



Research Paper

Childhood Relationships: Unprecedented Portrayal in Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye*

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ABSTRACT: *The present paper aims to explore the inimitable relationships of childhood in Margaret Atwood's Cat's Eye. These relationships, shared at one's early life, are generally considered as insignificant and are least explored and studied in the whole spectrum of literature. Atwood in her novels, especially in Cat's Eye, lays bare the fact that the bonds of early age that are generally considered as immaculate, innocent & unadulterated form of relationships are rather the most complex and intriguing ones and suffer from internal strife, manipulations, treachery and dominations.*

KEY WORDS: *Margaret Atwood, Cat's Eye, Childhood, Relationships, intriguing*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Literature mirrors life, it has the great advantage over other disciplines of art in exploring the issues related to human beings and novel surpasses other genres of literature, as its magnitude allows a greater variety of characters, a sufficient development of milieu, subtle exploration of character and inimitable opportunities for expression. 'The people in a novel's world are not isolated from the contexts of their families, friends, and enemies when we encounter them; they are caught in the web of past mistakes, desperate hopes, or uneasy relationships in which men and women in real life operate. Hence there is no more sensitive and versatile laboratory for the understanding of individual or group behavior or for registering our own reactions, than literature.' (Roger B. Henkle, 4)

Atwood possesses exceptional quality of exploring the wide gamut of relationships shared by a person in his/her life span. Her novels chronicle myriad nature of relationships from family relations to social and friendly relations, to the relationships of enmity.

Among the myriad and diverse relationships explored by Atwood in her works, her most distinguishing and extraordinary accomplishment is the vivid and definitive exploration of childhood relationships. Generally considered as the most immaculate, innocent and unadulterated form of relationships, childhood relationships are least explored and studied in the whole spectrum of literature. But Atwood as the true and keen observer of life finds the relationships of this phase equally complex, intriguing and replete with the strong emotions, feelings, politics and betrayals akin to adulthood relationships. Interview with Susan Flockhart mirrors Atwood's views in this respect: '...childhood events are our most intense experiences, simply because they are unprecedented' (Flockhart) For Atwood early stage of life is equally real and close to realities than any other stage as the article of Shannon Hengen, highlights 'Childhood may figure for Atwood as a place in which we are closer to the real, closer to an intuition that we are as much composed of greed and aggression as we are of kindness' (Hengen, 77)

A prominent and prolific contemporary novelist of international acclaim Margaret Atwood is celebrated for her exceptional and versatile literary oeuvre that includes poetry, short stories, critical works etc. But her reputation as a writer rests mainly on her novels, in which she explores the issues of our time especially of gender, power and relationships.

Margaret Atwood, a daughter of an entomologist and Professor of Zoology at University of Toronto, was born in Ottawa in 1939. Although based in Ottawa, but because of her entomologist father, the family had to spend the long periods every year in the bushes of Northern Ontario and Quebec, living in a cabin without running water and electricity. In the Northern wilderness, Atwood and her brother had few children to play with, no television or cinema and a radio, that was used mostly to find out about the war, so books naturally became their companions.

In her initial years Atwood was home schooled by her mother, she indulged into reading books of all sorts, particularly Greek and Celtic mythology and the often brutal fairy tales collected by the Brother's Grimm. By the age of six, Atwood started dabbling with poetry, plays and comics and during these early years wrote a juvenile poem she called, 'Rhyming Cats'. In 1946, the family moved to Toronto where her father took a University post and Atwood began attending school regularly from grade eight in 1951. She did her graduation in English (Honours) and minors in Philosophy and French from Victoria College, University of Toronto. At the University Atwood got the opportunity to meet the literary critic and Professor Northrop Frye, who had great influence on her as a student and writer. During her University days, her acquaintance with figures like Jay McPherson and E. J. Pratt, too, strongly influenced her career.

Cat's Eye, a quasi-autobiographical novel by Atwood, is the story of avant-garde painter Elaine Risley, who in her fifties returns to Toronto for the retrospection of her art, a city she had fled years earlier in order to leave behind painful memories. This retrospection triggers the memories of her traumatic childhood that detached her from all and had shaped her identity and altered her sense of self forever.

One's present is the reflection of one's past, hence, to better comprehend the present and present relationships of a person, it is essential to evaluate and study his childhood and childhood relationships. The playing games of this stage are many a times mind games, hard to be discovered by others. Atwood with her astute and penetrating vision scrutinizes these early and fundamental relations. She lays bare the fact that the relationships at this initial stage of life are not just fairy-tales with all happiness, righteousness, naivety and simplicity, rather they suffer from internal strife, manipulations, treachery and dominations that remain hidden under the overt childhood innocence and probity. Rivalries between the siblings, manipulations and power politics between young and adolescent friends are integral part of one's childhood and the same are very subtly explored by Atwood in Cat's Eye.

Cat's Eye is Atwood's most stark and realistic piece of work that probes into the childhood relationships at length. Although much attention by critics and scholars have been given to young Elaine's relationship with her girlfriends, but her relation with brother Stephen is also subtly and beautifully portrayed by Atwood. The relationship of Elaine and Stephen in Cat's Eye unfolds all the emotions of love, jealousy, manipulation and rivalry that govern the sibling relationship.

During Elaine's early nomadic life before the family settles in Toronto, her sole companion and peer is her brother Stephen. Relations that these two children share are marred by impassivity, apathy and manipulations. Elaine is quite sensitive and subservient who looks up to her elder brother for love, solicitude and company, while Stephen is indifferent towards her and subsumes and repudiates her at his will. Their relationship which superficially seems to be quite simple and innocent, underneath suffers from childhood bullying and rivalry. Apparently, their games, frolic and caper seem to be juvenile activities that in reality camouflage their maneuvering. Elaine mentions their squabble, childhood frictions and clandestine fights, a secret between them, not to be revealed to their parents:

Once in a while we fight. I don't win these fights: Stephen is bigger and more ruthless than I am, and I want to play with him more than he wants to play with me. We fight in whispers or well out of the way, because if we're caught we will both be punished. For this reason, we don't tell on each other. We know from experience that the satisfactions of betrayal are scarcely worth it.

Because they're secret, these fights have an extra attraction. It's the attraction of dirty words we aren't supposed to say, words like bum; the attraction of conspiracy, of collusion. We step on each other's feet, pinch each other arms, careful not to give away the pain, loyal even in outrage. (CE 32)

Because of her passive nature Elaine is subdued by Stephen. Aware of her reliance and desire for his company, Stephen takes the advantage of it. Games played by them are more according to Stephen's will. They are the mainly games of war and fights with his wooden guns, daggers and swords, in which Elaine conforms and subscribes to his orders and instructions:

I am the infantry, which means I have to do what he says. He waves me forward, motions me back, tells me to keep my head down so the enemy won't blow it off.

"You're dead", he says.

"No I'm not."

"Yes you are. They got you. Lie down."

There is no arguing with him, since he can see the enemy and I can't. I have to lie down on the swampy ground, propped against a stump to avoid getting too wet, until it's time for me to be alive again. (CE 31)

The relationship between the two is governed by the rules that go without saying. Once in the city, the unstated rules of Stephen for their relationship incorporate the norms of social conventions. Their relation takes a new course, while the communication between the two through 'a walkie - talkie with two tin cans and a piece of string, which runs between their two windows', 'the messages written in cryptic language pushed under each other's door' and 'signaling by shoe lacing together,' continue within the circumference of the house, out of the

house Stephen feels humiliated and embarrassed to be with her, as per rules she is expected to maintain a distance:

I know better when to speak to my brother during these times, or to call his or any boy's attention to me. Boys get teased for having younger sisters, or sisters of any kind, or mothers; it's like having new clothes. When he gets anything new my brother dirties it as soon as possible, to avoid having it noticed; and if he has to go anywhere with me and my mother, he walks ahead of us or crosses to the other side of the street. If he's teased about me, he will have to fight some more. For me to contact him, or even to call him by name, would be disloyal. I understand these things and do my best. (CE 62)

Due to this distant nature of relationship and lack of bonding and association with her brother, Elaine fails to share the trauma, she endures at the hands of her girlfriend, with him, who otherwise would have been her guardian and savior. Gradually when Elaine takes up an assertive role against her victimization and begins to use her mean mouth, besides Cordelia, Stephen too becomes her target: 'I don't have occasion to use my mean mouth on boys, since they don't say provoking things to me. Except for Stephen, of course. These days we trade verbal meannesses as a kind of game, like badminton. Got you. Got you back'. (CE 315)

Elaine develops an ambivalent feeling towards her brother. She gains power over him because she's the only one with whom Stephen has shared his secret of girlfriend, but at the same time feels uncomfortable in exerting a power of which she's neither habitual nor willing:

Knowing this secret, being the only one chosen to know, makes me feel important in a way. But it's a negative importance, it's the importance of a blank sheet of paper. I can know because I don't count. I feel singled out, but also bereft. Also protective of him, because for the first time in my life I feel responsible for him. He is at risk, and I have power over him. It occurs to me that I could tell on him, lay him open to derision; I have that choice. He is at my mercy and I don't want it. I want him back the way he was, unchanged, invincible. (CE 138-39)

This manipulation and rivalry undercurrent in their childhood makes them aloof and detached to each other. Consequently, they never, in future, could connect with each other. The distance between them grows with their growing age. Grown up, Elaine gets engaged with her art classes, while Stephen leaves for his studies of Astrophysics. Communication between them confines to Stephen's occasional postcards with brief words, in which he mentions the places he visits, his marriage, and his divorce. But never both of them are able to share their joys, sorrows and sufferings. Stephen always remains apathetic towards her younger sister using her as his pawn, whereas Elaine always longs for her brother's love, affection and guardianship. When grown up, she wonders:

I wonder what it was like for him, having a little sister tagging along. For me, he was a given: there was never a time when he didn't exist. But I was not a given, for him. Once he was singular and I was an intrusion. I wonder if he resented me when I was born. Maybe he thought I was a pain in bum; there's no doubt that he thought this sometimes. Considering everything and on the whole though, he made the best of me. (CE 447)

Cat's Eye is Atwood's most critically acclaimed work, for the in-depth study of the uncharted territory of girlhood. The novel explores the young girls' capacity of being cruel among the peers. Too young, they are generally considered innocent, but as Elaine contemplates, 'Little girls are cute and small only to adults. To one another they are not cute. They are life - sized'. (CE 159) 'As, Atwood presents it, the world of little girls is not marked by sugar and spice, but rather by the same power politics that characterize adult life'. (Schlager and Lauer, 44) Bethan Jones, in the article, 'Traces of Shame: Margaret Atwood's Portrayal of Childhood Bullying and its Consequences in Cat's Eye', talks about Atwood's perception that Atwood seems concerned with the lack of innocence within children's play... Her protagonists become locked in a 'dynamic' "dance macabre" between the perpetrator and victim of the bullying, with devastating consequences. (Jones 29-30)

Elaine a young girl becomes the victim of her three best friends. The malice, brutality and the psychological violence enacted by the girls against Elaine destabilizes her sense of self and influences her whole personality and relationships not only during her childhood but also in the adulthood. Elaine's early childhood in the bush alienates her from the world of little girls. During her early nomadic life with her parents and brother, Elaine yearns for the company of girls. 'I want some friends, friends who will be girls. Girlfriends. I know that these exist, having read about them in books but I've never had any girlfriends because I've never been in one place long enough'. (CE 35-36) She carries a very innocent image of the girls. Playing together, while Stephen draws war she draws girls, 'But I draw girls.....This is the elegant, delicate picture I have in my mind, about other little girls'. (CE 37)

But her perception about young girls is terribly shattered with her introduction and placement in the terrain of girls. When the family settles and Elaine start attending school at Toronto, she is rudely awakened of her own awkwardness and the ways of the feminine world. The new socialized environment, totally contradictory to her previous erratic life, makes her aware of her 'otherness'. She realizes how different she's from others, how her parents are not the same as other parents and most significantly, the difference between

boys and girls, represented by two different doorways at her school, one marked as 'Girls' and another as 'Boys' that makes her feel displaced:

The boys don't have a separate classroom, they're in there with us. They go in the BOYS door and end up in the same place we do. I can see the point of the boys' washroom, because they pee differently, and also the boys' yard, because of all the kicking and punching that goes on among them. But the door baffles me. I would like to have a look inside. (CE 60)

This new cognition about the differing worlds of boys and girls, forces her to move into the world of girls, in which she feels herself alone, leaving the other category 'Boys' with whom she has always associated herself. She quickly learns that, 'You can't wear pants to school, you have to wear skirts. I'm not used to this, or to sitting still at a desk'. (CE 59) This feeling of awkwardness and naivety with the feminine world makes her the fall guy of her peers at school. 'Elaine, lacking the 'normal' background of her more rooted companions, is particularly susceptible to allegations of 'abnormality'. The other girls prey on her supposed weaknesses: weaknesses that they conjure in the interest of inflicting abuse, but which Elaine feels she actually possesses. The acute awareness of these weaknesses, and the ensuing lack of self-worth, arise unconsciously through contact with the perpetrator of the bullying.' (Jones, 32)

Though the girls claim to be her friends and wish to help her adjust with the unfamiliar feminine world, but underneath this friendship they bully her to an extent that never in her whole life she could be comfortable in the female company. Elaine's long desire of girls' company is fulfilled when she joins school but soon she feels uncomfortable and terrified to adopt the behavior of the new world around her:

So I am left to the girls, real girls at last, in the flesh. But I'm not used to girls, or familiar with their customs. I feel awkward around them, I don't know what to say. I know the unspoken rules of boys, but with girls I sense that I am always on the verge of some unforeseen, calamitous blunder. (CE 62)

This naivety and uneasiness of Elaine with the new feminine world is easily discovered by the trio of girls, who dupe her in the name of friendship. Elaine's victimization due to her awkwardness is metaphorically presented when Elaine and Stephen go to the Zoology Building where their father works and the mouse feeder tells them, '...that if you put a strange mouse into one of their cages, one with the wrong, alien scent, they will bite it to death'. (CE 47) Similarly Elaine becomes the victim because she is alien and foreign in this new cage of girls.

Carol Campbell, one of the Elaine's class fellows, first makes friends with Elaine. For Carol the choice of Elaine as a friend is not intended with the wish of love, sharing and friendship but 'In a way she has to'. The school bus girls were considered foreign and needed partner when it's time to line up and as Elaine is the only girl from her grade in the bus, she's given the opportunity to be Carol's friend. Once she befriends Elaine, Carol soon realizes Elaine's ignorance and innocence, and uses it as a weapon against Elaine. As an elitist, while she displays her own house, her clothes with haughtiness, on the other hand, she humiliates Elaine for her living standard. She speaks in an ignominious manner, "This is where you sleep" she says. "This is where you eat? These are your clothes?" (CE 64)

Elaine gradually realizes that in order to fit into the feminine world she'll have to change drastically. In fact, Carol uses Elaine to gain the attention at the school, she tells about Elaine's family's short comings smugly, with oddity:

Carol tells everyone at school that our family sleeps on the floor. She gives the impression that we do this on purpose, because we're from outside the city; that it's a belief of ours.... She puts it around that I don't know what church I go to, and that we eat off a card table. She doesn't repeat these items with scorn, but as exotic specialties. I am, after all, her lining - up partner, and she wants me to be marveled at. More accurate: she wants herself to be marveled at, for revealing such wonders. It's as if she's reporting on the antics of some primitive tribe: true, but incredible. (CE 65)

She constantly makes Elaine conversant of the ways of city life. The display of haircuts and twin sets, which are new to Elaine, make Elaine feel singled out and lonely. Carol enjoys wielding this power of navigating Elaine, 'Carol is more and more gratified the more bewildered I am.... She's eager to explain things to me, name them, display them.... she says I am her best friend'. (CE 68)

While Carol introduces Elaine with the initial form of decadent friendship among young girls, one that is confined to humiliating and degrading other, in order to satisfy ones' ego and gain attention, much more grim and hideous nature of friendship waits for her. Grace Smith, Carol's best friend, 'who is sometimes her best friend and sometimes not' (CE 68) lays bare the much more intriguing facades of friendship among young girls. She is manipulative and operates both Carol and Elaine according to her will. In her game of school, 'Grace is always the teacher, Carol and I the students'. (CE 70) They both are allowed to color in Grace's movie star coloring books as long as they stay inside the lines:

The things we play are mostly Grace's ideas, because if we try to play anything she doesn't like she says she has a headache and goes home, or else tells us to go home. She never raises her voice, gets angry, or

cries; she is quietly reproachful, as if her headache is our fault. Because we want to play with her more than she wants to play with us, she gets her way in everything. (CE 69)

While playing with Grace and Carol, she observes and learns that modesty and hypocrisy are the unspoken rules of the games between the girls. In order to gain appreciation for their work, they criticize their own work saying, "Oh, yours is so good. Mine's no good. Mine's awful." (CE 71) Elaine notices, "Their voices are wheedling and false; I can tell they don't mean it, each one thinks her own lady on her own page is good. But it's the thing you have to say, so I begin to say it too". (CE 71)

Initially Elaine finds it difficult to adopt the artificial and hypocritical feminine behavior. She confesses, "Playing with girls is different and at first I feel strange as I do it, self-conscious, as if I'm only doing an imitation of a girl. But I soon get more used to it". (CE 69) But her intense desire to fit into this world forces her to transform. Elaine finds herself changing according to the new world, "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...." (CE 71) and while watching one of her photograph from the days of her nomadic life she comments, "Already that child seems much younger, poorer, farther away, a shrunken, ignorant version of myself". (CE 74)

This effort of Elaine to fit into the world of girls makes her more passive, hence, an easy target for the other girls. The hollowness of the relationship of the girls with Elaine, is again apparent when she returns from forest and the two girls barely show signs of recognition to her. Though Carol and Grace's games are limited to make her conscious of her short comings, however, Cordelia's entry in the life of Elaine, after her return from four months sojourn in forest with her family, confronts her with the most cruel and vicious nature of childhood friendship. Unwary of the kind of relationship she is about to be entangled Elaine welcomes another friend in her life, who turns out to be her biggest tormentor.

Cordelia starts by making Elaine feel lesser with the display of the flowing vases of Swedish glass, of cleaning lady, egg cups each with an initial of family member at her house. While playing with the trio, Elaine discovers how politicized and deceptive the relationships, they share, are. They at once disapprove of one another's choice and also do so in a manner so that they do not lose their so-called friends. Cordelia disapproves of Grace's Eaton's Catalogues but, "She doesn't say this out loud though. Like the rest of us, she wants to stay on the good side of Grace". (CE 122) To establish her supremacy Cordelia tries to suppress and master all three of them but Grace denies to follow Cordelia's instructions:

"Now you kill yourself," says Cordelia.

"Why?" says Grace

"Because you've been deserted," says Cordelia

"I don't want to". says Grace..."(CE 99)

On some days when Cordelia decides, its Carol's turn, unable to revolt, to save herself Carol starts crying. Carol cries too easily and noisily and draws attention so could not be depended on for their secret manipulative games. So, Cordelia is left with Elaine, who's too docile to rebel or to express her sufferings, as the most important rule of these clandestine mind games is secrecy and Elaine realizes the need to follow this rule, "whatever is going on is going on in secret, among the four of us only. Secrecy is important, I know that: to violate it would be the greatest, the irreparable sin. If I tell I will be cast out forever". (CE 161) So to remain friends with them Elaine endures all the hostility and barbarism of her friends. All three of them treat her as a person who's ignorant and radically different from other girls and camouflages their hostility in the name of making her learn how to behave properly. Elaine, too, endures their harassment and accepts victimization as a possible solution to her ignorance, with the effort to fit into the new world:

I worry about what I've said today, the expression on my face, how I walk what I wear, because all these things need improvement. I am not normal, I am not like other girls. Cordelia tells me so, but she will help me. Grace and Carol will help me too. It will take hard work and a long time. (CE 159)

The passivity of Elaine allows her friends to treat her maliciously; many times, she's made to sit alone because they aren't speaking to her. The implied norm of this mind game is that it is not to be revealed to adults. It's evident when Elaine's father walks into the room where Elaine is made to sit alone on the window ledge, Cordelia soon moves and sit close to Elaine saying they were enjoying a lot and, she puts an arm around her, gives her 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. (CE 157) This is the most fiendish politics that prevails among the girls. The weaker one has to abide by the rules of the stronger ones in order to remain friends with them, "This is how it goes. It's the kind of thing girls of this age do to one another, or did then, but I'd had no practice in it". (CE 158)

While reminiscing about her childhood traumas Elaine wonders whether her own daughters at the age of nine, were the victims of the same politics which she herself as a child endured. Unable to judge she contemplates:

When their friends arrived at our house to play, I scanned their faces for signs of hypocrisy. Standing in the kitchen, I listened to their voices in the other room. I thought I would be able to tell. Or maybe it was worse. Maybe my daughters were doing this sort of thing themselves, to someone else. That would account for their blandness, the absence of bitten fingers, their level blue-eyed gaze. (CE 159)

To save themselves, Carol and Grace also collaborate with Cordelia in victimizing Elaine. Both of them remain watchful of Elaine in the absence of Cordelia, in order to report her later. Three joins together to prey on Elaine. At this juncture, Elaine's failure to stand up for herself and save herself from the cruelty results in giving physical pain to herself:

I chewed the ends of my hair, so that there was always one lock of hair that was pointed and wet. I gnawed the cuticles off from around my fingernails, leaving welts of exposed, oozing flesh which would harden into rinds and scale off.... I did these things constantly, without thinking about them. But the feet were more deliberate. (CE 153)

Regarding this physical pain thrust by Elaine on herself Bethan Jones in his article states that 'Self-harm, particularly in the form of feet-peeling, appears to indicate a way of regaining control: it is a displacement activity in which an immediate, palpable physical pain serves as a substitute or anesthetic for the less tangible and more devastating psychological torture.' (Jones 32)

Depressed of the victimization and to save herself from it, Elaine begins to avoid her friends, she lies to them that she had to help her mother. She pretends to be sick, but eventually she's trapped by them every time. For a time being she's relieved when the family moves to forest, 'I've begun to feel not gladness, but relief. My throat is no longer tight, I've stopped clenching my teeth, the skin on my feet has begun to grow back, my fingers have healed partially ... I can be free of words now, I can lapse back into wordlessness, I can sink back into the rhythms of transience as if into bed'. (CE 193) But this relief does not last long, as soon as the family is back in Toronto Elaine feels that already her body is stiffening, emptying itself of feeling.

She finds Cordelia waiting for her in a much harsher form. Her humiliation and harassment now knew no limits. Elaine becomes so helpless that to evade Cordelia she thinks about becoming invisible. She thinks about 'eating the deadly nightshade berries from the bushes beside the path', she thinks about 'drinking the Javex out of the skull and crossbones bottle in the laundry room', 'about jumping off the bridge', 'smashing down there like a pumpkin, half of an eye, half of a grin', 'She would come apart like the dead people'. These things which she does not wish to do but feels as if Cordelia forces her to do in her kind voice, 'Do it come on'. Later when Elaine suffers from the failed marriage with her first husband Jon, the verbal echo of Cordelia's words forces her to slash her wrist with a knife:

This is when I hear the voice, not inside my head at all but in the room, clearly: Do it. Come on. Do it. This voice doesn't offer a choice; it has the force of an order. It's the difference between jumping and being pushed. (CE 502)

Elaine claims it to be Cordelia's voice, 'It wasn't a frightening voice, in itself. Not menacing but excited, as if proposing an escapade, a prank, a treat. Something treasured, and secret. The voice of a nine-year-old-child'. (CE 504) Bethan Jones, in this context, points out that: 'The compulsion exerted by this command.... indicates the extent of Cordelia's power over her, during the two-year period of dominance and indoctrination' (Jones, 40).

Nobody is able to help Elaine in her trauma, she desires to express her suffering to her brother and asks him for help but wonders what exactly would she tell him, but tell him exactly what? Against girls and their indirectness, their whisperings, he would be helpless. On the other hand, her mother realizes Elaine's trauma but fails to help her. Elaine resents her mother's helplessness who tells her, 'You don't have to play with them'. Elaine initially feels surprised at her mother's awareness "What has she noticed, what has she guessed, what is she about to do?" (CE 211) Instead of helping her she advises her, "You have to learn to stand up for yourself". (CE 211) which more than an encouragement seems her mother's failure in helping her daughter, "I wish I knew what to do" (CE 212) Elaine thinks: 'This is a confession. Now I know what I've been suspecting: as far as this thing is concerned, she is powerless'. (CE 212) 'In *Cat's Eye*, Elaine Risley's mother does not fit the stereotype.... Rendered impotent as a role model in her daughter's eyes because she does not abide by the Establishment's code of correct deportment, Elaine's mother is an outsider to a women's world that captivates Elaine.' (Goldblatt, 279)

The confession of Elaine's mother reveals how childhood political games are difficult for the adults to understand and even if they understand it is difficult for them to do anything about them. Later, aware of her approaching death, Elaine's mother, while emptying the cellar with her daughter confesses of being aware of the hardships Elaine endured during her childhood and apologizes for her inability to help her at that time, which later Elaine is able to forgive. Carol Osborne in his article, 'Constructing the Self Through Memory: *Cat's Eye* as a Novel of Self-Development', points out this helplessness, 'Elaine, now that she is a mother, can understand and forgive her own mother for not protecting her against Cordelia. She realizes that her mother was concerned but powerless, unable to control the social pressure that had been so traumatic for her daughter.' (Osborne)

The incidents like burying in the hole and ravine ultimately confront Elaine to the vilest nature of friendship that could prevail among young girls. The former incident is though repressed by Elaine in order to be friends with them but the latter one painfully makes her aware of the cruelty of her friends. She realizes how cruel and harsh girls can be to each other. The politics in the relationship of young ones is very intriguing and incomprehensible to others. Atwood when asked, by Susan Flockhart, about the source of inspiration for such unexplored area, replies that: 'she didn't have to look for inspiration. "I've been a young girl, I worked on summer camps, I had a young sister and a daughter."' Clearly, it's a subject close to her heart. She further says: "With girls, best friend and worst enemy can be the same person. The top girl one day may find she's been deposed the next, without knowing why. It's venomous and it's incomprehensible to boys. They have whispering campaigns without including so-and-so making sure so-and-so knows about it." (Flockhart)

Elaine walks away from her friends when their torments reach culmination. 'I can hear this for what it is. It's an imitation, it's acting. It's an impersonation, of someone much older. It's a game: There was never anything about me that needed to be improved. I was always a game, and I have been fooled. I have been stupid'. (CE 259) But the traumas that shadowed her childhood continue to haunt her even in her adulthood, never again in her life she is able to relate herself with other women. Her many years of being singled out make her uncomfortable in the company of women throughout her life.

At the retrospection of her art, while observing other women in the room, she contemplates, 'They all seem to have more friends than I do, more close women friends. I've never really considered it before, this absence; I've assumed that other women were like me. They were, once. And now they are not'. (CE 470) Her out cast from the terrain of girls makes her feel 'Sisterhood is a difficult concept for me' (CE 462) which she carries with her throughout her life. By the end of the retrospection Elaine attempts to reject Cordelia's existence, that continues to haunt her, but fails. She contemplates; 'Cordelia has a tendency to exist'. (CE 557) Cordelia continues to exist within Elaine's psyche. Akin to the childhood game with her brother Stephen, she has a hypothetical conversation with Cordelia:

You're dead, Cordelia.

No I'm not.

Yes you are. You are dead.

Lie down. (CE 558)

Bethan Jones rightly remarks that: 'it is evident that Cordelia's presence can only be made dormant and passive, rather than destroyed'. (Jones 40)

The portrayal of such childhood relationships probes deep into the psyche of the changes that women have undergone in regard to relations outside family. Such relations show how pressures other than the family play a significant role in molding the behavior of a person from compassion, sanctity to violence, aggression and anger leading to turbulence in inner life that generally remains grabbed by external affectation.

Relation of siblings that have also been marred by rivalry but have also remained bonded by true feeling and emotions have lost that bonding in the present time. Friendship that was man's first true effort to form a relationship out of his family with willingness for sharing companionship is now defined by the needs and manipulations.

Atwood as the true examiner of life finds these early formative years as crucial in the formation of one's personality and one's nature of relationship in adulthood. In the absence of expected cordial and affectionate relationship during their early stage of life they eventually, too, become incapable of forming close bond with others. These fraught and uneasy relations at early age result in the complexity of selfhood, whatever little emotions and feelings they are capable of get buried beneath the false self, that they create in order to negotiate with the social expectations. Their camouflaged self though tries to form relationships that are part of social structure but they too are artificial and fake as their adopted personality. They lack the fervors and sentiments that could make their relations true and genuine.

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