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Memory and Identity in Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye*

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Z á s a d y p r o v y p r a c o v á n í :

Práce se zaměří na román *Cat's Eye* od současné kanadské autorky Margaret Atwood a na důležitost vzpomínek a utváření identity. S využitím relevantní sekundární literatury se studentka v úvodní části práce zamyslí nad postavením žen v daném období - pozornost bude věnovat druhé vlně feminismu v Severní Americe. V hlavní části bude autorka analyzovat minulost hlavní hrdinky (která utvářela její osobnost a které postava po návratu do města svého dětství nemůže uniknout), pokusí se vystopovat příčiny její narušené identity a též pojedná o stereotypch a prezentaci žen. Na konci práce autorka své závěry přehledně shrne.

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Abstract

The main aim of this paper is the analysis of the novel *Cat's Eye* by Margaret Atwood. The theoretical part provides readers with historical and cultural context of the novel – it is focused on the role of women in the 1940s and 1950s society, on second wave feminism in the 1960s and it explains the term identity which is crucial for the analytical part of the paper. The second part of the paper tries to trace back the reasons of identity crisis of the main protagonist of the novel. The main aim is to examine identity development of the main character with the analysis of the main character's memories.

Key words: *Cat's Eye*, roles of women in society, second wave feminism, identity, Margaret Atwood

Abstrakt

Tato práce se zabývá analýzou románu *Kočičí oko* od kanadské spisovatelky Margaret Atwood. V teoretické části je román zasazen do historicko-kulturního kontextu, který se zabývá postavením žen ve společnosti, druhou vlnou feminismu a také pojmem identita. V druhé části práce se nachází vlastní analýza díla, která se snaží vystopovat příčiny narušené identity hlavní hrdinky. Hlavním cílem je prozkoumat vývoj hrdinčiny identity pomocí analýzy hrdinčiných pamětí.

Klíčová slova: *Kočičí oko*, postavení žen ve společnosti, druhá vlna feminismu, identita, Margaret Atwood.

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1. Introduction

The paper is focused on the novel *Cat's Eye* by contemporary writer and novelist Margaret Atwood. The novel deals with the identity crisis of the main character, who is unable to define who she is, for as a child she cannot find her place in society. The main aim of this paper is to analyse the identity development of the main character who tries to face her problems and traumas in order to find herself. With the help of secondary sources among which the interviews with Atwood herself are the most helpful, this paper examines the importance of memories and identity on personal self-esteem.

The plot of the novel takes place from the 1940s to 1980s in Toronto, Canada. The period of time from the 1940s – 1960s was crucial for many women because they were forced to stay at home and take care of the family. In summary, they were forced to conform to the requirements of the society. The paper is divided into two parts. The first (theoretical) part focuses on the socio-cultural background of the three decades from the 1940s to 1960s. The first chapter describes the social role of women in the 1940s and 1950s. In this chapter it is suggested that the reason for women to stay at home is that men came back from World War II and women should leave their jobs and let their husbands work again to become the breadwinners of the family. The second chapter is about the 1960s and the growing dissatisfaction among suburban housewives who are influenced by the feminine mystique. This term is first used by Betty Friedan in the book called *The Feminine Mystique*, where Friedan focuses on women's roles in society and tries to explain why there were so many women suffering from the “problem that has no name.” This book is said to have started the Second-wave Feminism in America. It is important to note that the paper mentions America and it is thought as North America so it means the culture of the USA and Canada together because of “the Americanization of Canadian culture” (Goetsch, 169) and because “Canadians live within 100 miles of the border, making it difficult to establish any clear natural distinctions between the two countries.” (Macpherson, 11) During these three decades Canada was very influenced by American values and that is the reason why Canadian culture is covered by the more general term America or American culture. The third chapter explains what individual and collective identity means, and how it should be

understood for the purposes of this paper, because this term is very often used throughout the whole thesis.

Then the second (analytical) part follows. In this part the book *Cat's Eye* is analysed. It can be said that the novel is a frame narrative in which the protagonist Elaine has a retrospective exhibition of her paintings in Toronto and as she comes back to the place where she experienced serious torment she is overwhelmed by the memories of her childhood she has to face and accept in order to find her identity. The analysis focuses especially on Elaine, who tries to find her identity and deal with the memories of her painful childhood. The analysis traces identity damages back to her childhood and the chapters are arranged chronologically. The first chapter of the analysis is about Elaine's family background which formed her identity as a child. The next chapter describes Elaine and her life in Toronto where she has to conform to the society but it is hard due to her different family background and later it is the reason why she is seriously abused and bullied by her peers. In this chapter the main character suffers from an identity crisis and represses her memories of torment. The third chapter is then focused on her life from the university to the present when she comes back to Toronto and regains the memories of her childhood, so she is able to face the troubles she once had. The paper ends with a conclusion which summarizes the findings.

2. Roles of Women in the 1940s and 1950s Society

The main purpose of this chapter is to describe social and cultural background in the 1940s and 1950s. The chapter is focused especially on white middle-class women in Northern America. The 1940s radically changed women's status in the society because during World War II women had to replace men in the work place but when men returned from the war the place of women is again at home with the children, for it is believed that “men should be paid a sufficiently large wage so that women and children did not have to work.” (Kleinberg, 196) As already mentioned, World War II provided new employment opportunities for women:

Many worked for more money in a broader variety of jobs than previously and wished to keep their jobs. They combined employment with looking after their families, while being constantly reminded that their war service was a temporary expedient to bring the troops home faster. (Kleinberg,203)

After World War II women stayed again at home where they were caught in a trap of domesticity which became popular during the 1940s and 1950s. As a result of this era many women married young and these two decades are typically characterised as a baby-boom era:

The decade after World War II was characterized [...] as the “decade of domesticity” because of its high birthrates and its emphasis on home, family and women's traditional roles. (Mueller, 240)

The society became more conservative, and so traditional gender roles were supported. The importance of family also increased, for there was “a growing conviction that families of three and four children were “normal” and desirable, in contrast to the socially correct family of one and two children in thirties.” (Link, 588) A new set of values and the needs of the families forced them to move away from cities or villages to suburbia. Link claims that “former city-dwellers not only found a new way of life in suburbia but also became increasingly conservative as property owners and members of integrated communities.” (Link, 632)

The conservativeness of suburbia-dwellers only supports all the generally agreed stereotypes about gender roles, for example that “men remained the primary

breadwinners and women the keepers of the home.” (Meyerowitz, 1471) For this reason many post-war era “journalists, educators, advertisers, and social scientists had pulled women into the home” (Meyerowitz, 1455) and as the women living in suburbia adjusted to the norm they were strongly influenced by magazines:

The magazines assumed that women wanted to marry, that women found being wives and mothers rewarding, and that women would and should be the primary parents and housekeepers. In the midst of the baby boom, some articles glorified the housewife, sometimes in conscious attempts to bolster her self-esteem. (Meyerowitz, 1470)

Magazines and advertisements played an important role in conformism as they targeted large groups of white middle-class suburban housewives who could be then easily manipulated by the magazines.

As women were forced to stay at home and take care of their families they were exposed to conformity and consumerism and so they were easily manipulated by advertisements and magazines. These magazines created a largely supported ideal of the suburban housewife who became the norm of that era, and so many women accepted it as a norm and conformed to it. McLeod says that conformity is:

A type of social influence involving a change in belief or behaviour in order to fit in with a group. This change is in response to real (involving the physical presence of others) or imagined (involving the pressure of the social norms / expectations) group pressure.[...] Group pressure may take different forms, for example bullying, persuasion, teasing, criticism etc. (McLeod²)

Group pressure on women to adjust the norm and return back to their houses was really great and many women obeyed it without any question. Until the 1960s the only place for a woman was her home where she took care of her family and did not want to be more than a happy housewife from suburbia.

3. The 1960s and *The Feminine Mystique*

Second Wave feminism emerged in the 1960s as a reaction to the traditional concept of family and gender roles. Women were not satisfied with their role in society, for they were forced to stay at home and to take care of the family and household. While the first-wave feminism was mostly about “women's struggle for the rights to acquire an education, own property and vote” but “having won these rights, however, women

remained subordinate to men” (Dean, 63), Second Wave movement emerged especially among white middle-class suburban women and Thomson suggests that reason was that there was a “rising number of white, middle-class women unwilling to be treated like second-class citizens in the boardroom, in education, or in bed.” (Thomson, 338) The most influential book, published in 1963, is called *The Feminine Mystique*, written by Betty Friedan, who “argued that American women, especially suburban women, suffered from deep discontent.” (Meyerowitz, 1455)

Friedan focused her book especially on white middle-class, suburban housewives whose lives were determined by the majority of society: “There was a strange discrepancy between the reality of our lives as women and the image to which we were trying to conform, the image that I came to call the feminine mystique.” (Friedan, 7) The image which Friedan talked about was represented in all the magazines published in the 1940s and 1950s; these magazines helped to create the feminine mystique which mirrored the perfect American housewife:

The American housewife – freed by science and labor-saving appliances from the drudgery, the dangers of childbirth and the illnesses of her grandmother. She was healthy, beautiful, educated, concerned only about her husband, her children, her home. She had found true feminine fulfillment. As a housewife and mother, she was respected as a full and equal partner in his world. She was free to choose automobiles, clothes, appliances, supermarkets; she had everything that women ever dreamed of. (Friedan, 13)

There is a question then why all these women were unhappy when they had everything they want. Although suburban wives had everything they wanted and their lives were eased by appliances it seems that consumerism and the need for new products did not solve their problems. As Whiteley claims:

Obsolescence was not only accepted by the fashion-conscious young, often it was positively celebrated [...] 'style obsolescence' was not a 1960s' invention: it can be traced directly back to the 'high mass-consumption' stage of post-Second World War consumerist America, and has its origins even earlier in the century. (Whiteley, 3)

Friedan also noticed that consumerism played an important role in lives of suburban housewives and so the advertisements were focused especially on them as they force them “to buy more things for the house.” (Friedan, 197) Friedan argued that “the perpetuation of housewifery, the growth of the feminine mystique, makes sense (and

dollars) when one realizes that women are the chief customers of American business.” (Friedan, 197) Hite confirms that:

Feminine identity comes from the requirement that the adult woman internalize a permanent belief in her need for improvement, a belief essential to her primary role as consumer, as the magazine advertisements indicate. (Hite, 142)

Friedan sees suburban housewives as easy targets to manipulate through mass media, for mass media claim that women can find a “sense of identity, creativity, or the self-realization by the buying of things.” (Friedan, 199) It means that women need to fill their free time by buying many new appliances for the household, although consumerism did not solve their feelings of emptiness and loneliness. While they were manipulated by the media into believing that having all the things was essential for their self-realization. Sellers realized that women often identify with their advertisements and so they also targeted teenage girls, for they felt they needed to get them “in schools, churches, sororities, social clubs, [...] teenage TV programs and teenage advertising, [for] this is the big market of the future.” (Friedan, 211) The main purpose of this advertising was to keep the housewives at home and not let them think independently or, worse, let them be independent.

Although women in the 1960s were claimed to be equal to men, they were still dependent on their husbands and they were not encouraged to find their self-realization somewhere outside the home. Thus housekeeping should have given the impression that it was equal to careers of their husbands: “Housework, washing dishes, diaper-changing had to be dressed up by the new mystique to become equal to splitting atoms, penetrating outer space.” (Friedan, 229) Feminine mystique gave women “prestige” as housewives (Friedan, 244) but it discouraged women to find their identity and self-realization as an independent person.

In fact, women lost their identity voluntarily as they married young and rejected thinking about their future apart from family and children. Friedan claims that “the feminine mystique permits, even encourages, women to ignore the question of their identity. The mystique says they can answer the question “Who am I?” by saying “Tom's wife... Mary's mother.” (Friedan, 64) The author says that American women have lost their identity and now they search for a new image to identify with. This

image is largely supported by mass media, especially by the magazines, television, and commercials and so “glossy public image decides every detail of their lives.” (Friedan, 65)

It was generally accepted that “anatomy is woman's destiny [...] the identity of women is determined by her biology.” (Friedan, 71) Logically, this resulted in the theory, that a woman's role in society is maintained by her gender and so she is primarily a mother and a housewife rather than she might have any other identity, for example as a painter. Friedan's opinions stand in contrast against these prejudices, for she claims that “women and men found personal identity and fulfilment through individual achievement, most notably through careers.” (Meyerowitz, 1455) Although Friedan persuaded women to try to be recognized also outside their household, she still represented the liberal way of feminism in which all these early feminist were “feminine, married, and not man-hating.” (Meyerowitz, 1460)

Being “feminine” was the main aim of many American women and this illusion was supported by the feminine mystique which ordered women “adjustment to the feminine role” and found “fulfillment as a wife and mother.” (Friedan, 16) And so while women were told “how to dress, look, and act more feminine” (Friedan, 11), they gradually started to be dissatisfied with the roles they had in the society. But none of these women were able to describe what exactly the source of the problem was; many women said that they feel “empty somehow... incomplete” or “as if [they] don't exist” and that they do not “feel alive.” (Friedan, 16, 17) Horowitz claims that Friedan “discovered what she called “The Problem That Has No Name,” the dissatisfaction her suburban peers felt but could not fully articulate.” (Horowitz, 5) Friedan then says:

Each suburban wife struggled with it alone. As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, [...] lay beside her husband at night – she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question – “Is this all?” (Friedan, 11)

Friedan is persuaded that the answer to the question would be to find a career because she is persuaded that women wasted time on doing routine housework although they could be useful and rewarded outside their house as well.

To sum up, the 1960s were mainly connected with rising interest in minorities such as race, ethnicity, and also gender. This chapter summarizes opinions of the most influential feminist author of that era – Betty Friedan. Friedan fought for women's rights to be recognized as equal to men; in her book *The Feminine Mystique* she explains why women lost their identity, who was a typical American woman and why she suffered at home. Friedan criticized the society for consumerism and conformism which were seen as the main problems of women's identity development.

4. Individual and Collective Identity

This chapter tries to explain what identity means and how to understand it in context of this paper. There are two types of identities which are described in this chapter - individual identity and collective identity. Both are very closely tied together. Johnston says that without a collective or society the individual would not have a mirror to reflect their behaviour and so they would not find their individual identity, for individual identity is very much based on the perspective of the others:

Sociologists and social psychologists have pointed out that personal identity emerges through the mirror of social interaction, that is, by playing different roles and by interpreting how others see us. (Johnston, 13)

A very similar opinion is also suggested by Hogg and Abrams who claim that individual identity is “people's concepts of who they are, of what sort of people they are, and how they relate to others.” (Hogg and Abrams, 2) Influential psychologist Erik H. Erikson who focuses on identity construction and development, claims that childhood is one of the most influential stages of life when the identity develops and is constructed. In his book *Identity Youth and Crisis*, he explains that there are five life stages when the individual gains his or her identity; as has been already mentioned identity construction is developing from early childhood to adolescence. Erikson claims that the identity is “the mere sum of earlier identifications.” (Erikson, 158) He also suggests that:

Identity formation, finally, begins where the usefulness of identification ends. It arises from the selective repudiation and mutual assimilation of childhood identifications and their absorption in a new configuration, which, in turn, is dependent on the process by which a society [...] identifies the young individual, recognizing him as somebody who had to become the way he is who, being the way he is, is taken for granted. (Erikson, 159)

In summary, Erikson claims that children identify with the patterns they see in their environment (for example at home or at school) and from all these identifications new identity and personality is formed: “Family, neighbourhood, and school provide contact and experimental identification with younger and older children and with young and old adults.” (Erikson, 161) However, the term identity is hard to describe and many other authors also try to explain what identity means and how it should be described to be clear and understood.

Smith, for example, claims that individual identity or the self “is composed of multiple identities and roles – familial, territorial, class, religious, ethnic and gender [and] how each of these identities is based on social classifications that may be modified or even abolished.” (Smith, 4) Smith's opinion is closely connected to collective identity, for he suggests that the individual identity is “made up of social roles and cultural categories” (Smith, 3) which means that, for example, a woman in the 1940s and 1950s is a mother, wife, and female – these are her social and cultural categories: “The groups [...] which people belonged to were an important source of pride and self-esteem. Groups give us a sense of social identity: a sense of belonging to the social world.” (McLeod¹) Johnston suggests that “the concept of collective identity refers to the (often implicitly) agreed upon definition of membership, boundaries, and activities for the group.” (Johnston, 15) It means that if the individual agrees with the philosophy or the concept of the group he would simply identify and adopt the rules which he conforms: “Collective identity is an interactive and shared definition produced by several individuals (or groups at a more complex level).” (Melucci, 44) For an individual it is important to have a sense of belonging to a group of people or society because these provide them with a feeling of security and with generally accepted rules the individuals can identify with. McLeod divides people into in-group (individuals who are included in a group) and out-group (individuals who are excluded) and says that “the central hypothesis of social identity theory is that group members of an in-group will seek to find negative aspects of an out-group, thus enhancing their self-image.” (McLeod¹) This is what happened to women who did not conform to the norm to be the housewives instead they chose career and so housewives could exclude them and pity them in order to strengthen their self-image as feminine women and wives, for example.

Elaine's Family and Their Influence

The main aim of this chapter is to introduce Elaine's family, the Risleys, and its members because they have a significant impact on Elaine's personality development. Her family has four members: the father, the mother, her older brother Stephen, and Elaine. It is important to introduce each member of the family and their unusual lifestyle which is very different from the typical 1940s and 1950s family pattern propagated in that era. 1940s and 1950s lifestyle is described in the theoretical part of this paper. It is evident later in the novel that Elaine's unusual family background helps her to make important decisions but it also proves to lead to trouble once the Risleys settle in Toronto.

Elaine's father is an entomologist and his job forces him to be a fieldworker and so his family leads a nomadic lifestyle. They all sleep in tents or in motels and they spend most of their time in the wilderness. Elaine's father talks often about environmental problems such as pollution or extinction of species and his scientific opinions also help to form Elaine's personality; she is expected to become a biologist until the day she surprisingly decides to be a painter. Her father's job not only means that the family has to live in the wilderness but it also impacts on the family in religious way – her father as a scientist does not worship God and so the children are not influenced by religion – which is later a thing that Elaine somehow misses because it makes her different from her friends: “She has no religious training since her father, a scientist, does not believe in organized religion.” (Osborne) Elaine announces her decision to be a painter to her parents who are alarmed and persuaded that painting is not a way how to make a living and for her father Elaine becomes “a botanist manqué” (Atwood, 338) because he thinks that her talent is wasted. In the 1950s girls are forced to conform to the feminine mystique but Elaine's parents “just believed that it was incumbent on [her] to become as educated as possible.” (Ingersoll, 55) Her parents do not have prejudice against female gender as the majority of society has (and so forces women to fulfil their feminine role); her parents want her to be independent and be able to take care of herself.

The next member of the family is Elaine's mother who is an independent person and “does not give a hoot” (Atwood, 253) about other people and their opinions. It is especially clear later in the novel when little Elaine and her family moves to Toronto.

While the family lives in the bush and is not exposed to the pressure of the majority society represented by middle-class suburban families the personalities of both children are developing naturally and without any facing the reality. Hite suggests that:

The single-family house [is] a unit that serves the disciplinary purpose of fixing hitherto nomadic populations like Elaine's own family. In particular, such houses pin down mothers, who are supposed to occupy them continually. (Hite, 141)

After moving to Toronto it is especially Elaine who feels the restriction of the middle-class society and requirements she tries really hard to meet. Elaine wishes to conform to the society, which is really hard for her, for her mother does not provide the right milieu for little Elaine. Elaine's mother stands in a sharp contrast to a typical 1940s and 1950s housewife. While a typical housewife has a husband, children, and a perfect house in the suburbs and her hobbies are cleaning, Hoovering, and other housework; Elaine's mother is the complete opposite of them. In the 1940s she spends most of the time in the bush, and when she moves to Toronto she does not mind that their house is not finished and furnished. She is not keen on housekeeping and cooking and her main task is not to look perfect. Elaine later comments that her mother "did most of the cooking but it was not her favourite thing. She was not fond of housework generally." (Atwood, 178) For example, in the cellar they have "several things made of real silver [...] wrapped in tissue paper and turning black, because otherwise they would have to be polished." (Atwood, 178) This example shows mother's attitude towards housekeeping and especially towards pointless work which is an everyday duty of a "good" housewife expected by the magazines and the society.

Elaine's mother not only has an indifferent attitude to housekeeping but she also does not mind how she looks. She wears whatever she wants; on their travels she wears "her slacks and boots and her man's jacket" (Atwood, 179). She wears this kind of clothing even after they move to Toronto – her mother claims that "all her taste is in her mouth" (Atwood, 253). And that is the reason why her clothes are bought by her husband. Elaine is quite angry with her mother because she does not ask the question: "*What will people think?* the way other mothers do, or are supposed to do." (Atwood, 253) Elaine's adolescence and growing awareness of the feminine world could be considered as the reasons why Elaine separates from her mother (because she feels embarrassed that her

mother does not conform). The fact that Elaine takes care of herself and her mother does not care is even more disturbing because:

She [Elaine's mother] is becoming even more indifferent to fashion, and strides around in improvised get-ups, a ski-jacket, an old scarf, mitts that don't match. She says she doesn't care what it looks like as long as it keeps out the wind. (Atwood, 253)

Elaine realises these contrasts especially when talking with her friend Carol Campbell who shows her the world of typical housewives, and Elaine finds her mother disappointing since she does not fit the requirements of society. By living in the wilderness, Elaine's mother avoids the pressure of the society to fulfil her role as a perfect mother and housewife; therefore, when living in Toronto she does not realize all those requirements and restrictions as clearly as young Elaine. She is not a victim of consumerism which forces women to buy newer and newer things from clothes to products which should ease their housekeeping. Elaine notices: "As far as she [mother] is concerned a chair is there to sit down on, and she couldn't care less whether it has pink petunias on it or purple polka dots, as long as it doesn't collapse." (Atwood, 253) As Elaine's mother hates shopping, it is her father who furnishes their house: "She does not inhabit the house, the way the other mothers do; she's airy and hard to pin down." (Atwood, 185) Elaine does not realise that her mother shows her a pattern which she will follow later in the novel, for her mother is seen as an independent woman who is able to manage her own life and hobbies. Some of her mother's personality traits might be later seen in Elaine's own behaviour – for example her attitude towards housekeeping, or her ability to swim against the tide when she decides to be a painter, which is very unusual, since artists are mainly men.

When Elaine remembers the time when she is seriously tormented by her friends she asks herself: "What would I have done if I had been my mother? She must have realized what was happening to me." (Atwood, 178) Truly, her mother suspects that Elaine is bullied and she advises Elaine "to learn to stand up for [herself]" (Atwood, 186) but this advice is all that her mother can offer to her daughter. Elaine understands that her mother is powerless and cannot help her because she does not look credible and no one would believe her story:

She might tell their mothers. This would be the worst thing she could do [...] My mother is not like the other mothers, she doesn't fit in with the idea of them [...] They seem to me grown up in a way that my own mother is not. I think of Carol's mother in her twin set, her sceptical smile, Cordelia's with her glasses on a chain and her vagueness, Grace's and her hairpins and drooping apron. My mother will turn up on their doorsteps, wearing slacks, carrying a bouquet of weeds, incongruous. They won't believe her. (Atwood, 185, 186)

This quotation compares Elaine's mother with her friends' mothers who all fit the requirements of the society. In comparison to Grace's mother who devotes her life to her family and who is a regular visitor to the church, Carol's mother who is caught in a consumerism trap by wearing twin sets and cold waves, and Cordelia's delicate mother; Elaine's mother is too different to be trusted.

The last member of the family is Stephen. He is Elaine's older brother and when living in the wilderness they spend time together playing games. Elaine does exactly the same things as Stephen – they play wars, explore the forest or they compete in different games. Elaine is simply identified with him she plays games which girls are not supposed to play but Elaine is not aware of social and gender restrictions which shows a woman or a girl her place in society. Stephen treats her as a boy and so she does not know about the feminine world and even her mother does not behave as a feminine woman and as Elaine has no pattern to follow “she [Elaine] spends her time happily as a person rather than a gender-conditioned woman.” (Wilson², 304) As Elaine has grown up with Stephen she understands boys better and she does not think of them as a different species. She spends a lot of time with her brother she later knows how to behave towards other boys and she feels comfortable in their company. Atwood claims that “the “boy world” has been friendlier to her.” (Ingersoll, 174) Even though Elaine is not yet aware of the feminine world she feels that she is different from Stephen and that is why she later desperately wants a girlfriend:

I want some friends, friends who will be girls. Girl friends. I know that these exist, having read about them in books, but I've never had any girl friends because I've never been in one place long enough. [...] I don't think about what I might say to them if I actually met some. I haven't got that far. (Atwood, 31, 33)

Her wish comes true after some time when her father accepts a position at the University of Toronto and this act means that the family has to settle in Toronto. After moving there, Elaine makes some friends but the bond between little Elaine and her brother weakens, since they are separated at school which is divided into boys and girls

sections. What Elaine learns among little girls is a new role of “a consumer; what she lets go of is her competitive nature, a nature fuelled by growing up with an older brother.” (Macpherson, 61) Cooke suggests that “the prevailing school culture, which separates girls from boys, gradually draws Stephen away from Elaine. Instead of playing with Stephen, she takes up with Carol Campbell” but “she understands much better the games Stephen plays with his own friends.” (Cooke, 99) Stephen is very clever and he becomes a scientist, sometime he discusses physics with Elaine who is interested in “discussions about physics and the nature of time and the universe” (Cooke, 103) although it is not feminine to be interested in science.

5. Identity Crisis and Tormenting

Following chapter is focused on Elaine's childhood in Toronto from the age of eight to seventeen; it is the first time in her life when Elaine has the opportunity to compare her family with the typical 1940s family. She sees that her background is completely different and it makes her a target of severe bullying, for she and her family do not fit into the ideal of the 1940s. This chapter traces Elaine's identity development back to her childhood experiences which have a considerable impact on her further problematic relationships with other women; especially with her tormentor and simultaneously her best friend Cordelia.

“Until we moved to Toronto I was happy.” (Atwood, p. 23) Elaine's retrospective comment on the situation summarizes very precisely her opinion about her life in Toronto. Since the first moments in Toronto, she feels desperate and trapped in their new house; she knows that she loses her freedom and soon she has to confront the pressure of the society and many new situations. This new environment makes Elaine nervous since she is not used to living in one place: “I feel trapped. I want to be back in the motel, back on the road, in my old rootless life of impermanence and safety.” (Atwood, 36) Their new house is a big disappointment for her because it is unfinished and it is in a big contrast to the image of a cosy suburban house: “We are a far cry from picket fences and white curtains.” (Atwood, 37) The only advantage Elaine sees is her own room which can be arranged as she herself wishes with no regard to her brother, but even though it sounds exciting she feels loneliness and bleakness. These two

feelings she connects with Toronto until her adulthood: “I hate this city. I've hated it so long I can hardly remember feeling any other way about it.” (Atwood, 13)

Soon after moving to Toronto, Elaine befriends two girls, Carol and Grace who introduce Elaine to unknown world of “pageboy haircuts, Eaton catalogues, and twin sets.” (Osborne) Elaine is amazed by the new world which is opened for her and she slowly becomes aware of the restrictions and requirements which the middle-class society forces girls and women to accept. While Carol and Grace play with Elaine they show her the way she should behave too; for example by playing with catalogues, cutting out pictures of women and furniture and pasting them into their scrapbooks, but little Elaine does not understand these games much. Hite suggests that:

These pasted-down women serve as models of housebound Fifties femininity: like all the mothers but Elaine's own, they are fixed in place by the requirements of consumption and ownership. (Hite, 145)

Little girls from their early childhood are furtively forced to fulfil the requirements of the society for a perfect woman; they adopt these requirements and “things women should *not* do as she [they] flip through women's magazines” (Cooke, 108) and by reading these magazines girls slowly learn what an ideal woman is like.

As discussed above middle class society in the 1940s and 1950s is quite conservative and forces others to conform to the norm, which for women means to be feminine, in order not to be excluded and considered an outsider like Elaine. When comparing Elaine, Carol and Grace, the novel suggests that Carol and Grace would probably be the best products of the middle-class ideology (which is to be a perfect wife). Carol can be considered as the most successful product of the middle-class requirements; she accepts her gender role very easily since her mother represents an example of a feminine woman whose life is influenced by consumerism. Carol just adopts patterns she sees at home. Her mother is a perfect female and her father is the head of the family who has the power over his family. And even though Carol's mother has a job as a singer, which is not entirely typical for 1940s housewife, she is still caught in the consumerism trap: she wears twin sets, cold waves; they have twin beds, and other popular products of the 1940s. However, Elaine and her mother do not know “about the material trappings of

middle-class culture.” (Osborne) Carol is growing up in the family where masculine and feminine worlds are clearly divided; hence she gains a feeling that boys are different.

While Carol's mother is an example of a feminine woman, Grace's mother rather represents a perfect example of suburban housewife whose life is determined by the majority of the society. She stays at home and devotes her life to her family and household. She takes care of the family, she goes to church and she buys things from the catalogues; this pattern will probably be adopted by her daughters as well. Grace prefers scrapbooks into which she pastes women with furniture cut out from the magazines and catalogues. From her early childhood, Grace is caught in a consumerism trap which influences her strongly and playing other games, for example theatre, is boring for her because “Made-up stories don't interest her unless they contain a lot of real things: toasters, ironing boards, the wardrobes of movie stars.” (Atwood, 86) It can be seen that Grace is successfully targeted by advertisements and magazines which, according to Friedan, try to focus on younger and younger girls to catch them and influence them as new potential customers in the future.

As a result of growing up in the major middle class society, Carol and Grace adopt naturally feminine behaviour and due to their experience they become Elaine's guides through the feminine world. With the help of Carol who shows Elaine the feminine world, and Grace who introduces her to religious principles, Elaine learns how to behave as a girl and she finds the girl's world much easier than the boy's world because she does not have to prove her strength to anyone or to compete to strengthen her position in a group. Elaine comments: “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.” (Atwood, 61) From this it is obvious that she tries to fit to her new role but she does not feel comfortable as she has to pretend and do things to which she does not have any relation; Atwood agrees: “Girl” was learned for her rather than assimilated. If you grow up with a lot of girls around, then you just absorb.” (Ingersoll, 175) Elaine is forced by the group and also society to fit into her new feminine role which is not natural for her, but she tries to learn her new gender identity and she adopts its typical features even though she has to forget the way she behaved with her brother.

Although the main protagonist is not used to her new life, she lives quite calmly and she would probably soon get used to behaving as a typical girl until a new girl joins the group and this girl completely changes life of the group. This new girl is named Cordelia and from the first moment Elaine feels uneasy about meeting her, for her behaviour is different from other girls – she is more like an adult than a child and that makes Elaine “feel shy with Cordelia” (Atwood, 82) but then Cordelia confidently “creates a circle of two, takes [Elaine] in.”(Atwood, 83) Elaine feels relief as she thinks she is included.

However, instead of protecting Elaine and guiding her, Cordelia soon starts bullying her for her being different. Osborne agrees that “instead of providing an outlet for Elaine, Cordelia becomes the embodiment of the culture's intolerance.” (Osborne) Everything starts the day when the girls play the burial of Mary Queen of Scots by lowering Elaine, who impersonates Mary Queen, into a hole which Cordelia digs in the garden. “When I was put into the hole I knew it was a game; now I know it is not one. I feel sadness, a sense of betrayal. Then I feel the darkness pressing down on me; then terror [...] the point at which I lost power” (Atwood, 125, 126) Not only does the main protagonist lose power, she also loses her self-confidence and identity. This treatment results in many memory gaps. When Elaine tries to remember this cruel game and also her birthday shortly after the incident, she cannot remember anything.

After this event Cordelia decides that Elaine needs improvement and she starts tormenting her; for Elaine this time becomes a nightmare. She is uncertain and feels uneasy to be with girls, she rather avoids them because she is permanently under the gaze of Cordelia who always punishes Elaine's wrong behaviour. Atwood explains that “childhood is very intense, because children can't imagine a future. They can't imagine the pain being over.” (Ingersoll, 122) Elaine confirms this when she reminisces on Cordelia:

What do you have to say for yourself? Cordelia used to ask. Nothing, I would say. It as a word I came to connect with myself, as if I was nothing, as if there was nothing there at all. (Atwood, 47)

As Elaine is lost in the world of girls and she just pretends to behave like a girl she naively believes that Cordelia does all these things for her own good:

All of this is for my own good, because they are my best friends and they want to help me improve. [...] 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. (Atwood, 140)

Cooke suggests that the situation is even worse for Elaine because she is persuaded that these girls are her best friends and so concludes that “pure and consistent hatred would have made it simpler.” (Cooke, 101) Bullying makes the main character nervous; she loses her confidence and she has a low self-esteem, for she cannot behave in a way which is natural for her, like when she played with her brother. As a result of this tormenting “Elaine begins surreptitiously to peel skin off her fingers and feet,” (Macpherson, 61) for she needs to feel that she is alive and there is also something else to think about: “The pain gave me something definite to think about, something immediate. It was something to hold onto.” (Atwood, 134) While she tries hard to conform to Cordelia's requirements which are never satisfied, she is haunted by girls and always criticised:

Once I'm outside the house there is no getting away from them. They are on the school bus, where Cordelia stands close beside me and whispers into my ear: “Stand up straight! People are looking!” Carol is in my classroom, and it's her job to report to Cordelia what I do and say all day. [...] They comment on the kind of lunch I have, how I hold my sandwich, how I chew. On the way home from school I have to walk in front of them or behind. In front is worse because they talk about how I'm walking, how I look from behind. (Atwood, 141)

This tormenting results in her low self-confidence which lasts until her adulthood; she is not able to get rid of the feeling that she is watched by the society and other women as well as being judged. As the main protagonist is still watched and criticised, she “gradually learns how to exist under the Gaze and then to manipulate it, whether sent by Cordelia, Grace, and Carol.” (Wilson¹, 182) Elaine learns that it is better not to ask questions, for whatever she says is wrong. She finds an unusual solution to her problems with girls, when she learns how to faint, and Elaine uses fainting as a kind of escape from her bullies and their orders. As Elaine is nervous about being with girls, she starts to avoid them because whatever she does is wrong. Elaine becomes puzzled because she does not know how to behave to please Cordelia and not to be punished. She asks: “Is it wrong to be right? How right should I be, to be perfect?” (Atwood, 147) Elaine does not understand that there is nothing wrong with her and she is just a random

target of bullying and that Cordelia tries her bullying also on other girls but is not as successful as with Elaine.

As a consequence of Elaine's uneasiness with other girls, she starts to empathize with other people who are also excluded from society. The first person she sympathizes with is Mr. Banerji who is from India and wants to live and work in Canada. She immediately identifies with him since she notices his unease when he talks to other people. Deery suggests that Elaine “detects a similarity between his position and hers” (Deery, 482); she feels that he is in trouble for he is excluded from the Canadian society – “like Elaine Mr. Banerji is never totally accepted in Toronto.” (Osborne) She knows that Mr. Banerji feels up-rooted and like an alien in the conservative society where differences, which do not fit into the norm, are never accepted. The narrator shares these feelings, for she is also considered different and so she understands that she would never be accepted by the society because of her unusual background. Erikson's approach to identity construction says that:

Children at different stages of their development identify with those part aspects of people by which they themselves are most immediately affected, whether in reality or fantasy. (Erikson, 158)

Other people whom Elaine aligns with are Mrs. Finestein (who is Jewish and so her living in the Christian society, where Jews are considered the murderers of the Christ, is not easy) and her teacher Mrs. Stuart (who is from Scotland) – both are foreign and are not accepted by Toronto middle class people. Later in the novel the main character depicts all three people in a painting called *The Three Muses* which shows them as influential people who provide Elaine with a kind of protection and security, for they have always been kind to little Elaine although society represented especially by Elaine's friends and their parents hints that she does not belong among them.

Elaine overhears the conversation of Mrs. Smeath with her sister – they are both talking about the protagonist as a heathen who is unable to learn the habits of “normal people” and what is more, she understands that adults are aware of her being tormented but they “sanction the abuse she [Elaine] receives from her peer for being different.” (Osborne) Even her own mother is powerless and cannot protect her daughter against all those attacks. Elaine now sees that she is alone and no one helps her to solve her problems

even though adults know about the tormenting; she understands that she has to be self-reliant. It takes her some time, however, to learn how to solve her unpleasant situation and stand up for herself. Atwood comments: ““Socialization” wasn't a word in the '40s. Nobody paid any attention to that, you were in school to learn to read and write and that was it, not to be socialized.” (Ingersoll, 172) That is also the reason why nobody pays any attention to Elaine's problems she has within the group of girls. The only kind of “socialization” in the 1940s is conformity as Elaine's family is not a conformist family – it provides a different milieu and background for little Elaine and so she is abused and bullied for her being different and nonconformist.

While she realizes that there is no one to protect her, the tormenting escalates and it ends when Cordelia forces the main hero to go to a ravine to retrieve a hat which Cordelia had thrown into the ravine as a punishment for laughing at her. It is winter and Elaine nearly freezes to death because her “friends” leave her. After this event Elaine gathers her strength and realizes that she does not need them and that they only used her for their cruel improvement plays: “It's a game. There was never anything about me that needed to be improved. It was always a game, and I have been fooled.” (Atwood, 229) Then Elaine decides to go her separate way and to forget her torment. Thus, the main protagonist “represses her memories so effectively that when Cordelia re-enters her life after a period away [...], Elaine does not acknowledge their past.” (Macpherson, 62) She is successful in forgetting her bad times and hardens herself; she says she is “hard-shelled, firmly closed” (Atwood, 237) as the result of this hardening is Elaine's “invulnerability to the girls' taunts.” (Cooke, 102)

After being reunited with Cordelia at high school, Elaine befriends her again. In this period the relationship between Elaine and her friend changes radically; Cordelia loses her power over Elaine and conversely, Elaine gains power over Cordelia. Elaine is pleased by the new situation and enjoys her power over Cordelia: “I'm surprised at how much pleasure this gives me, to know she's so uneasy, to know I have this much power over her.” (Atwood, 274) Cooke claims that “each one draws strength from the other. We never see a time, in this novel, where both [Cordelia and Elaine] are strong and independent of one another.” (Cooke, 108) Girls are monitoring each other and whenever Cordelia feels great Elaine feels low and vice versa. Once Cordelia was

stronger but it is Elaine who more powerful; Elaine is finally able to discover who Cordelia really is although she still does not know about her painful childhood memories.

Elaine watches Cordelia closely and notices that her friend is somehow the wrong person. The discovery is made when the main protagonist visits her at home. Cordelia's sisters make fun of Cordelia and she is not able to react verbally, she just flushes. "Pull up your socks, Cordelia, or you'll flunk your year again. You know what Daddy said last time." (Atwood, 248) The threat embodied by her father becomes clear when Elaine meets Cordelia's father. Cordelia is afraid of her father and she is not able to answer his questions, for "she is frightened of not pleasing him." (Atwood, 295) And as Elaine detects: "He is not pleased. I've seen it many times, her dithering, fumble-footed efforts to appease him. But nothing she can do or say will ever be enough, because she is somehow the wrong person." (Atwood, 295) Cordelia is not as perfect, beautiful, and intelligent as her sisters, and as she is still compared with them at home she gradually changes to be different from them. Cordelia cannot please her family and so

Cordelia's treatment of Elaine, then mirrors her own family's treatment of her. In tormenting Elaine, Cordelia is simply acting out of the loneliness and rejection she feels within her own family, even echoing her parents' words in her reprimands of Elaine. (Osborne, 5)

In addition to previously mentioned situation at Cordelia's home, Elaine becomes a witness of Cordelia's change into the black sheep of the family. She begins to shoplift, smoke and drink. She slowly loses interest in education and fails her year again. It seems she does not care. As Cordelia rejects her present, she often mentions old times, but Elaine refuses to think of them because she is afraid that there could be something bad and dangerous for her. Cordelia confesses to Elaine that she used to have lots of problems with her father and that she hated the school and the house they moved to. As Cordelia continues confessing, Elaine avoids knowing more:

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 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)

After this moment the narrator starts to avoid her best friend since she is afraid that she discovers something she does not want to know. Cordelia's inferiority complex is even worse, when she is not accepted in her family and her defeatist attitude is mirrored in her personality and appearance: "Her hair is lustreless, the flesh of her face pasty. She's gained a lot of weight." (Atwood, 302) She does not take care of her appearance which is one of the main attributes of the 1950s society; as Hite suggests that "most of the women of *Cat's Eye* are obsessed with controlling how they look." (Hite, 139) This controlling of their appearance is supported by the idea that every woman has to be improved "as the magazine advertisements indicate." (Hite, 142) Elaine notices that Cordelia "lets herself go" which is the biggest imperfection that women could do because they lose their femininity which is important for being recognized as a perfect feminine woman. It is not only Cordelia's indifferent attitude to herself which makes Elaine angry but also the fact that Cordelia is not able to utilize opportunities and chances which are offered to her she rather ignores them and her lack of interest in further studying suggests that she does not care what happens with her life. Whilst Cordelia's life stagnates, for she is not interested in solving her problems, Elaine's life changes and develops radically when she decides to be a painter instead of a biologist. She could make this decision because she learned to stand up for herself: "I'm not going to be a biologist, as I have thought. I am going to be a painter [...] I know this with absolute certainty." (Atwood, 301) This decision is supported by choosing a course of Life Drawing which is held every evening; the course is named Life drawing and opens new era of Elaine's life.

6. Searching for the Self

This chapter examines the process Elaine has to undergo to retrieve her memories, to understand her past. The chapter describes the era from the studies at the university to Elaine's return to Toronto because of the retrospective exhibition she has in one of the Toronto galleries.

Moly Hite suggests that Elaine's wish to be a painter results from her tendency towards the "sphere of masculine, which she apprehends as a relatively safe haven from female machinations." (Hite, 137) As shown earlier, Elaine feels comfortable with boys. She prefers being with them because she knows what to expect from them and this is partly

caused by growing with her brother whom she identified with as a little girl. Until her decision to be a painter it is mostly Elaine who is watched, controlled and judged by the society, represented by Cordelia, Grace, and Carol, but her decision reverses the situation and now she “is in control of how other people look” because “[Elaine] as a painter occupies a position usually reserved for the dominant class of men in a patriarchal system” (Hite, 140) Elaine can express her understanding of the world around her and how she apprehends it.

The Life Drawing course, which Elaine attends, is taught by Mr. Hrbik who is an immigrant from Eastern Europe and whose judgement of her paintings is not very high: “We can begin from nothing [...] We will see what we can make of you.” (Atwood, 319) Elaine also becomes a student of Art and Archaeology at the University of Toronto because it is the “only sanctioned pathway that leads anywhere close to art.” (Atwood, 323) The drawing course and university provide environments which are different from each other and offer Elaine a comparison. At university, Elaine attends classes full of other female students and she notices differences between her and her classmates:

None of the girl students wants to be an artist; instead they want to be teachers of art in high schools, or, in one case, a curator in a gallery. Or else they are vague about their wants, which means they intend to get married before any of these other things becomes necessary. (Atwood, 324)

The situation described above is typical for 1950s women, who rather avoid being responsible for their lives and choose marriage as the main aim of their lives. Comments, which Elaine makes on her classmates, are supported by Friedan's opinion that the girls at the university just wait there to change their status from single to married in order to start living a “real life” which means to have a husband, children and a beautiful house:

Fewer and fewer college women were preparing for any career or profession requiring more than the most casual commitment. [...] In the 1950s those who stayed, even the most able, showed no signs of wanting to be anything more than suburban housewives and mothers. (Friedan, 142)

These women then never find their identity, because to the question: “Who am I? they would answer: Tom's wife or Mary's mother.” (Friedan, 64) And so they would not try to search for any other identity and reward outside the house because being “feminine” in this narrow way is the main aim of these women.

At first, the pressure of conformity is very strong and Elaine tries to adjust to her university classmates; she wears the same clothing and she talks with them about boys and clothes, but she feels uneasy with them because she has to pretend that she has the same interests as other girls. On one hand, Elaine knows that her Life Drawing course would “be seen as a waste of time” and “something you can always do at home, in your spare time” (Atwood, 324), but on the other hand, Elaine is persuaded that this course is exactly what she wants to do, that it is her real life – she wants to be a painter not to be a housewife, therefore, she begins “to eliminate whatever does not fit in with it.” (Atwood, 325) Thus she avoids her university classmates and identifies with the students of the Life Drawing course. As proof of her identification with the students of the course she starts wearing black turtlenecks and jeans: “This clothing is not a disguise, like other clothing, but an allegiance.” (Atwood, 325) Elaine wears black turtlenecks and black skirts even to Art and Archaeology where she is in contrast with her classmates who wear cashmere and pearls.

Young Elaine identifies with the group of the boys from life drawing easily; she goes with them to pubs and she becomes a part of their group. She knows what boys talk about, what they think about other women and they make Elaine feel privileged as if all the things they talk about women are not about her. Davies suggests that Elaine could be an example of “how women learn to see themselves and other women through men's eyes.” (Davies, 62) As she listens to boys' comments about girls and women she knows their way of thinking and she is able to apply their comments to other girls.

In addition to Elaine's identification with the Life Drawing course crowd she grows distant from the majority of society represented by her classmates at the university. Elaine does it on purpose, for she knows that she is not accepted in the society, and she does not feel comfortable in it anyway. She changes her appearance and her lifestyle to make herself different even though she knows that she will be excluded but she does not mind “and even teases the girls [from the university] to prove to herself that she's not like them.” (Cooke, 104) Instead of pretending to be one of the university girl students whose main interests are marriage, husband and being a mother, Elaine decides to be herself and like her mother she “does not give a hoot” about their opinions, comments and “jokes about arty beatniks.” (Atwood, 325) As Elaine fails to conform to her

university classmates she puts herself “above and beyond the gendered stereotypes.” (Rigney, 163) Her change into a beatnik is seen as an attempt to make herself different from the university girls and so by accepting her new collective identity, she rejects the world of university girls which is preferred by society and which is the reason why Elaine is excluded.

With respect to her changed lifestyle, Elaine also starts to prefer another kind of boys for dating. Elaine is aware that she is excluded and judged not only by girls but by boys as well. She observes:

I've given up on going out on dates in the old way: somehow it's no longer a serious thing to do. Also I haven't been asked that often since the advent of the black turtlenecks: boys of the blazer-and-white-shirt variety know what's good for them. In any case they are boys, not men. (Atwood, 328, 329)

Elaine lost her interest in boys of the “blazer-and-white-shirt variety”; however, she is not attracted by boys from the Life Drawing course either. The men who attract Elaine are those experienced ones; after this statement Elaine's attachment to her teacher Josef Hrbik slowly changes into love affair. From the beginning of the relationship, it is Josef who has the power over Elaine, and he starts to control her life by improving her. It is clear that Elaine is still vulnerable to disapproving comments which have tendency to judge, criticise, and punish her as if she is doing something wrong. Josef is in a similar position to Cordelia, who was also very powerful. As Joseph claims, Elaine is “an unfinished woman” (Atwood, 321), therefore, he starts to improve her. When he recommends to her that she should wear her hair loose or that she should wear purple dresses, Elaine follows his advice. He also changes her opinion about marriage which Elaine considers as “dishonourable” and she “puts herself beyond marriage” (Atwood, 350) and starts to imagine herself as an eccentric painter dedicated to her painting. She is influenced very strongly by Josef: “Atwood's point is that it is difficult to say what women are without male observation: Women have always been women-as-observed-by-men [...]. Outside this observation, it is difficult to say what exists.” (Deery, 476) Her decision to be with Josef can be understood as her need to be recognized as a painter and not as a potential wife she would be seen by the boys of the “blazer-and-white-shirt variety.” Elaine chooses Josef although she knows that her relationship with

him leads nowhere and so she leaves him and becomes independent of him. As Osborne says that there is not:

A man to enter the plot, providing a fountain of wisdom through which the woman discovers herself[...] No man in *Cat's Eye* is given such power; husbands, lovers, and even a male psychologist do not provide the insight that Elaine must achieve on her own. (Osborne)

Elaine gradually grows independent of her family and tries to establish her own life; she graduates from university and she takes a course named Advertising Art. Elaine marries her classmate Jon with whom she has a baby and so Elaine does not have time for her painting and instead she takes care of their daughter and household: "I have lost confidence: perhaps all I will ever be is what I am now." (Atwood, 401) Osborne argues that by "conforming to Jon's expectations when she moves in with and then marries him, she loses a sense of her own identity. (Osborne) Elaine like many other women in that time suffers from "the problem that has no name" – "a sense of unease when the basic needs of life were fulfilled, but a woman still felt unhappy, uneasy, unrewarded." (Macpherson, 26) Elaine unsatisfying life leads her to a group of feminists where she would like to find herself but as Cooke says "being part of a group of women makes Elaine feel both nervous and powerful, sisterhood being a difficult concept for her, given her childhood." (Cooke, 105) The feminist group stands in a contrast with the traditional view of a female and male; these women are strongly against men and patriarchy in general; Jody who is the leader of the group asks: "Wear lipstick? Dress up in slinky clothing? Alter our shapes? What is wrong with us the way we are?" (Atwood, 402) Deery claims that:

Women's edges are uncertain and their self-definition blurred because [...] they do not know or see themselves – though they are beginning to. Her [Atwood's] women characters [...] still mostly see themselves as men do, as fragments, as fetishized and commodified erotic parts. (Deery, 474)

Even Elaine feels that Jon sees her just as a fragment - a mother of their daughter: "I don't like it when he calls me Mummy. I am not his mummy, but hers [...] I don't yet see Sarah as a gift I have given him, but one has allowed me." (Atwood, 398) That is also one of the reasons she searches for understanding among the group of feminists although she realizes that she is different from them, for she has a husband and she feels that if she were a single mother, she would be appreciated more. Elaine comments on

her situation in the group: “I don't say much, I am awkward and uncertain, because whatever I do say might be the wrong thing. [...] At the same time I want to please.” (Atwood, 404) This comment slightly recalls Cordelia's relationship with her father whom she wants to please too. Macpherson claims that “the novel focuses on the position of the female artist [...] as well as the myth of feminine solidarity, a myth taken apart at every stage, from girlhood to adolescence to middle-aged adulthood.” (Macpherson, 59) Feminine solidarity is not a term Elaine would be familiar with, because she is repeatedly persuaded that this solidarity does not exist among girls and women since from her childhood it has been very difficult for her to establish some stable relationship with girls and later women, for she is persuaded that they want to improve her and they do not accept her the way she is.

Later Cordelia reappears in the novel and wants Elaine to help her escape from a rest home but Elaine refuses and leaves Cordelia persuaded that “she was like this at the end of high school, and then things got better.” (Atwood, 422) This is the last time Elaine sees her friend; but she is still haunted by Cordelia in her imaginations and often regrets her refusal to help her peer. Macpherson claims that “from this point on, she [Cordelia] only really recurs as a haunting presence.” (Macpherson, 63) Atwood comments on the situation: “There are loose ends left from Elaine's life at that time, especially her unresolved relationship with Cordelia. These things have been baggage for her a long time.” (Ingersoll, 122) Elaine understands that there are things she needs to understand but she is not able to do it because she does not know what exactly is the problem and so her unresolved relationship to Cordelia still haunts her: “Get me out of this, Cordelia. I'm locked in. I don't want to be nine years old forever.” (Atwood, 471)

Elaine's life is ruined when she discovers that her husband is unfaithful to her; she no longer paints and her life consists of the work to pay the rent, of buying food, cooking, and taking care of the family. She stops visiting meetings of women, for they make her feel even worse and she is desperate: “Whatever is happening to me is my own fault. I have done something wrong [...] I am inadequate and stupid, without worth. I might as well be dead.” (Atwood, 438) As Elaine is in this depressing state of mind, she hears the voice which “has the force of an order: *Do it. Come on. Do it.*” (Atwood, 439) The voice induces her to commit suicide and Elaine obeys it; the voice belongs to nine-year-

old Cordelia who “is the first to make Elaine feel as though she is nothing.” (Osborne) After this event Elaine realizes that she is haunted by her past and Cordelia; thus she decides to leave. Elaine often solves her unpleasant situations by leaving – earlier she leaves the group of her tormentors, then she leaves Josef and now she leaves her life in Toronto – her marriage, her past, and Cordelia. Elaine herself comments on leaving: “I’m good at leaving. The trick is to close yourself off. Don’t hear, don’t see. Don’t look back.” (Atwood, 442) The problem of her leaving is that she runs away from her unresolved problems which will wait for her until she returns back to Toronto; it also proves that leaving is not the way how to solve these problems.

In Vancouver, where Elaine settles down, she joins the group of women artists; these artists are “far more militant than the first ones [in Toronto], made up of lesbians and radical feminists, with whom she didn’t quite feel comfortable.” (Cooke, 105) Elaine feels uncomfortable in this group: “They make me more nervous than ever, because they have a certain way they want me to be, and I am not that way. They want to improve me.” (Atwood, 446) Atwood claims that:

The early mythology of the Women's Movement - that women were born into sisterhood - is no more true than to say that women are born into motherhood. The styles of motherhood are very much learned, as are the styles of relationships among women. (Ingersoll, 158)

Elaine does not feel included and her feelings that they want to improve her are still very strong because of her childhood experience with other girls; her comment shows her nervousness when she is with the feminists: “*Bitch*, I think silently. *Don't boss me around.*” (Atwood, 446) Macpherson agrees that Elaine's “introduction into femininity and girlhood consisted of being always in the wrong, always improved upon, that this almost violent reaction to other women becomes understandable.” (Macpherson, 60)

Although Elaine is not in the group of female artists, her paintings become popular and she is “suddenly at the front of a smallish wave.” (Atwood, 447) After some time Elaine meets her second husband with whom she has a happy and stable relationship and their life is calm, stable, and comfortable until the day when Elaine has to come back to Toronto. This city makes her anxious, for she knows that she has left her unresolved past and relationships with Cordelia and Jon there. As she helps her mother to clean the house she discovers her old red purse and hidden cat's eye marble in it as she looks into

it she “sees my [her] life entire.” (Atwood, 468) The marble represents a talisman she used to have to protect her against Cordelia's torment. “At this stage of the novel, then, the cat's eye marble represents a particular way of seeing: from a distance, with a cold impartiality.” (Cooke, 111) At this moment Elaine gains all her memories and is able to comment on her past as she walks in the Toronto overwhelmed by the scenes of her childhood.

In Toronto Elaine searches for Cordelia as she wants to establish and to solve her relationship with her and she wants to understand why she was tormented:

Really it's Cordelia I expect, Cordelia I want to see. There are things I need to ask her. Not what happened, back then in the time I lost, because now I know that. I need to ask her why. (Atwood, 485)

But Elaine is disappointed because Cordelia does not appear and so many questions are not answered and Elaine has to accept the past by herself: “I've been prepared for almost anything; except absence, except silence.” (Atwood, 487) Cooke claims that Elaine “has not been able to put Cordelia entirely behind her.” (Cooke, 106) Elaine has to find her way how to deal with the situation and so she visits the bridge where she almost died and thinks of Cordelia, finally, she is able to forgive her and she lets her “go home.” (Atwood, 496) By this act Elaine frees from Cordelia's haunting presence and she is able to break the bond between Cordelia and her: “Elaine shows that she has reached an acceptance, not only of her past and the figures in it, but of herself” (Osborne) because now she knows who she is and she can understand her problematic relationships she has with other women. When Elaine flies back to Vancouver she realizes there will never be time when Elaine and Cordelia become two old friends: “This I miss Cordelia: not something that's gone but something that will never happen. Two old women giggling over their tea.” (Atwood, 498) Although Elaine has difficult relationship with Cordelia she forgives her and she longs to be a friend with her, for Elaine does not want to avoid women. She wants to have a friendship which is not based on monitoring each other and being improved anymore. This wish is represented by those two old ladies whose “responsibilities have fallen away from them, obligations, old hates and grievances; now for a short while they can play again like children, but this time without the pain.” (Atwood, 498) Elaine's wish is not fulfilled but she found herself “by taking infer journey through her past and renewing the relationships from which she had previously

run away.” (Osborne) In summary, Atwood's point in this novel is that only by accepting the past and facing her old traumas Elaine can find her identity and say who she is.

7. Conclusion

The main aim of this paper was to track the identity development of the main character of the book called *Cat's Eye* and to show the importance of memories in finding individual identity. For full understanding of the book and the novel it was important to introduce the era of 1940s to 1960s which is crucial for the novel as well as for the identity development of the main character. In this paper it is claimed that the identity was seriously damaged in early childhood of Elaine when she had to face conformist requirements of the society which was very conservative in the 1940s. As her background was different from the generally accepted norm she was seriously tormented by her peers who became the embodiment of society's intolerance. Elaine lost her identity and did not know how to behave as she lost the sense of self and it took her long time to accept and face the memories of her childhood. She was able to deal with the painful memories in her late adulthood when she was able to forgive her tormentor Cordelia. As she came back to Toronto which is the place of her traumatic childhood her memories emerged and she had to face them and accept them to gain the full understanding of herself and of her peers.

The paper is divided into two parts the first part is theoretical and it provides the readers with socio-cultural background of the novel which takes place especially in the 1940s – 1960s. The first chapter is focused on cultural changes in the role of women who are massively forced to go back home and become housewives for it should be their main aim. “The decade of domesticity” is generally supported by magazines and mass media; the pressure to conform the norm increases and many women adjust it. In this chapter it is also needed to explain what conformity means and how it is reflected in the society. The second chapter continues with the description of the 1960s and especially with Friedan's influential book *The Feminine Mystique*; in this book she criticises the conformist middle-class society and women's role as housewives. Friedan believes that a woman would hardly find her identity if she marries young and becomes a mother soon; she claims that women suffer from “The Problem That Has No Name” because they define themselves only as someone's mother or wife. As a solution Friedan

suggests that women should find some recognition outside their houses, for example they can start their own career.

The next chapter tries to explain what individual and collective identity means, these two identities are often mixed and it is hard to distinguish them clearly. Erikson focused his work mainly on individual identity and he claims that identity develops from early childhood until adolescence, he says that children identify with people in their milieu, for example their parents and siblings, who influence their behaviour as they copy the patterns they see around. It is also said that society is strongly influential and can form individual identity too, for society can exclude or include the individuals on the basis of their identity. This is connected to collective identity which results from the need of individuals to belong in some group and in order to be accepted by the group the individuals have to accept rules which are approved by the group.

The analytical part is focused on the novel itself and especially on the main protagonist, Elaine, who tries to find her identity and face her memories of “the bad time.” The first chapter of the analytical part introduces Elaine's family and the lifestyle of the family and then it is focused mainly her mother and her brother who are seen as very influential people who helped to shape her personality in her early childhood. Her family and especially her mother provides unusual background for which Elaine is tormented.

The next chapter describes Elaine's childhood in Toronto where her family settles; for the first time in her life she is exposed to the majority of the society and that she is different and so she tries to conform. But her peers who seem to be her friends become her bullies and start “improve” the main protagonist. Elaine loses her identity and she does not know how to behave to please her bullies. As result of her identity loss she has a low self-esteem and gains a permanent feeling that someone watches her and wants improve her. She avoids girl but she is not able to say why she does not like other women, for she represses her painful memories.

Her uncomfortable feeling she has among group of women continues until her adulthood on which the third chapter is focused. In this chapter it seems that Elaine starts to conform to the feminine mystique that surrounds her at the university. She also becomes a housewife and a mother but she realizes her unhappiness and starts to

struggle for her identity and career as a painter. Elaine loses herself as she defines herself as a mother and a housewife while she represses her wish to be a painter. As she is depressed from her personal failure she attempts to commit suicide obeying Cordelia's voice. Throughout the whole paper there is a relationship between Elaine and Cordelia which changes and have many different forms. Once Cordelia was her tormentor, then her friend and although they live their own lives separated from each other, Cordelia haunts her in her imaginations. Her difficult relationship with Cordelia Elaine tries to solve when she comes back to Toronto for a retrospective show of her paintings where she is overwhelmed by the painful memories of her childhood; she has to face them and accept her past to gain the full understanding of herself. As she reconciles herself to the memories of her past and people in it; she is able to get over her past; she understands what formed her identity and personality and who she is.

8. Resumé

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá románem *Cat's Eye* od kanadské spisovatelky Margaret Atwood. Kniha je pojatá jako retrospektivní román, kde hlavní hrdinka vzpomíná na své dětství prožité v Torontu. Do tohoto města se hlavní hrdinka, Elaine, vrací při příležitosti své výstavy v galerii, ovšem i po letech město na Elaine působí velmi silně a ona zjišťuje, že je obklopena vzpomínkami na své ne příliš šťastné dětství a dospívání prožité v tomto městě. Elaine si vybavuje všechny bolestivé okamžiky svého dětství, kdy byla šikanována a vzpomínky, které měla, vytěsnila poté z paměti. Proto hlavním cílem této práce je vystopovat příčiny narušené identity hlavní hrdinky. Román se odehrává především v období od čtyřicátých let dvacátého století do let šedesátých.

Tato práce je rozdělená do dvou částí. V první (teoretické) části se autorka pokusí přiblížit dobu a kulturní pozadí románu. Je důležité zmínit, že přestože se jedná o kanadskou kulturu je zde užíván název americká kultura jako souhrnný pojem pro severní Ameriku, kam patří jak USA, tak i Kanada. První kapitola je zaměřená na 40. – 50. léta 20. století a postavení žen v americké společnosti. Během druhé světové války musely ženy nahradit muže v práci, protože muži většinou rukovali do války, ovšem po jejich návratu se od žen očekávalo, že i ony se navrátí zpět do svých domácností, kde bylo odjakživa jejich místo. Těsně po válce se rapidně zvýšila porodnost a snížil se věk pro uzavírání manželství. Většina žen se opravdu navrátila do svých domovů a plně se věnovala péči o rodinu a domácnost, jak jim diktovala média a reklamy.

Avšak v 60. letech, kterým je věnovaná druhá kapitola, se začala zvedat vlna odporu proti domácímu způsobu života žen. Nejhlasitější odpůrkyní byla Betty Friedan a její kniha *The Feminine Mystique*, která vzbudila velký ohlas mezi ženami. Kniha pojednává o problému moderních hospodyněk, které jsou uzavřené ve svých domácnostech a jejich celoživotní náplní je pouze péče o rodinu a domov. Friedan tvrdí, že tento problém se týkal především hospodyněk z předměstí, které časopisy a jiná média včetně reklam nutila přizpůsobit se tajemnému feminine mystique, které ženám ukládalo být co nejvíce ženská a nestarat se o nic jiného mimo svůj domov. Tyto ženy byly čím dál víc nespokojené, ale nedovedly svou nespokojenost jakkoliv popsat. Friedan pojmenovala tuto novou nespokojenost či nemoc jako „problém beze jména.“

Jako řešení tohoto problému navrhovala sama autorka, aby ženy začaly hledat své uplatnění také mimo domov a našly si i jinou identitu než tu co by manželka a matka.

Třetí kapitola teoretické části pojednává o identitě, kterou je velice důležité pochopit, jestliže celý zbytek práce se jí pak zabývá. Kapitola je zaměřena především na individuální a kolektivní identitu a jejich vznik a utváření. Erik H. Erikson, jehož práce je v této části citována navrhuje, že rozvoj individuální identity se dá rozdělit do pěti stádií, od dětství až do puberty. Erikson tvrdí, že velkou roli při utváření individuální identity každého jedince hraje jeho dětství a první lidé se kterými se tento jedinec identifikuje, protože tito lidé slouží jako první vzory chování, které dítě kopíruje a poté se i promítnou v jeho osobnosti. Johnston zase navrhuje, že individuální identita pramení z toho, jak jedinec vnímá sám sebe a jak ho vnímá společnost. Kolektivní identita vychází z definovaných pravidel členství a také společných aktivit skupiny.

Druhá (analytická) část se zaměřuje na dílo samotné, ve kterém se autorka snaží vystopovat identitu mladé Elaine od jejího dětství až do dospělosti, kdy se vrací do Toronta a musí čelit svým vzpomínkám proto, aby našla ztracenou část svého já a byla schopná si tak utvořit ucelený obraz sebe sama. V kapitole pojednávající o jejím dětství a rodině, jsou čtenáři seznámeni s rodinou malé Elaine, která jí dává a poskytuje první vzory a také identifikace s jejími členy. Rodina Elaine nežije typickým způsobem usazená na jednom místě, ale kočuje po okolí, protože otec Elaine pracuje jako terénní pracovník – entomolog. Další členkou rodiny je matka, která se vymyká obrazu typické hospodyně dokonce i po usazení v Torontu, nevnímá tlak okolí a nesnaží se nikomu a ničemu přizpůsobit. Její matka není ovlivněna konzumerismem ani feminine mystique a zachovává si svou nezávislou osobnost. Toto je velmi nepříjemné pro malou Elaine, protože na ni jsou vyvíjeny tlaky okolí, aby se přizpůsobila, a protože tak i dělá, stydí se pak za svou vlastní matku, která tak nečiní.

Ačkoliv se v mládí stydí za svou matku, později se u ní také projeví jistá nezávislost a touha jít si za vlastními cíli, například když se rozhodne být malířkou. Posledním členem rodiny je Stephen, bratr Elaine, který byl pro Elaine jediným blízkým člověkem, když vyrůstala v divočině se svou rodinou, proto si také mladá Elaine osvojí zvyky, které jsou spíše typicky chlapecké než dívčí. Jako důsledek hraní chlapeckých her má Elaine blíže k chlapcům, kterým rozumí líp než dívkám.

Další kapitola analýzy se zaměřuje na hrdinčino dětství a dospívání na předměstí Toronta, kam se rodina přestěhovala a usadila. Elaine se skamarádí s dvěma dívkami, Carol a Grace, které se pro ni stanou průvodkyněmi dívčím světem. Elaine se tak nenápadně seznamuje se světem, který před ní až dosud byl skrytý. V prvních chvílích shledává, že hrát si s děvčaty je mnohem méně náročně, protože nemusí s nikým soutěžit a nic dokazovat.

V momentě, kdy se přidá ke skupině další dívka – Cordelia – změní se život hlavní hrdinky k horšímu, poznává, že její jinakost může být důvod k šikaně. V tuto chvíli Elaine definitivně ztrácí svou identitu a neví, jak se má chovat a co je správné, protože cokoliv udělá je špatně. Vztah Cordelie a Elaine se pak prolíná celou prací, protože je stěžejní k pochopení některých Elaininých skutků (například její celkově nedůvěřivý postoj k ženám, nebo její pokus o sebevraždu). Jako důsledek šikanování je Elaine nervózní a trpí nízkým sebevědomím, ale i přesto se snaží přizpůsobit Cordelii a jejím příkazům. Jako svou obranu Elaine vytěsňuje všechny špatné vzpomínky z hlavy a tak, když potkává Cordelii znovu, nepamatuje si nic z předchozích let plných smutku a utrpení. Vztah Elaine a Cordelie se mění a nyní je to Elaine, kdo pečlivě pozoruje Cordelii a má nad ní větší moc. Elaine se stává svědkem Cordeliina úpadku a zatímco se Cordelia propadá níž a níž, Elaine se rozhodne jít proti proudu a rozhodne se být malířkou.

V poslední kapitole analýzy se autorka zaměřuje na Elaine období od studií na univerzitě až po její výstavu v Torontu. Toto období je plné nejrůznějších ztrát a znovunalezení identity hlavní hrdinky. Která opakovaně mění sebe i svou identitu, a proto čtenáři nebudou nikdy schopni identifikovat přesně, kdo vlastně hlavní hrdinka je, protože ona sama není schopna podat ucelený obraz sama sebe.

Elaine odmítá jít s davem univerzitních studentek, které žijí zahalené v tajemném „feminine mystice.“ Místo toho se raději identifikuje s davem večerního kurzu kreslení. Jako důkaz její nové identity nosí černé oblečení, přestože ví, že bude vyloučena společností i dívkami na univerzitě. Její milostný poměr s učitelem kurzu je v analýze viděn jako hrdinčina touha po tom být uznána nejen jako žena, ale také jako malířka. Její vztah však není příliš perspektivní a hlavně Josef ji začíná přeměňovat a vylepšovat podle svých představ, Elaine si uvědomí, že nechce být opět manipulována a

rozchází se s ním. Když se provdá za svého spolužáka Jona, ztrácí opět svou identitu a podléhá obecnému trendu feminine mystique – stává se z ní matka a manželka a na své kreslení zanevře. Avšak Elaine není šťastná, trpí „problémem beze jména,“ který se stal častým jevem u nespokojených hospodyněk, které se plně oddaly péči o svou domácnost a rodinu.

Porozumění Elaine hledá u skupiny feministek, ovšem necítí se v ní dobře, protože opět cítí, že ji tyto ženy pozorují a chtějí nějak „vylepšit,“ aby více odpovídala jejich požadavkům. Elaine se pokusí o sebevraždu, když je depresi, že jí nic nevychází a že se jí bortí celý život. K sebevraždě ji navádí hlas devítileté Cordelie, která má na Elaine stále svůj vliv. Po tomto zážitku, Elaine navždy opouští Toronto a všechny staré křivdy nechává za sebou, nejen ty s Cordelií, ale i s Jonem a celkově její minulostí. Když se do Toronta vrací u příležitosti své výstavy, je najednou obklopena starými vzpomínkami na kruté časy jejího dětství. Jak prochází známými místy, vybavuje si své ztracené vzpomínky a chce znovu potkat Cordelii. Ta však nepřichází a Elaine musí jejich zvláštní nedořešený vztah jednou pro vždy nějak sama ukončit, nakonec je schopna odpustit a akceptovat svou minulost, která jí chyběla k plnému pochopení sebe samé. Atwood také zdůrazňuje, že hlavním zdrojem pochopení sebe sama je pochopit svou minulost a akceptovat ji, jedním tak je možné se posunout dál ve svém životě.

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