**Chapter 12 Close Read**

Cora has run the bath. It steams like a bowl of soup. I take off the rest of the clothes, the

overdress, the white shift and petticoat, the red stockings, the loose cotton pantaloons. Pantyhose

gives you crotch rot, Moira used to say. Aunt Lydia would never have used an expression like crotch

rot. Unhygienic was hers. She wanted everything to be very hygienic.

My nakedness is strange to me already. My body seems outdated. Did I really wear bathing suits,

at the beach? I did, without thought, among men, without caring that my legs, my arms, my thighs and

back were on display, could be seen. Shameful, immodest. I avoid looking down at my body, not so

much because it's shameful or immodest but because I don't want to see it. I don't want to look at

something that determines me so completely.

I step into the water, lie down, let it hold me. The water is soft as hands. I close my eyes, and

she's there with me, suddenly, without warning, it must be the smell of the soap. I put my face against

the soft hair at the back of her neck and breathe her in, baby powder and child's washed flesh and

shampoo, with an undertone, the faint scent of urine. This is the age she is when I'm in the bath. She

comes back to me at different ages. This is how I know she's not really a ghost. If she were a ghost

she would be the same age always.

One day, when she was eleven months old, just before she began to walk, a woman stole her out

of a supermarket cart. It was a Saturday, which was when Luke and I did the week's shopping,

because both of us had jobs. She was sitting in the little baby seats they had then, in supermarket

carts, with holes for the legs. She was happy enough, and I'd turned my back, Luke was over at the side of

the store, out of sight, at the meat counter. He liked to choose what kind of meat we were going to eat

during the week. He said men needed more meat than women did, and that it wasn't a superstition and

he wasn't being a jerk, studies had been done. There are some differences, he said. He was fond of saying

that, as if I was trying to prove there weren't. But mostly he said it when my mother was there. He liked to

tease her.

I heard her start to cry. I turned around and she was disappearing down the aisle, in the arms of

a woman I'd never seen before. I screamed, and the woman was stopped. She must have been about

thirty-five. She was crying and saying it was her baby, the Lord had given it to her, he'd sent her a

sign. I felt sorry for her. The store manager apologized and they held her until the police came.

She's just crazy, Luke said.

I thought it was an isolated incident, at the time.

She fades, I can't keep her here with me, she's gone now. Maybe I do think of her as a ghost, the

ghost of a dead girl, a little girl who died when she was five. I remember the pictures of us I once

had, me holding her, standard poses, mother and baby, locked in a frame, for safety. Behind my

closed eyes I can see myself as I am now, sitting beside an open drawer, or a trunk, in the cellar,

where the baby clothes are folded away, a lock of hair, cut when she was two, in an envelope,

whiteblond.

**Prompt: How does Margaret Atwood utilize point of view to convey the significance of this experience on the narrator?**