A survey of the reception of Margaret Atwood’s poetry clearly demonstrates that since the beginning of her literary career she has been commended for the originality of her metaphors. The strikingly innovative metaphorical usage in her early novels has also provided the basis for much speculative comment, particularly about her choice of a central metaphor as a technical device around which to structure *The Edible Woman* (1969) and about the clusters of metaphors emphasizing the themes of *Surfacing* (1972), *Lady Oracle* (1976) and *Bodily Harm* (1981). Furthermore, recent critical discussions of her later novels have underscored how Atwood displays a pervasive tendency to frame her basic insights in metaphorical terms. The majority of her short stories, however, have received little scholarly scrutiny in this respect, even though they contain excellent examples of her subversive use of metaphorical conceptualization. 1

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1 I am using the terms “metaphorical conceptualization” and “metaphorical expression” to refer to simile, nonliteral analogy, extended comparison, and metaphor in the narrowest sense. I am taking a middle position between those who minimize and those who maximize formal differences, because I think such rhetorical distinctions are relatively unimportant. When one adopts a cognitive linguistic approach in order to focus on the essential meaning conveyed by these four tropes, they are conceived as figures of thought rather than simply figures of speech. In other words, I am bearing in mind the growing recognition that metaphor is much more than just a rhetorical device to embellish or enliven writing, and I am aware of how metaphor has moved from the ornamental fringes of discourse to a central position in the understanding of thought. See George Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal About the Mind*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987; George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980; and George Lakoff and Mark Turner, *More Than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989. See also *Metaphor and..."

In her introduction to *The Oxford Book of Canadian Short Stories*, Atwood noted that several of the writers featured in the volume, including George Bowering and Matt Cohen, had “experimented with techniques that draw attention to the artificiality of art”.³ Although she did not add her name to the list, we can safely suppose that when she made this remark about their work, she also had in mind and was implicitly alluding to her own postmodernist methods of storytelling. Indeed, one of the most outstanding features of her short fiction is the use of easily noticeable procedures to expose the fictional illusion and underscore the overtly metafictional nature of her self-reflexive texts. Some of her devices, specifically designed to enhance the reader’s awareness of literariness and to stimulate closer inspection of her short stories as artifacts, are related to the metaphorical strategies she deploys, not only by fashioning highly ingenious metaphors and similes but also by discussing figurative language in her fictional writings.

Atwood incorporates critical commentary on metaphor in the structure of many of her short stories, thus openly inviting her readers both to ponder on the trope from a theoretical perspective and to

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² Margaret Atwood is probably the most frequently taught Canadian short fiction writer, and her short stories are included in anthologies worldwide. Scholars were at first much less drawn to her short stories than to her novels and poems, with the notable exception of Michelle Gadpaille’s chapter “Margaret Atwood”, in *The Canadian Short Story*, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988, 82-98. In her introduction to this book, Gadpaille hailed Atwood as one of “Canada’s contemporary masters of the short story”, together with Mavis Gallant and Alice Munro (viii). After a relatively long period of scholarly neglect, Atwood’s short fiction has been subjected to a great deal of rhetorical and hermeneutical analysis by academic literary critics.