Chapter Four

When a Blind Assassin Meets a Sacrificial Maiden

The previous chapter discussed archetypes in the novel-within-the novel, the science-fiction allegory, and this chapter will more specifically deal with the relationship between these two imageries—the blind assassin and the sacrificial maiden, and the main characters in Iris’s memoir—the members of Chase family. The family includes Iris’s parents, Norval and Liliana, and her sister, Laura. All of them have their life shadowed by misfortunes: while Liliana ruins her health by devoting too much of herself to others and dies after a bloody miscarriage, Norval, “a shell-shocked World War I veteran, alternately distracts himself with alcohol or soirees with radically chic artists come to eat his food and criticize his politics” (Wineapple 58) and dies of serious drunkenness after he realizes his factories are merged; and their younger daughter, Laura, drives a car off the bridge and dies a violent death. The only survivor is Iris, the narrator of the novel; however, her surviving is still in a kind of tragic atmosphere—she is left in solitude, misunderstood by her daughter and alienated from her granddaughter.

Their tragedies not only reveal the misfortunes of the time when they lived, the hard time between two World Wars, but also their own flaws that result in their misfortunes. Symbolically, they follow the patterns of the protagonists in the science-fiction allegory, struggling and suffering as well as calculating and desiring. The Chase family offers a realistic version of that allegory, bringing the history in another dimension into the contemporary one.
In the previous chapter, it has been examined that the figure of the sacrificial maidens mixes the patterns of the sacrificial saints such as Andromeda and Christ and the silenced sufferers such as Philomela and the little mermaid. If we examine Laura and Liliana from these points of views, we will find that both of them resemble the above characteristics. In relating Liliana and Laura with the characteristic of silence, both of them do keep silent about their suffering: Liliana keeps silent about her suffering from the excessive workload (76) as well as the excessive sexual demands of her husband (91); Laura also keeps silent about her being harassed by the tutor, Mr. Erskine (169) and being exploited sexually by her brother-in-law, Richard Griffen, until the last moment.

Meanwhile, both of them are respectable sacred figures from the perspective of sacrifice—both are often related to the words such as “saint” and “angel” and both are very pious toward their beliefs and willing to devote themselves completely to their beliefs. In the eyes of the housekeeper, Reenie, Liliana is “just like an angel” (72) and “a saint on earth” (146). The sentence that “Mother\(^1\) could walk on the water as far as Reenie was concerned” (92) makes a straightforward connection to the Christ-figure. Liliana has been a schoolteacher and “accepted a position at a one-room school, farther west and north, in what was then the back country” (71) before she is married. Shocked by “the poverty, the ignorance, the lice” there (71), Liliana feels that “she was accomplishing something—doing something—for at least a few of those unfortunate children, or she hoped she was” (71). Her profession as a schoolteacher

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\(^1\) The sentence is narrated by Iris, so “mother” here means Liliana.
and her tendency toward self-devotedness make her image closer to that of Christ, who is the instructor God sends for human beings as well as the devotee that can redeem the earthly sin. In the hard time during the war, Liliana’s Christ-like personality becomes even more obvious, whether in her marriage or on the public service. Iris writes: “At Avilion, my mother set her will in motion. She believed in public service; she felt she had to do roll up her sleeves and do something useful for the war effort” (75).

Laura has this kind of devoting tendency, too; and from the beginning of her life, Laura’s Christ-characteristics are even more dramatic those of her mother. Since Laura was a baby, her image was described beyond human beings:

She had unaccountable crises—a dead crow would start her weeping, a cat smashed by a car, a dark cloud in a clear sky. On the other hand, she had an uncanny resistance to physical pain: if she burnt her mouth or cut herself, as a rule she didn’t cry. It was ill will, the ill will of the universe, that distressed her. (88-89)

These characteristics straightforwardly make a hint that she has the potential to transcend from corporeal world to the spiritual one as well as the compassion for the whole universe, just like Christ does. Alex Thomas describes Laura as a girl, who is “a saint in training” (217). In fact, Laura is not only a saint in training, but also in practice: she has tried to sacrifice herself twice in order to save other people—the first time is her trying to drown herself after her mother’s funeral for she believes that her death can be a substitution for her mother’s (155); the other is her self-sacrifice sexually to Richard Griffen, her brother-in-law, in order to keep Alex Thomas in safe
By examining their characteristics of silence and sacrifice, we will find that most of these points are identical—the points of their silence often correspond with those of their sacrifice. Silence is the term that describes the phenomenon of passiveness such as being robbed of voice and being dominated; however, if we view the phenomenon of silencedness with the conception of sacrifice in mind, we will see that silence is not only the outcome of being dominated but also the extension of the sacrificial behaviors. Silence is the sacrifice of voice, the abnegation of personal opinions. As what we have mentioned in Chapter Two, the archetype of Martyr embraces the conception of sacrifice, “believing it will bring redemption” (Pearson 98). Silence, as well as sacrifice, becomes a sacred mean for Liliana and Laura to express themselves.

In the sections describing Liliana, the phase “saying nothing” is often repeated. The first instance of her silence in the novel appears at the moment when her future-husband asks her to marry him. Iris portrays her mother’s silence pretty well—“What did my mother do at this crucial moment? She studied the ice. She did not reply at once. This meant yes” (72). And later, her performance of silence is more and more involved with the conception of sacrifice and suffering. She silently forgives her husband, Norval, for his relationship with other women during the war and after his returning from war. “She did understand, or at least she understood that she was supposed to understand. She understood, and said nothing about it, and prayed for the power to forgive, and did forgive” (80). She understands that her husband’s need to clutch every lifeful thing within his reach after he has been seriously damaged by the
war both physically and psychologically. Later, she silently submits to his “excessive sexual demands.” (Stein 139) The housekeeper, Reenie, says about Liliana’s reaction to her husband’s demands: “Of course she’d never say a word, but she’s not a well woman” (91). In the relationship with her husband, Liliana’s silence affirms her position as a giver and forgiver as well as her attitude as a Martyr. Certainly, Liliana does not always affirm her martyrdom through silence, for example, when she devotes herself in the public service, but her way of using silence to maintain a peaceful life reminds us of what Pearson says about the transformative sacrifice Martyrs can do for others: “No matter how much suffering they experience, they do not pass it on to others. They absorb it and declare: Suffering stops here” (103).

Laura is another Martyr in the novel; however, Laura’s sacrifice is different from that of her mother, Liliana. “Sacrifice is an ideal that many talk about but that Laura takes quite literally” (Stein 146). The word “literally” does not mean that Laura cannot sacrifice in reality; in the contrast, she does sacrifice herself for sure. “Literally” means that Laura is trapped in the ideal of sacrifice regardless of realistic concern. This tendency is, in Jung’s term, the symptom of inflation.

In Chapter Two it has been mentioned that over-identification with an archetype will take people away from healthy life by self-limitedness in a certain form. Woodman in another book The Pregnant Virgin: A Process of Psychological Transformation explains the psychic operation of the inflated ego that “The inflated ego tends to idolatry. It focuses on a single image, fashions it and worships it” (27). What Laura worships is the images of Martyr and she tries to make herself a Christ-figure. In these two remarkable events, it is clear to see that Laura has
identified herself as a Martyr: in the case of her trying to drown herself in order to bring her mother back from death, she does act as a Christ-figure, an agency between God and human beings, a bargainer who can make an exchange of life between hers and her mother's; in the other case of her agreement to have sexual relationship with Mr. Richard Griffen in order to keep Alex Thomas from danger, Laura's playing the role of Christ remains the same. Just as Woodman has mentioned that “the raped woman has in some sense replaced the crucified Christ as the most powerful and meaningful of icons” (Addiction to Perfection 132), Laura’s being raped has a strong connection to Christ’s crucifixion. Besides, the relationship between Laura and the person she sacrifices for, Alex Thomas, is noteworthy. Although Iris has been mistaken for a while that Laura is in love with Alex Thomas, she finally realizes from Laura’s notebooks that he is “for Laura, in another dimension of space” (517), that is, he has no significance in Laura’s personal relationship. In fact, Alex Thomas has made clear much earlier that Laura’s interaction with him is out of her ethical principles not of personal relationship. The event happens before Iris’s marriage: when Alex Thomas is forced to flee for everyone suspect he has burned the Chase factory, Laura helps him to get hidden. As Iris asks the reason Laura hides him for, he answers: “Matter of principle. Once I asked, she had to accept. I fall into the right category for her. […] ‘The least of these,’ […] To quote Jesus” (217). According to these, Laura's willing to sacrifice herself for Alex's safety is, again, reminding us of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who sacrifices himself for his people rather than for his personal relationship.

Accompanied with the over-identification with the archetype of Martyr, Laura
does reveal some symptoms of inflation. One of them is the tendency of being extreme. “Laura believed words meant what they said” (89) and she carries this kind of tendency to the extreme that even the words of command will bring harm to her body. “Laura had a way of believing such things, not in the double way everyone else believed them, but with a tranquil singlemindedness” (100). Absoluteness is the way of keeping in the state of perfection that Laura has believed in. Laura has “the same tendency toward absolutism, the same refusal to compromise, the same scorn for the grosser human failings” (297) and believes that the only way of remaining “beautiful” (297) is to getting away from the frailty of human beings, the uncertainty toward belief. The words “tranquil singlemindedness” and “absolutism” show a contrast to the healthy psyche that Woodman has observed: “the stronger the ego is, the more flexible is becomes” (Addiction to Perfection 49). Laura’s ego loses its flexibility, and her insistence of “there is no middle way” lets her drive off the bridge after Iris points out that her sacrifice does not save anyone. Woodman has warned the danger of being inflated that “Addiction to perfection is at root a suicidal addiction. The addict is simulating not life but death. Almost inevitably a woman addicted to perfection will view herself as a work of art, and her real terror is that the work of art, being so absolutely precious, may in one instant be destroyed” (52) and the tragedy of Laura does happen at one crucial instant.

Comparing Liliana and Laura, it can be seen that their connections with the archetype of Martyr are different. Although Iris holds a negative attitude toward the behaviors of sacrifice, she still tells the difference between Liliana’s sacrifice and Laura’s inflated one. Iris writes:
What virtue was once attached to this notion—of going beyond your strength, of not sparing yourself, of ruining your health! Nobody is born with that kind of selflessness: it can be acquired only by the most relentless discipline, a crushing-out of natural inclination, and by my time the knack or secret of it must have been lost. Or perhaps I didn’t try, having suffered from the effects it had on my mother.

As for Laura, she was not selfless, not at all. Instead she was skinless, which is a different thing. (76)

Iris’s cynical attitude toward sacrifice echoes with the voice of the women’s movement that “has not been very respectful in its rhetoric towards sacrifice” (Pearson 100), for that sacrificial ideal has been used to keep women in a limited role. However, she does recognize that what Laura really does is far from being selflessness. The word “skinless” points out Laura’s incapability to confront with the truth in reality and her essence of being a piece of mythology instead of living a life. Being just like the sacrificial maiden in the science-fiction allegory, who is kept in the outworn ritual no one believes in except herself, Laura remains the only one who lives in the ritual and refuses to accept that the sacrifice is no longer needed. Ultimately, she loses contact with reality of the people she is sacrificed for.

(II) Iris and Norval

The other protagonist of the science-fiction allegory, the blind assassin, has been analyzed in Chapter Three and as a connection with the archetype of the Warrior. In this section, the figure of the blind assassin and the characters whom the figure
refers to will be closely examined. In addition to Iris, whom Atwood herself specifically points out as a blind assassin in the realistic narrative, Norval, Iris’s father, will be put in the same category under discussion. Norval will be related to the figure of blind assassin not only for the fact that he was a warrior in the war and he is blind physically with one eye but also for his personality that leads him to a tragic life with the similar pattern of the blind assassin.

According to what has been mentioned in Chapter Three, the blind assassin is a figure that includes positive and negative energy of the Warrior together; and Iris and Norval, like their symbolic figure in the allegory, possess both positive and negative aspects.

Unlike Liliana and Laura, Iris and Norval are very conscious about their rights as human beings instead of their duties to God or any higher agency. Because of the war, Norval comes to realize that there is no more treasurable thing than the life itself. He affirms the value of life and doubts about everything that puts the life of human beings in the secondary place, including religion and nationalism. Iris narrates:

my father was now an atheist. Over the trenches God had burst like a balloon, and there was nothing left of him but grubby little scraps of hypocrisy. Religion was just a stick to beat the soldiers with, and anyone who declared otherwise was full of pious drivel. What had been served by the gallantry of Percy and Eddie—by their bravery, their hideous deaths? What accomplished? They’d been killed by the blunderings of a pack of incompetent and criminal old men who might just as well have cut their throats and heaved them over the side of the SS Caledonian. All
the talk of fighting for God and Civilization made him vomit. (80-1)

Awakening from the illusion of being a warrior “fighting for God and Civilization”, he becomes a warrior who fights only for himself, defending his own rights, benefits and the pleasure of life. Iris depicts how desperate her father has tried to grasp the things he supposes to have in life after his two brothers have been killed and he himself been seriously wounded in war: “he’d clutched at life, at whatever handfuls of it might come within his reach” (80).

Norval’s realization that the cruel war is good for nothing shows his resistance to the dominant ideology, and along with this realization comes the humanistic view toward life and rights of human beings. It is the positive aspect of the Warrior—it is an enlightenment-like awakening, and through it, we know what we deserve, being conscious of fairness and justice and daring to fight for our rights. In examining this point, Iris, like her father, is another character who is conscious of being fairly treated or not in the novel. Her tendency toward justice shows well at the scene before her mother’s death. She recalls of her feeling:

My mother took hold of my hand; […].

“Be a good girl,” she said. “I hope you’ll be a good sister to Laura. I know you try to be.”

I nodded. I didn’t know what to say. I felt I was the victim of an injustice: why was it always me who was supposed to be a good sister to Laura, instead of the other way around? […].

[…]

I wanted to say that she was mistaken in me, in my intentions. I didn’t
always try to be a good sister: quite the reverse. […]

But I had no words to express this, my disagreement with my mother’s version of things. I didn’t know I was about to be left with her idea of me; with her idea of my goodness pinned onto me like a badge, and no chance to throw it back at her […]. (96-7)

Iris’s reaction that “I felt I was the victim of an injustice” forms a shape contrast to Laura’s eagerness of self-sacrifice. On the one hand, Iris is a more selfish person by this juxtaposition; on the other hand, Iris has more self-awareness that she is a human being and is careful not to go beyond the limitation of humanity.

Just as what has been mentioned along with Liliana’s selflessness in the previous section, Iris does not agree to be a selfless person. Iris criticizes that selflessness is not “natural” for humanity at all—“Nobody is born with that kind of selflessness” (76). Furthermore, Iris affirms this idea even more seriously as she is exploited as a sexual plaything in her long-suffering marriage. Following the pattern of Norval, who awakens to his position as a human being in the war, Iris has her self-awareness sharpened when she learns the terrible fact that her “job” in the marriage is “to open my legs and shut my mouth” (342). Because of this awareness, many critics such as Sharon R. Wilson and Karen F. Stein have viewed Iris as a feminist warrior who resists the tradition that restricts women in the position of self-sacrifice. According to the above passage, it is obvious that Iris disagrees with the traditional judgment about “goodness” and her duty of “being good”, and reveals her potential and ambition to subvert it. Indeed, although Iris cannot resist the traditional pressure at the beginning, she does succeed in resisting it later in her life, claiming her
existence and identity by writing memoir, doing her business and having her revenge.

The positive energy of Warrior shows obviously on the personalities of Norval and Iris, however, the negative energy of Warrior shows on them even more seriously. As for Norval, although the war forces him to realize the inviolable rights of human beings, the war traumatizes him at the same time. He is turned by war into “a shattered wreck, as witness the shouts in the dark, the nightmares, the sudden fits of rage, the bowl or glass thrown against the wall and floor” (80). The image of Norval coincides with that of Medusa, whom has been driven mad by the irrecoverable damage done on her and been overwhelmed by agony and anger. In fact, Iris uses the same word “monster” in her memoir to describe her father: “I could feel him, a shambling monster with one eye, so sad. I’d become used to the sounds, I didn’t think he would ever hurt me, but I treated him gingerly all the same” (81). The negative emotion derived from the trauma of the war takes away his ability to have any close relationship with people, including his wife and daughters. Even though he never brings any material harm to his family, for “he was still a gentleman in his own view” (81), his negative emotion already results in an aggressive atmosphere that alienates his family from him and ruins the harmony in the family.

Compared with her father, Iris is less aggressive in attitude; however, her cynical tone toward life and people reveals her distrust in any intimate relationship, or it may be said, in humanity. As Iris hardly trusts anyone, she is rarely trusted; and her tragedy of life results from a series of distrust: the housekeeper, Reenie, who has brought her up, cannot trust her at the point of preventing Laura’s tragedy (458); Aimee, her daughter, distrusts not only her mother’s love but also her mother’s
identity—she does not believe that she herself is Iris’s daughter but considers herself to be Laura’s daughter instead (447); Laura keeps the terrible things that happened to her from Iris, including Richard’s sexual harassment, partly because Laura has treated her misfortunes as sacrifice and partly because she does not think Iris will believe her (502). Iris preserves her trust for defending others, but at the same time, she has alienated herself. In many passages of Iris’s memoir, the repeated nightmares reveal her anxiety of being desolate and her suffering from being alone (339).

As Verena Andermatt Conley introduces Helene Cixous’s interpretation of the image of Medusa in Helene Cixous, the figure of Medusa is associated with the power of transgression. Cixous views this petrifying and snakelike-haired monster as a woman who can undo “the law of meaning through laughter” and give “herself to be seen in her beauty and splendour” (Conley 34). Analyzing Iris with the figure of Medusa in mind, we find Iris a Medusa-figure of both traditional and subversive viewpoints. Iris shares the destiny of the traditional Medusa, who is alienated and traumatized and incapable of escaping from the instinct of hurting others; paradoxically, she is also Cixous’s Medusa filled with the subversive power at the same time. Iris’s wit and ability to survive the difficult time in her life show her ability to manipulate the rules of reality that are dominated by male power. Furthermore, her intention of liberating women from the patriarchal restriction is obvious—as Iris publishes the novel under Laura’s name in order to give Laura a voice and writes the memoir for her granddaughter to encourage her to get rid of the burden of her family as well as the patriarchal society. Iris gets the “last laugh” with her writings. From this perspective, Iris does become a Medusa who can subvert “the
negative image imposed by men” (Conley 34) and re-find a meaning of her being herself.

(III) When a blind assassin meets a sacrificial maiden

In Chapter Three, I have made a connection between the two protagonists of the allegory and the mythical figures such as Philomela, Procne, Christ and Judas. As we examine the interaction between the blind assassin and the sacrificial maiden in the allegory as well as that between the members of the Chase family according to that between these mythical figures, we will find that the interaction between these pairs resemble one another.

Being identified as an aggressive Warrior, the figure of the blind assassin has been related to another mythical figure, Procne. As we study Iris’s tragedy with the mythical story of Procne in mind, we find Iris is a modern Procne. Like Procne, Iris is eager to take revenge on her husband after she learns about his rape of her sister, Laura. Iris becomes a skillful assassin: She publishes the novel under Laura’s name, and from the context it is hinted that Richard is shocked to death by the love-affair details in the novel (528). However, Iris also follows Procne’s tragic pattern of repressing her femininity, which is centered by relationships and emotional feelings. Both of them lose an important relationship in order to recapture the justice—Procne is so eager to take revenge that she kills her own son as well as the important part of femininity, motherhood, while Iris loses her connection with her daughter, Aimee, for the sake of revenge. Iris loses Aimee’s trust toward her (even to the extent that Aimee does not believe that Iris is her biological mother) for her insistence to break away
from the Griffen family. Iris depicts Aimee’s suffering in the dysfunctional family:

“Laura went over the bridge when Aimee was eight, Richard died when she was ten. These events can’t help but have affected her. Then, between Winifred and myself, she was pulled to pieces” (445-6). Resembling Procne, who kills her son in order to take revenge, Iris indirectly causes her daughter’s misfortunes with her intention of revenge on her husband. Recalling the scene of Aimee’s death, Iris writes: “I mourned her, of course. She was my daughter. But I have to admit I mourned the self she’d been at a much earlier age. I mourned what she could have become; […] More than anything, I mourned my own failures” (449). Iris is a blind assassin, so is Procne, for both of them fail to see how much it will cost by their intentions of revenge.

As we turn to treat Laura and Liliana as Christ-figures, we find Iris and Norval Judas-figures. Both of Iris and Norval resemble Judas’s pragmatism, resentfulness, and unfaithfulness to God. Moreover, both of them connect themselves with the image of Judas through the characteristic Judas is always attached to—the betrayal to Christ.

It is obvious that Iris and Norval lack the faith toward God. For Norval, “God had burst like a balloon” (80), and for Iris, God is nothing but an indifferent observer when she is in a desperate situation—“It was God, looking down with his blank, ironic searchlight of an eye. He was observing me; he was observing my predicament; he was observing my failure to believe in him” (233). Unlike Liliana and Laura, Iris and Norval tend to solve problems according to the rule of reality, not to the faith toward God. And when the benefit of reality and the command of God are contradictory to each other, they will grasp the material world without hesitation.
Iris holds a more realistic view toward her life, or it might be said, a more egotistical view when she is compared to selfless Laura. Take an event in her memoir for example: as she recalls the scene of her mother’s sickness, she writes: “I could see how ill she was, and I resented her for it. I felt she was in some way betraying me—that she was shirking her duties, that she'd abdicated”(96). What comes to Iris's mind when her mother suffers is the trouble that might come to her. With the sharp comparison with Laura, a Christ-figure who is ready to drown herself in order to save her mother, Iris reacts just like the hideous Judas, who is concerned about himself even in the face of others’ suffering.

Nevertheless, what makes Norval and Iris Judas-figures is their “betrayal” of Christ-figures. Norval’s case of betrayal is a simpler one: he has sexual relationship with other women after the war (82) even though he knows his wife, Liliana, is devoted so much to him. On the other hand, Iris’s situation of betrayal is a more complicated one—there are two specific events, in which Iris behaves with the intention of betrayal: one is that Iris pushes Laura to the ground at the day after their mother's funeral (101); another happens when Iris breaks the news of Alex's death to Laura. Iris’s intention of betrayal of Laura is obvious in each context. In the former event of betrayal, Laura feels comfortable with herself at their mother’s funeral, for she believes firmly that their mother is by the side of God now. Iris, on the contrary, is not satisfied with the explanation of clergymen about God, and suffers a lot from her mother's death. Therefore, Iris pushes Laura down with the intention that she wants Laura to suffer, and she admits later: “I have to admit I was gratified by this. I'd wanted her to suffer too—as much as me." (100-1). The latter event happens when
Laura believes that her sexual sacrifice to Richard will save Alex Thomas from danger and comes to Toronto to await his return. In face of Laura’s hope, Iris breaks the news of Alex Thomas’s death and the fact that they were lovers for a long time, and after these revelations, Laura drives the car off the bridge. The event can be related to betrayal because Iris is not only conscious about what she is going to do with Laura but also conscious about the consequence of doing so. “My fingers itched with spite. I knew what happened next. I'd pushed her off” (503)—Iris knows that what she is going to do is out of bad intention, with “spite”, and she knows the result: “the shock will kill them” (503). Thus, Iris's breaking the truth to Laura is not an accident but an intentional plot with a foresight that it will kill her sister.

From the traditional viewpoint, what Judas's betrayal represents is not only a mean and despicable behavior but also a sin derived from the frailty of human beings. As Christ's blood is meant to clean the sin of human beings, Judas's betrayal is exactly what Christ sacrifices himself for. However, as we view these two figures—Christ and Judas—as archetypal figures of the Martyr and the Warrior, the interaction between them will be no longer as simple as betrayal. It results from the conflict between these archetypes’ negative energy.

It is negative energy because all of these characters, more or less, suffer from the state of inflation—while Laura and Liliana over-identify themselves with the Martyr, an archetype that contains the feminine energy, Iris and Norval overly take the masculine energy of the Warrior. All of them fall in an unhealthful state of psychic imbalance, which Woodman specifically points out in Addiction to Perfection: “When in the man the feminine is repressed, it becomes destructive; equally, when in a
woman the masculine is repressed, it will inevitably take over” (132). A healthy
psychic state is a balanced state of masculinity and femininity; however, none of the
members of Chase family could achieve the balance.

Although all of these characters have the tendency of inflated ego, their extents
of inflation are different. From the memoir, we will find that Iris knows clearly that
who would suffer more in the state of inflation. As she compares four family members,
including herself, she writes:

To all appearances I was my father’s child. I looked more like him;
I’d inherited his scowl, his dogged skepticism. […] Laura on the other
hand was my mother’s child. She had the piousness, in some ways; she
had the high, pure forehead.

But appearances are deceptive. I could never have driven off a bridge.

My father could have. My mother couldn’t. (83)

Her categorization in the former paragraph coincides with that in this chapter; and the
other one in the latter paragraph explains two different extents her family suffer from
inflation: Laura and their father, Norval, suffer much more seriously, even to the
extent of committing suicide, than the other two, Iris herself and their mother, Liliana,
who have comparatively more balanced psyche.

As we turn to examine the interaction between Iris and Laura with the
conception of inflation in mind, we find that Iris, a Warrior, has her energy
contradicted with that of Laura, a Martyr. These two events of Iris’s betrayal of Laura
reveal the central gap between their views of their identities—Laura is a believer
while Iris is not. As a person who believes nothing but herself, Iris encounters more
problems with her identity than Laura does. In the memoir, Iris’s pondering about her problems of identity continues and she wonders her problems: “Gazing out the window. Hesitating. Thinking, How lost to myself I have become” (307), while Laura has the “scorn for the grosser human failings” (297). Therefore, in the case of Iris’s pushing Laura to the ground, Iris’s betrayal as a Judas-figure to Laura, reflects Iris’s intention that she wants Laura, a Christ-figure, to experience the suffering in the same place of hers, a position of not being a Martyr, a position without the faith toward God. Iris’s admission explains her intention well—“I have to admit I was gratified by this. I'd wanted her to suffer too—as much as me” (100-1). From the perspective of Judas, though Christ intends to sacrifice and suffer for the sin of human beings, he is still in the different position from human beings—he belongs to another sphere beyond human, that is, even though Christ is suffering, he knows that he will resurrect eventually and return to the side of God. The suffering of Judas, who belongs to the mortal world, however, is without the affirmation of ending. Thus, Judas's betrayal is the intention to draw Jesus Christ down from the state of semi-God, the higher place of perfection, from which he gives the sympathy toward human's suffering, to the same level of human beings to go through human dilemma.

Another betrayal Iris does to Laura occurs when Iris reveals the fact that Alex is dead and that she and Alex were lovers for a long time. Iris says to Laura: “whatever it was you did, it didn't save Alex” (503). What she actually wants to tell Laura, a Christ-figure, is that your sacrifice does not save anyone. From the perspective of Judas, Christ's sacrifice is his own process of canonization, not a replacement of human's suffering. Iris's cynical attitude toward Laura is actually a Warrior’s criticism
toward a Martyr, criticizing that the act of sacrifice is not what people need but only to satisfy the inflated ego. The sacrifice becomes the fantasy that belongs only to the Martyr and has nothing concerned with the other people. However, the price of sacrifice is not only the Martyr’s life but also the sense of guilt of the people who are claimed to be sinful. This sense of guilt makes people worship the sacrificed people, so the sacrificed are always able to touch people—the story of Jesus Christ is much more touching than the story of Judas, just as the image of Laura is much more touching than that of Iris. Iris is quite conscious about that, saying that “Laura touches people, I do not” (197).

The paragraph where Iris describes her granddaughter, Sabrina, who takes after Laura in Iris’s imagination, reveals Iris’s critical view of Laura’s idealistic sacrifice. Iris depicts her:

She’s on some mission or other—feeding the Third World poor, soothing the dying; expiating the sins of the rest of us. A fruitless task—our sins are a bottomless pit, and there’s lots more where they came from. But that’s God’s point, she’d doubtless argue—the fruitlessness. He’s always liked futility. He thinks it’s noble. (297)

By relating expiation to the words “fruitlessness” and “futility”, Laura shows her tendency of treating expiation as only an ideal without a connection to reality, just as her embrace of sacrifice.

However, do the Judas-figures love the Christ-figures? Does the betrayer love the betrayed? Paradoxically, the answer is suggested to be “Yes.” After Jesus Christ is condemned, Judas hangs himself, knowing that he will be condemned and sinful for
ever without any possibility of resurrection and will carry the name of betrayer of Christ until the end of the world—but he is willing to accept this kind of punishment.

Before committing suicide, Judas throws down the thirty pieces of silver in the sanctuary, and says: “I have sinned in that I betrayed innocent blood” (King James Bible 27:4). At the last moment of Judas' life, what he is concerned with is not the issue of God, but his personal relationship with Christ. The reason for his repentance is not because of Jesus Christ's being, Son of God, but because of Christ's personal characteristic—“innocent blood”. Iris has this kind of tendency, too. Iris's writing the memoir is not to justify herself but to recall her personal experience with Laura; and Iris publishes the novel under the name of Laura not only to take revenge on Richard Griffen but also to build up a close connection between her and Laura—Iris’s intention can be shown through the observation that the rest of the time after Laura’s death is almost neglected in her memoir. Therefore, the name of Laura will be with her throughout her lifetime and ever after just like Judas's story of his whole life is always under the name of Jesus Christ.

Both of the betrayers do not try to find any excuse for themselves; they are willing to punish themselves whether they are dead or alive and willing to link their names with the one they betray—both of these behaviors show their concern and love toward the betrayed.

Even though they love, their love has the limitation—both of them refuse to love under the condition that the persons they love are viewed as divine beings. Judas chooses the everlasting punishment not because of his fear of God’s power but because of his emotional burden with Christ; Iris chooses to mourn for Laura for the
rest of her life after her action of awakening Laura from her fantasy of saving people. With the self-affirmative energy of Warrior, both of them seem to resist the love or the salvation of an orthodox power and to insist on loving people in an equal position. So they draw the persons they love to the positions that are equal to them, claiming that they do not love until the loved are not deities. However, this insistence would be very fatal to a person such as Laura, who over-identifies herself with a Martyr and treats herself as a perfect piece of work.

The love story between the blind assassin and the sacrificial maiden is never completed in the novel published under Laura’s name. As the lovers discuss the ending of the story, the woman (known as Iris later) asks for a happy ending but the man (known as Alex Thomas) rejects it. By lack of an ending, it seems to symbolize that the love between the blind assassin and the sacrificial maiden can never have a happy ending because of their troubled personalities. Indeed, the blind assassins and the sacrificial maidens in reality, Norval and Liliana, Iris and Laura, build tragic and co-dependent relationships between them, involving love and care as well as harm and conflicts.