

An Analysis of Social Structures and Repressive Attitude of Elaine Risley in the Novel *Cat's Eye* by Margaret Atwood

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Abstract

Canadian Poet, novelist and critic, celebrated for her feminism and complex plots. At times Atwood's plots are very somber but always filled with passion, vigor and eagerness. The present work attempts to delineate Atwood's fiction in the light of quest of identity and survival. Atwood's vision of life center around psyche, the soul and consciousness of human. The protagonist's self-exploration involves an examination of social pressures. She has suffered in different periods of her life. The process is closely related to feminist psychoanalytical theory that propose such an examination in order to produce change. Elaine's art is a way of expressing these bottled – up emotions and a means of dealing with her trauma. Atwood's purpose behind this is to bring to light the complexity of character in Elaine and highlight her struggle in coming to terms with her own identity.

KeyTerms: *Contented Relationships, Mental Trauma, Repressed Memories, Self- Analysis, and Social Pressures.*

1. Introduction

Margaret Atwood's works has been regarded as a barometer of feminist thoughts. Her protagonists are often a kind of 'Every Woman' characters or weaker number of society. Criticism has tended to focus on her political and social views as they are represented in her works, most notably her feminism, of which has spoken frequently in interviews. Since her works often portray physical and psychological violence in relationships between men and women, some commentators have labeled Atwood as a pessimistic and dismissed her as little more than an ideologue, but other critics have hailed her as a visionary interpreter of contemporary feminist thought.

II Headings

1.1 Art Retrospective

Atwood's novels involve various characters who are all in search of something, whether for answers, equilibrium, freedom, revenge, understanding and fulfillment. 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 Elaine takes a journey into her childhood and by means of it, she challenges the society and culture, that laid the basis of her identity: "This is the middle of my life. I'm supposed to have accumulated things by now: possessions, responsibilities, achievements, experience and wisdom" (Atwood 13). Beauvoir's assumptions 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*.

Atwood starts the novel with the definition of time: "Time is not a line but a dimension, like the dimensions of space" (Atwood 1). 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. In adult life she becomes a painter, but her childhood trauma haunts her 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 the baby: "I think about Susie and her wings of red blood. I refuse to end up like her"(Atwood 394). 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.

The exploration of identity is a chief theme running throughout the body of Margaret Atwood's works and *Cat's Eye* is no exception. Disturbing, hilarious and compassionate, *Cat's Eye* is a breathtaking novel of a woman grappling with the tangled knot of her life. The novel 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. Beauvoir stresses that womanhood is a social construction and not biologically determined.\

The portrayal of women in search of an identity for their own selves as well as of their country's cultural identity is an important phenomenon in recent Canadian fiction. Looking back at her past from the perspective of a relatively complacent middle age, Elaine revises her own attitudes and those of successive feminist generations to allow a wide margin for the privileges of domesticity.

When Risley comes back to Toronto, she is fifty years old and a painter of some renown. Nevertheless she has no self-worth and very little will, to get on with life. She has been going through life, reliving the relentless abuse. Many of the memories are repressed but she suffers under their weight. The only way to discover herself and let herself free is to acknowledge what had happened to her. The novel's central area of exploration is of different versions of reality and the accuracy and truthfulness of our own visions of how we see the world and ourselves.

The structure of *Cat's Eye* serves as a critique of this unproblematic view of the world. The novel constantly shifts between past and present and her narration as a young Elaine and old Elaine. The gallery is appropriately named, contributing to Atwood's hypothesis, Life is a series of different and conflicting versions of reality, identity and reality are not fixed and the concept of exact truth can never be captured. *Cat's Eye* erects another beacon of liberation, grounded in the awakening lives of girls, mothers and female artists. We have a highly personal portrait of a woman unlearning the bitterness of her past. Elaine's strongest memories are of Cordelia, the worst perpetrator of a trio of girls, whose actions tint her perceptions of relationships and her world, echoing Freud's belief that much in adult identity is formed in early childhood.

III Conclusion

Considerably, literature has influenced in the life of human being. It has an empowered language to display the inner world of man. There is no space for memories, introspection, retrospection, foreshadow, flashback and awful remembrances that are coloured by pain, wound and trauma. Atwood has an aim to illustrate the pain and suffering of female characters in order to gain self-knowledge and self-confidence for women: "This is what I miss, Cordelia not something that's gone, but something that will never happen"(Atwood 498).

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