Chapter VII

Cat's Eye

In the preceding chapters, we discussed the psychological compulsions of five women protagonists, namely, Marian in the The Edible Woman, the narrator-heroine of Surfacing, and Joan Foster in Lady Oracle, Elizabeth and Lesje in Life Before Man, and Rennie in Bodily Harm and tried to gain insight into their behaviour. The analysis revealed psychologically intelligible heroines striving to grapple with the crisis which elude solution. The protagonist of Cat's Eye is not much different from her earlier counterparts. Like them she shifts the blame on others and tries to convince herself and her readers that Cordelia has been the cause of her troubles. In this connection, it would be relevant to refer to the heroine of Surfacing who is sure that her parents and her lover have created problems for her; Joan Foster squarely blames her mother; and Marian shifts the responsibility on Peter. This strategy relieves them of tension and saves them from self-hate. Another strategy all except Joan Foster adopt is of running away and return. The motion is thus circular. The protagonist of Surfacing returns to the lake-side abode in search of her father and relives her past; Marian accepts her life after making Peter eat the cake; Joan does not
return but we have every reason to believe she would; and Elaine recasts her past after coming back to Toronto. In the process she not only blows Cordelia into an out of proportion bully and herself as a victim, but she also reveals her own psychological conflicts, perpetuated by her inability to wriggle out of her past. Her theory is that one does not "look back along time but down through it, like water" (CE, p. 3). The very act of looking "down through it" suggests plumbing the depth. In other words, it is introspective, whereas Elaine professes to have returned to Toronto for a Retrospective of her paintings. The novel thus works on two levels--retrospection and introspection--which provide some base to understand Elaine's epistemological problems despite the phenomenological data made available by the "unreliable" first person narrator.

The first person narrator replays in her mind the fragmented pieces of her childhood and re-constructs her life. Soon, the picture of Toronto of her childhood is complete with her brother Stephen teasing her, her mother engaged in a constant battle to transform her into an acceptable girl child and her friend Cordelia bullying her into accepting the norms of Toronto society. Elaine grows into an adult with a damaged sense of personal worth. It is only away from Toronto that her art flowers. When she returns to her childhood surrounding as a middle-aged
painter after many years of absence, she finds herself "rampant with memory" like Hagar Shipley of Margaret Laurence’s *The Stone Angel*. But unlike Hagar, she does not rage about time. Instead, she realises that "time has a dimension" and that "nothing goes away" from memory. In Elaine’s memory, Cordelia reigns supreme as a fearful presence because she has had the ability to reduce Elaine to "nothing," to make her "rigid with anxiety" (*CE*, p. 124). In Cordelia’s presence she feels "without worth, that nothing I can do is of any value, least of all to myself" (*CE*, p. 41). With her brother Stephen trying to educate her, so that she does not become "a pin-headed fuzzbrain" (*CE*, p. 218) and Cordelia always ready to frighten her by her overbearing presence, we get the self portrait of Elaine as a "nut." There is always "a force" (*CE*, p. 373) pushing her to do things as others want them done. She feels "locked in" (*CE*, p. 400), a victim, a will-less creature, mute and faceless.

The themes of the novel, one of mental journey across time, and another of victimization are established by the two epigraphs. The first, from *Memory of Fire: Genesis*, reads thus:

When the Tukanas cut off her head, the old woman collected her own blood in her hands and blew it towards the sun. ‘My soul enters you too!’ she shouted. Since then
anyone who kills receives in his body, without wanting or knowing it, the soul of his victim.

This epigraph is relevant for us to analyse Elaine's crisis. Has Elaine killed Cordelia? If yes, how and why? If no, then, why is she overburdened by her spirit? It seems from her childhood memories that Cordelia has been important in the formation of Elaine's identity. In the chapters describing Elaine in the present as an artist, we learn about her adult life and the haunting effect of her dual identity. If Elaine and Cordelia are "like the twins in the old fables, each of whom has been given half a key" (CE, p. 411), it follows that Cordelia is in Horneyan terminology the "arrogant-vindictive" side of self-effacing Elaine. The conflict, thus, is not between Cordelia and Elaine, but between the two contradictory drives. The other problem is articulated by the novelist in her second epigraph: "Why do we remember the past, and not the future?" Elaine's inability to wriggle free of her haunting past makes her vulnerable and self-denigrating. The process of retrospection and introspection produces tension between theme and mimesis which accounts for much of the beauty of Atwood's realism. That is why many critics classify the novel as "autobiographical" or "transparent autobiography" and trace Elaine Risley's "resemblance to Atwood." If a "retrospective" is "a point of arrival, or a plateau that
provides a view of the past—a reflective pause—before one moves into the future,“then Elaine's "Retrospective" of her paintings should resolve the crisis voiced by the second epigraph. Moving from the past into future should purge Elaine Risley of her self-accusation and self-denigration and make her "an autonomous and independent" artist, as Martha Sharpe views her. Our purpose here is to see through the protagonist and not at her as she presents herself, so as to grasp all the aspects of her personality. For this we shall seek help from her story. When we dive down time "Sometimes this comes to the surface, sometimes that, sometimes nothing". (CE, p. 3). What "comes to the surface" will promise the clue to her innermost self.

According to the protagonist, the two forces which affected her psyche and undermined her basic self-confidence are: her changed social milieu and the negative influence of Cordelia. She feels alien and apprehensive when the family settles down in Toronto, after years of wandering. Till now, she and her brother have led "an old rootless life of impermanence and safety" but it was a happy life. Toronto with its new environment threatens her. Significantly, chapter II opens with a categorical statement, "Until we moved to Toronto I was happy" (CE, p. 21). It gives a graphic picture of her happy childhood before she was nine. It was the life of "nomads on the far edges of the war"
(CE, p. 25) driving long distances with the packed household, living in tents, in motels and enjoying the warmth of brother-sister relationship. But once they settle down in Toronto things change for little Elaine. Her meeting with Cordelia, "lanky, sinewy," with "a smile like a grownup's," (CE, p. 70) overwhelms her. Suddenly she feels helpless and unhappy and looks for safety and reassurance. At school, Mrs Lumley "rules by fear," the social microcosm terrifies her.

Here, the children are divided into categories of boys and girls with separate entry points and secret codes of language. Untrained in the ways of the world, Elaine feels "awkward" with her girl friends. "I know the unspoken rules of boys, but with girls I sense that I am always on the verge of some unforeseen, calamitous blunder" (CE, p. 47). Socially, the family feels alien in stifling middle-class world of Toronto. More so Elaine, whose friends marvel at her as if she were a museum piece, an "exotic" item, someone who is not one of them but an outsider landed in their midst "from outside the city" (CE, p. 49). When Carol tells others in school about the way the Risleys live, she makes it sound as if "she's reporting on the antics of some primitive tribe: true, but incredible" (CE, p. 49). Carol, Grace and Cordelia, girls from affluent middle-class families influence little Elaine. Her constant effort is to measure up to their standards so that she becomes
"acceptable" to them. Being "acceptable" becomes of foremost importance to Elaine because it means being "lovable." In order to be lovable, she experiences herself as her subdued, victimized self—small, helpless, vulnerable. This, according to Horney, is the "shrinking process" (NHG, p. 223). "Everything will be all right as long as I sit still, say nothing, reveal nothing, I will be saved then, I will be acceptable. . . " (CE, p. 117). By thus reducing herself to a zero, she hopes to minimize her anxiety born out of the fear of rejection.

The conditions for and the symptoms of anxiety take roots in Elaine's home. The atmosphere of non-conformity of her home is socially and culturally alienating. She is constantly haunted by the fear of being put to shame for not belonging to any church. Her father's liberal ideas about bringing up children and his belief that religion "has been responsible for a lot of wars and massacres. . . as well as bigotry and intolerance" (CE, p. 96), do not equip Elaine to face her friends and their religious church-going parents. It is not complimentary when Mrs Smeath looks at her "as if I'm an orphan left on her doorstep" (CE, p. 97) or when Aunt Mildred derides her as a "heathen" or when her friends mock at her. The highbrow Toronto neighbourhood makes her aware of her parents's monetary position. Compared to Carol, Grace and Cordelia whose mothers wear "rubber gloves while washing
dishes" (CE, p. 51), who sleep on new-fashioned twin-beds with matching "chenille bedspreads" and who can spend "money on flowers".

Elaine's parents are plain middle-class people who have led an unsettled, nomadic life. Seeing the glory and glamour around, Elaine realises "for the first time that we are not rich" (CE, p. 71). This gives blow to her self-esteem. In order to salvage it, she "doles" out gifts which she terms as "offerings" and "atonements" and feels happy because "just before giving I am loved" (CE, p. 135). This is her moment of triumph, it ensures company and since as a self-effacing person she cannot "stand being alone" (NHG, p.227), human contact and company is of paramount importance to give meaning to her existence.

Existence for Elaine is both defined and limited by her image of herself as viewed by Cordelia. She is often attacked as "stupid," "mute" and "alien." So powerful is the impact of Cordelia on Elaine's psyche that she is unable to see herself as an independent entity. Even as a middle-aged painter she is not free of the image which sometimes chokes her; sometimes it frightens her; and often it haunts her. As the author herself substantiates it, the novel is "partly about being haunted"\(^5\) not only by the past but also by her own obsessive thoughts. Adult Elaine is disturbed by
Cordelia’s everpresent spirit. She hears her voice "inviting and conspiratorial, gleeful, urging me over" (CE, p. 375), saying "Do it. Come on. Do it" (CE, p. 373) and under its impact Elaine slashes her wrist with a knife. "This voice doesn’t offer a choice; it has the force of an order" (CE, p. 373), it rings inside her head and becomes her secret Cordelia, thus becomes a part of her self. She cannot shrug her off.

Drawing a parallel between Lear’s Cordelia in Shakespeare and Elaine’s Cordelia in Cat’s Eye, a critic considers it a case of "an arrested state of the mirror stage" in which the child identifies with the parent in viewing his or her own identity. In case of both Lear and Elaine, Cordelia becomes the reintegrated presence. "Unable to rid themselves of the image of Cordelia, they live with split or dual identities--Cordelia fills and defines their other halves." Elaine is only her half-self without Cordelia. Even her self-portrait has only the upper half. Cordelia’s portrait is named Half a Face. She, thus, is fragmented without Cordelia. In Horneyan terminology Cordelia is Elaine’s "expansive self" existing with her compliant strategy of defence. Since Elaine is the narrator she has the advantage of projecting herself as she sees and feels. She considers herself a sufferer, a victim and would like her readers to believe her, but despite our sympathy
for her and with her, we understand that she is adopting a
defensive measure to ward off her inner conflicts by
throwing the blame on Cordelia.

We agree that Cordelia is responsible to an extent for
damaging child Elaine's self-confidence, but to let her
victimizer engulf a part of her identity and to let herself
be crippled for life is an indication of Elaine's
psychological weakness. Elaine narrates her story with the
vision of a "Retrospective" having its own ups and downs in
a novel that takes victimization as one of its themes.
Nevertheless, Margaret Atwood seeing much more than the
first person narrator does, allows her protagonist to turn
to art-painting in this case which could have therapeutic
effect. But unfortunately, instead of being cured by
creativity, Elaine reverts in an obsessive manner, to her
past, reliving an experience she would fain forget.
Probably, she wants to have it reiterated that she is free
of Cordelia but she feels "locked in" by a presence and she
admits to herself, "I am not free, of Cordelia" (CE, p.360).
Indeed, Cordelia is that part of her identity which Elaine
is trying to forego. Memories of past torture, make her
fragmented. "I am in fragments," she often says. Only when
these old connections, which bind her to her particular
identity in time are severed, she is sure to feel whole.
Here, we are reminded of Nanda Kaul in Anita Desai’s *Fire on the Mountain* and Bim in *Clear Light of Day*. Both wish to run away from past memories but both are tied down by them. In *Clear Light of Day*, Bim shudders at the thought of reliving her childhood and tells Tara that she would not like to revert to that time and undergo the torture; in *Cat’s Eye*, Elaine shouts to a non-existent Cordelia, "I don’t want to be nine years old forever" (CE, p. 400) because that child seems "younger, poorer, farther away, a shrunken, ignorant version of myself" (CE, p. 55). But Nanda, Bim and Elaine find their past inseparably linked with their lives. When it erodes their present, the three protagonists react according to their psychological exigencies: Nanda dies unable to bear the truth, Bim seeks solace in music and Elaine admits, as she flies away from Toronto, that once we shed our "old hates and grievances," like the two old women in the plane, we tend to be free of all prejudices and their scalding effect. "It’s old light, and there’s not much of it. But it’s enough to see by" (CE, p. 421). She appears to have wiped out all malice towards Cordelia when she comments on the loss of companionship, "This is what I miss, Cordelia: not something that’s gone, but something that will never happen. Two old women giggling over their tea" (CE, p. 421).
The author would have us believe in Elaine's march towards wholeness and health as she concludes the novel with an apparent healthy note:

Now it's full night, clear, moonless and filled with stars, which are not eternal as was once thought, which are not where we think they are. If they were sounds, they would be echoes, of something that happened millions of years ago: a word made of numbers. Echoes of light, shining out of the midst of nothing. It's old light, and there's not much of it. But it's enough to see by (CE, p. 421).

Symbolically, the full, clear night with a star-studded sky can be interpreted as Elaine's conscience which has rid itself of Cordelia and has gained her freedom. She has marched ahead, in time and only "echoes" are heard, not the real voice. If we consider this statement as an indication to a healthy attitude, then Elaine is a mentally sound woman who has got over her neurotic difficulties. But my contention is that Elaine's positive last statement is only an expression of her relief because she is leaving Toronto. Away from this town, she hopes to be at peace and immerse herself in her art as she has done earlier. This is an effort of the alienated self to ward off conflicts so as to protect her subjective values. In the following discussion I shall try to show as to why the status quo is maintained.
To cope with the hostile environment at Queen Mary Public school, Elaine develops a complex network of defenses. Because of her need to have "girl friends" and because she wants to earn their goodwill, she becomes humble, agreeable and pleasant. That she needs friends is clear from list of "wants" on her eighth's birthday : "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" (CR. p. 28). Thus, Elaine's primary solution is self-effacement. Her other strategies--withdrawal and mastery--subsidiary to it are not strong enough to come to the surface.

As the novel opens with Elaine's resolve to have a "Retrospective" of her paintings, we are able to see the three moves--withdrawal, mastery and compliance. But it is her compliant solution that rules her psyche and makes her miserable when she fails to stand up to her glorified image of a good, unselfish, devoted friend. Elaine acts in an aggressive manner only once when she "walks away" from Cordelia for which she suffers under scathing self-accusation. The thought that she has failed her friend gives a blow to her self-image. "I'm good at leaving. The trick is to close yourself off. Don't hear, don't see. Don't look back" (CR, P. 376). She blames herself thus and
consequently wallows in self-contempt. "Whatever is happening to me is my own fault. I have done something wrong, something so huge I can't even see it, something that's drowning me. I am inadequate and stupid, without worth, I might as well be dead" (CE, p. 372). Since self-torture is "in part an inevitable by-product of self-hate" (NHG, p. 145), Elaine torments herself physically, as well as psychologically; physically by inflicting pain on herself and psychologically, by losing herself in all kinds of feelings like shutting herself off from others, wallowing in guilt-feelings, yearning for fading out in sleep and often in her death-wish as the ultimate extinction of self.

A question arises here: why does Elaine rebel and break away from Cordelia? It could be argued that she rebels out of desperation when the three girls reduce her to a "naught." She can no longer tolerate being abused and humiliated. Once she is able to disregard Cordelia's orders, she feels free of her. Not that Elaine has changed overnight into a bold young woman. She is afraid of Cordelia's anger and the sneers of others.

I am still a coward, still fearful; none of that has changed. But I turn and walk away from her. It's like stepping off a cliff, believing the air will hold you up. And it does. I see that I don't have to do what she says, and, worse and better, I've never had to do what she says, I can do what I like (CE, p. 193).
Cordelia becomes somewhat conciliatory after her daring act and Elaine gains confidence that she no longer needs them. "I am indifferent to them. There's something hard in me, crystalline, a kernel of glass" (CE, p. 193). Her mother, too, reinforces this attitude of self-assertion. She has always been advising her to stand up for herself. "Don't let them push you around. Don't be spineless. You have to have more backbone" (CE, p. 156). In Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre, we confront an identical problem. Jane is abused, insulted and hurt despite her obedience and meekness. But when the attacks of the Reeds become unbearable, she rebels and fights back. Once she shows her strength, her tormentors change their attitude. Bessi approves of her "frank and fearless" behaviour and tells her that people will respect her better if she is bold and is able to stand for herself. In Cat's Eye, Elaine also sees a remarkable change in her friends' attitude towards her; they become "polite" but "distant." She even gains sufficient courage to answer Cordelia's "What do you think of me?" with "Nothing much" (CE, p. 254), which though intended to be a joke, has a grain of truth in it. Thus, as a result of bitter experience, Elaine learns to resort to aggression when her compliance fails. Submission and revolt are two contradictory trends; they account for much of her conflicts in life.
Along with compliance and aggression, Elaine learns that withdrawal prevents problems and that resignation protects her from hostility. In childhood, she counters the sneers of Cordelia and others by learning to be quiet, "I've never said a lot anyway" (CE, p. 254), she confesses. She even becomes careless about her appearance as a grown-up young woman. Mrs Finestein reports to her mother "She's letting herself go. Such a shame" (CE, p. 27). Elaine's mother is rightly concerned because this is an "alarming" sign. Horney feels that when a person withdraws from an active interest in his own growth, he is in the "danger of moving away also from the depths of his feelings" (NHG, p. 285). There are times in adult Elaine's life when she is pervaded with inertia:

I don't do anything else. I no longer go to the meetings of the women, because they make me feel worse. Jody phones and says we should get together, but I put her off. She would jolly me along, make bracing and positive suggestions I know I can't live up to. Then I would only feel more like a failure.

I don't want to see anyone. I lie in the bedroom with the curtains drawn and nothingness washing over me like a sluggish wave. Whatever is happening to me is my own fault. I have done something wrong, something so huge I can't even see it, something that's drowning me. I am inadequate and stupid, without worth. I might as well be dead (CE, p. 372).
Thus, she "removes herself from the inner battlefield," and becomes an "onlooker" on life (NHG, p. 260), without any will to participate in life. These measures relieve inner tensions to an extent.

Another method to run away from tension is the desire to be invisible which she expresses often. As a child, she imagines as if "my body is dissolving and I am being drawn up and up, like thinning mist, into a vast emptying space" (CE, p. 105). Invisibility gives one the power over others without exposing the self. Nanda Kaul in Anita Desai's Fire on the Mountain wants to be anonymous and her strong urge, is to "merge with the pine trees and be mistaken for one." At another time her desire is to lie still, to be a "charred tree trunk." By withdrawing from the world of active life into a world of their own, these characters save their individuality from being altogether cramped and engulfed. When overpowered by Cordelia, Elaine thinks of being invisible.

I think about becoming invisible. I think about eating the deadly nightshade berries from the bushes beside the path. I think about drinking the Javex out of the skull-and-crossbones bottle in the laundry room, about jumping off the bridge, smashing down there like a pumpkin, half of an eye, half of a grin. I would come apart like that, I would be dead, like the dead people (CE, p. 155).
In adult life, Elaine's wish to invisibility turns into death-wish. Once she succumbs to it and slashes her wrist to commit suicide.

Suicidal instinct works at two levels for Elaine: it gives her power over others, elevating her as a suffering martyr and it helps her ward off her self-hate. In the first case, it satisfies her self-effacing need. The fantasy of being looked after, with Jon by her side, Sarah nearby and the doctors hovering around her, she "felt white, drained of blood, cared for, purified. Peaceful" (CE, p. 374). Secondly, in addition to restoring her dwindling neurotic pride, it satisfies her masochistic longing for self-extinction. Horney sees "masochism" as arising out of the basic demands of self-effacing structure. It is not a "morbid phenomena" as seen by Freud and Karl Meninger. According to Horney, it arises out of a craving for love and it expresses itself through "demonstrative sufferings" in which a person feels ultimate triumph in "dying at the offender's doorstep" (NHG, p. 236). He or she develops feelings of all kinds like losing himself/ herself "in a sea of tears; in ecstatic feelings about nature; in wallowing in guilt--feelings; . . . and often in his longing for death as the ultimate extinction of self" (NHG, pp. 240-41). Suffering has a special appeal for Elaine and it is a complex and compulsive phenomenon of her strategies.
Apart from fulfilling her need for love, suffering provides her the means to feel whole. As Elaine’s feelings of fragmentation increase, she resorts to self-mutilation. She pulls the strips of flesh from her feet, nibbles her fingers and clips her nails till she feels the pain. This compulsion, developed in childhood, stays with her. Living with Jon years later, she falls on this habit. She recalls "When no one is around, I bite my fingers. I need to feel physical pain, to attach myself to daily life" (CE, p. 338). She chews her fingers to get the taste of blood, for blood is the "taste I remember." She confesses once that she admires the wounds because "I know about the status conferred by" them (CE, p. 77). Obviously, these acts of self-mutilation and self-torture not only assuage her own self-accusation but also ward off the possible reproaches of others. Discussing the role of suffering for an expansive person, Horney believes that it is "his specific way of suppressing vindictiveness." Suffering provides Elaine with an overall alibi both for not actually making more of her life and for not achieving ambitious goal.

Elaine continues her suffering process by returning to her past and wallowing in self-pity as well as in guilt-feelings. Self-pity, for being a victim of Cordelia all through her life and guilt for having deserted Cordelia in time of her need. "I am not sure I want to travel back into
the past;" she says, yet she reverts to it, blames Cordelia for torturing her in childhood and for continuing to haunt her even after death. As Elaine remembers those past incidents, she suffers and reiterates "I don't want to remember. The past has become discontinuous, like stones skipped across water, like post cards" (CE, p. 302). Like Atwood's other heroines, Elaine, too, has difficulty with her past. In Bodily Harm, Rennie tries to put a lock on her past, the narrator of Surfacing fabricates her past, Joan of Lady Oracle compartmentalizes it and Elaine dreads hers. In the memory of the past, she catches "an image of myself, a dark blank, an image, a blank" (CE, p. 302). Elaine employs this strategy to actualize her idealized image of herself as a victim and significantly, its realization depends on others, particularly on Cordelia who would

... alternate between kindness and malice, with periods of indifference; but now she's harsher, more relentless. It's as if she's driven by the urge to see how far she can go. She's backing me towards an edge, like the edge of a cliff: one step back, another step, and I'll be over and falling (CE, p. 154).

She is successful in projecting herself as her victimized, subdued self but both the narrator and the reader are confused at some point to know exactly which Cordelia is the culprit? "The one I have conjured up, the one with the roll-top boots and the turned-up collar, or the one
before, or the one after? There is never only one, of anyone" (CE, p. 6). Obviously, Elaine, in recounting her life, has lost her 'self' and has become a split personality.

The split is between Elaine’s two selves: effacing and aggressive. So far, we have seen her only as a victim of her peculiar circumstances and of Cordelia. But, there are indications of aggressive drives all through the narrative which significantly point towards Elaine’s duality, revealing her expansive self hidden underneath her subdued image. Elaine wants power. She needs to feel stronger. When power does not come easily, she seeks it vicariously in childhood through her marble "cat’s eye." That the cat’s eye has power to protect her, is a secret, well guarded from Cordelia:

She doesn’t know what power this cat’s eye has, to protect me. Sometimes when I have it with me I can see the way it sees. I can see people moving like bright animated dolls, their mouths opening and closing but no real words coming out. I can look at their shapes and sizes, their colours, without feeling anything else about them. I am alive in my eyes only (CE, p. 141).

Later in life, she seeks power through her paintings. "I remember when I had ideas about eternal greatness, when I wanted to be Leonardo da Vinci" (CE, p. 225, emphasis added). With these qualifications in mind, Elaine could
hardly be expected to toe the line set by others. She always likes to "think about things the others know nothing about" (CE, p. 141). She is, thus, a superior being who can master life. Since Cordelia with her overwhelming personality poses a danger to her image and reduces her to a "nothing", Elaine rebels and defies her tormentor. After her first act of rebellion, she gains confidence to handle her difficulties. She decides to streamline her life and take a course in Art. It becomes her "lifeline, my real life. Increasingly I begin to eliminate whatever does not fit in with it, . . . ." (CE, p. 276). Cordelia and others are eliminated at this stage.

However, Elaine cannot obliterate Cordelia from her consciousness. She becomes an integral part of her identity. Margaret Atwood uses mirror imagery to focus on Elaine's dual identity. When reflected in the mirror of Cordelia's sunglasses, Elaine appears "in duplicate and monochrome, and a great deal smaller than life size" (CE, p. 303). In psycho-analysis, the mirror metaphor has symbolic significance as it functions of perceiving and being perceived. Lacan uses "mirror-phase" in which the child "perceives itself as other, an image, exterior to its own perceiving self, [which. thus] necessitates a splitting between the I which is perceived and the I which does the perceiving."9 In Horneyan terminology, the mirror-imagery
points towards intra-psychic conflict. As Stephen Ahern observes, "The fact that images of mirrors and reflections abound in *Cat’s Eye*, and are a dominant motif in Elaine’s paintings as well as in her inner life, underscores the possible symbolic significance of this psycho-analytic metaphor." Mirror becomes the all-seeing eye:

I become fascinated with the effects of glass, and of other light-reflecting surfaces. I study paintings in which there are pearls, crystals, mirrors, shiny details of brass. I spend a long time over Van Eyck’s *The Arnolfini Marriage*, going over the inadequate colour print of it in my textbook with a magnifying glass; what fascinates me is not the two delicate, pallid, shoulderless holding figures, but the pier-glass on the wall behind them, which reflects in its convex surface not only their backs but two other people who aren’t in the main picture at all. These figures reflected in the mirror are slightly askew, as if a different law of gravity, a different arrangement of space, exists inside, locked in, sealed up in the glass as if in a paper-weight. This round mirror is like an eye, a single eye that sees more than anyone else looking: over this mirror is written, "Johannes de Eyck fuit hic. 1434." It’s disconcertingly like a washroom scribble, something you’d write with spray paint on a wall (*CE*, p. 327).

Elaine’s childhood negative self-image continues to have power over her "like a mirror that shows you only the ruined half of your face" (*CE*, p. 410). Whenever she sees in the mirror, she finds Cordelia standing near her, which disturbs her because, as Stephen Elaine’s brother observes "Cordelia has a tendency to exist" (*CE*, p. 242). Stephen’s
words suggest a relationship based on dependency syndrome. This dependency brings her needs into conflict. Although Cordelia’s tendency to master is the very characteristic which both attracts and repels Elaine, the power Elaine has given Cordelia over herself threatens her freedom. To avoid self-hate for being vulnerable and a victim, Elaine exaggerates Cordelia’s bullying nature, but it is actually the "IronLung" of her own need to submit which suffocates like "some invisible leash" (CE, p. 93) around her neck. Elaine develops a kind of love-hate relationship with Cordelia. In moments of crisis she becomes Elaine’s enemy, when the crisis is over, she thinks of her as her friend. This love-hate relationship accounts for much of her trouble in later life not only with regard to herself and Cordelia but also in her human relationship. Just as she has dual identity, she has dual love relationships with Jon and Joseph, simultaneously:

Two men are better than one, or at least they make me feel better. I am in love with both, I tell myself, and having two means that I don’t have to make up my mind about either of them (CE, p 316).

That Elaine stands on unsure grounds is illustrated by the above lines. She is indecisive about the men in her life because as she says "my life is now multiple, and I am in fragments" (CE, p. 316). Flight from decision relieves her
tension temporarily, but the inner burden does not allow her freedom. A continuous conflict arises between her compliant and expansive selves. She likes Cordelia because Cordelia is what Elaine would love to be—powerful, masterly and triumphant; she hates Cordelia because Cordelia by her domineering nature reduces her to "nothing." She often indicts her, "Cordelia, I think. You made me believe I was nothing" (CE, p. 199), to which she gets a careless reply "SO?" There is no answer to this. The trouble is, if Elaine accepts her self-effacing tendencies and identifies herself with goodness, meekness and helplessness, her expansive self will surface and it will chide her for being a willing victim, a spineless woman; if she becomes her aggressive triumphant self, then again conflict would be triggered off by her compliant nature for violating the norms of "good" behaviour. The easiest way of releasing tension is through passive externalization. This shows in her "feeling accused by others, suspected or neglected, kept down, treated with contempt, abused, exploited or treated with outright cruelty" (NHG, p. 225). The scape-goat is Cordelia.

Because she can avoid self-hate only by avoiding responsibility for her loss of confidence, Elaine goes to a great deal of trouble to convince herself and the readers that she has been "driven" all her life, that she has always been "fragmented" and "unreal" and that she has been a
"disembodied" self. The onus of responsibility thus shifts to others. In order to escape self-hate, she goes away from the suffocating milieu of Toronto and earns name as a painter. She is in the limelight with her art exhibition getting good publicity and journalists coming to interview her. In spite of these attempts to escape self-hate and lead a normal life, Elaine is stuck down by half-truths, condemned to experience life in pieces.

Elaine’s dreams manifest her inner turmoil. She dreams of the dead raven, the wooden bridge over the ravine falling apart, her mother not coming to her rescue when she is standing on the Swaying bridge, the chokeberries turning into "deadly nightshade berries" which burst open and "blood runs over my hands" (CE, p. 145). Again, she dreams of being ashamed of her bare skin:

I dream I’m putting on my winter clothes, in Toronto, but my dress doesn’t fit. I pull it on over my head and struggle to get my arms into the sleeves. I’m walking along the street and parts of my body are sticking out through the dress, parts of my bare skin. I am ashamed (CE, p. 145).

These dreams show the fear of self-hate and the approaching self-alienation. Karen Horney corroborates the significance of dreams in understanding neurosis and in taking clue from them for the therapeutic process. The onslaught of self-hate
and self-berating may appear in dreams even before the person is conscious of it. "He may present himself through the symbol of a cesspool, some loathsome creature, . . . a gangster, a ridiculous clown. He may dream of houses with a pompous facade but inside as messy as a pigsty, of houses dilapidated beyond repair, . . . of somebody making a fool of himself in public, etc" (NHG, p. 133). In another set of dreams, Elaine sees herself searching some lost treasure. Symbolically, it is her loss of identity she is searching for. Horney elaborates the process thus:

In many ways the loss of identity can there be expressed directly and succinctly. The dreamer may have lost his passport or when asked to identity himself be unable to do so. Or perhaps an old friend of his will appear in his dream looking quite different from the way he remembers him. Or he may look at a portrait but the picture frame encloses an empty canvas.

Much more frequently the dreamer is not explicitly puzzled by the question of his identity but presents himself in terms of divergent symbols: different people, animals, plants, or inanimate objects. . . the torturer and the tortured, the frightened child and the rattlesnake (NHG, p. 188).

Elaine's dreams and her art express her unconscious to a large extent.

Just as her dreams expose her loss of identity, her paintings show her fragmentation. She has titled her works according to their themes. Significantly, they have eloquent
themes--nature, figures from her past, her parents, brother, Mrs. Finestein, Mr. Banerji and others. Her self-portrait is entitled *Cat's Eye* and it eloquently expresses her fragmented self because in it she has painted only her half-face. The title expresses her need for power. While the painting reflects some of the elements of her past, it becomes a portrait of her inner turmoil. The foreground/background structures of her works with inner/outer split and half face/full face focus displays the inner duality of Elaine. That Cordelia is only the half-self of Elaine is clear from the painting depicting Cordelia, and named *Half A Face*.

Elaine makes us believe that she is a displaced person who has lost touch with her inner self but we realise that she is not a demented woman. There are times when she seems to be in touch with the centre. It is not contended here that Elaine achieves wholeness or that she has found a final resolution to her quest for identity. On the contrary, she tosses like a shuttle-cock between her past and present, blurring the traces of self-understanding, if any. She builds up defences and becomes acutely aware of the world around her, and as Stephen Ahern points out "her psychological development is arrested in a kind of atemporal stasis." But, despite being trapped, she saves herself from being a disembodied being. She comes to terms with
some of the demons of past. In rare moments of illumination, Elaine understands human limitations. If Mrs Smeath has been harsh on her, it was not because she was bad, it was because she was trapped in "a small town thread bare decency" and was herself a "displaced person" (CE, p. 405). Elaine realises that malice and vengeance do not allow one to see clearly, "an eye for an eye leads only to more blindness" (CE, p. 405). One must have a broader vision without being encumbered by prejudices.

Similarly, she understands Cordelia's position too. Cordelia was isolated at her home where there was silence, lack of love and understanding. She took her vengeance on her friends at school by bossing over them. The sufferer was Cordelia, her friends suffered only by implication. An adult Elaine asserts that she is not afraid of Cordelia but she is afraid of being Cordelia. "I'm not afraid of seeing Cordelia. I'm afraid of being Cordelia. Because in some way we changed places, and I've forgotten when" (CE, p. 227). Elaine would not like to merge her identity with Cordelia, because Cordelia is, after all, not the stronger of the two. Elaine forgives Cordelia as she sees clearly that the flaws for which she suffered guilt were not hers at all:

I know she's looking at me, the lopsided mouth smiling a little, the face closed and defiant. There is the same shame, the sick feeling in my body, the same knowledge of my
wrongness, awkwardness, weakness; the same wish to be loved; the same loneliness; the same fear. But these are not my own emotions any more. They are Cordelia's; as they always were (CE, p. 419).

In her forgiveness lies her freedom. This does not mean that she has resolved her crisis, nor does this suggest that she goes away from Toronto cured of her self-alienation. The "Retrospective" has given her the scope to transfer her vision from being "ego-centered" to "problem-centered." Significantly, the last chapter is named Bridge, which suggests the ability to join two parallel lines or banks. Standing on the bridge, Elaine recasts her past once again. She remembers the day she fell into water and froze to death; the epiphanic moment when Virgin Mary had rescued her. That time is past now. A mature, adult Elaine hears no voice, sees no vision. "There was only darkness and silence. Nobody and nothing" (CE, p. 418). This sense of "nothingness" is devoid of all bitterness. It fills her with relief. She accepts the landscape as it is. "The bridge is only a bridge, the river a river, the sky is a sky" (CE, p. 419). It is impersonal, no longer subjective. The landscape is both "empty" and "not empty" like her. She reconstructs Cordelia's weakness and her strength; forgives her, as indicated by the line "the snow in my eyes withdraws like smoke" (CE, p. 419) and Elaine flies away from the disturbing milieu of Toronto. The I/Thou
dichotomy still holds good in Elaine’s psyche; as the plane flies westward, she looks at the sinking sun. It appears "a murderous, vulgar, unpaintable and glorious display of red and purple and orange;" (CE, p. 420). This is suggestive of a future, bright but "murderous." Behind her, "The ordinary night rolls forward," it is indicative of the past which she has tried to obliterate. Elaine comprehends the human weakness of Mrs Smeath, Cordelia, Jon and Josef. She also understands the futility of judging others because every human being is entrapped by his or her situation. She has taken her revenge on them by painting them as she saw them: mean Mrs Smeath, half-faced Cordelia, uncertain Mr Banerji and helpless Stephen. Art has released her tension, and now she no longer wishes to judge people.
Notes and References

3. Martha Sharpe, "Margaret Atwood and Julia Kristeva: Space-Time, the Dissident Woman Artist, and the Pursuit of Female Solidarity in *Cat's Eye.*" *Essays on Canadian writing*, No. 50 (Fall 1993), p. 175.