Chapter Three

Two Types

(I) Gender stereotypes: angels/ ice vs. devils/ fire

As Karen F. Stein analyzes the characters in Atwood’s *The Blind Assassin*, she puts them into two categories, angels and devils, and points out that these imageries of angels and devils are represented through a series of images related to ice and fire. Stein separates these two types of imageries through genders: “*The Blind Assassin* utilizes imagery of angels and devils, fire and ice to characterize women, men and sexuality” (139).

For Stein, the portraits of women and men in *The Blind Assassin* are quite stereotypical, for the descriptions between gender differences depend on the emphasis of “fragile, sexless women and demanding, dangerous men” (139); or rather, Atwood shows that they are in an environment that believes in gender stereotypes—women are taught that they “should be ‘angels in the house’: dependent, selfless, pure and devoted to family” (140). She points out that the depictions of female characters are in stark contrast to that of male characters:

Liliana and Laura are presented as serious and chaste, and they are linked to imagery of Heaven and angels, water and ice. In contrast, men are expected to be independent, assertive, and active in the larger world of business. […] Norval, Alex and Richard are each shown to be sexually demanding and dangerous and they are repeatedly depicted in imagery of fire and Hell. (140)

The only character Stein finds hard to fit in these two categories is Iris, the
narrator of the novel. She finds that Iris possesses the quality of both fire and ice and has the ability to transcend the boundary between gender stereotypes. “Iris herself participates in both the fire and ice imagery. […] Although Iris at first behaves according to the stereotypes of femininity that reduce her to passivity and dependence, she is ultimately able to resist” (143).

However, when we read the gender stereotypes that are attached to the characters closely, we can find that the gender stereotypes cannot represent the essential nature of the characters, especially the members of the Chase family. The man who is supposed to be demanding and dangerous can also be revealed to be fragile and frustrated; the woman who is supposed to be passive and innocent can be revealed to be demanding and instructive.

For example, Norval and Liliana, the parents of the narrator, Iris, do not fit into the imageries of devil and angel perfectly. The main point Stein argues about is on the sexual interaction between them that results in Liliana’s death, “When Liliana Chase dies from a miscarriage in 1925, her nine-year-old daughter, Iris, overhears conversations that attribute her death to Norval’s excessive sexual demands on his fragile wife” (139). Nevertheless, the demanding and demonic imagery of Norval and the fragile and angelic imagery of Liliana are not carried throughout the novel. While Norval is made very harmful in the relationship with his wife, he is indeed a victim according to the facts Iris has heard and known. Returning from war with “one good eye and one good leg” (Atwood 79) and having lost two brothers, Norval is seriously harmed in both psychologically and physically. The imagery associated with Norval is woundedness instead of aggressiveness: “He was broken, and needed mending […]
Light step, heavy step, light step, heavy step, like an animal with one foot in a trap” (80). Despite his injured soul and body, he still tries his best to help people. Iris remembers:

All over the country there were shutdowns and layoffs, but not in my father’s factories. He hired, and overhired. He hired veterans. He said the country’s lack of gratitude was despicable, and that its businessmen should now pay back something of what was owed. Very few of them did, though. They turned a blind eye, but my father, who had a real blind eye, could not turn it. (83)

Rather than an aggressive devil, Norval is more a sufferer, who is conscious about his own physical and psychological wounds and has compassion for others’ suffering.

Norval is not an aggressor in the public and social relationship, nor is he in his personal relationship with his wife. Although Stein has emphasized “Norval’s excessive sexual demands on his fragile wife” (139), his relationship with his wife is never that between the oppressor and the oppressed. Iris has questioned herself about the relationship between her parents and concluded as follows: “He loves her; in some ways he was devoted to her. But he couldn’t reach her, and it was the same on her side. It was as if they’d drunk some fatal potion that would keep them forever apart, even though they lived in the same house, ate at the same table, slept in the same bed” (82). The relationship between them is not built upon power that involves the oppressor and the oppressed but upon love, even though the love between them is stifled by the trauma of war. It is not only Liliana, who is suffering in the alienated relationship but also Norval; and both of them do not know how to recover from the trauma of war. In
this sense, there is no aggressive devil in this relationship; in contrast, there are only two fragile people, who want to love but are incapable of showing their love.

Norval does not represent the male stereotype perfectly, nor does Liliana the female stereotype. Although some descriptions of Liliana do fit in with the female stereotype, her behaviors break this impression. At first sight, Liliana does demonstrate many characteristics of the female stereotype: she is a fragile woman, self-sacrificing, devoting herself totally to the works of her family and of public service when her newly-married husband is called up to join the war. “She did not spare herself…She ruined her health. She went beyond her strength, especially considering her condition” (76). In the position of devotion, she does spend all her strength and mind on her family and other people. She lives for other people, reserving nothing to her self. Although Liliana resembles so many characteristics belonging to the female stereotype, her daughter, Iris, has noticed that she is not as stereotypical as she seems to be. Iris has found the demanding aspect of her mother, writing that “Her comportment as a mother had always been instructive rather than cherishing. At heart she remains a schoolteacher” (88). According to Jungian analysis that has been discussed in the previous chapter, the image of a schoolteacher has more connections to “Logos, the masculine principle of knowledge” rather than “Eros, the feminine principle of relatedness” (Hopcke 44), that is, in the relationship with her daughters, Liliana is rather a demanding and masculine teacher than a softly-loving and feminine mother. Besides, in the relationship with her husband, she shows the demanding part of her nature too, though in a less immediate way. When Iris recalls the fact that her mother forgave her father his sexual relationships with other women,
for her understanding that he has gone to war for so many years, she also finds her mother’s stressful “tyranny” penetrating through her forgiveness:

[My father] can’t have found living with her forgiveness all that easy.

Breakfast in a haze of forgiveness: coffee with forgiveness, porridge with forgiveness, forgiveness on the buttered toast. He would have been helpless against it, for how can you repudiate something that is never spoken? She resented, too, the nurse, or the many nurses, who had tended my father in the various hospitals. She wished him to owe his recovery to her alone—to her care, to her tireless devotion. That is the other side of selflessness: tyranny. (80)

The word “tyranny” subverts the imagery of a fragile angle Liliana is attached to. She is not a woman, who is passive and dependent, but a woman, who knows what she wants and what she does very well. Obviously, she holds her life with her will; and the word “tyranny” suggests that she even holds others’ life under her will, too.

The imageries of devils and angels do not give us a rounded picture of the characters but only certain aspects. It is impossible to interpret the characters in The Blind Assassin with the patterns of gender stereotypes, for the characters are much more than mere stereotypes.

While the imageries of ice/ angels and fire/ devils are too simple for interpreting the characters, the intertextual figures in the science-fiction allegory, the blind assassin and the sacrificial maiden, are two symbols than can explain the personality and the fate of the characters in the memoir well. Famous for its multiple narratives, The Blind Assassin carries itself with these imageries that run through
multiple narratives and reveal the relationships between these narratives. In

“Atwood’s Specular Narrative: The Blind Assassin”, Hilde Staels explains the

Atwood’s use of multiple narratives as follows:

The mirroring devices between the three main narratives or textual layers

belonging to different narrative genres grant the novel its specificity and
deeper significance. Similarly, the deeper meanings of the characters can

be derived from the manner in which they are interrelated, mirrored or
doubled by the means of imagery.” (149)

By means of imagery, these narratives explain one another as well as deepen one

another. Before we talk about these two important figures, the blind assassin and the
sacrificial maiden that bear echo to the fate of the main characters, we should talk
about the science-fiction story, the most central narrative, and its teller first.

(II) The science-fiction allegory: dominating Snifards vs. dominated Ygniroids

The science-fiction allegory is told by an unnamed man, who is later revealed to

be Alex Thomas, the secret lover of Iris. As a socialist, Alex Thomas is very

conscious of exploitation and oppression from the dominant class in society and he

reveals his concern in his story. His story is set in a planet called Zycron and a city
called Sakiel-Norn where the strict social structure between the dominating aristocrats
called Snifards and the dominated slaves called Ygniros takes place. Pointing out
that the science-fiction story is mirroring the conflicts in human society, J. Brooks
Bouson writes that the story “in describing a misogynistic society of aristocratic

privilege that practices child slavery and the sacrifice of young virgins, provides a
pointed commentary on the violent and war-torn world of gender and class oppression inhabited by the lovers” (253). The conflicts between genders and social classes are shown irreconcilable in the story.

In spite of setting the story in another dimension of space, he emphasizes that the details of the story, such as unbalanced social structure and the cruelty the dominating class imposes on the dominated, are based upon real history of human beings. When he mentions about the story that the bankrupt Snifards sells their wives and daughters to maintain their social status from being demoted to Ygniroids and concludes that “It was much rarer for an Ygniroid to achieve the status of Snifard, since the way up is usually more arduous than the way down” (18-9), Iris criticizes that he makes it up with his Bolshevism. However, he defends himself with the historical facts: “The culture I describe is based on ancient Mesopotamia. It’s in the Code of Hammurabi, the laws of the Hittites and so forth. Or some of it is. The part about the veils is, anyway, and selling your wife. I could give you chapter and verse” (19).

However, Alex’s science-fiction allegory is not only based upon the history of ancient times but also that of his own. His lover, Iris, is exactly like the daughters who are sold to maintain their families in the allegory. Iris has been “sold” to the new-money industrialist, Richard Griffen, to save her family industry. “Atwood's description of the circumstances surrounding Richard's proposal to Iris, who has been raised by her father to act the role of the dutiful daughter, is a scathing critique of patriarchal marriage and the historical treatment of women as objects of exchange between men” (Bouson 257). What Alex says about the dilemma of a demoting
Sniffard is actually a reflection of what happened to the Chase family—“If a Sniffard should become bankrupt, he might be demoted to an Ygnirod. Or he might avoid such a fate by selling his wife or children in order to redeem his debt” (18). Iris’s father hopes her marriage with Richard can save their family factories, but this plan is revealed to be in vain—Richard Griffen does not intend to save the Chase factories, on the contrary, he merges all of them out of his own interest, regardless of that of Iris and Laura.

(III) Two imageries of exploited people: blind assassin vs. sacrificial maiden

While the Sniffards and the Ygniroids represent the dominating and dominated classes, the two protagonists, the blind assassin and the sacrificial maiden, represent two different kinds of attitudes to face the domination. Both of them suffer a lot from the inhumane exploitation whether physically or mentally, but their reactions to the exploitation differ, making one of them a killer, the other a sacrifice.

(a) The sacrificial maidens—silenced and sacrificed

The theme of sacrifice comes with associations with the Christ figure or Andromeda1 in Greek mythology. Both of them are willing to sacrifice their lives for their people: Jesus Christ has sacrificed himself to redeem human sin while Andromeda offers herself to a sea monster to free her people from the monster’s ravages. The sacrificial maidens in the science-fiction allegory follow the same pattern: like Christ or Andromeda, God’s son or the princess of her kingdom, they are of the noblest Sniffard families, and “Those sacrificed were known as ‘the Goddess’s

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1 Andromeda’s story has been mentioned in Chapter Two.
maiden,’ […] that the welfare of the entire kingdom depended on their selflessness” (30-1). Set up as an agency or liaison or mediator between gods and their citizens, the sacrificial maidens have esteemed and lofty statuses just as Christ and Andromeda. After their death, “prayers and flowers and incense were offered to them so they would intercede on behalf of the living” (30).

However, Atwood makes a twist in depicting the tradition of Sakiel-Norn’s rituals of sacrifice. Firstly, the noble Snilford families begin to substitute their daughters with the offsprings of female slaves. Using these female slaves to replace the noble families’ girls “was cheating, but the noble families were powerful, so it went on with the eye of authority winking” (30). Secondly, the ritual of sacrifice loses its sanctitude. “More time went by. Now only a few people still took the gods seriously, and anyone overly pious or observant was considered a crackpot.[…] but such things were not the real business of the city” (31). While the rituals that originally should be sacred are now involved with cheating and deterioration, the sacrifice begins to lose its holiness.

However, the citizens do not give up the rituals; instead, “The citizens continued to perform the ancient rituals because they had always done so” (31). The sacrificial girls are “shut inside the temple compound, […] rigorously trained so they would be ready for the great day—able to fulfill their duties with decorum, and without quailing” (31). Atwood writes about the phenomenon and how they begin to cut the girls’ tongues off:

Despite their isolation, some of the girls came to realize they were being murdered as lip service to an outworn concept. Some tried to run
away when they saw knife. Others took to shrieking when they were
taken by the hair and bent backwards over the altar, and yet others cursed
the King himself, who served as High Priest on these occasions. […]
Anyway, such outburst could spoil the festivities: everyone enjoyed the
sacrifices, even the Ygniros, even the slaves, because they were allowed
to take the day off and get drunk.

Therefore it became the practice to cut out the tongues of the girls
three months before they were due to be sacrificed. […]

Thus, tongueless, and swollen with words she could never again
pronounce, […] she looked like a pampered society bride. (31-2)

Therefore, these maidens are not only sacrificed but also silenced. Just like the
sacrificial figure, the silenced figure is not invented from nowhere, either. When it is
further examined, it will be seen clearly that it repeats the patterns in mythology or in
fairy tales. The descriptions about the tongueless girl who cannot speak and tell her
story remind us of Hans Christian Anderson’s literary tale “The Little Mermaid”\(^2\) and
the story of Philomela\(^3\) in Greek mythology.

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\(^2\) “The Little Mermaid” is one of the most famous tales of Anderson. The little mermaid, who
falls in love with a human prince, is willing to have deal with a sea witch and exchange her musical
tongue with a pair of human legs, and further, she gambles her life on the prince’s love—if he does not
fall in love with her and marry another girl, she will turn into a bubble and disappears. However, after
she gets acquaintance with the human prince, he falls in love with a princess from another country and
decides to get married soon. Before the day of the wedding, the little mermaid is trapped in a long-time
struggle, for she has the chance to return to the life of mermaid only if she kills her beloved prince.
Finally, she gives up the chance and turns into a bubble on the next day.

\(^3\) According to Edith Hamilton’s *Mythology*, the story of Philomela is full of sexual violence. Philomela’s sister,
Procne, is married to King Tereus of Thrace. Tereus has an illicit passion for his wife’s sister. He rapes Philomela
Both of the female protagonists are famous for their silence and their tragic lives; and the relationship between their tragic lives and their being silenced is inseparable. In Philomela’s case, she is robbed of her voice and treated as a passive object that can be gazed at, desired and violated by the patriarchal forces. “A feminist reading will look deeper into the text and beyond, asking for whom Philomela herself, transformed into a wordless swallow, is the sign of what threatens the woman’s voiced existence in culture” (Keuss 248). In the little mermaid’s case, the heroine seems to be in a less frustrated situation: she seems to have a more active role—she possesses the position of the active gazer instead of the passive gazed. However, her position is not as active as it seems to be. Even though the little mermaid actively falls in love with the prince, she does not try to woo him actively; instead, she is waiting for his proposal. Although she can manipulate the power of the gaze, what she intends to do is to become the object of the prince’s gaze—she tries to catch his eye with her body and her dance regardless of her bleeding feet.

It is silence that turns women’s stories to a mystery, to a forbidden knowledge. And it is the silence that represses women’s expression of their love, anger or hatred. Philomela is silenced because she knows the horrible deed done by Tereus. Her silence can be viewed as the attempt of patriarchal power to erase other voices that

when she is invited to his country and cut out her tongue so that she cannot tell Procne what has happened to her. However, Philomela weaves her story on a tapestry and passes it to her sister. After realizing what has happened to her sister, Procne decides to take revenge on her husband. She kills her son, Itys, and cooks his body as a supper for Tereus. She reveals to Tereus the horrible truth after he finishes his supper. Procne and Philomela flee when Tereus tries to catch them. When he almost overtakes them, however, the gods suddenly turn them into birds—Tereus into a hawk, “Procne into a nightingale and Philomela into a swallow, which, because of her tongue was cut out, only twitters and can never sing.” (Hamilton 284)
might threaten its dominant position. As for the little mermaid, the silence is her price of trying to take the active role that is supposed to be played by males. She does want to be active in the process of winning the love of the prince; however, the payment for her activeness is very costly. Her silence draws her down from being an active heroine that is capable of saving and wooing her lover, turning her to an object that is being guessed about, wondered and misunderstood. The payment for her activeness is the silence that ironically resembles passiveness. Nina Auerbach has noticed that the imagery of Anderson’s little mermaid corresponds with the female stereotype in Victorian ideology, pointing out that “Anderson’s mermaid clings winsomely to her disposssession, but her choice is a guide to a vital Victorian mythology whose lovable woman is a silent and self-disinherited mutilate” (Auerbach 8).

Compared with the stories of Philomela and the little mermaid, the sacrificial girls’ story reveals the bitter fact that patriarchal culture tends to silence women. The citizens just follow the tradition of keeping them in the position of sacrifice and silence. While the silence of Philomela is to protect Tereus and that of the little mermaid is her exchange for a pair of human legs, the silence of the sacrificial girls made by Atwood is just a performance without any urgent necessity. The story of the sacrificial maiden becomes a bitter criticism toward the tradition of keeping women in silence that is carelessly continued.

The reason for keeping the rituals going is absurd—“because they had always done so” (30). In this absurd situation, how do the tongueless girls for sacrifice think about themselves and their positions? Elaine Showalter holds a feminist view toward the novel, and interprets the allegory that Atwood wants to awaken women about their
own silenced and sacrificial condition by laying bare the absurd situation of the sacrificial maidens:

The state of female erotic thraldom, traditional in both fairy tale and pornography, is a favourite theme of Atwood's. But for her, as opposed to Angela Carter, with whom she has many affinities, the male object of fascination scarcely seems to matter. Alex in *The Blind Assassin* and Nick in *The Handmaid's Tale* are shadowy catalysts who release the woman, awakening her to her own condition. (53)

In the allegory, some girls do awaken themselves and try to resist, but the resistance to the sacrificial rituals seems to be stopped after they are cut off tongues. Do the sacrificial girls accept their positions of sacrifice because they are forced to? Or, do they really believe that they are sacrificed for the whole city? If they know their sacrifices have not been treated as a serious matter but only taken as a decoration in the festival, their surrenders to it can be seen as a compromise or even a connivance with the society that neglects their lives. Although the dominating power from the unbalanced society is overwhelming, they would be like the tongueless Philomela, who finds another way to express herself; but they do not, they are “led in procession to the sound of solemn music, wrapped in veils and garlanded with flowers, up the winding steps to the city’s ninth door” (32).

Or, there is another possibility—“Many believed what they were told” (31). If they do believe it and try hard to make themselves correspondent to the ideal figure of sacrifice, they have indulged themselves in a fantasy of sacrifice. They die for a fantasy that their sacrifices hold “the welfare of the entire kingdom” (31) while there
is no need for anyone to sacrifice in reality. Regardless of reality, their sacrifices only satisfy their inflated and ideal views of themselves that have been created and outworn by the dominating class.

The sacrificial maiden is an archetypal figure of the Martyr, following the mythological patterns of Christ, Andromeda, Philomela and the little mermaid. Just as what has been discussed in the previous chapter that the Martyr contains both positive and negative energy, the sacrificial maiden is a figure full of perplexity. On the one hand, she is a figure of holy sacrifice that reveals the greatness of selflessness; on the other hand, she is a victim who is limited in a certain kind of ideology—who has internalized the ideology made by the exploiting power and has lived with it as belief—and lacks connections to the true reality.

(b) The blind assassins—being hurt and blindly hurting

While the sacrificial maidens represent a figure that has indulged in the fantasy with which the dominating class practices manipulation, the figure of blind assassins represents another type under the inhumane exploitation. Born in the class of Ygniros, the blind assassins encounter a series of misfortunes from the beginning of their life.

The blind assassins are slave children who are trained at weaving before they become blind, and the aristocrats of Sakiel-Norn, the Snifards, become rich by the children-woven handicrafts. The eye-sight of these children is the price of these handicrafts. Atwood writes:

The carpets were woven by slaves who were invariably children, because
only the fingers of children were small enough for such intricate work.

But the incessant close labour demanded of these children caused them to go blind by the age of eight or nine, and their blindness was the measure by which the carpet-sellers valued and extolled their merchandise: *This carpet blinded ten children*, they would say. *This blinded fifteen, this twenty.* (24)

After they become blind, they will be sold off to brothel-keepers whether they are girls or boys. And if they escape from being a sexual slave, they will make their living by “the profession of cutting throats in the dark and […] hired assassins” (24) because their “sense of hearing was acute; they could walk without sound, and squeeze through the smallest of openings; they could smell the difference between a deep sleeper and one who was restlessly dreaming” (24).

“Treated without mercy, they become merciless killers” (Bouson 260), they can kill without feeling anything, even when they are hired to kill the people who share the same destiny with them. Atwood depicts the psychological details of one of the blind assassins, the protagonist in the science-fiction story, in the process of being hired to kill the sacrificial maiden:

He feels nothing about the death he is about to inflict, nor does he care to know the reasons for it. Who is to be assassinated and why is the business of the rich and powerful, and he hates them all equally. […] It means noting to him that she’s little more than a decorated and bejeweled prisoner. It means nothing to him that the same people who have made him blind have made her mute. He’ll do his job and take his pay and that
will be the end of it. (135)

In contrast to the sacrificial maidens, who internalize the fantasy created by the Snifards to keep the sacrificial girls on the altar, the blind assassins internalize the patterns of the Snifards themselves—exploiting whoever are below. Being exploited and hurt by the powerful Snifards, the blind assassins learn the merciless rules of the society, and follow them well; as they escape from the dominated position, they scarcely pity the people who are in the same position they used to be before, and join the dominating and exploiting group. They are the victims of the aristocratic luxury, but at the same time, they are the killers, mostly hired by aristocrats to kill the powerless people. They try to resist their designated fate and try hard to use their skills to live and go between the dominating and the dominated class. However, their doings only follow the same patterns of the Snifards, reinforcing the miserable fate shared by the oppressed class and strengthening the irreversible hierarchy of the society.

Although the blind assassin is a figure who does not get rid of the vicious circle of being victimized and victimizing others, he is the one, who dares to claim his living and his right in contrast to the figure of the sacrificial maiden. According to what we have discussed in the previous chapter, the blind assassin is more like an archetypal figure of the Warrior, for he is conscious of his self-defense and is willing and capable of fighting for himself. However, the negative energy of the Warrior shows as clearly as the positive one on this figure.

Woodman has used the figures of Athena and Medusa to embody the positive and negative energy of the Warrior archetype. As we examine the negative figure of the
archetype, Medusa, we find the story of the blind assassin sharing many characteristics with the myth of Medusa.

Medusa was once beautiful maiden, one of the Gorgons sisters. “But one night Medusa lay with Poseidon, and Athena, enraged that they had bedded in one of her own temples, changed her into a winged monster with glaring eyes, huge teeth, protruding tongue, brazen claws and serpent locks, whose gaze turned men to stone” (Grave 127). After that moment, Medusa becomes a monstrous killer, whom adventurous heroes want to eradicate. No one can kill her until Perseus, under the guidance of Athena and Hades, succeeds to cut off Medusa’s head; “whereupon, to his surprise, the winged horse Pegasus, and the warrior Chrysaor grasping a golden falchion, sprang fully-grown from her dead body” (Graves 239)—“these had been begotten on Medusa by Poseidon” (Graves 239).

Medusa is a tragic figure, who is seriously hurt and turned into a monster, and whether she is willing or not, she will bring deadly harm to the people who get close to her. The monstrous shape reflects the more serious metamorphosis of her psyche. Negative emotions accumulated in her previous life are drained in the same terrible way onto others when she has opportunities. Transformed from victims to killers, she do not escape from the limitation of the vicious circle, just as the blind assassin—they create more victims; and they themselves become the merciless power they have abominated before.

The blind assassin resembles those characteristics of being trapped in the vicious circle and destiny from being hurt to hurting; however, the figure of the blind assassin is more than that of Medusa. The imagery of Medusa is full of outrageous anger and
agonies, almost close to madness, but the imagery of the blind assassin is calm and cold with accurate calculation on economy and reality. While Medusa’s “snaky locks twist and writhe in constant agitation” (Woodman 9), the blind assassin is “renowned for his soundlessness, his stealth, and his pitiless hand with knife” (122) and he cares for nothing but efficiency and remuneration—doing his job and taking his pay. Far from being as overflowingly emotional as Medusa, the blind assassin shows a tendency of having their emotions controlled and focusing themselves on rational and realistic practices.

The tendency of having emotions controlled shows another side of the Warrior, which Woodman uses Athena as its representative. The blind assassin’s calmness and accurate calculation resemble the characteristics of the goddess of “wisdom, reason, purity” (Hamilton 30). However, these two figures of the Warrior are irreconcilable for each other according the myth. Athena cannot tolerate things beyond her expectation—she feels insulted for Medusa’s having sex with Poseidon in her temple and turns her into a monster and after that moment, she is eager to destroy Medusa as a monster.

However, the monster Athena is eager to erase is in fact reflecting the other side of her psyche—her repressed unconsciousness. Marion Woodman makes the interpretation when she looks into the myth of Athena: “Athena is chained to Medusa as surely as Medusa is chained to Athena” (10). Pearson has the same opinion with the Warrior archetype, pointing the problematic psychic situation that “Warriors also have to be on the lookout for inappropriate qualities within themselves to be slain or repressed” (80). Being two sides of a Warrior, Athena and Medusa are destined to be
chained together while Athena is eager to slay Medusa, who keeps struggling and resisting to the goddess’ oppression.

The blind assassin is a figure that combines these two sides of Warrior together. On the one hand, the blind assassin concentrates himself on the accurate and emotionless calculation and joins the cold-blooded oppression just as the goddess of reason and war; on the other hand, he cannot get rid of the experience of having been terribly treated and oppressed and the negative emotion derived from that experience even if he tries so hard to neglect it.

As an archetypal figure of the Warrior, the blind assassin is a figure in opposition to the sacrificial maiden, the archetypal figure of Martyr. While Warriors try to claim their identities, their independence, and their rights of living so hard that they fight everything that will interfere with their ambition of self-affirmation, including the part of their inner qualities that do not support their fighting; Martyrs abandon their benefits of living, even the living itself, and devote themselves to God, to a belief, to a relationship, to a group of people—to anything that is more important than themselves. The very extreme conceptions held by these two archetypes is that Warriors consider the most important thing are their selfhood while Martyrs think there is always thing that is more important than themselves. The negative energy of Martyr will lead a person into the fantasy of sacrifice, just like the sacrificial maiden in the story, having internalized the ideology made by the upper class and having been trapped in the status of oppression. Meanwhile, the negative energy of Warrior will keep a person in a condition of fighting and killing, regardless of his/ her inner need for love and relationship. Having themselves armed physically and mentally, Warriors view the
people around them as their enemy as well as their yearning for love. The negative energy of Warrior reminds us of Procne and Judas. As the former kills her own son, Itys, in order to take revenge on her husband, for her husband’s rape of her sister, Philomela; the latter betrays his Lord, Jesus Christ, for his personal interest. Both of them claim their rights so desperately that they even slay the people that mean so much to them: Procne kills her son as well as her motherly love within her nature for her demanding the justice for her sister; Judas grasps his earthly interest so hardly that he betrays his guidance of belief. The blind assassin follows the same pattern, gaining his benefits and earning his right of living strenuously, he represses his emotional reaction toward any people, including the people of his class before.

The sacrificial maidens and the blind assassins are not only two representative images of people who are struggling in the exploited position but also two archetypal figures of Warrior and Martyr. Atwood enriches the science-fiction allegory with their controversial personalities that are derived from both the positive and negative energies of these archetypes; and furthermore, she makes them symbols that mirror the characters in the realist narrative in The Blind Assassin. They carry the condensed version of the fate and personalities of the main characters in the novel—the members of Chase family. Some of them have internalized the fantasy of sacrifice while others resemble the psychology of blind assassins, being traumatized and later doing harm to others.

Atwood was once asked about what the figure of blind assassin refers to in an interview, and she has given a specific answer: “Of course, you know who the blind assassin really is. Ultimately it's Iris. But I can't explain it without talking about the
end of the book” (Gussow 2). Her answer explains why the novel is called The Blind Assassin, for the novel includes an allegory about a blind assassin and the novel is a memoir of a woman, who is a “blind assassin” in the symbolic meaning.

Iris’s echoing with the figure of the blind assassin is without doubt; however, the imagery of blind assassin is not limited to the point Atwood herself makes clear about—it does not only refer to Iris, it can refer to anyone who is changed from a victim to a victimizer. So does the figure of sacrificial maidens. In next chapter, a more close examination of these two figures and their relationships with the main characters in the memoir will be presented.