruses and blades" (Atwood 2007, p. 57). We do not know the cause of the speaker's strong sense of discomfort. From a psychoanalytic perspective, Julia Kristeva remarks, "It is a rare person who does not invoke primal shelter to compensate for personal disarray" (Kristeva 1993, p. 90). The bear's "fat and fur" (Atwood 2007, p. 57), its capacity to

"insulate" from danger, appeals to the speaker and evokes regressive fantasies, with these images of security, that are suggestive of the prenatal womb.

In "Another Visit to the Oracle", a long meta-poem mainly concerned with the meaning and scope of writing poetry today—one of the most significant pieces in the collection, to which I shall refer throughout this essay—one finds ample reference to "liquid life", a condition where constant insecurity prevails. Here, the speaker experiences a deeply uncomfortable sensation, "as if the earth is about to crumble / as if there is no safe refuge" (Atwood 2007, p. 101).

Liquid life is precarious; it cannot stand still. It is in a perpetual succession of new beginnings and of new endings. In this process of continuous movement, to be able to free oneself of the past in order to face the future is of paramount importance: "time to get out / with what you're carrying. / Forget the jewellery, / forget the lovers you once had." ("Another Visit to the Oracle," (Atwood 2007, pp. 105–6)). The emphasis is on forgetting stems from the necessity to avoid the burden of the past and of tradition. Atwood had stressed this issue also in relation to literary traditions. In *Negotiating with the Dead* she emphasises that authors "must take care not to be captured and held immobile by the past" (Atwood 2002, p. 178). This line of thinking echoes Nietzsche, notably went against the philosophical tradition of remembering, and advocated instead the salvific value of forgetting. To forget is to release the past and to be able to act, since a nostalgic consciousness is inevitably caught in a paralysis: "Any action requires oblivion" (Nietzsche 1997, p. 61). In these poems, forgetfulness is vital; it liberates one from the weight of the past, and is an active process essential to action. In *The Tent* the authorial persona, a sort of trickster figure (familiar in Atwood's work) helps the subject to escape a painful past: "Voilà! You say ... your childhood sorrow—the ones that held you back and bogged you down—they've been erased. Now you can get on with it" (Atwood 2006b, p. 15). Nietzsche underscores over and again the value of engaging in forgetting: "In the case of the smallest or of the greatest happiness . . . .it is always the same thing that makes happiness happiness: the ability to forget" (Nietzsche 1997, p. 62). Analogously, the speaker in "A Sad Child" encourages the subject to elaborate and overcome his foregone history, by means of active forgetfulness. "Take up dancing to forget. / Forget what? / Your sadness, your shadow, / Whatever it was that was done to you" (Atwood 1995a, p. 4).

The poems in *The Door* are immersed in the liquid atmosphere of contemporary times, and show the uneasiness, the insecurities, the precariousness, and the obsession with safety that are now common; they stress the anxieties of the subject, and the strategies employed to navigate the conditions they have to face. In these texts, the poet plays a major role in trying to show the way to overcome fear. A number of these poems inscribe the poet's concern to comfort and reassure the reading public.

2. Meta-Poetry or a Personal Poetics

In addition to the anxieties regarding security discussed above, *The Door*, Atwood's first poetry collection in twelve years, also explores a nuanced sense of the autobiographical. Reflections on poetry, creativity, and the role of the poet combine to develop a discourse, or meta-poetry, on the responsibilities and dangers of writing.

What distinguishes this extraordinary collection from the previous ones is the authorial preoccupation with what it means to be a poet when one is no longer at the beginning, or even in the middle of a brilliant career. Considering the volume as a whole, one notices a meticulous care in the arrangement of the fifty-one poems in the five constituent parts, and their thematic development across the collection. The retrospective focus of the early poems seems to suggest that the future has lost its fascination for the poet, and the archaeology of memory has instead become richer, and furthermore, somehow uncanny. The central, transitional section focuses on contemporary concerns: the environment, war, violence, abused children, and so on. Finally, the later sections focus on writing and creativity, as well as contemplating time and mortality. The collection's lyric tone shifts constantly—prophetic, meditative, and ironic—while the subject matter is wide ranging, oscillating between the personal and the political, the intimate and the global. The poems are permeated by uncertainties and by a persistent lack of a sense of security. These themes, which informed to a lesser

extent *Morning in the Burned House*, published a decade earlier, in which the supposed safety of home vanished in flames, characterize *The Door*. In "Resurrecting the doll's house", which gives voice to "anxieties of the nest", the safety of home is long gone: "How can we keep it safe? / There's so much to defend" (Atwood 2007, p. 9)[1].

Repeatedly in Atwood's work, the mysterious aura around the poet, the potential power of the seer/oracle, and the suspicions with which poetry is received by society, prompt anxieties. The poet too dwells in danger and risks. A short story of the seventies, in the collection *Dancing Girls,* addresses the perils that lurk in the lives of the poets. Here the young woman writer reflects: "*Don't do it*, she wanted to tell them, *don't make the mistake I made*. But what was her mistake? Thinking she could save her soul, no doubt. By the word alone" ("Lives of the Poets" (Atwood 1984a, p. 193)). At times in the poetry, the awkwardness is due to a sense of being a social misfit: "Confess: it's my profession / that alarms you. / This is why few people ask me to dinner" (Atwood 1995a, p. 49). Similarly, in an earlier collection, *Interlunar,* the poet is a frightening figure: "Everyone is afraid of me. / [...] Is it my potential, the energy / of an open socket, a dark / vortex in the wall, which is never seen / doing anything?" (Atwood 1984b, p. 65). The poet perhaps resents such special status: "and you see me not as human/but as cavern: / larval darkness and velvet shelter" (Atwood 1984b, p. 66).

In "Doorway", the poet seems to be "waiting to be told what to say" (Atwood 1984b, p. 29) behind a door that will lead to yet another story to "tell", which in its turn is a kind of force: "Power of a door unopened" (Atwood 1984b, p. 29). The theme of the power of storytelling is paramount in Atwood's texts from the eighties onward. In *True Stories*, the poem "Spelling" articulates this awareness: "A word after a word / after a word is power" (Atwood 1982a, p. 64). The same collection evokes the poet's intimacy with darkness: "watch me vanish / into darkness, flicker / and reappear" (Atwood 1982a, p. 79). In a much later poem, "Disturbed earth" (*The Door*), you may get a glimpse of the poet, but you have to know where to look. The writer's pen becomes metonymically linked to the shovel, as words become weeds—"After you've wrenched them out / they'll snake back underground"—and the poet advises: "Don't search the perennial border: / look for me in the disturbed earth" (Atwood 2007, p. 120). Part IV of *The Door* ends on imagery that leads again to the poet's familiarity with the world of shadows. In "Another Visit to the Oracle", darkness and obscurity are intrinsic to the creative process: "What I do: I see / in darkness. I see / darkness. I see you" (Atwood 2007, p. 104). Atwood has underlined elsewhere that the salvific role of literature lies precisely in its capacity to make the reader imagine what it means to be somebody else.[2] The ability to see life from another person's perspective is the poet's unique gift:

> All I have to do
> is be present in my head
> which contains your head.
> I can walk around in there
> as if in a cave,
> a well-lit cave (Atwood 2007, p. 100).

As Atwood remarked in a lecture in 1995, despite "the conditions under which the poets work —giving all, receiving little in return from an age that by and large ignores them . . . I'm still writing poetry, I still can't explain why" (Atwood 1995b, "Waterstone's Poetry lecture"). In discouraging

---

[1]   Although this article is primarily concerned with poetry, it is worth noting that anxieties around security are central to Atwood's most recent dystopian novel, *The Heart Goes Last* (Atwood 2015). Fear and the concomitant desire to feel safe motivate the actions of the protagonists, particularly Charmaine, for whom home is a "warm cocoon, their shelter from the dangerous outside world, nested inside a larger cocoon" (Atwood 2015, p. 189). Safety, however, proves ephemeral: "Maybe no one can ever be safe. You run into your room and you slam the door, but there isn't any lock" (Atwood 2015, p. 198) Atwood's narrative fiction both points at and undermines the supposed security of the middle-class house, as Susan Watkins has recently argued. (See (Watkins 2013)).

[2]   "If writing novels—and reading them—have any redeeming social value, it's probably that they force you to imagining what it's like to be somebody else. / Which, increasingly, is something we all need to know" (Atwood 1982b, p. 430).

conditions, poets endure: "the trick is just to hold on / through all appearances, and so we do . . . when it's even darker / than it is now . . . when it's darkest and coldest / and candles are no longer any use to us (Atwood 1995a, p. 125). Similarly, in "Owl and Pussycat, Some Years Later" (Atwood 2007, p. 33), she advises: "sing on, sing / on, someone may still be listening / besides me". In this latter poem, Atwood (the cat) and the poet and life-long friend Dennis Lee (nicknamed Owl because of his large glasses frames) critically reflect on their own past, present and future, now that they are celebrated writers. The poem commences by recalling with humour their earlier obscurity:

> So here we are again, my dear,
> on the same shore we set out from
> years ago, when we were promising,
> but minus—now—a lot of hair,
> or fur, or feathers, whatever (Atwood 2007, p. 32).

In a manner reminiscent of Edward Lear's wordplay, they both comment on their younger personas, on their ambitions, and more importantly, on their naive illusions: "Whatever / made us think we could change the world? / Us and our clever punct- / uation marks" (Atwood 2007, p. 33). Today, with fame, comes a different experience, not entirely welcomed: "The worst is, now we're respectable. / We're in anthologies. We're taught in schools [. . .] In ten years, you'll be on a stamp, / where anyone at all can lick you" (Atwood 2007, p. 37).

This preoccupation with time and ageing recurs elsewhere. In *Morning in the Burned House,* "Miss July Grows Older" stresses how precious time is, an awareness that comes with age: "The way the sun / moves through the hours becomes important" (Atwood 1995a, p. 23). The feeling of aging and fatigue returns in "Another Visit to the Oracle", where one witnesses the poetic persona's desire to reduce and finally to eliminate useless words, in a manner reminiscent of Samuel Beckett: "There's so much I could tell you / if I felt like it. Which I do less and less." (Atwood 2007, p. 99).

The meta-language of "The line: five variations", reflects instead on the poet's misplaced sense of power and its risks: "Think you're some kind of a poet. / Now look at what you've done, / you and your damned line- / mucking around with creation" (Atwood 2007, p. 98). The most dangerous liability, however, remains that of attributing to oneself the duty to spell out the truth: "You could ... emit a croaking sound / you could call truth" (Atwood 2007, p. 89). This troubled question of "truth" is also examined in the earlier work, *True Stories* (1981), which problematizes the notion of poetic truth: "Don't ask for the true story; / why do you need it? / It's not what I set out with / or what I carry" (Atwood 1982a, p. 9). Here, Atwood returns to the issue of the poet's status and reminds her readers that the poet remains anchored in the mundane world. There is no "glass tower / where the phone doesn't ring / and nobody eats" (Atwood 1982a, p. 33). Accordingly, the poet is far from being a disembodied voice: "Is this really your fate, / to enter poetry and become transparent?" (Atwood 1982a, p. 39). In *Interlunar,* the speaker speculates on the uniqueness of the poets' status, which sees them both immersed in the ordinary world and paradoxically out of it. It seems unfeasible to heal the contradictions: "Do poets really suffer more / than other people? [. . .] / Some day though I want, still, / to be like other people" (Atwood 1984b, p. 82). It looks as if the poets are trapped "in the place we are stuck in, the place we've chosen" (Atwood 1984b, p. 83). In the last stanza, however, a commonality with other human beings emerges. The poets are "no more doomed really than anyone" as they find themselves in this "dry . . . moon terrain [. . .] looking for water" (Atwood 1982a, p. 83), that is, the source of life for us all. Shared experiences with common people return in the penultimate collection: "Of course I pick a flower or two / [. . .] and press it in the hotel Bible / for a souvenir. / I'm just as human as you" (Atwood 1995a, p. 53). These texts regard the ordinary world an inevitable part of the poet's life and a necessary anchor: "The line is a life line, / it leads you out and again / to the profane ("The Line: Five Variations" (Atwood 2007, p. 96)). Not only is the poet embodied; s/he expresses concerns about rigid gender roles and expectations. Critics have amply discussed these ideas as they unfold in Atwood's fiction, less so in the poetry and prose poems. The next section will explore some of these preoccupations.

3. Dutiful and Disobedient Women

Atwood's sense of social responsibility emerges also in her approaches to literary genres. Her fiction shows a striking tendency to revisit conventional fictional forms inherited from traditions of both "high" and "low" forms of writing, as for example, *the Gothic,* the sentimental novel, the picaresque, ancient myth and the fairy tale. The way in which different genres and traditions function in the texts reveal the author's skillfulness to work within a set of generic conventions in order to subvert them. Atwood's interest lies in shaping the material from which she borrows, in order to "transform it, rearrange it, and shift the values" (Peterson 1987, p. 138). This process is metafictionally referred to here and there in her fiction. In the prose poem, "Plots for the Exotics" in *The Tent,* the narrator, who is also a writer, reflects on her own art: "I could make up some new plots, or give a twist or two to the old ones" (Atwood 2006b, p. 58).

In the prose poem "The Female Body", included in the collection *Good Bones* (Atwood 1992), there is a profusion of intertexual references to folk and fairy tales. "The Female Body" starts in a humorous, entertaining mode:

> I agree, it's a hot topic [. . .] Take my own for instance. / I get up in the morning. My topic feels like hell. I sprinkle it with water, brush parts of it, rub it with towels, powder it, add lubricant. I dump in the fuel and way goes my topic, my topical topic, my controversial topic, my capacious topic, my limping topic, my nearsighted topic, my topic with back problems, my bad behaved topic.
>
> (Atwood 1992, pp. 39–40)

The list continues. The tone, however, changes abruptly as the female body metamorphoses into something treacherous or, alternatively, into something that can drift away, that must be constrained and controlled. A solution is suggested, inspired by the nursery rhyme "Peter, Peter, Pumpkin Eater", the origin of which can be traced to America, and to nineteenth century Scotland. This seemingly innocent rhyme has potent undertones directed at controlling woman's sexuality, and is really about the dilemma of a poor man with an unfaithful wife. The complete text reads as follows:

> Peter, Peter, Pumpkin Eater,
> Had a wife and couldn't keep her,
> He put her in a pumpkin shell
> And there he kept her, very well.

The pumpkin here refers to the woman's genitals, which Peter imprisons in a chastity belt (the "pumpkin shell") to prevent adultery. The resolution here echoes not only the nursery rhyme, but also variations on the "Rapunzel" theme, so familiar in Atwood's fiction, that are suggestive of female imprisonment. "Catch it. Put it in a pumpkin, in a high tower [. . . .] Quick, stick a leash on it, a lock, a chain, some pain, settle it down, so it can never get away from you again" (Atwood 1992, p. 46. See (Rao 2014; Tolan 2007)). Opening up generic boundaries is also important since it reacts against woman's conventional limitation within the divisions and paradigms of patriarchal thinking.

Similar images of women's bodies and, specifically, their vulnerability to time, recur in *The Door*: "Could it be that we are the old people / already? / Surely not. / Not with such hats" (Atwood 2007, p. 126). The lyric tone becomes remarkably sardonic in two consecutive poems where the poetic personae reconsider their inclination to self-sacrifice, which will result in a radical self-re-fashioning. In "Dutiful", the speaker disapproves of her past attitudes, when she used to go around with a "small broom and dustpan, / sweeping up dirt I didn't make [. . .] But I've resigned" (Atwood 2007, p. 111). In "String tail", the poetic persona objects to her past goodwill: "I used to have helpfulness tacked onto me / like a fake string tail on a mangled dog. / Wag, wag, wag went my nerveless appendage: / If I give you something, will you like me?" (Atwood 2007, p. 113). In this case, too, the persona's former diligent, helpful and obliging self is shed, like a second skin, in a liberating ritual. Both poems feature a refusal of that imagined identity of a quiet and unassuming child, later to

become a docile, malleable, and acquiescent woman, and offer instead images of metamorphoses that liberate the subjects from those stereotyped roles. As with Atwood's prose narratives, where identity is mostly represented as constructed and heterogeneous (see Wilson 2003; Howells 2005, 2006), her poetry too insists on the notion of identity as fictive.

In "The Year of the Hen", the act of cleaning clutter from a cellar suggests the speaker is shedding layers of the self that have become obsolete with time. "This is the year of sorting, / of throwing out . . . of sifting through the heaps, the piles . . . the sediments" (Atwood 2007, p. 7.) The "bowl" full of "pebbles gathered time after time" (Atwood 2007, p. 8) long before, evokes fragmentation; identity, like the pebbles themselves, is discontinuous and above all fragmentary. Incessant transformations and metamorphoses traverse the self in these poems; "there [is] no seam" (Atwood 2007, p, 17), only the rhythm of "breathing" (Atwood 2007, p. 17) which suggests the disjunction of identities as well as their perpetual renovation.

A fracture within the self emerges in "Europe on 5$ a day" titled after a tourist guide from the late fifties (Frommer 1957). Here, however, there is no tourist. Instead, one finds a lyric persona dislocated from home who—possibly—has come back to a place that was once very familiar. The poem explores the themes of displacement and of defamiliarization, as its imagery evokes a life painfully divided between a before and an after. This unconventional homecoming begets the anguishes of the uprooted subject. Nevertheless, thanks to this severance from home—"I've cut myself off. / I can feel the place/ where I used to be attached" (Atwood 2007, p. 9)—and to its de-familiarized gaze, the speaker is able to see the location with fresh eyes: "The city's old, / but new to me, and therefore / strange, and therefore fresh" (Atwood 2007, p. 5). This disjointing from roots is figured as a bloodless wound that cuts painfully through the body: "But where exactly on me / is this torn-off stem? Now here, now there" (Atwood 2007, p. 5).

Similarly, in "Marsh Languages" in *Morning in the Burned House*, the speaker is suffering from the linguistic displacement of exile. The poetic persona is mourning the slow disappearance of "Mothertongue" (Atwood 1995a, p. 54), and is painfully processing the state of being deprived of words, of not being filled with language any more. Dispossessed of the "soft" (Atwood 1995a, p. 54) language of childhood, the language of affect, "I" experiences a painful psychic and linguistic void since it has to go on living "with resonances and reasoning that are cut off from the body's nocturnal memories, from the bitter-sweet slumber of childhood" (Kristeva 1991, p. 15).

> The sibilants and gutturals,
> [. . .]
> forming at the back of the throat
> [. . .]
> The lost syllable [. . .]
> are all becoming sounds no longer
> heard because no longer spoken,
> and everything that could once be said in them has
>   ceased to exist (Atwood 1995a, p. 54)

Like a cannibal, or a warrior, the new language has taken over, like a "conquest" (Atwood 1995a, p. 55), and devoured or destroyed everything: "the one language that has eaten all the others" (Atwood 1995a, p. 55). Lost between languages, the estranged speaker has no language to define his / her identity. The stranger living permanently on the border can have only an "empty confidence" (Kristeva 1991, p. 8), and is left with "nothing to say" (Kristeva 1991, p. 22) to the native; the foreigner remains alone "only a mouth / only skin. / There is no more longing" (Atwood 1995a, p. 55).

The psychic threshold between the mother tongue and the adopted language, the one between life in the old country and life in the present can be painful psychic spaces. Nonetheless, it is possible to overcome this condition, as the next part will discuss.

4. Thresholds

The Latin word *limen* originally meant a stone placed on the threshold of a door that physically had to be mounted in order to cross from one space to another. With spatial liminality, the emphasis shifts to the relationship between centres, marginal zones become liminal by being situated in between the two centres, thus mediating them; possibly eventually even becoming the new centre. It should be noted here that Atwood's fascination with thresholds and liminal states lays in them being temporary situations. They highlight the formative aspects of transitory periods as a bringer of change.

In the short story cycle of *Moral Disorder,* the main entrance to the protagonist's Nell childhood home suddenly turns into a door "to the afterlife" (Atwood 2006a, p. 55). It is thanks to this transformation that Nell, a fictionalized representation of Atwood, had she not become a writer, acknowledges the inevitability of death (see also (Ingersoll 2009)). Similarly, in the prose poems that compose *The Tent,* a significant threshold, perhaps an entrance to life after death, plays a part in a particularly cryptic piece: "You examined the door. There were no windows in it. There was no lock. / I'm supposed to go in here? You said." (Atwood 2006b, p. 35). In *Negotiating with the Dead*, Atwood expands on this idea of the poet's easiness with the world of shadows. Among the numerous writers she refers to in this inquiry into the nature of creative writing, her primary focus is the celebrated Austrian poet, Reiner Maria Rilke, who "in his *Sonnets to Orpheus*, makes the underworld journey simply a precondition of being a poet." (Atwood 2002, p. 173). For Rilke, the poet "doesn't just visit the Other World. He partakes of it" (Atwood 2002, p. 173). Atwood admits that her creative drive is nurtured by the tension between the dread and the allure of that "risky trip". Both poets aim at bringing back "something or someone" (Atwood 2002, p. 156) from the world of the dead, which in actual fact, Atwood stresses, means acting in the present: "to enter the realm of the audience, the realm of the readers, the realm of change" (Atwood 2002, pp. 178–79; see also (Huebener 2009)).

Atwood's poetry witnesses the poet's familiarity with the world of shadows. The title poem in *Interlunar* (to which I will return later) starts with this awareness: "Darkness waits apart from any occasion for it; / like sorrow it is always available" (Atwood 1984b, p. 103). In "Down", from *Morning in the Burned House*, obscurity and darkness are ingrained in the poet's life, and they can emerge "at any moment" without "warning" even "in the kitchen" during the everyday "mild routines" of breakfast (Atwood 1995a, p. 72). In "Waiting", the "dark thing" has finally arrived; it is "here". This poem, with its intense sense of temporality and transience, can be considered a version of "The Door" in embryo, as the speaker realizes "for the first time" that "old" age has come, carrying with it loneliness and fear (Atwood 1995a, p. 10).

In the 2007 collection, the door of the title poem swings opened and closed at the implacable passage of time. The image of the threshold door reflects the influence of Adrienne Rich, a poet whom Atwood greatly admires. Both poets take on our gravest perplexities and injustices—inequalities of gender, class, war and its costs, and the despoiling nature of language. They both ask questions, knowing perhaps that no one has the answer. As Rich writes: "The door itself / makes no promises. / It is only a door"[3].

Atwood's title poem probes into the subject's relation with time: it looks at every phase in a person's life—adolescence, youth, adulthood, and finally old age—and in each phase, the subject constantly sees a door opening and closing. In the early stage of life, he/she is afraid of what could be behind the door; in the second stanza, in youth, time runs tremendously fast: "the dance is nice. / The door opens / and swings closed so quickly / you don't notice" (Atwood 2007, p. 128). When adulthood or maturity come, the subject becomes more curious to discover what is behind the door: "you look in: / why does this keep happening now? / Is there a secret?" (Atwood 2007, p, 129).

---

[3]   "Perspective Immigrants Please Note" (1962) in *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law: Poems 1954–1962*. In *Adrienne Rich's Poetry and Prose.* Selected and edited by Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi & Albert Gelpi eds. (Gelpi B. C. and Gelpi A. 1993, p. 17). See also (Atwood 1973, pp. 280–82). For Atwood's comments on Rich see (Ingersoll 1990, pp. 101, 113).

As the years pass, he finally dares to look in and distinguishes, albeit feebly, some sort of shape: "But what is that shining? / Is it water?" (Atwood 2007, p. 129)

Doors can open onto the past, although mainly they open onto the future. Even paradise has gates. Toward the end of the poem and, we may suppose, close to the end of the subject's life, Hermes is invoked; also Mercury, the gods' messenger, the one who stays always young, with wings at his feet, ready to accompany the souls to the underworld: "O god of hinges, / god of long voyages" (Atwood 2007, p. 30). In the last stanza, the darkness has lost its fearful traits, and has acquired new meanings. It is worth noticing that the door is closed to the on looker. We do not know what is inside there, where the subject has tried to see throughout his life.

Not only does the mysterious door open onto time, it also opens onto the creative act, which remains mysterious, as if engulfed by a veil. In the title poem, bewilderment, danger, and mortality lurk behind the door. Before crossing this entranceway, the speaker finds himself in a liminal state, on the threshold between being and nothingness. The lyric I, now inescapably exposed, vacillates on the rim of an abyss, on the brink of the unknown. Maybe it will be on the door's limen that it will acknowledge the darkness within and around himself. In this collection, the Cumanean Sibyl, one of Atwood's personae, repeatedly tries to warn, "Don't be deceived" (Atwood 2007, p. 102), and reassure: "Don't be afraid" (Atwood 2007, pp. 105, 106). Analogously, in the title poem in *Interlunar* the poet acts as a guide, as a sort of Virgil with Dante. In the last stanza, after the liminal passage, after "the edge", the frightening darkness "becomes light" (Atwood 2007, p. 103). In "The Door", it will be the poet to act as the mentor: in the darkness, only the poet is at ease: "You confide yourself to the darkness. / You step in. / The door swings closed" (Atwood 2007, p. 130).

Darkness as symbol of irrationality emerges as privileged locus also in the space of the labyrinth,

5. Labyrinths

The Tent, a rather bleak conglomeration of poems, short prose poems, and fictional essays, permeated by paradox and irony and fragmented in content and form, allows Atwood to dismantle Descartian subjectivity and positivist epistemologies, once again. In one of the longest prose poems, "Resources of the Ikarians", the reader encounters, yet again, another mythical figure, Icaro, and his fatal flight from the island of the Minotaur. The escape from the labyrinth, managed by its own maker, Daedalus, evoked in this story, suggests that the maze could be a crucial motif in this collection.

Environmental designer Romedi Passini argues that mazes, common to all human cultures, are of two kinds. The simple—"unicursal"—version has a more or less compound but inimitable path that, if followed, leads to the centre and out again. The trial in such design is not to find one's way, but to comprehend the spatial outline and one's position in it. "By contrast, the multicursal type is composed of a number of paths, forking, intersections, and possibly leading to impasses or dead ends. Here, one is not only confronted with the difficulty of identifying one's position in the maze, but also of finding the way into a destination and, more importantly, of finding a way out again" (Passini 1992, p. 10). This latter type, with its forking roads and dead ends, repeatedly figures in Atwood's text.

The maze remains, with all its ambiguities, a powerful and versatile sign. One of its meanings is the allusion to the artificial systems that the subject creates in his attempt to understand the world and invest it with meaning. In his seminal study *Treatise of the Labyrinth,* anthropologist Jacques Attali highlights how the Enlightenment considered it a repository of evil, darkness, and doubt, since the labyrinth stood for everything irrational, dark, and unpredictable. The liquid era of indeterminacy and uncertainty, Bauman remarks, seems to have privileged the labyrinth, perhaps unknowingly.

Of course, in the best of circumstances, as Passini stresses, "the prime characteristic of the labyrinth is to disorient" (Passini 1992, p. 11). The mazes that different cultures in the world have produced stand, to some extent, for that frightening realization of ultimate instability; they are a sort of spatial puzzle that challenge the courageous to test their tolerance for the disorder that already and always lurks in the darkness. Therefore, Passini continues, complex spaces remain connected with "unpredictability, the unknown, and the mysterious" (Passini 1992, p. 11). As human geographers and psychologists

alike have underlined, ambiguous spaces are related to gaining a sense of the "familiar", so that they can "become place", with all the security and protection that "place" suggests (Tuan 1977, p. 73). Even an undifferentiated space as the woods can metamorphose into place, and thus be endowed with value. "My father chops with his axe ... It's nineteen forty-three ... At night I sleep in a bunk bed ... This is comfort and safety, / the sound of chopping in the empty forest" (Atwood 1995a, p. 76).

In *The Tent,* the maze's "labyrinthine corridors" (Atwood 2006b, p. 140) echo through the entire collection. The nameless characters, or voices, figure as people lost in a funhouse: a place where nothing makes sense and everything is contradictory: "But you are shut up inside the warlord's territorial periphery, which at times feels like a protecting wall and at other times like a dungeon" (Atwood 2006b, p. 139). The labyrinth enhances the impression of an indeterminate locus, a place where all truths are elusive. It also suggests a subversion of every common sense and common-knowledge certainty. As the incipit of "Impenetrable Forest" reads: "The person you have in mind is lost . . . in the middle of an impenetrable forest. His head is full of trees. Branches he's bumping into . . . Paths that lead nowhere" (Atwood 2006b, p. 13).

The nameless characters in *The Tent* experience utter disorientation and loss in a world with no reference points, no landmarks, and no signposts. For these anonymous characters, there is not even a proper name to guarantee or seal identity. As a result, autobiography is untenable. In the opening piece, "Life Stories", a contraction of the enunciations occurs, which is deeply liberating from both "space" and "time" (Atwood 2006b, p. 5), memory and affects. "I'm getting somewhere now. I'm feeling lighter ... Only a paragraph left, only a sentence or two, only a whisper. / *I was born.* / *I was.* / *I*" (Atwood 2006b, p. 5). Likewise, in "No More Photos", the prospect of a single consistent autobiographical narrative is denied: "As it is, I'm watery, I ripple, from moment to moment I dissolve into my other selves" (Atwood 2006b, p. 25). For the poetic persona, singularity is impracticable: "I suffer from my own multiplicity" (Atwood 2006b, p. 25).

The labyrinth returns as a powerful emblem against rationality. It connotes the opaque locus where the arrangement of the roads may not obey any law. To quote Attali, "Chance and surprise rule in the labyrinth, which signals the defeat of Pure Reason" (Attali 1996, p. 23). The disoriented ephemeral narrating subjects in *The Tent* are desperately looking for "protection" (Atwood 2006b, p. 144), a refuge of some sort that will never come. To these characters, nothing looks "familiar" anymore, not even one's possessions or belongings: "My things? You said. You inspected the rucksack. It didn't look familiar. What did he mean by things? A toothbrush, underwear?" (Atwood 2006b, p. 34). The narrating subjects have estranged looks and are painfully estranged from themselves. In other words, they are well into the Freudian *Unheimliche.* The "long liquid song" sung on a "branch" at "night" in the "forest" (Atwood 2006b, p. 138) becomes a metaphor of a liquid identity, of the indeterminacy and the uncertainty that frame this collection, where meta-language abounds and emerges in almost every single piece: "the page darkens and ripples/because it is liquid and unbroken" (Atwood 2006b, p. 83).

In the title piece, the wilderness suddenly becomes increasingly scary and dense with menaces. Towards the end of this four-page piece, the nameless narrator, a stand-in figure for the artist / writer poses a momentous question. "Why do you think . . . this graphomania in a flimsy cave, this scribbling back and forth and up and down over the walls of what is beginning to seem like a prison, is capable of protecting anyone at all?" (Atwood 2006b, p. 146). As Heike Harting and Smaro Kamboureli stress in "The Tent" the writer is seen as "a reluctant but compulsive social guardian" (Harting and Kamboureli 2009, p. 666). This piece, they argue, conveys a strong sense of the need for security and of the pervasiveness of a threat that is, supposedly, outside of the tent and thus "the writing act keeps that threat in abeyance" (Harting and Kamboureli 2009, p. 667). In addition, writing "offers the possibility of both offering a radical rewriting of the mythologies surrounding security and of producing an act of witnessing" (Harting and Kamboureli 2009, p. 667). In this light, graphomania becomes then a sign for a sort of compulsion or moral obligation to bear witness (see also (Sheckels 2012, pp. 1–29)). Indeed, since early in her career, Atwood has emphasized the responsibility of the public and moral role of the author / poet / novelist. (Atwood 1982b, 1983, 2002). "Witness is

what you must bear" (Atwood 1986, p. 81). In an extensively analysed text, the 1981 collection *Notes Towards a Poem that Can Never Be Written,* the title poem, as Pilar Somacarrera notes, focuses on the urgency to "bear witness to the abuse of power even if it is painful" (Somacarrera 2012, p. 569). Atwood's notion of the writer as "an eye-witness and an I-witness" is well known and dates back to 1982 ("An End to Audience", *Second Words,* (Atwood 1982b, p. 348)).

As Peter Childs, discussing contemporary literature, remarks, storytelling "can be a form of processing as well as witnessing; a way of telling the past that shies away from claiming the judgment of history or the indulgence of autobiography" (Childs forthcoming, p. 15). In "The Tent", the only redeeming feature, for a writer, is "to keep on writing anyway because what else can you do?" (Atwood 2006b, p. 146). For non-writers (as in "Chicken Little Goes Too Far"), a possible defence is to honour and celebrate the repetitious creativity of acts of daily life. Routines keep the subject in place, and keep darkness and disorder at bay. Nonetheless, the tent remains extremely "fragile" (Atwood 2006b, p, 146). The reader is ultimately left with narrating voices lost in the labyrinth of an "impenetrable forest" (Atwood 2006b, p, 16): "This is not pleasant. The sun is sinking. The shadows are darkening. Things could hardly be worse" (Atwood 2006b, p. 13).

It takes courage to face the choices that life offers. As the voice in "Bottle II"—yet another version of the Cumanean Sibyl—ponders: "Fear is synonymous with the future, and the future consists of forked roads [. . .] A road is a process, not a location" (Atwood 2006b, pp. 38–39). To quote Bauman again, "Life is a sequence of episodes—each to be calculated separately, as each has its own balances of losses and gains. Life's roads do not get straighter in the course of being trodden, and turning one corner is not a warranty that the right turn will be taken in the future" (Bauman 2000, p. 139). In Deleuzian fashion, roads here figure as "lines of flight" constantly moving along a "rhizome". They imply constant movement, transformation and, ultimately, "becomings". In this process of constant changes, and again in a Deleuzian mode, in these poems the "self is only a threshold, a door, a becoming between two multiplicities." (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, p. 240). What these characters undergo is a break down between space and place. As Jacques Derrida writes: "The future can only be anticipated in the form of danger. It is that which breaks absolutely with constituted normality" (Derrida 1997, p. 5). Although these characters orient themselves to landmarks, the landmarks may well shift ceaselessly out of alignment with entrance or center. Moreover, no signpost twice seen may be the same. Whatever patterns they find and whatever they mean have answers that are plural and found, in most cases, in the future, rather than in the present.

The narrating subjects in *The Tent*, as often in *Morning in the Burned House,* and in *The Door,* stand on responsive alert, clear about the limits of poetic life. In the liquid era, plenitude belongs to the tracts of fictioning. States of security, windswept, reveal the nature of illusion. There will be no gathering home, even if the poet has projected a homeward turning: "You know it was you/ who slept, who ate here, though you don't/believe it" (Atwood 1995a, p. 3). Repeatedly the condition of being at a loss and disoriented seems unavoidable: "It always takes a long time / to decipher where you are" (Atwood 1995a, p. 104). In addition, nothing looks identifiable any more: "This is not a train/ There is no cricket. / Let's not panic.... Do you recognize anything? I said. / Anything familiar?" (Atwood 1995a, pp. 88–89). There is no escaping the sense of uncanny estrangement: "Where is this forest?" (Atwood 1995a, p. 81). Likewise, in *Interlunar*, the poetic persona is following a homely and familiar path, "We're hand in hand along/ any old street". Suddenly that same path turns ephemeral. "Where / are we going? It looks like / nowhere" (Atwood 1984b, p. 88).

Once more, that home place that seemed so adjacent, so solid and safe has swiftly vanished, and with it the brightness of the sun: "I would spend the rest of my life / in a house corner, in the sun. / If there were a house. If there were a sun" (Atwood 1984b, p. 76). As it has been argued throughout this essay, it is the poet who holds the unique "gift" (Atwood 1995b, "Waterstone's Poetry Lecture"; "The Gift" (Atwood 2017)) that renders it possible to turn toward the darkness, and then to glow and rejoice in it: "Old thread, old line / of ink [...] where are you leading me this time? [...] down into the darkness / where you reverse and shine" (Atwood 1995a, pp. 72–73).

Atwood offers an inventory of liquid modern fears. These texts attempt to uncover their common sources, to analyze the obstacles that pile up on the road to their discovery, and to examine the ways of putting them out of action or rendering them harmless. Through her brilliant poetic rendering of the fears and anxieties that weigh on us today, Atwood alerts us to the scale of the task, which we shall have to confront through most of the current century if we wish our fellow humans to emerge at its end feeling more secure and self-confident than we feel at its beginning.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

Attali, Jacques. 1996. *Chemins de Sagesse: Traité du Labyrinth*. Paris: Fayard.

Atwood, Margaret. 1973. Review of Adrienne Rich's Diving into the Wreck. *New York Times Book Review*, December 30, 280–82.

Atwood, Margaret. 1982a. *True Stories*. London: Cape.

Atwood, Margaret. 1982b. *Second Words: Selected Critical Prose*. Toronto: Anansi.

Atwood, Margaret. 1983. *Murder in the Dark. Short Fictions and Prose Poems*. Toronto: Coach House.

Atwood, Margaret. 1984a. *Dancing Girls*. London: Virago.

Atwood, Margaret. 1984b. *Interlunar*. Toronto: Oxford University Press.

Atwood, Margaret. 1986. *Selected Poems II: 1976–1986*. Toronto: Oxford University Press.

Atwood, Margaret. 1992. *Good Bones*. Toronto: Coach House.

Atwood, Margaret. 1995a. *Morning in the Burned House*. London: Virago.

Atwood, Margaret. 1995b. Waterstone's Poetry Lecture. Paper presented at Hay On Wye, Wales, UK, 29 May 1995.

Atwood, Margaret. 2002. *Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Atwood, Margaret. 2006a. *Moral Disorder*. London: Bloomsbury.

Atwood, Margaret. 2006b. *The Tent*. New York: Doubleday.

Atwood, Margaret. 2007. *The Door*. London: Virago.

Atwood, Margaret. 2015. *The Heart Goes Last*. London: Bloomsbury.

Atwood, Margaret. 2017. The Gift of Poetry. In *The Saying of It: Conversations on Literature and Ideas with 13 Contemporry English-Language Poets*. Edited by Marco Fazzini. Pisa: ETS.

Bauman, Zygmunt. 1991. *Modernity and Ambivalence*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bauman, Zygmunt. 1999. *In Search of Politics*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Bauman, Zygmunt. 2000. *Liquid Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bauman, Zygmunt. 2006. *Liquid Fear*. London: Polity.

Bauman, Zygmunt. 2005. *Liquid Life*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bauman, Zygmunt. 2007. *Liquid Times*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Castel, Robert. 2003. *L'Insécurité Sociale*. Paris: Seuil.

Childs, Peter. Forthcoming. *The Contemporary Past: C21st Literature and Recent Heritage*. Unpublished.

De Lint, William. 2011. Conclusion: Security and Everyday Life. In *Security and Everyday Life*. Edited by Vida Bajc and Williem de Lint. New York: Routledge.

Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. 1987. *A Thousand Plateaux. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Derrida, Jacques. 1997. *Of Grammatolgy*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Frommer, Arthur. 1957. *Europe on 5 Dollars a Day*. New York: Crown Publishing Group.

Gelpi, Barbara Charlesworth, and Albert Gelpi, eds. 1993. *Adrienne Rich's Poetry and Prose*. New York: Norton.

Gorjup, Branko. 2006. Margaret Atwood's poetry and poetics. In *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Grace, Sherrill. 1997. Introduction. In *Margaret Atwood. A Quite Game and Other Early Works*. Edmonton: Juvenilia Press.

Harting, Heike, and Smaro Kamboureli. 2009. Discourses of Security, Peacekeeping Narratives and the Cultural Imagination in Canada. *The University of Toronto Quarterly* 78: 659–86. [CrossRef]

Howells, Coral A. 2005. *Margaret Atwood*, 2nd ed. Basingstoke: Macmillan, First published in 1996.

Howells, Coral A., ed. 2006. *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Huebener, Paul. 2009. Dark Stories: Poet-Audience Relations and the Journey Underground in Margaret Atwood's *The Door* and Other Works. *Studies in Canadian Literature* 34: 106–33.

Ingersoll, Earl, ed. 1990. *Margaret Atwood: Conversations*. Princeton: Ontario Review Press.

Ingersoll, Earl. 2009. The Trope of Doors in the Writings of Margaret Atwood. *LATCH* 7: 1–16.

Kristeva, Julia. 1991. *Strangers to Ourselves*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Kristeva, Julia. 1993. *Nations without Nationalism*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Massey, Doreen. 1998. *Space, Place and Gender*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. 1997. On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life. In *Untimely Meditations*. Edited by Daniel Breazale. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Passini, Romedi. 1992. *Wayfinding in Architecture*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company.

Peterson, Nancy. 1987. Bluebeard's Egg: Not Entirely a 'Grimm's Tale'. In *Margaret Atwood: Reflection and Reality*. Edited by Beatrice Mendez-Eagle. Edinburg: Pan American University Press, pp. 131–38.

Piatti, Barbara, and Lorenz Hurni. 2009. Mapping the Ontological Unreal—Counterfactual Spaces in Literature and Cartography. *The Cartographic Journal* 46: 333–42. [CrossRef]

Rao, Eleonora. 2006. Home and Nation in Margaret Atwood's later fiction. In *Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood*. Edited by Coral Ann Howells. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rao, Eleonora. 2009. "It's a howling wilderness": Forests and Mazes in Margaret Atwood's *The Tent*. *Cuadernos de Literatura Inglesa y Norteamericana* 12: 61–67.

Rao, Eleonora. 2014. "The words boil out of me, coil after coil of sinuous possibility": Fairy Tales in Margaret Atwood's work. In *Textus: English Studies in Italy*. Edited by Chantal Zabus and Daniela Corona Special issue, Critical Retellings of Violence in Myths and Fables within Contemporary Fiction; vol. 3, pp. 113–4.

Sarup, Madan. 1994. Home and Identity. In *Traveler's Tales: Narratives of Home and Displacement*. Edited by George Robertson and et al. London: Routledge, pp. 115–20.

Sheckels, Theodore. 2012. *The Politics in Margaret Atwood's Fiction: The Writing on the Wall of the Tent*. Farnham: Ashgate.

Soja, Edward. 2010. *Seeking Spatial Justice*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Somacarrera, Pilar. 2012. "Witness is what you must bear": Politics in Margaret Atwood's Poetry. *Cross/Cultures*, January 1.

Tolan, Fiona. 2007. *Margaret Atwood: Feminism and Fiction*. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi.

Tuan, Yi-Fu. 1977. *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Van Spanckeren, Kathryn. 2003. Humanizing the Fox: Atwood's Poetic Tricksters and *Morning in the Burned House*. In *Margaret Atwood: Textual Assassinations*. Edited by Sharon Wilson. Columbus: Ohio University Press.

Wæver, Ole. 1995. Securitization and desecuritization. In *On Security*. Edited by Ronnie D. Lipschutz. New York: Columbia University Press.

Watkins, Susan. 2013. "Summoning Your Youth at Will": Memory, Time and Aging in the Works of Penelope Lively, Margaret Atwood and Doris Lessing. *Frontiers* 2. [CrossRef]

Wilson, Sharon. 2003. Quilting as Narrative Art: Metafictional Construction in Alias Grace. In *Margaret Atwood's Textual Assassinations*. Edited by Sharon Wilson. Columbus: Ohio State University Press.