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**Female Identity Construction in
Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye***

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of the requirements for a **Master degree in English Language,
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Candidate:

Miss. Sara FTICI

Supervisor:

Ms Abida BENKHODJA

Panel of Examiners:

- **Chair:** Ms Houria HALIL
- **Supervisor:** Ms Abida BENKHODJA
- **Examiner 1:** Ms Sabrina SLIMI
- **Examiner 2:** Ms Sihem SAIBI

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Abstract

This research paper examines Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye* through the lens of feminist theory. It traces the issue of identity quest and explores movingly the painful psychic effects of adolescent cruelty and bullying, switching between the narrative and the protagonist's childhood. This research not only focuses on the evolution of the fragmented identity of the female protagonist, taking into account the different influences that shaped the formation of her selfhood, but also dramatizes the limitations and unreliability of human memory and the effects of time upon the human subject. Throughout this dissertation, I have attempted to highlight the importance of past memories and the need to deal with them in order to cope with present reality.

Dedication

To my mother, sisters and brothers and Malek.

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	i
Dedication.....	ii
Acknowledgments.....	iii
Table of contents.....	iv
General introduction.....	1
Chapter I: Cat's Eye: Text and Context	
Introduction.....	10
1- Background and Context	
1-1 Historical influences.....	10
1-2 Canadian identity.....	19
1-3 Feminism in Canada.....	20
1-4 Canadian literature.....	21
2- Textual Analysis of <i>Cat's Eye</i>	
2-1 Atwood's biography.....	24
2-2 <i>Cat's Eye</i> : Plot Overview.....	26
Conclusion.....	32

Chapter II: Future As Mirrored by the Past

Introduction..... 33

1- Pioneering Second Wave Feminism..... 33

2- Elaine’s quest for identity..... 39

3- Elaine’s development of Social Interaction and the process of growing up

3-1 Elaine’s relationship with women..... 42

3-2 Elaine’s Relationship with Men..... 52

4- Visual Representation of Women..... 54

5- Childhood Trauma..... 58

6- The Role of the Figure of Virgin Mary in the Life and Art of Elaine Risley..... 60

7- The Significance of Cat’s Eye..... 66

Conclusion.....68

General conclusion..... 69

Bibliography..... 73

General Introduction

A quest for women's identity has been a key idea of contemporary feminist thought. Traditionally, women had no value compared to men; they were seen as merely objects or commodities and could not achieve full independence in a dominating patriarchal society. An eminent issue stems from that view, that of women's role in traditional society and the way they perceived themselves.

With the exception of a handful of books, efficient treatments of the universal issue of the oppression of women, both historically and in modern times, were marginalized due to the fact that woman is perceived by her environment as a static object; that in the absence of a male character she cannot act as an independent entity or as a dynamic participant who is involved in society's current issues.

One of the most famous and controversial advocates of the rights of women, Simone de Beauvoir, exposes in her 1949 disputable book *The Second Sex* the image of woman as the Other and the dehumanization and subordination of woman in accordance to man. The French philosopher, novelist and feminist evokes the delicate, quarrelsome and tabooed topic of female gender roles.

The Second Sex prompts the idea that woman's oppression, alienation and subordination to men originates from her consentment of being man's "Other". Beauvoir figures out that though many women are doomed to live in a patriarchal social system, in a part, they must feel culpable for their own subjugation as this subjugation creates a sort of relief that results from a decreased burden and responsibility. She reaches the conclusion that in order to be

recognized as an independent, influential character, a woman must stand firm towards the emancipation and reclamation of her selfhood and relinquish her imposed traditional status.

It is this particular issue that Margaret Atwood sheds light on in her novel *Cat's Eye*. The heroine of the novel Elaine Risley, is bound by the stereotyped notion of her role in society, thus she realizes the deficiencies of this concept and tries to defy it. The means of her struggle to find her identity, as well as the differences and similarities in the description of women's experience in relation to the changes of the social climate are the main focus of this paper. In other words, the widely accepted vision of womanhood and the traditional views on gender identity are analyzed through the lens of Atwood's *Cat's Eye*.

As a child, Elaine, the novel's protagonist, faces difficulties to develop friendships with other girls because she cannot seem to relate to them. But once she finds a group of girls who befriend her, she has to fit in with them. Consequently, Elaine finds herself caught up in a trap of society's expectations of what a girl should be and act like, and her own way of expressing herself. Thus, she loses her voice along with her identity by imitating her friends and acting differently to what she is, leading a self-effacing role.

Indeed, this novel contains memory narratives where the main character looks back on her past, on her relationships and on the society of her childhood. The female character is subject to intense scrutiny and judgment, each dreadful attitude towards her being justified only by codes and norms.

My reason for undertaking this research on Margaret Atwood's novel is to be able to provide a significant analysis on the formation of female selfhood. The reason for which I have chosen *Cat's Eye* is that the novel is involved with childhood memories which intervene in the narration with the purpose of making the main character and narrator aware of the various sources which brought about their state of mental turmoil. In other words, dissecting

the protagonist's childhood memories helps her understand the source of her feelings of melancholia.

Margaret Atwood combines considerable popular acclaim with an international reputation for serious literary achievement and provocative ethical concerns. Her best novels are highly respected for their innovative combination of traditional realism with postmodern devices such as parody and pastiche, and their critical re-readings of literary traditions: the Gothic, science fiction, fairy tale, the detective novel and social history, especially women's history. She is also the dominant literary Canadian of her generation, representing her nation for a worldwide audience; her works have been translated into over thirty languages. There is no authorized biography of Atwood, and Atwood herself has made scathing remarks about those that have been published, but there is a growing body of criticism, particularly on her fiction.

Recent works include Sharon Rose Wilson's *Margaret Atwood's Fairy-Tale Sexual Politics* (1993), Judith McCombs (ed.) *Critical Essays on Margaret Atwood* (1988), Barbara Hill Rigney's *Margaret Atwood* (1987), and Lorraine M. York (ed.) *Various Atwoods: Essays on the Later Poems, Short Fiction, and Novels* (1995). In 2000, a collection of essays entitled *Margaret Atwood: Works & Impact*, edited by Reingard M. Nischik, was published to mark her sixtieth birthday.

Harold Bloom, in his collection of critical views, *Bloom's Modern Critical Views: MARGARET ATWOOD New Edition*, refers to the most recurring themes in Margaret Atwood's works. Bloom states in his introduction that his depreciation of "Feminist, Marxist, Historicist and Deconstructive" theories as well as their tenets is grounded on the propagation of these "ideologies" to literary studies. Additionally, his comment about Atwood's analytical and critical competence is universally renowned (1). In his work, Bloom

refers to many critical essays related to Atwood's novels, however, the most salient ones and the ones that trigger our interest are those that tackle different notions in *Cat's Eye*.

For instance, Alice M. Palumbo's essay entitled "*On The Border: Margaret Atwood's Novels*" promote the idea of importance of the protagonist's intertwined phases of life. She argues that *Cat's Eye*, besides the fact that it explores the notion of time, it finds balance between women's relationships impact and tormenting memories. Furthermore, she demonstrates that the author's skilful selection of events that contribute in the construction of the self, give unity to the text though sometimes paradoxical.

Alice Ridout briefly refers in her article "*Temporality and Margaret Atwood*" to Atwood's high esteem of pioneer Canadian writers. Her intent to write and become an author has not emerged at random, it goes back not only to the fact that Canadian literature had been neglected for long, but also to her being influenced by Canadian authors who laid the groundwork for the emergence of Canadian literature.

The notion of time and history rise as the mainstream idea of Barbara Hill Rigney's article "*Alias Atwood*". She clearly states that time is the only preoccupation of the novel's female protagonist while history is in its turn completely alienated.

Finally, Roberta White describes in her article "*Northern Light*" how Atwood smartly weaves together both elements of fiction and accurate events of her personal life. Thus, asserting that *Cat's Eye* is deemed to be one of the novels relating to her life. Even her portrayal of the protagonist as an art artist conveys in itself Atwood's passion for art.

In "*Margaret Atwood: Feminism and Fiction*", Fiona Tolan establishes a connection between Margaret Atwood's fiction and feminism. As she examines Atwood's first eleven novels, Tolan sketches the influences of feminism on Atwood's works. Tolan argues that what makes *Cat's Eye* a unique work is its representation of second wave feminism though the

author denies being a feminist. She also states that dealing with gender role issues is obvious throughout Atwood's protagonist since Elaine is raised in a boyish environment where being feminine had an encrypted definition.

Coral Ann Howell's work entitled "*Contemporary Canadian Women's Fiction*" examines how female Canadian writers struggle in a patriarchal society, which imposes social constructs on the status of women, to prove themselves and work on the rise of female identity. These writers, including Atwood, are condemned in reshaping history and thus evoking possibilities for social improvements and radical changes.

The quest for the self is a recurrent theme in literature, either it takes the form of an internal conflict or an external one. Working on the various kinds of literary works, the differences between Atwood's writing style and that of other writers can easily be noticed. Many works and researches have been conducted on the theme of identity quest, for instance Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* and James Joyce's *Ulysses* as well as other works clearly explore the topic of identity, but using male characters.

Thus my intent in this study is much like the previous researches but with a small divergent angle. This research deals with the analysis of the process of the development of the female character Elaine Risley in Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye* during her search for personal identity and the construction of uneasy relations with others that stems mainly from childhood trauma. Besides, the aim of this dissertation is not only related to the topic of identity using female characters, but examines the way the author deconstructs the usual coming of age to show the real impact that gender roles have on a person's self belief.

Margaret Atwood's novels involve various characters who are all in search of something; whether for answers, equilibrium, freedom, revenge, understanding, or fulfillment. Her works' plots are complex, at times very somber, but always filled with passion, vigor and

eagerness. What each of Atwood's books sheds light on is that there are no simple answers, no flawless people, and that even the sweetest memories can carry bitterness or loss. Often called a feminist writer, Atwood's female characters, generally, range from vulnerable little girls to murderesses, while at the same time they defy such easy labels. The stories range from childhood cruelty to grown up inhumanity of people towards each other; from the search of a father, to the search for answers in a post-apocalyptic wasteland.

In terms of genre, Margaret Atwood's range is remarkable. Usually, several genres and styles are fused together within one work; consequently, elements of fictive autobiography may blend with social documentary and fairytale or Gothic elements, as in *Cat's Eye*. The author's various literary devices and techniques employed in her works not only serve for literary purposes but also allude to an obvious political impulse. The latter is illustrated through her concern for socio-cultural issues including nationalism, gender and human rights issues. Margaret Atwood explores this territory through her writing in the spirit of social reportage. Atwood's involvement and interest in political issues can be perceived in *Cat's Eye* where gender and inter-gender relationships are centralized.

From the above discussion essential and complementary questions deserve to be raised: why is Elaine alienated from her society and how does alienation affect her? How could she construct her identity while being confined to her society's demands? How could both her experience as a woman and gender differences affect her relationships? Does Atwood's novel embody feminist ideals while the author denies to be a feminist? Can we relate Elaine as a character to Atwood as a person?

As Stephen Ahern argues in his article entitled "*Meat Like You Like It*": "*The Production of Identity in Atwood's Cat's Eye*", the female protagonist's "fragmented identity is the result of her immersion in a world of contradictory patriarchal discourses, a world governed by an

ideology of gender difference that on the one hand creates her as a subject, free to pursue her personal and artistic potential, and on the other constructs her as an object to be judged according to the basest measures of this kind of society” (8). For me, as the novel follows the protagonist’s evolution and growth throughout different phases of her life, it demonstrates in a jumbled narrative that her female identity construction is psychologically, socially disturbed as her mind is submerged by fragmented pieces of her childhood. In the novel, her psychological journey involves a search for the source of her melancholia through flashbacks. This memory that transports her forward and backward in time traps her in a vicious cycle that prevents her to move forward in her life. In fact, Elaine is portrayed as a victim of her society and environment which played a major role in shaping her relationships and defining who she is.

Throughout this analysis, I intend to rely on the feminist literary theory by putting a special focus on Simone De Beauvoir’s foundational text *The Second Sex*. This theory consists of describing and analyzing the representation of women’s status within literature with the depiction of fictional female characters. Beauvoir demonstrates that the oppression and injustice a woman faces everyday constrain the process of the construction of female identity, and that this restriction is encouraged by social constructs as well as human prejudice.

In this regard, the selection of this pertinent method allows a deep and sustained analysis of the main character in her journey of quest for identity through flashbacks and art retrospective. The protagonist takes a journey into her childhood and by means of it, she challenges the society and culture that laid the basis of her identity. Beauvoir’s assumption of the emergence of an unequal relationship supported by social structures and repressive attitudes that restrain the natural development of female identity can relate to Margaret Atwood’s *Cat’s Eye*. The novel’s protagonist undergoes a bitter struggle in an attempt to

fulfill her society's expectations and to act in accordance to her lifelong tormentor's commands, Cordelia, while interpreting the role of the Other.

This work will be divided into two chapters. The first chapter will be devoted to the analysis of the novel *Cat's Eye* contextually and textually, that is to say examining historical influences that shaped Canadian people and society. Additionally, a small emphasis will be put on the concept of Canadian identity and thus described as multicultural and characterized by openness and uniqueness. The history of feminism in Canada that had a tremendous impact on liberal and feminist movement is briefly outlined added to a short introduction to Canadian literature illustrating Canada's most famous authors. In the textual analysis, I will refer to the author's biography as well as the plot overview that introduces generally the main themes of the novel.

The second chapter, which is the rudiment of my research work, will deal mainly with the theme of female identity construction. First, feminist literary theory is introduced, chiefly illustrated in Simone De Beauvoir's work. The famous feminist notions taken from her book *The Second Sex*, will be used as supporting evidence to mainly analyze the novel's female protagonist in her attempt to construct her troubled identity, considering the fragmented development of her relationships with her environment. Second, the protagonist's art, more specifically the visual representation of women in her paintings are highlighted since it is through her art that she manages to express then liberate herself from her recurring flashbacks. Indeed, these recurring flashbacks establish a linear relation to her past. Actually, these traumatizing visions are linked to old childhood memories.

In this chapter, I will also allude to the theme of religion and the positive impact it plays in the life of the non-religious protagonist as her encounter with religion changed her life for

good. Finally, I will explore the significance of the novel's title: "cat's eye", providing different interpretations, that of the narrator as well as mine.

Chapter One:

Cat's Eye: Text and Context

Introduction

Literature has an intertwined relationship with society, culture and history. Its quality as well as its content, style and form involve and reflect on social facts and cultural ideals. My attempt in this first chapter is to explore the social, cultural and historical events that marked the period in which Margaret Atwood's novel *Cat's Eye* was written and to illustrate the movements by which her works were influenced.

Though published in 1988, *Cat's Eye* spreads out the time period that extends from World War II to the late 1980s. Margaret Atwood began writing her novel in 1964 but set it aside till the late 1980s, drawing her ideals from the movement of feminism that emerged in Canada and depicting the role of women in Canadian society.

In addition to highlighting the importance of Canadian identity and women's movement that had been of great influence on Atwood's perspectives, this first chapter will also deal with the textual study of the novel. The textual analysis will include the author's biography and the plot overview.

1- Background and Context

1-1 Historical Influences

Canadian people, history and society have a unique cultural identity that reflects their needs, aspirations and vision of life itself. Numerous events contributed in shaping Canada's social, cultural as well as political identity locally and internationally.

Culturally, Canada is diverse. This country is relatively new so its history is mostly contemporary. Culture manifests itself in diverse areas such as literature, art, photography, music, film and theatre. On the one hand, the country itself is regarded as spectacular scenery and a world of contrasts. On the other hand, the contribution of the native tribes to the evolution of art cannot be denied. Canadians come from many different racial and religious backgrounds. Indeed, Canada enjoys a society that is open and relatively free of class distinctions. Any kind of discrimination based on race, age, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation and mental or physical disability is totally inadmissible. Canada has a wide and diverse culture, singing and painting represent the national pride of Canadians that keep the bond between them.

Furthermore, Canada is an expression of the influence of many cultures mainly French and British cultures, American culture and most importantly its indigenous culture as well. In a country where tolerance reigns, religious freedom is highly respected, minor communities perfectly fit into their multicultural society and national festivals are celebrated in a warm atmosphere.

Canada's political culture stresses some important aspects that qualify Canada to be a full independent country that allow its people to live in a comfortable atmosphere and feel Canadians. Constitutional law, freedom of belief, and social and political freedom are the pillars upon which Canada stands. Canadian government works for the amenity of Canadian citizens and promises through the help of a good government an environment in which peace and order reign and offers citizens the liberty of expression.

The history of Canada underwent several phases that range from the first European interaction with the aboriginals, crises and wars that Canada experienced till present day. All this has eventually shaped Canadian identity and made the country into what it is today.

Canada's history dates from the presence of the aboriginal inhabitants on the Canadian territory. These first nations developed a distinct and unique system of government, culture, tradition and way of life.

As North America faced important migrations because of climate changes, epidemics and wars, the most marking event that altered life at that time was the European-Indian encounter. Consequently, to ensure aboriginals rights and calm atmosphere, treaties, acts and bills were enacted including both parts.

By the late 15th century, French and British colonization and exploration of North America began. As a result of the seven years war, France relinquished most of its colonies to Britain. Thus, the dominion of Canada was formed as result of the unity of these colonies but kept it dependent on the British Empire. The dominion of Canada however witnessed a long time dependence on the British Empire that ended through the enactment of two eminent acts. Firstly, the enactment of the statute of west minister allowed much more sovereignty but with some restrictions mainly concerning the constitution of laws which remained dependent on the parliament of the British Empire. Secondly, the enactment of the Canada act rejected any dependence on the British parliament and ensured a total autonomy of the dominion of Canada.

World War 1 and World War 2 promoted the Canadians' desire to achieve a sovereign country and enjoy a full Canadian citizenship. In the following years, acts were enacted in order to achieve full sovereignty.

The First World War, or as some called it, the Great War, was a global conflict that encompassed many areas; from Europe to the Pacific, and from Africa to the North Atlantic. Contrary to all expectations that assumed that this was an easy war and combatants will certainly win a quick victory, it appeared to be a bloody struggle for survival. This was the

first modern war with machines and technology playing a major role in the battles, the war and the result.

By 1914, a chain of successive events took place in Europe and lead consequently to World War I. At that time, Canada was rather concerned with its internal affairs where wars left brutal memories for generations than in European affairs. Moreover, the summer of 1914 witnessed a second year of drought, turning the productive wheat fields into bare lands which coincide with unprecedented amount of unemployed men that contributed in framing the two new transcontinental railways due to their unpaid debts, causing a fall in the Canadian economy.

With one event following another, Canada expected the Great Powers to intervene and bring peace as they had always done. Indeed, news of war did not cause a reaction in Canada until Germany invaded Belgium as a part of the Schlieffen Plan. The latter was adopted as a deployment plan and shaped a violent Franco-German war including Italy and Austria-Hungary as German Allies, in addition to the ultimatum imposed by Britain to Kaiser Wilhelm to withdraw from Belgium otherwise Britain would declare war on Germany.

Since most recent wars had begun with surprise attacks, Britain saw it safer to warn its colonies to be cautious and take the necessary safety measures in case of war. As a result, Canada's soldiers and few sailors as well as arms and submarines were alert in case Britain enters in war with Germany, since Canada did not have control over her foreign policy.

Economically, Canada, as other war participants, could not bear the expensive cost of war because when the first World War broke out the expectations were high, thinking it would last only few months. In Great Britain, a bill was passed for the compulsory enlistment of all men between the ages of 18 and 41. Consequently, recruiting efforts in Canada for the war doubled, thus, an array of British immigrants and the unemployed answered the call. Canada

gathered more men than expected; they were supplied with the necessary equipments, uniforms and weapons to fight the enemy.

Canadians fought at many important battles such as the Ypres, the Somme, Passchendaele supervised by British authorities but lead by a unified Canadian command. For Canadians, the Battle of Vimy Ridge is seen as one of the best achievement of the Canadian army designed with meticulous planning, powerful military support and extensive training. This battle has shaped a new sense of identity as it became a nationalistic symbol of achievement and sacrifice.

By mid 1914, thousands of men volunteered to join the army and serve their country as Canada felt immediately concerned by the war since Canada constituted a part of the British Empire. Canada's aim was to get people volunteer for the war by any means. By 1916, the Battle of the Somme took place in which thousands of troops were sent to France to fight against the German empire. Thus, more men were needed. This war however, caused heavy losses at the front and Canada was desperate for soldiers since there were not enough soldiers to replace the dead and wounded ones. As a result, for the first time in British history conscription was introduced. Conscription was introduced by Prime Minister Robert Borden under the Canadian military service act of 1917; it implied the compulsory enlistment of men.

However, many Canadians denounced such act, especially French Canadians in Quebec. Moreover, French-English tensions were already running high since French Canadians were enraged that Ontario has banned French as a language of instruction in its schools, so they did not see it necessary to fight for England. The two nationalists who stood against conscription were Henry Bourassa and Sir Wilfred Laurier. To ensure the stability of conscription during the election of 1917, Borden allowed overseas soldiers and women serving as nurses to vote as he knew in advance that all of them were in favor of conscription, he also allowed women

related to overseas soldiers to vote. Consequently, Borden's Unionist Party won the election with 153 seats.

After four years of devastating war, millions had lost their lives and the world was forever changed. The victorious allies negotiated a series of treaties in 1919 and 1920, redrawing the continent's national frontiers. New states were found as parliamentary regimes based on universal suffrage. During the peace negotiation, the American president stressed the importance of disarmament using diplomacy for the resolution of conflict thus paving the way for the creation of the League of Nations as foreseen in the treaties. Nevertheless, the treaties did not just reshape Europe but also established a just new balance of power in favor of the victors. Yet the creation of new nations did not resolve all the difficulties relating national minorities.

A large number of men were recruited and a new workforce was needed. World War I marked a new era for women. Women were needed to help with the war effort, filling the gaps left by the men who went to fight in the war and were taken out of the domestic sphere into men's world. While the war offered many new choices for women and work, it did not usually lead to a rise in the salaries of women, which were already much lower than men.

In the United Kingdom, mass-mobilization and large casualty rates made a strong impression on society. Though many participants did not share in the experiences of combat or spend any significant time at the front, or had positive memories of their service, the images of suffering and trauma became the widely shared perception. By the end of the First World War, women gained new social and economic options and stronger political voices. Perhaps the most famous consequence of wider women's employment and involvement in World War I, is the liberation of women as a direct result of recognizing their war time contribution.

In 1918, the vote was given to property owning women over the age of thirty years. Ten years later, the voting age of women came down to twenty-one, equal with men. Once women could vote, many people felt that they had gained full and equal rights. But there was still a long battle ahead for equal treatment and respect both at work and at home.

Moreover, unemployment was very high and Canada faced a rapid inflation in the same time. There was unrest in the workplace because of lack of job security and low wages due to the return of the thousands of soldiers from the war with only few jobs waiting for them at home. These soldiers brought with them the famous influenza epidemic, the Spanish flu that broke out towards the end of the war, which killed three times as many people as the war itself.

Many countries felt the severe economic consequences of waging a world war. The United Kingdom went from one of the world's largest overseas investors to one of its biggest debtors, less concrete changes for Britain was also apparent. There was a growth in national pride among some other commonwealth nations. Canada along other countries held important roles in numerous battles through the war subsequently; they received more diplomatic autonomy in the decades that followed returning home from the battlefields.

In 1929 the New York Stock Market collapsed, followed by the Toronto and Montreal Stock Markets. Many businesses closed their doors leaving thousands of people unemployed. The worldwide Great Depression that started in the United States quickly reached Canada. People waited in long lines for any means of a job, shelter, or food, and to worsen matters, the country and more severely the prairies, were hit in a massive drought as the harsh winds blew away fertile topsoil making it very difficult to grow crops. The first industry affected was wheat farming, which saw a collapse in prices. Many businesses closed, wholesale prices dropped and unemployment reached its peak. Consequently, thousands starved and were

forced to live on the streets. People became disappointed with the government as there were few alternative jobs as primary industries collapsed; they fought hard to receive help and aid. The governments set up relief camps to create jobs and workers were disgusted with the terrible conditions in the camps. The 1930s were a time of grief and great despair as the Canadian recovery from the great depression went on slowly.

With memories of the Great Depression still vivid, post war governments in Canada began toying with Keynesianism and the rudiments of a welfare state... Such concessions with respect to the rights of labor as were secured in the Canadian welfare state were of one piece with the historic terms and conditions for continuing capitalist production outside the periphery. (Mookerjea, Szeman and Faurschou 21- 22)

Memories of the First World War, the tragic loss of life, the heavy burden of debt and the threat of conscription on the country's unity, made Canadians, including politicians of all parties, reluctant to go through another similar experience. By 1939, business growth in Canada coincided with the recovery in the American economy. Thus, it took the outbreak of World War II to pull Canada of the depression. Canada's involvement in the Second World War began after France and Britain entered war with Germany once again. Britain's declaration of war did not automatically commit Canada, as had been the case in 1914, but rather the government and people were united in support of Britain and France. Consequently, Canada declared war on Germany as Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King promised that only volunteers would serve overseas.

Canada was not ready to undergo such a war. Its army moved from a 4500 men to more than 50 000 soldiers. These soldiers lacked appropriate training as well as the required

equipment. The air force and the navy too were unelaborated to face the enemy. Canada's industrial contribution to victory was noticeable, though it began slowly. With the establishment of the department of Munitions and Supply, various acts boosted industrial efforts. New factories were built while old ones served war purposes and Britain ordered the necessary war equipment. Whereas in the First World War Canadian arm production suffered a lot, now various guns and small arms were produced. Many ships were built as well as military airplanes and the field of military vehicles witnessed a large production. Women then were recruited into the labor force and filled various jobs vacated by men on duty overseas. Mainly more than half the industrial material was destined to Britain but Britain could not pay for all of it, so to help win the war Britain financed a high proportion. During the war, Canadian financial assistance to Britain reached its peak as a program of mutual aid to serve allied nations generally and Britain specifically.

On the political scale, one of the important issues that rose in Canada during the war concerned the conscription issue. While French Canada's eagerness for the war and its opposition to conscription were as evident as in the first world war, an upheaval struck English Canada for overseas conscription. Consequently, Prime Minister King held an election on releasing the government from its pledge; however, there was still active enthusiasm for conscription in English Canada. The atmosphere changed after the casualties increased, "At this point, the ruling elite in Canada undertook a long quest to reconstitute national hegemony in a time of transition marked symbolically by the end of the Second World War and by the Indian independence from the British Raj in 1947" (Mookerjee, Szeman and Faurichou 21). The significance of the Second World War in Canadian history was great but probably less than that of the first. Canadian involvement in world affairs is not often portrayed as passive and insignificant. Events of WWI and WWII clearly reveal that Canada will not hesitate to fight and is a powerful ally despite its small population.

1-2 Canadian Identity

Canadian identity refers to the unique culture, national symbols and histories that are shaped by the background of its people, their languages and beliefs that made the country what it is today. During the 1960s, Canada's official policy was biculturalism and equal partnership between the two founding peoples the English and the French but in 1971 major changes occurred by which Canada became the first country in the world to adopt multiculturalism as an official policy. In addition to the influence that the aboriginal art and culture continue to exert a marked influence on the Canadian identity, Canada is seen to be a collage of all different ethnicities, religions and languages that share common rights and freedom but most importantly a Canadian citizenship.

The unified conception of Canadian identity has taken various forms throughout Canadian history. On the one hand, in attempt to impose itself as a culturally and linguistically independent unit, French Canada lives a constant conflict with English Canada. On the other hand, the close relation that links English Canada and the British Empire demand a whole process to gain full independence from the latter. Most importantly, because of the close connection and strong influence that its geographic and economic neighbor, the United States, has on English Canada. By the twentieth century, as Canada grew gradually independent from the British Empire, it became home to citizens from all over the world. It is the contribution of these immigrants that shaped the Canadian identity.

The world is changing at an alarming rate and so is the meaning of being a Canadian, thus "Canada's national identity has always been intensely contested in ways that have had a determinate impact on the character of social, political, and cultural life"(Mookerjea, Szeman and Faurschou 5). Today, Canada is a diverse society made up of a variety of people from various nationalities and cultures that have emphasized on equality and inclusiveness for all

people. Many of this country's most cherished symbols and values: the flag, the charter of rights, freedom and peace keeping are different ways in which multiculturalism has manifested itself by providing a unique experience for each Canadian citizen.

1-3 Feminism in Canada

Right from the end of 19th century, Canadian women went through profound experiences in order to impose their position in society and claim for equal treatment between men and women. With the show of women's movement with a main goal of gender equality, the lifestyle of Canadian women and women in most other western countries was subject to thorough reconstruction leading towards a political and intellectual revolution. Also, the federal government in 1967 set up the Royal Commission on the status of women to examine the situation, and in its 1970 report the commission was in favor of the equality of women.

The late 1960s witnessed a period of feminist revolution in Canada with the rise of a new women's movement. Women became more aware about the reality of things, the fight was no more about gender equality but went beyond that. Canada witnessed a rise in consciousness about women's place in public life, promoting the rise of the status of women as women became aware about the decayed situation they endured thanks to the many books and articles published by feminists such as Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics*, Germaine Greer's *Female Eunuch* as well as Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique*. For instance, in her 1969 controversial feminist book *sexual politics*, Kate Millett argues how men-dominated culture contributed in the rise of a patriarchal and sexist society, giving them total freedom to produce literary works that are derogatory and humiliating to the status of women. These writers and many others illustrated the type of society in which women lived, as men being the major actors and holders of power with an ability to silence women's voice. Notwithstanding such view,

Margaret Atwood visualizes feminism from a different perspective, for her, “Feminism has done many good things for women writers, but surely the most important has been the permission to say the unsaid, to encourage women to claim their full humanity, which means acknowledging the shadows as well as the lights” (Chakravarty 144)

The women’s movement had a major goal of establishing social justice that incorporates various domains including the need for equal pay for equal work, the recognition of the role of women in the workforce and the attempt to halt violence against women, among other requirements.

1-4 Canadian Literature

Canadian literature is literature originating from Canada. While Canadian literature, like the literature of every nation, is influenced by its socio-political contexts, Canadian writers have produced a variety of genres. Influences on these writers are broad, ranging from geographical to historical, reflecting the country’s dual origin and its official bilingualism.

Canada’s dominant cultures were originally British, French, and Aboriginal. After 1971, Canada became home to a more diverse population of readers and writers as a result of the implementation of the Policy of Multiculturalism. Therefore, Canadian literature became heavily influenced by international immigration. Written works focused on nature, frontier life, and Canada’s position in the world, all revolving around what is known as the Garrison mentality. Ethnic and cultural life was illustrated by many prominent writers and was clearly reflected in their literature.

The garrison mentality is a common theme in Canadian literature, in both English Canada and French Canada. The garrison mentality makes the Canadian literature unique and special

by the means of its unparalleled texts, in which characters set up figurative obstructions against the outside world for fear of oppressiveness of other nations mainly the United States. A term coined by literary critic Northrop Frye and further explored by Margaret Atwood who discussed Canada's preoccupation with the theme of survival in her book *Survival: A Thematic Guide To Canadian Literature*.

The diverse descriptions given to Canada made the Canadian literature deal with themes such as anti-Americanism, multiculturalism, nature and quest for self-identity among others. These varied descriptions prompted a series of pervasive stereotypes of Canada, but over time, Canadian writers sought to use literature to shape their own culture by recording local experience rather than to imitate other societies.

Additionally, French-Canadian literature was popular too, but the 1849 burning of the Canadian parliament took with it thousands of French-Canadian books. Thus, many people still falsely believe that Quebec had no literature until the 1820s. *L'Influence d'un Livre* by Philippe-Ignace-Francois Aubert de Gaspé is regarded as the first French-Canadian novel. Father Henri-Raymond Casgrain was one of Quebec's first literary theorists and argued that literature's goal should be to project a proper Catholic morality image. Others, like Louis-Honore Frechette and Arthur Buies broke this convention and wrote more interesting literature.

Since Canada became officially a country in 1867, literature written before then was considered colonial. When we consider Canadian literature, it is important not to forget these written works that were produced prior to 1867. The earlier predecessors, Archibald Lampman and Susanna Moodie and E. Pauline Johnson and the rest, were intensely marginal, both to the country of their birth and to literature in general. Susanna Moodie and Catherine Parr Traill, after their moved to Canada, recorded their experiences as pioneers in multiple

writings and wrote until their death. Their books discussed survival in Canada's rugged environment, and these same themes appeared in Canadian authors' works, such as Margaret Atwood.

After the Second World War, writers such as Margaret Laurence and Norman Levine added to the Modernist influence to Canadian literature. It was not appreciated by most readers however. Levine's *Canada Made Me* controversial and critical assessment of Canada's moral and cultural values was widely rejected as it portrayed a corrupted version of Canada.

During the post-war decades only a handful of books of any literary merit were published each year in Canada, and Canadian literature was viewed as an appendage to British and American writing. After 1967, the government increased funding for publishers and small presses in Canada. Consequently, in the late 1970s, Susan Wood helped pioneer the study of feminist science fiction and brought much respect to the study of Canadian science fiction. By the 1990s, Canadian literature has won many international awards. Arguably, the best-known living Canadian writer internationally is Margaret Atwood. The prolific novelist, poet, and literary critic won the Booker in 2000 for *The Blind Assassin*. Also, Yaan Martel won the same award in 2002 for *Life of Pi*.

Some great 20th century Canadian authors include Gabrielle Roy, and Carol Shields along with Nobel Laureate Alice Munro, the 2013 Nobel Prize winner who has been called the best living writer of short stories in English, were the first to elevate Canadian Literature to the world stage. Indeed, during the period between 1965 and 1970, national identity was the dominant political question facing the Canadian people, and it produced questions that were and still are highly suitable for literary investigation.

2- Textual Analysis of *Cat's Eye*

2-1 Atwood's Biography:

Margaret Eleanor Atwood was born on November 18, 1939 in Ottawa, Canada and grew up in northern Ontario, Quebec and Toronto. The daughter of a forest entomologist, Atwood spent a large part of her childhood in the Canadian wilderness where her father was conducting a research, hence, previous incidents in her life survived through her subsequent writings ("Works of Margaret Atwood").

Atwood is credited for both the quality and the quantity of her writing; "Through intertextual allusions, alternations in narrative point of view, and the use of the unconscious, Atwood shows the way in which the self is constructed from contradictory impulses, some more societally acceptable than others." (Palumbo 21) She is the author of various literary works, including novels, shorts stories, poems, and works of literary criticism. As a critic, she is best known for her *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*. Since its first publication in 1972, the book "was considered the most startling book ever written about Canadian literature", at a time when most people were not acquainted with Canadian literature ("Margaret Atwood: the poetry foundation"). Atwood's attempt to shed light on Canadian writers brought about a resolution, creating new presses run by writers themselves, and would contribute in the abrupt initiation of Canadian writers.

Internationally, Atwood is celebrated for the candid feminism of her books. From her first novel, *The Edible Woman*, to her dystopian masterpiece, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), the book that sealed her international fame, Atwood has shown a tremendous interest in the restraints society puts on women and the facades women adopt in response. *The Handmaid's Tale*, which Atwood refuses to label as science fiction, depicts a society in which women are shorn of all rights except the rights to marry, keep house, and reproduce and struggle to break

free from her role. After *The Handmaid's Tale* made Atwood a major international celebrity, she wrote a series of novels dealing with women's relationships with one another, including *Cat's Eye* (1988) and *The Robber Bride* (1993) that was inspired by the story *The Robber Bridegroom* from the Brothers Grimm. *Cat's Eye*, published in Toronto in 1988, was the ninth novel by Margaret Atwood, one of Canada's most acclaimed writers of fiction and poetry. In 1992, she published *Good Bones*, short, witty pieces about female body parts and the constraints that have been placed on them throughout history. Atwood explores women's historical roles in other works, including her renowned poetry collection, *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* (1970) and her novel *Alias Grace* (1996). *Alias Grace* was Atwood's first work of historical fiction, inspired by a newspaper article that Atwood read about a woman who had been convicted of murder, but claimed to have no memory of the crime. Both re-imagine the lives of famous pioneer women in Canadian history.

These novels have received many awards. *Alias Grace*, *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Cat's Eye* have all been shortlisted for the Booker Prize for Fiction. *The Blind Assassin* was successful in winning this prize in 2000, and in 2003, she published *Oryx and Crake*, one of her most intriguing explorations of the power of science.

Atwood is also a beloved children's book author. Her first children's book was *Up In The Tree* (1978). It was followed by *Anna's Pet* (1980) and *For The Birds* (1990), and the delightfully sketched *Princess Prunella and the Purple Peanut* (1995). Her latest children's books are *Rude Ramsay and the Roaring Radishes* (2003) and *Bashful Bob and Doleful Dorinda* (2004).

Margaret Atwood has been recognized internationally for her work through awards and honorary degrees. Throughout her career, Margaret Atwood has received numerous awards and several honorary degrees including the Canadian Governor General's Award, Le

Chevalier dans l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres in France, and the National Arts Club Medal of Honor for Literature. She is the author of more than forty books--novels, short stories, poetry, literary criticism, social history, and books for children. Atwood's work is acclaimed internationally and has been published around the world.

2.2 *Cat's Eye*: Plot Overview

Cat's Eye is the deeply disturbing story of a young girl, Elaine Risley, a controversial painter whose life is traumatized by the cruel treatment she receives at the hands of her friends. Narrated in a first person and in present tense through the use of a series of flashbacks, the novel follows the girl from childhood into middle age, tracing the effects of her early experiences on her adult life.

Atwood moves her narrative back and forth through time to tell Elaine's story, intercutting the years of the girl's troubled childhood with scenes from her later life. A successful and qualified artist, upon her return to Toronto for a retrospective of her art, Elaine, is flooded with memories of her past.

As a very young child, Elaine lives in relative isolation with her parents and her brother as their father pursues entomological research in the Canadian wilderness. Thus, Elaine's only playmate is her older brother Stephen, and she happily engages in games of war with him.

When Elaine is eight years old, the family settles in Toronto after her father takes a position as a university professor, consequently, Elaine finds herself interacting for the first time with girls of her own age. Her encounters with her first two friends, Grace Smeath and Carol Campbell, are marked by her confusion over social customs; she has yet to learn, and her desperate desire to fit in society caused her to be very tomboyish.

That summer Elaine and her family went out on a vacation, camping for her father's work. Once back Elaine sees that there is an older and fourth addition to the group, Cordelia. She immediately establishes herself as the dominant member of the group and soon begins an escalating campaign of criticism and cruelty toward Elaine, whose lack of self-assurance Cordelia has discerned from the start.

At first, they play seemingly innocent games, but soon Cordelia begins to bully Elaine, and Carol and Grace join in. Under the guise of bettering their friend, Cordelia, Grace, and Carol humiliate and belittle Elaine, devising punishments and elaborate rules for her to follow. "She puts an arm around me, gives me a little squeeze, a squeeze of complicity, of instruction. Everything will be all right as long as I sit still, say nothing, reveal nothing. I will be saved then, I will be acceptable once more. I smile, tremulous with relief, with gratitude." (Atwood 138)

The effect of this treatment on Elaine is devastating; she begins to withdraw into deep depression and self-hatred, undergoing periods of illness, nervous breakdowns, and even self-mutilation before the situation at last reaches a crisis point. This torturing state of mind led her to adopt bad habits, such as peeling her skin, biting her nails, and pulling her own hair. When Cordelia throws Elaine's hat into a frozen ravine and orders the girl to retrieve it, Elaine falls through the ice and, in a state of delirium, imagines that the Virgin Mary has descended from the bridge overhead to help her.

"Shedding light on the relations between the present, the past, and the functions of memory", the story offers a twist on the traditional form of the female bildungsroman or "novel of development" (Palumbo 22). Instead of a linearly told narrative, in which the protagonist's maturity is marked by giving birth, marrying or establishing a career, Atwood presents a character who is already mature, married and divorced, a mother and an established

career woman. Risley is trying to come to terms with being fifty. She must also grapple with disturbing memories from her childhood, and much of the novel consists of Risley's narration of this period in her life.

As she goes through these memories, she examines the moments of her life that have had the most profound impacts on her development: her childhood friend Cordelia's abuses, the growing awareness of time that she begins to cultivate in her adolescence, a relationship with a teacher and an agitated marriage.

Cat's Eye begins with a definition of time. This is essential, as the novel is really an extended treatise on the interconnectedness of the past to the present and how this influences our perceptions of others and ourselves. Atwood overcomes the traditional vision of the linearity of time and replaces it with one of "time as having a shape, something you could see, like a series of liquid transparencies, one laid on top of another. You didn't look back a long time but down through it like water." (Atwood 3)

The notion of the *Cat's Eye* is central as it is both a symbol of a world into which she has been initiated as an artist, and as a medium which provides a distorted view of things. This notion of looking through time as through a transparent medium is further enforced by Elaine's looking through a *Cat's Eye* marble at the age of eight and seeing her own future as an artist. Later on, the cat's eye later appears as a common motif in Elaine's paintings, even if she does not remember why it is associated with those feelings.

In exploring the world of childhood female friendships, Atwood broke new ground. Her thorough examination of a young girls' world was undertaken in a delicate manner but with much determined insight.

In high school, Elaine-Cordelia's relationship was a different experience than that of childhood. Though they shared nothing in common, the two girls considered themselves to be

best friends. Nonetheless, as Elaine develops a “mean mouth” toward Cordelia, “Sometimes Cordelia can think of things to say back, but sometimes she can’t” (278). Obviously, Elaine became stronger in the relationship. Consequently, distance imposed itself in such relationship, by Cordelia after a notified changed attitude that reveals her having problems of her own, and by Elaine’s disturbing memory flashes.

Elaine’s success at school was counterweighed with Cordelia’s failure, the thing that indicates that she is experiencing emotional turmoil. Troubled emotions, loathsome memories and awful experiences ended by a break off.

After high school, Elaine attends university classes as well as night classes of the local Art College. She develops her drawing skill in Life Drawing class and is drawn into an affair with her teacher, Joseph. Unexpectedly, her classmate is involved too in a relationship with the same teacher but she is unaware about Elaine’s relationship. At that time, Elaine experienced the horrors of abortion alongside her classmate, the event that marked her life both as a female and human being. She claims: “I do not dream about Joseph. Instead I dream about Susie”. Following this tenacious adventure, Elaine immediately changed her attitude towards her teacher; she begins to treat him with contempt and spirit of meanness, making him leave Toronto in despair. (378)

In adult life she becomes a painter, but her childhood trauma haunts her and she struggles to make sense of her life and relationships with men and women. One of the outstanding instances in the novel is her personal pregnancy experience with one of her classmates, Jon. Having witnessed a similar incident with her classmate, the girl resolved to get rid of her baby. Elaine took the opposite direction. Though the couple took the decision of getting married, neither of them was ready to assume the burden of responsible adulthood, driving

towards the collapse of their relationship. Diving into a deep depression, Elaine took her daughter and left for Vancouver.

Elaine is trying to come to terms with being fifty. She must also grapple with disturbing memories from her childhood as much of the novel consists of her narration of this period in her life. "Elaine's own memories are finally integrated, and recuperated, in a series of events that accentuate the double voice of the narrative; first her paintings tell her story, then she speaks to exorcise Cordelia and by implication to her childhood guilt" (Palumbo 30). She imagines what Cordelia is like now that she is old and recalls how she was frequently intimidated by her strength and character. Now, however, she recognizes that the dark sensations are not in her, but in Cordelia admitting that "An eye for an eye leads only to more blindness" (Atwood 477). With new understanding, she reaches out to her old friend and offers help in order to get her out of the mental institution after having tried to commit suicide. Through the story Elaine learns to come to terms with the past and forgive Cordelia.

Cat's Eye promotes a woman's ability to explore her identity separate from a man and the importance and heavy impact of the desire for connection with other women, "This may be done through autonomy, through self-definition and self-reconstruction of one's own history, [...], through bonding among other women and through a refusal to the role of subjugation" (Tandon and Chandra 20)

Even though Elaine's early childhood experiences with girls leave her traumatized and hesitant to form close female bonds later in life, the desire for connection to, instead of separation from, other women is reflected again and again in her inner concerns as she relives her memories. Lovers, husbands nor a male psychologist can truly help her reach self-realization, only her inspection of her past and the conclusions she draws alone can aid her in feeling more whole.

“Elaine Risley’s narrative of her early life in *Cat’s Eye* relies on two equally unreliable sources: her memory and the visual record provided by her abstract paintings”, highlighting how our experience of the present is colored by past events (McWilliams 27). Thus at the end she manages to learn to forgive and wash away old bitterness as she begins to gain the level of empowerment that she sought throughout her life.

The exploration of identity is a chief theme running throughout the body of Margaret Atwood's work, and *Cat's Eye* is no exception. Even though Atwood denies that *Cat's Eye* is autobiographical in any way, many critics deem the novel her most autobiographical book as “She endows Elaine with many of her own memories, particularly memories of a childhood spent partly in the bush with her mother, brother, and entomologist father”, recalling us of Atwood’s personal life (White 164). Despite the similarities, *Cat's Eye* isn't a straightforward autobiographical fiction.

Through her commitment to art Elaine manages to overcome many of the complexes she has brought with her from her past. Art becomes a source of inspiration and power for her and through it she learns to understand the factors which governed Cordelia's behavior.

Elaine’s visual imagination is shaped so that, in adulthood, she will develop a cool, impersonal hand-edged style of painting, although it is also a style, that celebrates light and sources of light. Elaine’s art is thus a retrieval and a giving back of herself and her feelings, but in encrypted forms that offer a degree of self-protection. (White 167)

Disturbing, hilarious, and compassionate, *Cat's Eye* is a breathtaking novel of a woman grappling with the tangled knot of her life. Elaine makes many conclusions about herself, her art, and her life at various stages in the novel which are somewhat summed up in the end.

As a conclusion, local and international social, historical and political events marked the history of Canada as well as its literature. Such contribution reinforced the shaping of Canadian identity, influencing every aspect of life and resulting in a multicultural society that is aware of the necessity to cope with such considerable change. Atwood's *Cat's Eye* spread out along the mid 20th century where diverse cultural elements including feminism and art movement stimulated her effort in writing the novel. Judith McCombs sums up the novel as "a bildungsroman portrait of the artist that incorporates transmuted autobiography and its contrarily re-membering seer-narrator is Atwood's most elaborate representation of the human self as complexly layered, with fluid and sometimes buried layers." (qtd. in McWilliams 28). Atwood illustrates the importance of the past and memories and the need to deal with them, as both are always present and part of one's life.

Chapter Two:

Future As Mirrored by the Past

Introduction

The second chapter is the rudiment of my dissertation since it examines the novel's different perspectives and influences. This chapter centers on the application of the feminist literary approach to the novel and focuses mainly on the second wave feminism. I will explore the theme of identity and how relationships progress throughout different stages of life.

The novel's timeline is a fractured one in which the protagonist moves from her childhood memories to her adulthood memories and then to her adolescence in an easy and smooth manner. This forward and backward shift in time includes all the unexpected events that bring about change to the protagonist's personal life; both good and bad changes.

Analyzing a female internal struggle following Simone de Beauvoir's feminist approach in her controversial book *The Second Sex*, and pointing at the protagonist's early life fears and how they affected her for fifty years, shows that female identity develops only when we confront the past so that we can live the future.

1- Pioneering Second Wave Feminism

Simone de Beauvoir's gender theory is considered to be the beginning of the contemporary feminist thought. Her book *The Second Sex* is her most famous and influential book revealing how and why women were and are subjected to men's rule. It became a sourcebook of modern feminism, particularly in the United States for later feminist thinkers such as Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem, as she tried to free women from an overly deterministic understanding of their roles in society.

As one of the predominant founders of second wave feminism, her scholarly and fictional existentialist works contributed, among other French existentialist works, to the spread of existentialism precepts. De Beauvoir was not a feminist before writing *The Second Sex*; only much later in life did she claim to be one. Deriving from her own existential worldview, women were largely responsible for much of their own situation. More than feminism that tackles the issue of gender trouble, existentialism emphasizes individual existence, freedom and choice.

Deriving from her own existential worldview, Beauvoir argues that women were largely responsible for their situation and asserts in *The Second Sex* that “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (14) thus if women are exploited it is because they have permitted themselves to be exploited in the name of love. Beauvoir’s attempt is to prove that women are not *born* “feminine” but shaped by a thousand external processes. For her, a girl at each stage of her growing up, a girl is conditioned into accepting passivity, dependence, repetition leading to feelings of incompleteness and profound frustration. Every force in society conspires to deprive her of independence and subjectivity and turning her into an object thus woman must accept a dissatisfying and conventional life.

Simone de Beauvoir introduces her book’s introduction entitled *Women as Other* by asking the important questions that are crucial for the understanding of women’s role in today’s world. What is a woman? This question is not easily defined; it can be defined in biological terms as simply having ovaries for example, but does this really interpret everything that means to be a woman?

In an attempt to achieve an equal state with men, women desperately demonstrate that they are “haunted by a sense of their femininity.” (Beauvoir xx) Referring to yourself as a woman does have a negative implication, whereas when referring to a man is positive since man represents the entirety of human beings. Beauvoir evokes the way the woman is thought of in

relation to and as a part of the male form, stemming first from Adam and Eve. Several concepts are crucial to the argument of *The Second Sex*. The concept of the Other is introduced early in the text, which assorts women into the category of the outsider or foreigner. It has also become a critical concept in theories that analyze the oppression of colonized, enslaved and other exploited people. According to Beauvoir, a woman is the Other since “ she is determined and differentiated with reference to man, not he with reference to her; she is the unessential as opposed to the essential. He is the subject, he is the absolute: she is the Other.” (xxii)

The world is set up in favor of men; it is a man’s world, even Religion, biology, theology are working in favor of men showing women’s inferiority and instability as the lesser sex and as being caught up in this system that they do little to change it.

Although the bible and other early works set up women to be looked on as inferior to men, it is women who have allowed this to happen over the years. There is much more unity to be found among the male sex whereas women refer to themselves as ‘women’, and there is little or no solidarity in their efforts and way of life. Simone de Beauvoir argues that women have “gained only what men have been willing to grant; they have taken nothing, they have only received”, but it is only now that they are becoming aware of the unfairness of the situation (xxvi). Beauvoir suggests that the best ways to come up with a solution to this struggle is to get acquainted with all the past speculations, ideas, and biases about what a woman is and to repudiate the recurring arguments and evidence that people have been using for decades so that to be able to start over entirely, and uncover the truth about what being a woman actually means.

Innumerable works of the early 20th century provide an insight into the first wave feminism for the sake of denouncing legal inequalities, particularly women's suffrage.

Nevertheless, *Cat's Eye's* late 20th century publication refers to the broadened debate over cultural inequalities, in particular sexual liberation for women.

Atwood's early fiction coincides with the rise of the second wave of feminism. Although her inspiration was not drawn from the movement, the author's concerns resemble those of the second wave feminists. In order to connect Atwood's early fiction to the second wave of feminism, it is necessary to mention what prompted the movement in the first place. Beginning with the second wave of feminism, female scholars and activists have found that the problem of society concerning women resided in the definitions of femininity. Women's social condition in the sixties and the period that led up to this decade was defined by various political and cultural factors. From a political point of view, Kate Millett sheds light on patriarchy as a political characteristic and at the same time "as a profound organizational principle that affected all of culture and society." (Gerhard 92).

The widely accepted definitions of femininity were mostly seen when women reached the point in their lives when they needed to get married. Marriage represented the stage when they officially had to take upon a self-effacing role. Furthermore, motherhood along with marriage was seen as a fulfillment of femininity. As such, there was a problem of identity as in white middle class circles people did not expect women to develop a strong sense of selfhood. Betty Friedan called it the "malaise" of the white middle class woman that was caused by a "denial of human potential" which was inherent in the popularly accepted definitions of femininity (88). Given the situation, female scholars asked for a re-definition of the concepts of womanhood.

The need to redefine womanhood has been crystallized in this movement, but still the cause did not receive the support which was needed because of aggressive attempts at keeping the conventional statute of women. In such a context, second-wave feminists put across the idea that more women had to be first of all, aware of the lack of privileges which were

characteristic of the period between the sixties and the seventies' social organization. Women still believed that they could attain womanhood through marriage, birth and child raising and imposed those views on the younger generation.

In other words, the main objective of second wave feminists was to make the public aware of the cultural fabrication of gender identities. The concept of femininity was especially examined and deconstructed by them because it was “a cultural construct permeated with social values that had little basis in biology or genuine female experience” (88). In the late seventies and early eighties feminists sought to give a new form to mainstream culture as they realized that changing the culture and changing mentalities was one of the basic courses of action. Fiona Tolan furthermore asserts in her book entitled “*Margaret Atwood Feminism and Fiction*” that “The turn of the decade from 1980s to 1990s saw the longstanding feminist preoccupation with the body begin to shift towards an increasing interest in issues of gender and gender construction.” (174)

From her first novel, Atwood echoes the idea that there should be no barrier between the public and the personal as the public aggressively influences every aspect of human identity. When her early works were published, Atwood gave a series of counter arguments to the idea that her novels were the product of the second wave of feminism. With regard to *Edible Woman*, she argued that she doesn't “consider it feminism”, she “simply consider[s] it social realism. That part of it is simply social reporting” (qtd. in Tolan 2). Atwood was also invoking the chronological argument that, for example, *Edible Woman* which was published in 1969 was conceived in 1965, at a time when the Women's Liberation Movement had not been officially set in motion.

She enlists among her influences Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan's works which in turn were the ground works on which the liberation movement of the late sixties and early seventies was built: "I myself see the book as protofeminist rather than feminist: there was no women's movement in sight when I was composing the book in 1965, and I'm not gifted with clairvoyance, though like many at the time I'd read Betty Friedan and Simone de Beauvoir behind locked doors" (qtd. in Tolan 9). Atwood's stance towards the second wave of feminism was not dismissive as one can deduce; rather than taking upon an ideological path, she responded to the problems which the women were dealing with in her period. However, what particularly connects Atwood to the second wave of feminism is the inspiration she drew from her period's context, the discernment of the effects which the social organization of the sixties had on a woman's psyche. In order to avoid generalizations, it is important to note that the effects were not the same for every woman. There were women who were content in their role as supporters of their male partners and at the same time, there were a handful of women who entered a male-dominated area of work. Nevertheless, Atwood keeps in mind the women that feel the need to not comply and to question the role they have been given.

Thus, *Cat's Eye* is involved with the early formative years of an individual's life, and for this reason, the images which the main character was exposed to during her childhood are brought into focus. In *Cat's Eye* the construction of the character's selfhood is credited to the female characters from her childhood, each one leaving his presence engraved on her personality. The female characters which emerge in her paintings are key players in the development of her identity.

2- Elaine's Quest for Identity

Canadian author Margaret Atwood has achieved worldwide renown for her accomplishments in both fiction and poetry. She is well-known as a feminist and political activist, hence her writing serves as Atwood's commentary on society.

Many novels written about the search for identity have a linear timeline. The main character, usually of the male gender, seeks out to find himself in contrast to his family and society as a whole. We see this pattern in many novels such as *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* by James Joyce, *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison, and Kurt Vonnegut's *Player Piano*, where the main characters set themselves apart from everyone else and move forward.

In contrast, Atwood uses circular return in *Cat's Eye* to help emphasize a woman's need to be defined in relation to others. Through flashbacks in her character's past, Atwood takes us to the depths of the female mind and shows us how women need to confront the past to get on with the future.

Beauvoir mostly acclaimed statement: "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" sets limits to the ideas of self-creation and self-definition in which the individual is sustained by personal freedom and choice (14). By this, Beauvoir means to destroy the essentialism which claims that women are born "feminine", but rather define women to be the product of civilization and social structures as she stresses that womanhood is a social construction and not biologically determined. As Atwood bases her fiction on true political, historical, and contemporary events, she not only portrays how her typically female protagonist is shaped by her environment, but also how she develops within that environment.

As a matter of fact, the novel explores the female identity formation and reformation in a contemporary middle-class Canadian society. *Cat's Eye* can be seen as a bildungsroman,

since it depicts the development and maturation of an artist: Elaine Risley, but most importantly because the novel's protagonist undergoes a troubled quest for identity. However, Elaine in her quest for identity does not achieve a final resolution to her search. Indeed, if her search is fruitless, it is due to the obsessive cycle in which she finds herself trapped, that compels her to replay in her mind the fragmented pieces of her childhood in a desperate attempt to regain a unified self image.

Elaine, the novel's protagonist and narrator, visits her home town of Toronto for her art retrospective; she is flooded with memories as she "travels backward in time" to stand up to what has been stifling her identity (Atwood 3). She views time as "having a shape, something you could see, like a series of liquid transparencies, one laid on top of another. You don't look back along time but down through it, like water. Sometimes this comes to the surface, sometimes that, sometimes nothing. Nothing goes away" (3). This becomes apparent through Atwood's haunting flashbacks that devastate her present, and we witness Elaine's whole childhood flashing before her eyes within a time span of several days. Her focus, and the novel's, is all on the past, on those images that emerge unexpectedly, repeatedly, in the middle of the transformed city, images of the dead, of a lost time, and of Cordelia, her childhood friend and tormentor, her double.

Elaine grows up in an atypical family who "lived in so many places it was hard to remember them" (23). During the first eight years of her childhood Elaine is depicted as a boyish girl, spending time at her father's work, the Zoology Building, and inspecting things through microscopes with her brother Stephen. "We look at earwax, or snot, or dirt from our toes" (41). When they finally settle down and Elaine goes to school, it is hard for her to develop friendships with other girls because she cannot seem to relate to them. Thus her first impression once at school is that of awkwardness and feelings of not belonging, she claims:

“I’m not used to girls, or familiar with their customs. I feel awkward around them, I don’t know what to say.” (54)

Elaine is happy to integrate with her new group of friends, that of “Real girls...in the flesh”, but soon her behavior sees a complete change (54). For her, it is vital to act apart and differently from whom she attempts to fit in. The need of approval overpowers her and she finds herself caught between society’s expectations of what a girl should be and act like, and her own way of expressing herself. She loses her voice along with her identity by imitating her friends and keeping her own views to herself.

Her silence does not win their approval, the girls taunt, criticize and persecute Elaine and cause her to feel as though she “will burst inward,” (168). She “instigates physical pain in order to remove herself from Cordelia’s grasp” ,leading to her self-mutilation, peeling the skin off her feet until they bleed, and living such painfully hurtful experiences (Tolan 190).

Enjoying a Christmas dinner with Elaine’s family and her father’s “very beautiful” student, her father tells a story about the difference between wild and tame turkeys (Atwood 153). Mr. Banerji, their guest, is invited to join them since he does not celebrate Christmas in his country, though a nice and lovely boy, Elaine immediately detects that “he’s a miserable underneath his smiles and politeness” (152) .

He tells a story of a turkey farm where the turkeys all died because they were too stupid to go into their shed during the thunderstorm. Instead they stood around outside, looking up at the sky with their beaks wide open and the rain ran down their throats and drowned them. He says this is a story told by farmers and probably not true, although the stupidity of the bird is legendary. He says that the wild

turkey, once abundant in the deciduous forests in these regions, is far more intelligent and can elude even practiced hunters. Also it can fly (154).

Without eating much from her plate, Elaine deduces from her father's comment that "wild things are smarter than tame ones", thus she classifies people in her life as either "tame" or "wild", without including herself in this list (154). She then mentions the turkey at the table exhibiting itself "for what it is, a large dead bird," and that eating its wing is "eating lost flight" (155). Atwood uses this anecdote to accentuate Elaine's situation. She is being tamed by her friends, being silenced and losing her own "flight," because of her unnecessary and "stupid" need of their friendship (154-155).

As she lost her identity in the past, Elaine is also in her present life as a middle-aged painter who must come to terms with her own identity as a daughter, a lover, an artist, and a woman, but above all she must seek release from her haunting memories. This storyline, although less developed, is where Atwood's circular timeline of events begins and ends.

3- Elaine's Development of Social Interaction and the Process of Growing Up

3-1 Elaine's Relationship with Women

Friendships are always hard to deal with, especially when we, as women, do not know who real friends are. It takes time and patience to grow a seed of friendship into a beautiful flower, yet sometimes those flowers wither away.

Cat's Eye follows Elaine throughout her life in an episodic series of events, cutting out magazine houses with her friends, being "punished" by her friends, growing up and meeting

new friends, attending college, getting married, being a mother, finding her artistic muse, etc (Atwood 228). Atwood seamlessly weaves together Elaine's life experiences in a labyrinthine way in which manifestly isolated instances are tied in. The main thread that runs through Elaine's story is that of Elaine's relationship with women. She feels as if she does not understand women, having only a brother. When Elaine does make her first friends, they relentlessly bully her. These early experiences have deep repercussions as Elaine goes uneasily through her college experience, a world where "serious" painters are men. Through wifehood and motherhood, she is not sure how she wants to assume the traditional role, giving up her career to her artwork echoes images of different women who have influenced her for good and for bad.

Similarly, Beauvoir studies the roles of wife, mother, and even prostitute to show how women, instead of transcending through work and creativity, are forced into monotonous life of having children and administering their house. She argues that, by envisaging fulfillment as the loved one and mother in marriage, woman only ends up as a slave to her husband, she remains for the man the inessential Other.

An effective and interesting technique Atwood employs is that of making Elaine always speak in the first person. However, when she was describing her present self, her older, well-known painter self, she used the past tense. When she went back to her memories, she used the present tense. This reversal of reality alludes that the memories are in the present tense and that it is as if Elaine is living them again. The voicing "I rub my eyes; I know it would be wrong to be seen crying," allows Elaine to experience, as if under hypnosis, the way she felt when things happened, and reflecting that most events and emotions remain in a continual present if they remain unresolved (36).

In the course of her moment of professional glory, Elaine becomes consumed by vivid images of her past, as “The repressed trauma of her childhood centers on Cordelia”, her best friend and emotional counterpart who proceeds with exaggerated cruelties on her as a girl. Atwood employs wry humor, rich irony, and keen eye for detail in a brilliant exploration of a girlhood world (Tolan 193).

Much of Elaine’s trauma seems to stem from her school experiences in Toronto where the family eventually settled when she was eight years old. Initially, Elaine positions herself as submissive and weak; perhaps one reason for this is her difference and the difficulties she encounters conforming to feminine stereotypes. Her previous unconventional upbringing and nomadic lifestyle, influenced by her naturalist father, her brother, Steven, and carefree mother, who is neither fond of cooking nor housework, did nothing to prepare her for the shock of socialization. Later on, this shock however manipulates Elaine’s personal life as we notice an Elaine who “feels guilty for being unprepared to operate in a world of mothers who are housekeepers preoccupied with clothes and labour-saving devices” (Ingersoll 20).

Until she starts school in Toronto, Elaine is unaware of what being “feminine” is. She confesses, “I’m not used to girls, or familiar with their customs... I know the unspoken rules of boys, but with girls I sense that I am always on the verge of some unforeseen, calamitous blunder” (Atwood 54-55). With the help of her three new friends, Grace, Carol and Cordelia, Elaine learns the rules: the girls’ line is different than the boys; she is not able to follow her brother, Stephen, as she used to. Thus, it is only “Through the move to Toronto, a backward civilization in the 1940s” in which Elaine as a child “is suddenly forced to confront “femininity”...leaving behind the “unfeminine” clothes and undergendered role.” (Ingersoll 20). They are meant to be passive and follow the norm, and agree with others. She learns to say that her scrapbook pages are “awful”. “It’s the thing you have to say, so I begin to say it too”

(Atwood 62). She begins to have feminine cravings: “I begin to want things I’ve never wanted before: braids, a dressing-gown, a purse of my own. Something is unfolding, being revealed to me. I see that there’s a whole world of girls and their doings that has been unknown to me, and that I can be part of it without making any effort at all.” (62)

Elaine often associates her worst fears with her troubled relationship with Cordelia, who appears as a threatening and oppressive figure. She also becomes a symbol of the devastating consequences of socialization. Cordelia is harshly judgmental like her own father. She constantly censures Elaine and seeks to “improve” her: “Wipe that smirk off your face” (203). However, she also figures as a projection of Elaine’s own super ego as she fails to conform to traditional, “normal” social patterns (262). She represents the “shame, the sick feeling in my body”. She is the “knowledge of my wrongness, awkwardness, weakness” (495). However, “Risley sees, compassionately, that the crippling loneliness and shame are not hers but the father angering Cordelia” (McComb 20).

This novel is about an accumulation of crises, the repressed torments of childhood, the tortured lifestyle of Elaine’s youth and marriage. The subordination of women is explained in the *Second Sex* not only as a social and historical phenomenon, but also from an existentialist perspective. Furthermore, Tolan argues that “with *Cat’s Eye*, Atwood produces a text that begins to bridge the gap between the bodily essentialism of the feminisms of the 1970s and acculturated body that predominated in the 1990s” (175). For Elaine, self-acceptance will only come from an exhaustive examination of her often self-deceiving self. Elaine’s source of bad feelings is Cordelia. Her demands upon loyal friends are incredible: Elaine is put in a hole and “buried alive” under dirt or sent across a nearly frozen ravine to earn Cordelia’s admiration. To cleanse herself, Elaine occasionally peels off layers of skin. But, as an adult,

how can she get over Cordelia's taunts which have always hunted her? First, she must focus on the past, and then confront it.

Cordelia's face dissolves, re-forms: I can see her 9-year-old face taking shape beneath it. This happens in an eye blink. It's as if I've been standing outside in the dark and a shade has snapped up, over a lighted window, revealing the life that's been going on inside.... A wave of blood goes up to my head, my stomach shrinks together, as if something dangerous has just missed hitting me. It's as if I've been caught stealing, or telling a lie; or as if I've heard other people talking about me, saying bad things about me, behind my back. There's the same flush of shame, of guilt and terror, and of cold disgust with myself. But I don't know where these feelings have come from, what I've done (Atwood 299).

Because Elaine identifies herself as complicit in Cordelia's games, she carries guilt into marriage and then to the women's movement. Although a women's meeting in the early 70s concludes that "What is wrong with us the way we are is men" Elaine still looks guilty and considers her mistakes like a sin (402). As Beauvoir assumes in her book, women are made to believe that marriage alone permits them to keep their social dignity intact. In tracing woman's education from childhood, through her adolescence to finally experience adult life, she demonstrates how women are forced to relinquish their claims to transcendence and achieving subjectivity but most importantly struggling in a constrained environment of acceptance of the "passive" and "alienated" role to man's "active" and "subjective" demands.

Elaine finally unloads her burden at her show while confronting the many paintings she has done of Mrs. Smeath, another childhood tauter who knew what was “wrong” with Elaine but wouldn't tell her.

Now I can see myself, through these painted eyes of Mrs. Smeath: a frazzle-headed ragamuffin from heaven knows where [...] how could she know what germs of blasphemy and unfaith were breeding in me? [...] Some of this is true. I have not done it justice, or rather mercy. Instead I went for vengeance. An eye for an eye leads only to more blindness (477).

Atwood cares so deeply for every exposed layer of sadness, anger and remorse, insisting that the past becomes better once we have forgiven ourselves for having lived it.

Elaine's world is a world that Margaret Atwood portrays with deadly accuracy, a lonely, terrifying place with all its repulsive, distinctly feminine mysteries, a threat. At its center is Cordelia. She is scornful, manipulative, and wild. Elaine adores her and Cordelia finds Elaine a perfect target for all her own apprehensions. Cordelia suggests that Elaine needs improvement. “I am not normal, I am not like other girls. Cordelia tells me so, but she will help me [...] It will take hard work and a long time” (140).

In the campaign of terror that follows, Cordelia and her two friends surround Elaine throughout her day, pointing out her failings, her weaknesses, mocking the way she walks, the way she eats, the way she laughs. They torment her with her own image, reject her, and worse, bury her alive. Elaine submits. “They are my friends, my girl friends, my best friends. I have never had any before and I'm terrified of losing them. I want to please” (142).

Cordelia does not single Elaine out immediately, instead she tries to control all her playmates, but Carol is too coward and Grace too strong, “I don't want to,” says Grace, but Elaine, unaccustomed to the games of girls does not believe that she is being wronged, and therefore undergoes the brutal and cruel attack (87). Unfortunately, “because she feels radically incapable of fitting into the world outside her home, Elaine becomes the victim of Cordelia’s sadistic punishments” (Ingersoll 21). More and more sentences in the book start with “Cordelia says” and “Cordelia thinks” showing, very realistically, the way that Cordelia is gaining dominance in Elaine's life subconsciously. This distinctive lack of pronouns continues as she becomes more dominant in the group situations, “‘Try and see,’ says Cordelia. ‘Go on down there. I dare you.’ But we don't”. She shows her daring as she becomes a kind of leader for the group. “Cordelia goes right to the railing and leans on it. Gingerly we follow” (Atwood 88). “Cordelia makes short work of this game” is the end to what the group had pre- Cordelia done together- cut out pictures from the Eaton's catalogues (107). The dominance continues as Cordelia begins to introduce the topic of women and their bodies, her continual fascination shaping the conversation that would otherwise have been deemed improper.

Cordelia continues to dominate games and becomes bolder in her attempts to control and bully while Elaine still believes this is typical girls' conduct. A part of Cordelia's miserable behavior is explained through the analogy of the hole that “She's very wrapped up in [...] it's hard to get her to play anything else” (124). This did not seem a very typical or realistic behavior of a nine-year old child, to want to shut herself away from life by digging a hole in the backyard. When Elaine is put into the hole she blocks the memory, which in itself is quite typical and believable as disturbing memories usually fade quickly. This emotional denial, “I have no image of myself in the hole”, “I can't remember” is very realistic, and is the start of the bullying in earnest (125). The indefinite burial in the hole represents the height of Elaine's

subservience and darkness. Acting like Mary Queen of Scots, the three girls bury her for an interminably long time leading to a sense of betrayal and terror. She remembers a “black square filled with nothing” but in which “nothing goes away”. It signifies her complete impotence to the point of self-effacement. It is the “point at which she lost power”. It is also very realistic that Elaine's present behavior, her “Horror of birthday parties”, is influenced by past situations (126). The passive behavior that she has towards the previous incident, the fact that she doesn't seem to protest creates an attitude for the future when she lets herself be pushed around by others. The past also seems to have influenced her behavior towards her daughters Sarah and Anne, giving them solid sounding names that could not be made fun of, for example.

Eventually, the harsh dialogue between Elaine and the girls is often used to express how cruel and controlling Cordelia is. “Don't hunch over”, says Cordelia. ‘Don't move your arms like that” (141). Cordelia's dialogue is very bossy and commanding, Atwood uses the constant torturing by Cordelia to illustrate how she is hurting Elaine verbally and to display the social dynamics of the group, with Cordelia at the top and Elaine at the bottom. The verbal and emotional abuse manifests itself physically when Elaine starts to hurt herself, or wants to.

Since Elaine has started peeling the skin off of her feet for Cordelia, she has kept the practice up for so long that she is able to do it without looking. Elaine often makes comments about how she wants to hurt herself on something, such as burning herself on the toaster. McCombs adds that “the nine-year-old Elaine had begun to see the toaster and wringer as ways to burn or flatten out her shamed and punished self” (10).

Atwood uses the cruel dialogue of Cordelia to display how Elaine is becoming depressed and self harming. The dialogue is also used to flesh out Cordelia's character. “Stand up

straight! People are looking” (141). Cordelia says things that sound similar to what a parent would say. Atwood uses this to display how Cordelia’s home life is and also to show off her commanding and bullying personality.

It is, as Elaine says, “the kind of thing girls of this age do to one another, or did then,” and it nearly costs Elaine her life until a miracle, or at least what she thought, finally frees her from Cordelia's spell (139). As teenagers, the two girls briefly renew their friendship but with Elaine as the stronger, the needed, the one who has learned the power of cruelty.

The precise and devastating detail, the sense of the ordinary transformed into nightmare, the deplorable state of mind of characters, perfectly reflect Atwood. Inevitably, the intensity of these details draws on Elaine’s later life to be a futile and impotent one. Leaving Cordelia behind, Elaine begins to study drawing, has an affair with her teacher, marries another art student and is caught up, reluctantly, in the dawning feminist movement. She has a child, attempts suicide and finally flees Toronto. She sees Cordelia twice as an adult, the second and final time when Cordelia is a resident of a “discreet private loony bin,” drugged, trapped, “a frantic child [...] behind that locked, sagging face.” (420) .The nightmare has been exchanged between them.

Cordelia appears in every image Elaine has of herself, every self-doubt, every fear, in her every wish to be loved. Cordelia's ghost haunts Elaine's return to Toronto but at the retrospective itself her face does not appear among the crowd at the gallery, much as Elaine longs to see it. Yet time is fluid, it “turns back upon itself, like a wave” (482). And in one final gesture of conciliation, Elaine visits the place where they were young together and at last releases herself from the past by imaginatively returning to Cordelia “something you can never have, except from another person: what you look like from outside. A reflection” (485).

Throughout the novel, Elaine has an ambiguous and destructive relationship with Cordelia wherein both are scarred. Cordelia is not only friend and foe, but also the super ego in the socialization process. McCombs concludes that “Atwood’s Elaine and Cordelia, then are each other’s mirroring, complementary, and sometimes darker Others” (16). She helps Elaine discover her dark moments whilst simultaneously compounding them. A struggle for power is clearly at the heart of their relationship. Initially the unequal mirroring of positions is evident through Elaine’s fear and Cordelia’s defiance and has a direct impact upon Elaine’s confidence and sense of worthlessness.

Cordelia appears as a self-assured and manipulative girl from a middle-class background. She takes her name from Shakespeare’s King Lear and much is expected of her. She suffers under her harsh father’s judgments and constantly disappoints. The father was unpredictable, often losing his temper and rarely happy with Cordelia (Atwood 299). Over time, Cordelia “projects [...] her own shame and vulnerability onto Elaine” and reveals her wish to be loved (McComb 16).

Ironically, Cordelia eventually seeks love and comfort from the girl she alienates with her power games. As the tide turns in this fluid search for identity, Elaine realizes she turns into the dominant partner, and Cordelia is the one losing her grip on reality (300-301). Soon, unlike Elaine who succeeds in her studies, Cordelia fails academically, shoplifts and has a mental breakdown. She is placed in a sanatorium after attempting suicide and Elaine rejects her pleas for help.

This exceptional relationship raises several questions, but the one that continuously ponders in mind is how could they acquire the characteristics of a mean girl after experiencing the heartache caused by their actions? However Elaine’s attempt to inflict pain on her torturer,

Cordelia, is nothing but a hope to get some sort of relief or closure. At last, she realizes that it leads to more heartache, that she could have had a normal relationship with Cordelia.

3-2 Elaine's Relationship with Men

Cultural practices and norms give rise to the existence of social constructs and govern the practices, customs, and rules concerning the way we view them. Thus, the socially imposed construct is that of a male-dominated society in which males hold absolute power and portrays women as morally, intellectually and physically minor to men. This patriarchal social structure imposes on women different limitations, and even sees them, as Beauvoir states in her book, as "the Other". She argues that: "It is not the Other who, in defining himself as the Other, establishes the One. The Other is posed as such by the One in defining himself as the One. But if the Other is not to regain the status of being the One, he must be submissive enough to accept this alien point of view." (xxiv)

Nevertheless, throughout the novel Elaine Risley's relationships are almost always with people who need her more than she needs them. Cordelia, Mr. Hrbik, the drunken woman, and the boys Elaine dates in high school are all dependent on Elaine. Elaine depends on their need for her and is in fact drawn to neediness. The boys Elaine dates in high school are her silent companions. She controls the relationships because she understands that what boys need is silence and she gives them that. Elaine acknowledges that she does not love these boys and she doesn't take the relationships seriously. "My relationships with boys are effortless, which means I put very little effort into them" (Atwood 279). The only part of the boys that Elaine claims to need is their bodies. She also needs boys to escape from the girls in her life. To Elaine, the boys she dates are a pastime, no more than something to take her mind off her

difficulty in dealing with girls. At this point, Elaine is ignorant of the pain that men can cause because she only sees the pain that girls cause.

When Elaine reaches college, she begins a relationship with Mr. Hrbik, her Life Drawing teacher. She enters the relationship with innocence, and leaves it with an understanding of the complexities of adult relationships. In the beginning of the relationship, her respect and admiration for Josef are considerable. However, she recognizes early in the relationship that she is dependent on Josef's unpredictability in bed coupled with his desperate need. She is helpless in the face of this need; she claims "I am in love with his need" (348). When Josef's relationship with Susie ended, the full burden of his need is transferred to Elaine. He is hurt by Susie's pain and ending of their relationship, and he expects Elaine to comfort him. This proves to be too much for Elaine to handle. "He is too heavy for me. I can't make him happy" (377).

In Beauvoir's work, she states that according to the male-imposed society the ideal woman, is a woman who believes it is her duty to sacrifice herself for her man. She believes what makes the myth so horrible is that many women incarnate this thought as an accurate reflection of what it means to be a woman. Elaine however, revolts against such a principle imposed by the cruel society in which women have to endure inequality and injustice. Thus, she has realized that men are not always what they appear to be. Reacting this way, Elaine proves to be more mature, and with her maturity, she is able to leave Josef by simply walking away. Thus she ends the relationship with Mr. Hrbik.

However, when Elaine sees the drunken woman lying on the sidewalk she can't help but stop. She watches everyone else walk by, avoiding and ignoring the old poor woman, yet she cannot bring herself to do the same. Elaine is weakened when she sees others in need. The woman calls out to Elaine weakly and Elaine can't escape, "she's got me now" (181). Elaine

recognizes that the woman is drunk and would be a burden but it is too late. Elaine helps the woman up and gives her money to fulfill her imagined obligation. The woman's desperation weakened Elaine even as she tries to get away. Even though she helped the woman up and gave her money when no one else would, Elaine feels guilty because she walks away. She feels responsible for this stranger when in reality she is not. Thus, Elaine summarizes her powerlessness when faced with others desperate need as she claims "In the clutch of the helpless I am helpless" (181).

Elaine claims she has problems with girls but not with boys. Unfortunately, all the male characters turn out to be just as bad: The art teacher Josef has affairs with his two girl students at the same time, and ignores the fact that one of them is bleeding abundantly because of a miscarriage. In addition to his careless attitude toward his wife and daughter, Elaine's first husband Jon is hardly able to make a living. Elaine's brother, a brilliant scientist, is so absurd and absent-minded that he is once arrested for chasing a butterfly into a military zone.

4- Visual Representation of Women

The tools Atwood uses to understand the events and characters are crucial. A lot of attention is given to the housewife icon which, in this novel, is found on the pages of the magazines which Elaine uses for her collages. The characters on which she focuses her works are thought of in terms of conventional visual representations of women. To render them she often uses collages with material that she gathers from magazines and in which the four of them "are involved in that socialization; they study to be future housewives." (Ingersoll 21) Because she grew up in the forties, her artworks include a variety of commercial visual material from the magazines of that period.

In one of Elaine's collages, her mother is envisioned as the embodiment of the housewife icon which was created by the magazines of that time. She explains the visual representations

of her mother as they could be found in her paintings. The description of her artworks starts with a hand-drawn image with colored pencils and continues with the collage which was gathered from various magazines. The magazines which she chose for the purpose of visually rendering her mother were, as their titles hint, magazines marketed for women: *Ladies' Home Journals* and *Chatelaines*.

Sometimes I cut things out of magazines and paste them into a scrapbook with LePage's mucilage, from the bottle that looks like a chess bishop. I cut out pictures of women, from *Good Housekeeping*, *The Ladies' Home Journal*, *Chatelaine*. If I don't like their faces I cut off the heads and glue other heads on. These women have dresses with puffed sleeves and full skirts, and white aprons that tie very tightly around their waists. (Atwood 163)

Elaine offers a description of the dresses which the women in magazines used to wear: the puffed sleeves, white aprons tight around the waist. In the 1940s, the pages of the above-mentioned magazines contained pencil-drawn designs of ladies' clothes wear.

Elaine describes the pictures that she gathered with the purpose of visually representing her mother: "the artwork, with those rancid greens and faded blues and dirty looking pinks" which were the colors for women's dresses of that period (170). They also have the extra-slim waists which Elaine is talking about when she remembers the fashion tendencies of the period in which she grew up:

It's incredible to me that I myself was alive when all those chalk things were going on, all those statistical deaths. I was alive when women wore those ridiculous clothes with the big shoulder pads and the nipped-in waists, with peplums over their bums like backward aprons. I draw a woman with wide shoulders and a picture hat (279).

To show the complications which arise when one has to accept certain values, Elaine indicates to the reader that her mother was reluctant in adopting the housewife status which was advertized by the popular culture of her period: “The first was my mother in colored pencil, in her city house kitchen and her late-forties dress. Even she had a bib apron, blue flowers with navy piping, even she wore it, from time to time” (170). By the use of the words “even she”, one notices a contrast between what was represented in the magazines and her mother’s identity. Unlike Mrs. Smeath, another female influence in her life, she did not enjoy conforming to norms and did not display passivity.

As many of Atwood’s female characters, Mrs. Smeath is a haunting presence which undoubtedly had an effect on Elaine’s self-esteem. Already “as a child, Elaine clearly see Mrs. Smeath’s evil in the transparent world of that cat’s eye which will be an emblem of insight as an artist” (Ingersoll 22). But the explanation for the impact that this character had on the painter is revealed through language.

The visual serves the purpose of placing into the material world haunting memories. It is a primary stage in the quest for finding out the source of frustration and anger. For example, after Elaine makes the visual association between Mrs. Smeath and heaven, she goes on with relating the time which she spent with this character. As a result of Elaine’s supposed religious convictions, she was chastised by Mrs. Smeath and her family. As such, religion is given a particular attention in Elaine’s visual works. Mrs. Smeath was a strongly religious and even doctrinal woman who abided by Christian ideas of heaven and hell. She believed herself to be a “pure” soul and regarded Elaine as a heathen and such self-righteousness became a reason for Elaine to apprehend her presence:

I hate Mrs. Smeath, because what I thought was a secret, something going on among girls, among children, is not one. It has been discussed before, and tolerated. Mrs. Smeath has known and

approved. She has done nothing to stop it. She thinks it serves me right...She is right, I am a heathen. I cannot forgive (Atwood 214).

In *Half a Face*, the only picture featuring Cordelia, the two “friends” change places; the exact time and place of this shift is indefinable. Behind Cordelia’s face hides another face covered with a white cloth which depicts their fluctuating power dynamics. The “half” effect derives from a theatrical mask; the white cloth disguises images of animals that are in part reminiscent of the fundamental intuitive childhood impulses that are possibly unmanageable and never completely comprehensible.

On one level, Elaine is “afraid” of Cordelia who represents her childhood trauma and phobias as she states: “I am afraid of Cordelia” (267). After all, Cordelia reminds her of her vulnerability and fragility; she torments Elaine by breaking plates when Elaine doesn’t adhere to commands; she makes her suffer in the dark hole; she throws Elaine’s hat into the forbidden ravine. On the one hand, in *Half a Face*, the only picture that captures their close twin-like relationship, Elaine seeks to pinpoint the source of her greatest trauma, the 13-year old girl with a defiant and belligerent stare. On the other hand, Elaine also has trouble fixing the relationship in time and space, because whilst Cordelia is a 13 year old tormentor, she also reflects Elaine’s troubled state of mind which shifts and changes according to the flow of their relationship, “more than anyone else, Cordelia is the one from whom she must free herself by acknowledging not only difference but kinship” (Ingersoll 23).

Fear swirls in this painting as Elaine takes the position of the perpetrator. In a way, this reversal frightens Elaine more than Cordelia’s persecution. She is extremely fearful of being Cordelia. She experiences an acute sense of revulsion and flushes of “guilt and terror and cold disgust” of unknown origins of pain (Atwood 299).

5- Childhood Trauma

Atwood's 1988 novel involves an artist's development, explores the complex interrelationship among trauma, identity and culture, and more specifically, how trauma shapes the social construction of the protagonist's gendered identity and what are the possible routes in revealing and resisting such construction. Acknowledging trauma as consequence of power relations, Atwood measures power's devastating effects on identity that is unconsciously associated with death by a trauma victim. Atwood illustrates how the fragmenting and isolating elements of traumatic experience affects identity and finds unconscious expression in Risley's artistic vision and works.

Childhood memories are frequently depicted in Atwood's short fiction and novels since the characters go through assorted moments from the period when they were most susceptible. Indeed, as the adult versions of the main characters dig deeper into their childhood, they begin to find more explanations about their present condition.

Walking the gentrified city where she grew up and went to art school, Toronto, Elaine recalls her buried life in scenes as tempestuous as those her paintings depict, which have preserved her past better than she has. While the show is readied, she remembers. First, her girlhood in the late 40s, in which she is terrorized by the "whispering indirectness" of her girlfriends, mainly the aggressive Cordelia (Atwood 185). Second, her adolescence, in which she fights back, prompted by a talent for fainting and her own "mean mouth," and discovers the wonder of Time from her Time-obsessed brother Stephen (276). Third, her art school years which feature an affair with her seducing teacher Josef and marriage to the impetuous avant-garde 1960s artist Jon. The marriage results in a child, a suicide attempt, a divorce and triumphs with the 1970s women movement.

When 40-year-old Elaine finds her old cat's eye marble, she says "it's my life entire" (468). Ingersoll argues that "the image of the cat's eye is central, since it represents a world into which she has been allowed; at the same time, it is a world of inevitably distorted vision" (19). Also, Elaine is amazed at the accelerated rhythm path at which time passes. "For years I wanted to be older, and now I am" (Atwood 309).

Atwood's eloquence and ability to string together a sentence that combines sharp imagery and metaphors to endow a thought with intense meaning is impressive. For example:

We can't ask our mothers. It's hard to imagine them without clothes, to think of them as having bodies at all, under their dresses. There's a great deal they don't say...They know about toilet brushes, about toilet seats, about germs. The world is dirty, no matter how much they clean, and we know they will not welcome our grubby little questions. So instead a long whisper runs among us, from child to child, gathering horror. (109)

Some childhood questions rise curiosity in us, things we are too nervous to ask our mothers that make us laugh when we are finally given the real answers. I think everyone has experienced the desire to ask those awkward questions, but no one has ever labeled them.

Conversely, the bullying Elaine suffered throughout her childhood, an obvious effect on her depression and the decline in her perspective of self worth continued well into her adult life. Ingersoll asserts that "in reconstructing her past, or the critical years from age eight to young womanhood, Elaine Risley is in large part deconstructing that past"(19). This idea is further sustained with her reflection on the significance of these events on her present life as she restates that, "Little girls are cute and small only to adults. To one another they are not cute. They are life sized" (Atwood 140).

Thus, Elaine's strongest memories are of Cordelia, the worst perpetrator of a trio of girls, whose actions disturb her perceptions of relationships and her world. This embodies the impact of childhood trauma and also the way in which children can easily stray from reality, causing them to distort events due to their distorted perspective of the world. Ingersoll concludes that "the consequences of that deconstruction [...] is a complicated series of transformations through which the persona discovers that the past is only what we continue to reconstruct for the purposes of the present." (19)

Just as the often ironically distorted pictures in the exhibition reflect these unresolved issues and relationships in Elaine's life, in this novel Atwood also picks up on many of the themes, symbols and characters from her earlier novels. Employing her proficient skills in developing and forging them, the book itself in effect becomes both a retrospective and highly successful culmination of Atwood's own work and ideas.

6- The Role of the Figure of Virgin Mary in the Life and Art of Elaine Risley

An important motif in *Cat's Eye* is the figure of the Virgin Mary. As a child, Risley first encounters the visual representation of the Virgin, and the Virgin enters her imagination and plays a role in her tormented childhood, her development as an artist, and her later search for release from haunting memories. As a mature artist, Risley transforms Catholic iconography and theology into a personal vision of redemption. Thus, Elaine is solaced by her personal vision of the Virgin Mary. At her absolute weakest moment, physically and psychologically, the vision provides a turning point. From this moment, Elaine has the courage to withstand the scorn of her friends.

Because Risley is not raised in a religious family, she must discover the symbolic and healing power of the Virgin for herself and learn how to appreciate the value of Christianity.

She finds it hard to believe in God since her father is against religion. He believes it is a form of brainwashing that has been responsible for wars, massacres, injustice, and intolerance. Risley's mother also has a negative view of religion. For these reasons the family does not attend church, something Risley does for the first time when she accompanies the Smeath family to their Sunday worship at a Protestant church. From the Smeath family she hears only negative appraisals of Catholics. One of their complaints is that Catholics worship the Virgin Mary. In this sense, Elaine sets up an alternative religious figure who guides her through her trauma and provides comfort in the absence of traditional religious figures.

Risley becomes familiar with depictions of the Virgin from the Sunday school that she attends with Grace. But these are Protestant representations that show the Virgin subordinate to Jesus. Only when Risley happens to pick up a piece of paper in the street, printed by the local Catholic school, does she discover traditional Catholic representation of the Virgin. In this picture the Virgin wears a dark blue robe and a crown and has a halo. Her red heart is shown outside her chest, with seven arrows piercing it. These arrows represent the Seven Sorrows of Mary, and in Catholic thought they refer to trials that Mary endured in her earthly life, including Christ lost on the way to Jerusalem, the betrayal of Christ, the Crucifixion, and the Entombment.

Risley stores all these details in her deeply perceptive visual memory. The picture acts as a seed for her artistic imagination to grow. Later, the exposed heart of the Virgin becomes part of the inspiration behind Risley's series of satirical paintings, "White Gift," where it reappears as the bad heart of Mrs. Smeath.

Elaine's personal savior contrasts with her earlier encounter with Mrs. Smeath's traditional but frightening version of a similar figure. As a religious person, Mrs. Smeath had an influential impact on Elaine, which is evident through Elaine's large range of artworks

dedicated to belittle her. Albeit Mrs. Smeath is the one who introduced Elaine to religion, though in a negative way, she rejects and betrays her only when Elaine was seeking for maternal comfort. By doing nothing to curb the persecution, she becomes complicit. She even implies “it serves her right” (Atwood 213). “Mrs. Smeath has God all sewed up, she knows what things are his punishments” (214). She interprets Elaine’s exclusion as an indication of “God’s punishment” (213).

“Throughout the novel, various manifestations of Elaine’s unconsciousness can be detected, most notably in her paintings, the conceptions of which she describes as peculiarly passive” argues Tolan (188). Indeed, Mrs. Smeath is represented in many of Elaine’s paintings floating on air via heaven, as the result of a repressed memory from childhood: “The angels around her are 1940s Christmas stickers, laundered little girls in white, with rag-set curly hair. The word Heaven is stenciled at the top of the painting with a child’s school stencil set. I thought that was a nifty thing to do, at the time” (Atwood 100-101).

One can see the connection between the mental image which Elaine kept of Mrs. Smeath and her visual representation of this character. She makes a connection between Mrs. Smeath extreme religiousness and madness which shows us that at the moment when the painting was being done, she already detached herself from the harsh criticism which was directed towards her in her early years; instead of maintaining the victim position one sees her with the status of active evaluator:

There are indeed three photos. One is of my head, shot a little from beneath so it looks as if I have a double chin. The other two are of paintings. One is of Mrs. Smeath, bare-naked, flying heavily through the air. The church spire with the onion on it is in the distance. Mr. Smeath is stuck to her back like an asparagus beetle, grinning like a maniac; both of them have shiny brown insect wings, done to scale

and meticulously painted. Erbug, *The Annunciation*, it's called (265-266).

Mrs. Smeath is one of the most conventional characters in the novel and it is not surprising that she is also the character who is the most influential in her paintings. As a child, she arouse in her feelings of unworthiness on grounds of her religion. In addition, the old woman's passivity recurs in her later paintings. Passivity is another key feature of Mrs. Smeath, and it is characteristic of the housewife icon. In comparison with the painter's mother, Mrs. Smeath remains firm in her purpose of sticking to certain norms, a feature which originates in her passion for religious codes. Her mother, on the other hand, does not submit to her role of housewife which such easiness. Ingersoll acknowledges that "the retrospective of her art is partly an invention to allow Elaine to achieve a sense of self, distinct from both Mrs. Risley and Mrs. Smeath." (26)

Next to the paintings of her mother and Mrs. Smeath, Elaine exhibits "a self-portrait of sorts" entitled *Cat's Eye*, where she placed herself in "the right foreground, though it's shown only from the middle of the nose up: just the upper half of the nose, the eyes looking outward, the forehead and the topping of hair" (480). It represents Elaine at maturity with "the incipient wrinkles, the little chicken feet at the corners of the lids" (480-481). The setting of the painting is a snow covered field which resembles the place where Cordelia, Grace and Carol left her to freeze.

Behind my half-head, in the center of the picture, in the empty sky, a pier glass is hanging, convex and encircled by an ornate frame, In it, a section of the back of my head is visible; but the hair is different, younger...At a distance, and condensed by the curved space of the mirror, there are three small figures, dressed in the winter clothing of

the girls of forty years ago. They walk forward, their faces shadowed, against a field of snow (480-481).

This literary depiction of an imaginary work of art uncovers the connection between past and present and it reveals more clearly the role of memory in the construction of selfhood. Thus, “Elaine Risley’s retrospective allow her to re-view the people and relationships that have been important to the first fifty years of her life” (Ingersoll 19). The three small figures are identified with Elaine’s childhood friends and tormentors, namely Cordelia, Grace Smeath and Carol. It represents a defining moment of her childhood.

Nine-year-old Risley is so affected by the portrait of the Virgin that not long afterwards she begins praying to her. Risley sees this as an act of rebellion, since she understands that normally a person should pray to God. Elaine’s painting “Our Lady of Perpetual Help” aims to rebalance the relationship between the two spiritual idols, whereby the Virgin Mary, with the head of a lioness, is portrayed as “fierce” and “alert to danger” Elaine poses the question: “If Christ is a lion, why shouldn’t Virgin Mary be a lioness?” (Atwood 404). On that account, the artist endows females a strength that is not usually evident in the submissive females of her society. Even “Baby Jesus” glorifies the Virgin Mary as both caring and protective at the same time (216). These incidents might be seen as the earliest moment when Risley’s feminist sensibility begins to form, since she is implicitly rejecting the patriarchal version of God in favor of a female icon. McComb claims that “her Mary is fierce, wild, lion-hearted...Her other Mary...is a tired/Everywoman, or Everymother” and certifies that “Risley creates a Mary in her own, human image that re-credits and reclaims female history” (18).

Shortly after these incidents Risley has what she believes is a direct encounter with the Virgin. When she is lying freezing in the snow, abandoned by her friends, a lady with rays shooting from her head comes to her, walking “not on water, but on “nothing...on air” down

from the bridge” (McComb 18). The envisioned Mary is wearing a dark hood, and inside her cloak Risley sees a glimpse of red. She assumes this is the red heart of the Virgin, glowing like a coal outside her chest. The Virgin tells Risley, "*You can go home now ... It will be all right. Go home*" (Atwood 224). "Mary's savior...gift to Elaine is the ability to walk, with freezing feet, on snow" to drag herself out of the ravine (McComb 18). It is a pivotal moment, important both for Risley's mature art and for her later adult quest to bury her childhood memories associated with Cordelia.

Risley's next encounter with the Virgin comes when she is in her twenties. This time Risley sees a statue of the Virgin in a church in Mexico. It is the only statue of the Virgin she has seen that attracts her. The statue has a number of small items pinned to it by believers who were grateful to the Virgin for having saved something of theirs. Risley realizes the statue represents the Virgin in her role as Our Lady of Lost Things. In other words, the Virgin restores what has been lost. At the time, Risley has repressed so much from her childhood that she does not consciously know what she has lost, and so she does not know what to pray to the Virgin for.

Only later, on her return to Toronto in middle age, does her quest become urgent. The wounds she suffered in childhood still deeply affect her responses to life, and she must resolve in her mind why those things happened and find a way of reconciling with Cordelia. When she returns to the bridge that "is just a bridge", Elaine imagines the woman in her purview, as Cordelia, with the same "lopsided" mouth and defiant face (Atwood 496). There is the "wrongness, awkwardness, weakness; the same wish to be loved; the same loneliness; the same fear" (495). But critically, she is now able to externalize these emotions; they are not projections of her worst fears. At some stage, she has become the dominant one. "I am the older one now." I'm the stronger". "These are not my own emotions any more. They are Cordelia's; as they always were" (495).

Ironically at the height of her vulnerability, Elaine finds the power to resist as she gains the strength to revisit Cordelia's demons. She gradually transforms from a reticent impotent girl as she relies on her own Virgin Mary for strength and solace. Finally, though, through her art, her retrospective and introspective soul searching, Elaine is able to overcome her anxieties associated with the socialization process, her friendships and the symbols of darkness: the bridge and the ravine but most importantly is "rescued...from the spiritual death of a lifetime wasted in anger and resentment" (Ingersoll 24) .

7- The Significance of Cat's Eye

Cat's eye is actually a type of marble, described on page 73: "Usually the targets are more valuable: cat's eyes, clear glass with a bloom of colored petals in the center, red or yellow or green or blue [...] These exotics are passed from winner to winner. It's cheating to buy them; they have to be won."

The main character, Elaine, would play marbles with her schoolmates and would fix her eye on winning a cat's eye marble. Her attraction to cat's eyes can be described in the quote below:

I sit that way myself, the cold marbles rolling in between my legs, gathering in my outspread skirt, calling out cat's eye, cat's eye, cat's eye, in a regretful tone, feeling nothing but avarice and a pleasurable terror.

The cat's eyes are my favorites. If I win a new one I wait until I'm by myself, then take it out and examine it, turning it over and over in the light. The cat's eyes really are like eyes, but not the eyes of cats. They're the eyes of something that isn't thrown but exists anyway; like

the green eye of the radio; like the eyes of aliens from a distant planet.

My favorite one is blue. I put it into my red plastic purse to keep it safe. I risk my other cat's eyes to be shot at, but not this one (Atwood 73).

Undoubtedly there is some symbolism behind Elaine's choice of the cat's eye marbles. By employing the title "Cat's Eye", Atwood creates a sense of the multidimensional shape of time which exists only in our minds, where Elaine's highly estimated possession of a cat's eye marble mirrors how others see her and the way in which our lives can be reduced in significance. When Elaine rediscovers the marble years later and looks through it, she regains the memories she had lost, her "life entire" (468). Additionally, McCombs argues that this cat's eye can "sometimes secretly empower her, by letting her see people as it sees them, unfeelingly, as shapes, moving shadow, and "blocks of colour" only (10). The marble also served Elaine as a protective talisman, linked to the symbolic allusion of eyes and appearing as a common motif in her paintings. In this way, one of her most important paintings depicts the Virgin Mary carrying her marble over the bridge, a real life event that occurred during Elaine's childhood when she was left to freeze to death in the ravine by her friends.

My controversial interpretation of the marble is that it can be amplified to represent Elaine herself, where the deep scarring of her poisoned childhood urged her to lose herself and memories, leaving her to become a "cat's eye". In this way she is as cold as marble, detached and devoid of feeling, encompassed by glass, surrounded by hard, yet fragile reflections of her past.

Admittedly, the use of a physical object, the cat's eye marble, acting as a central symbol in the story, is a very insightful. Its universality is appealing, and yet Atwood has chosen something unusual enough to be interesting.

As a conclusion, Beauvoir's initiation to the notion of women as the "Other" does not imply that one cannot develop its own identity, this can be noticed through Elaine's agitated life and development of another self. The statement at the end of the novel, "an eye for an eye only leads to more blindness", conveys the notion that to achieve inner peace and facilitate self preservation, one must understand, forgive, and not forget (Atwood 477).

General Conclusion

Cat's Eye by Margaret Atwood is one of the most intriguing, captivating and thought-provoking novels that unveil the reemerging repressed childhood memories of the protagonist. Looking into the past in order to understand the present has been one of the most significant characteristics of Atwood's novels. In this dissertation, I have demonstrated that the perpetual construction of identity and the paradoxical relationship with the past in *Cat's Eye* is mirrored by Elaine's disorientation as she struggles to integrate lost aspects of herself.

Her childhood and adult memories are sometimes continuous but often disjointed; some memories are elongated, while others are buried. These recurring memories force her to confront and deal with a past she would have preferred to forget or view at a cold, ironic distance. Consequently, Elaine often sees herself as two personas that interact in complementary and contradictory ways.

Very few books explore the female friendship at this level of intensity; this novel explores meticulously the lives of four young girls. The heroine, Elaine, begins in present time and her present life, and then moves back to have a long central section about her girlhood and young adolescence. Each girl's background and situation is accounted for as we see them interact.

The first signs of pressure and bullying start to happen. Elaine feels alone and can't turn really to anyone for help. The fact of being scrutinized and watched all the times creates in her a feeling of fear that develops later to ephemeral ideas of suicide. Sadly, the mothers of these four girls appear to know what's going on but actually do nothing, simply approving it.

After being abandoned in a freezing river, Elaine's mother claims at one point she is helpless while Grace's awful mother appears to enjoy knowing her daughter is a bully.

In spite of this, Elaine stays with these girls because a childhood spent with malicious friends is better than a childhood spent alone, especially for girls. This belief may elucidate Elaine's actions as the girls torment her to the breaking point.

Atwood's depiction of the perversity of high school life is brilliant. She manages to create an ironic stance; she doesn't critique the values and norms of this society but rather projects the absurdities of high school and shows us the adolescent craziness in reaction.

What I have attempted to demonstrate is that Atwood in her novel creates a woman character that is forced to reconstruct herself in a more self-reliant and courageous form as she seeks to establish her relationship to the world and the individuals around her. Furthermore, I have argued that in *Cat's Eye*, the images which are considered by a majority to be conventional guidelines for behavior and appearance are reconsidered by the main character to include different discourses and representations.

Atwood is noted for her skillful use of feminist themes in which the female protagonist is victimized by gender politics. The novel is rooted in Canada in the mid 20th century, and includes an exploration of many contemporary cultural elements, including feminism and various modern art movements. Atwood echoes Simone de Beauvoir whose feminism, that later came to be identified as existential feminism, made her rise as a leading figure in the history of feminism. She challenges feminist thinking about gender identities and relations between the sexes and how it affects women's concept of themselves. A reading of this novel raises questions on the nature of femininity and inspires questions and introspection about the female relationships in one's life.

Thus, my attempt has been to shed light on the way Atwood treats the feminism of Elaine. Through the use of flashback technique and juxtaposition she managed to display the sufferings of a teenage girl and a young woman. The feminism Elaine encountered is alien to her, making her feel insecure, strange and threatened since our heroine admires boys and wants to be one in part. Her bias towards males may originate from her traumatic experiences of female relationships throughout her childhood years.

What can be noticeable is the difference between the then Elaine and the now Elaine. The grown Elaine seems to be a very critical, self-aware, and negative person. The tone of her narrative is full of complains and justifications. While the child Elaine is a very curious, observant, and even a care-free girl, she is certainly not critical. This might be a clue that Elaine's past is holding her back from doing certain things.

Elaine's art had an enormous influence on the development of her personality. Since Elaine seemed to be in perpetual flight, unable to find a sense of contentment or wellbeing, it provided her with an opportunity to revisit her past and reassess her life stories. Moreover, Elaine's art represents the traumatic memories of her unhappy childhood; it helped her decipher fantasies that have perpetuated her emotions. Significantly, her paintings become important mirrors of the past and in many ways symbolize Elaine's ambivalent and often contradictory relationships.

Through the characters' consideration of their audience's response, Atwood renders the social influence on her main characters' behavior and appearance. In this manner, Atwood's characters' freedom to express themselves is counteracted with the weapons of social norms.

After going through childhood images and reevaluating her artwork, Elaine realized that she had a series of mental pictures of how her life should evolve and what should happen at a

particular moment in time. The final tone is one of acceptance and optimism. In the end, after an examination of herself in various instances from her life, Elaine was able to articulate the regrets which were submerged in her unconscious.

In conclusion *Cat's Eye* reveals that memory is the cognitive process through which self-awareness is achieved because it implies the reassessment of the external influences that interfered in the formation of the main character and narrator's identity.

In this work, I have demonstrated that identity is always multiple, a dynamic construct of remembering and forgetting, where what is lodged in the unconsciousness might under certain circumstances rise through dreams to reflect on consciousness.

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