CHAPTER-VI

A Nocturnal Vision

CAT’S EYE
*Cat's Eye* is Atwood's attempt to expose male prejudices against women's creativity and talent and shows how art can be used as a weapon against tyranny in all its manifestations. Thus, the novel is like an oasis in a desert, for those whose creativity is prevented from blooming.

In the chronicles of art, a woman painter is very rare to come by. The reason for this is not that women have no talent for creative work, but because their egos are too badly smothered by the patriarchal order to germinate anything new. Germaine Greer observes thus: "There is then no female Leonardo, no female Titian, no female Poussin, but the reason does not lie in the fact, that women have wombs, that they can have babies, that their brains are smaller, that they lack vigour, that they are not sensual. The reason is simply, that you cannot make great artists out of egos that have been damaged, with will that are defective, with libidos that have been driven out of reach and energy diverted into neurotic channels".¹

180
Thus, the history of women artists is the sad story of the damaged and distorted egos. A brief survey of the literature of art up to twentieth century shows, that either the women painters rarely exist or they are virtually ignored, despite the wide-spread awareness about feminist issues in recent times.

In *Surfacing*, Atwood shows how gender politics have relegated women artists to a lower order and how their history is subsumed into the dominant patriarchal discourse. Whereas, *Cat's Eye* goes a step further to offer an alternative art history, which foregrounds women's achievement as artists. The novel marks the beginning of a new era, since it focuses on the issues of women through art, for the first time in history.

Atwood's first kunstlerroman, *Lady Oracle*, analyzes the relationship of popular women's fiction to the actual lives of women through the quest of the narrator-protagonist, Joan Foster, a writer of Gothic romances. As the novelist told Joyce Carol Oates shortly after *Lady Oracle* was published, "The hypothesis of the book, insofar as there is one, is: what happens to someone who lives in the 'real' world, but
does it as though this 'other' world is the real one? This question regarding the connection between life and art is one of the fundamental themes of the kunstlerroman, one which *Cat's Eye*, too, explores in its examination of the growth and development of the women-as-artist/woman in a society, where both these roles are marginalized. The conflict between the person, the artist and the social environment is after all particularly acute for the woman, for whom the quest for selfhood itself is problematic: the female protagonist of the Kunstlerroman has almost invariably had to choose between her artistic instincts and patriarchal norms of feminity, and in communicating her confrontation with these usually opposing forces, she has also revealed the relationship between the artist and society.

Thus, as long ago as 1807, Corinne in Madame de Staël's *Corinne* was, like the archetypal kunstlerroman protagonist, a highly sensitive person, whose very sensitivity alienated her from a Philistine society, and whose realization of her artistic integrity was achieved with her discovery, that true art is generated only through this same heightened awareness and responsiveness to experience: but, she was also a woman, and had to agonize, further, over the great divide.
between the claims of her selfhood and her creativity on the one hand and the expectations of society and her creativity on the one hand and the expectations of society from women on the other. Similarly, George Sand's *Consuelo* (1844) explores the characteristic Kunstlerroman themes of the conflict between time and timelessness and the suffering through which alone art is born; but it also underlines the gulf between conventional views about women and the quest for freedom, that she must somehow bridge. The woman in the twentieth century. Kunstlerroman continues to face the same situation. Esther in Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*, soon realizes, that her social role as a woman will inevitably destroy both her creativity and her selfhood: "So I began to think that may be it was true that when you were married and had children it was like being brainwashed, and afterwards you went about numb as a slave in some private, totalitarian state."

The experience of the artist-narrator of *Cat's Eye* is not very different. Elaine-Risley, the protagonist in this masterpiece, is a middle-aged painter, who returns to Toronto, once her home, for a Retrospective show of her paintings. The Retrospective becomes the novel's central metaphor, since what the novel depicts is Elaine's
retrospection of her own life from her school days, adolescence and her involvement in the avant-garde art scene, to her present career as a painter. Elaine’s early involvement with a feminist art show leads us to call her an “autonomous and independent, dissident” feminist painter—“a Sociocultural agitator, who seeks to change oppressive or stagnant language and laws” through her paintings. Thus, the male-centered order in art practices is displayed by the women-oriented paintings of Elaine. Elaine succeeds in establishing her position as “a speaking/painting subject.”

It is through the critique of paintings in Cat’s Eye, that Elaine shows how art promotes feminism and freedom for women. With her artistic creations, she demolishes the popular myth, that art is the privilege of men and seems to assert that “art must belong to all human beings, not alone to a traditionally privileged segment; every endeavour, every passion must be available to the susceptible adult, without the intervention of myth or canard.” The aim of her paintings is to break up the patriarchal art history in order to produce new spaces. They can be read as a kind of mapping of the position from which a woman as artist and as individual makes art and expands the possibilities of better and
healthy relationships between men and women. Elaine's primary activity is seeing, and therefore "Eyes are important, but so are microscopes and telescopes, and so are lenses, with their inability to magnify and to focus more powerfully than the naked eye". It is in this context, that the title of the novel acquires significance. Hence, this chapter seeks to examine the novel as a vision of the painter endowed with feminist consciousness.

To comprehend the growth and development of Elaine Risley’s vision as a feminist painter, it is necessary to evaluate her background. Elaine is a painter by instinct, as such she was interested in painting since her childhood. As a child, Elaine draws in her school workbook girls "in old-fashioned clothing, with long skirts, pinafores and puffed sleeves with big hairbows on their heads. Thus, the workbook has an exotic appeal for Elaine. Further, she uses "silver paper" of cigarette packages to draw figures of women as a childhood hobby. She likes the pictures in Eaton's Catalogue. She cuts the small colored figures of women, cookware, furniture out of the book and pastes them in her scrapbook. She plays the scrapbooks game with her brother, Stephen and friends: Grace, Carol and Cordelia. Thus, she presents "her vision as "backseat", the innocent vision of a child."
Elaine also cuts out pictures of women from the magazines, *Good House Keeping, The Ladies Home-Journal, Chatelaine*, and, with Lepage's mucilage, pastes them into her scrapbook. These pictures show the unenviable occupations a woman is conventionally associated with such as gossiping, knitting etc. She sums up sarcastically the whole business of their knittings thus: "walking, riding, standing, sitting where she goes, there goes her knitting". Elaine cuts out all these ordinary women, "with their forehead wrinkles", who play traditional feminine roles. She fixes them into her scrapbook to show how worried they are in discharging the duties assigned to them by a patriarchal society. Elaine's metamorphosis from a child in the fairy-tale world into adulthood affects "not only vision and the self, but conceptions of time and art". This "backseat" vision begins to change as she acquires a camera. Photography also becomes one of her hobbies. She takes snapshots of women with her camera and pastes them into her album. Playing marbles with her brother is also a favourite pastime of Elaine. Blue Cat's Eyes are her favourite marbles.

Fortunately, Elaine is raised by parents who are unconventional. She is influenced by her father who is, first entomologist,
and then a University professor of Zoology. Occasionally, she has watched his students draw insects. She judges them better or worse depending on the colors. She is fascinated by colors. She learns about insect infestations and acquires an interest in cross-section drawings, in which organisms are “cut open so you can see what’s inside them.”

Her interest in minute details later gives her a penetrating vision into things. Thus, she develops a microscopic vision.

This is a ‘Space-time’ novel. In her discussion of Cat’s Eye at the National Theatre, London in April, 1989, Atwood admitted: ‘The thing, I sweated over in that novel was time’, for Elaine’s story covers a period of nearly 50 years from the early 1940s to the late 1980s. It is her brother’s concept of “space-time” which Elaine later adapts to painting. Elaine discovers through her brother, a way to explore the freedom of imagination beyond the constraints of time. As Sharpe says: “Elaine unwittingly participates in this process, when she embraces her brother’s ideas about space-time and combines them with the symbolization of her private experiences in her paintings. She asserts no feminist political strategy, however, and claims simply to paint what she sees. But, the combination of science with private symbolization in her
paintings challenges the language and conventions of linear time and challenges the limits placed upon women’s communication. Elaine’s paintings bridge the gaps between herself and other women, they communicate visually instead of verbally by depicting the objects and symbols of her own world or space-time. Elaine also bears the stamp of her brother’s artistic talent. Stephen says: “We’re limited by our own sensory equipment. How do you think a fly sees the world?” Stephen aids Elaine in developing her mental perception and vision of painting by means of his drawing dimensional universes. Stephen’s scientific enthusiasms, in significant ways, shape “Elaine’s imagination, so that her paintings and his theories come to occupy the same area of speculation on the mysterious laws which govern the universe. His discourse from theoretical physics provides the conceptual framework for her paintings, for Elaine is ‘painting-time’. He teaches her that own time and space go hand in hand in the universe. He says: “Time is a dimension. You can’t separate it from space. Space-time is what we live in. Stephen’s letters, written when he was a summer camp instructor, empower her to paint women inspired by dream and memory.
He also teaches her how to see in the dark and to move her feet slowly balancing on one foot. This learning further helps her have Cat's Eye to look into the problems of women. She literally incorporates, that Cat's Eye visual powers along with what Stephen tells her about light and the solar system in order to strengthen her own imaginative vision. Elaine's association with her brother encourages her to develop her talent for painting. Thus, her family environment forms the background to her career of free-lance painting.

Since for Atwood "fiction is one of the few forms left through which we may examine our society not in its particular, but in its typical aspects," her novels suggest that this betrayal of selfhood and of humanity is a part of patriarchal/imperialistic conditioning. Elaine's desire to please, to be accepted, is thus the mark of a larger dehumanization of a society, which rejects anyone who does not belong to the dominant culture: a world which is threatening to self-destruct, through war, through environmental pollution, through any form of selfish exploitation, that everyone is guilty of and that everyone will suffer from. While taking her final Grade Thirteen exams, Elaine gets a flash-like thought, that she will be an artist rather than a biologist: "In the middle of the Botany
examination it comes to me, like a sudden epileptic fit, that I'm not going to be a biologist, as I have thought. I am going to be a painter. I look at the page, where the life cycle of the mushroom from spore to fruiting body is taking shape, and I know this with absolute certainty. My life has been changed, soundlessly, instantaneously. From this moment on, Elaine nurtures her ambition to be a painter. Why is the protagonist very particular about being called "painter" rather than "artist" who has social respectability? For Elaine, "artist" is an "overblown, pretentious, theoretical" person, who neglects the labour and the pain of creativity of the "painter". She juxtaposes these two activities: "The word artist embarrasses me; I prefer painter; because it is a tawdry, lazy sort of thing to be....."

To Elaine, the painter is like a proletarian. Therefore, she chooses the profession of painting even though her parents are opposed to it because it is difficult to earn a living by it: "Art was not something that could be depended on, though all right for a hobby like shell work or wood carving. According to Elaine, the artist leaves so much of a burden on the painter. Instead of the precise diagrams of botanical illustration, Elaine transforms "the master discourse of science,
...... through another medium or 'another mode of figuration’ and creates surrealistic paintings of women. The surrealistic quality of Elaine's imagination, incidentally, makes her an "amateur painter".

Elaine is admitted into the Toronto Night College of Art, because of her deep interest in paintings. She joins the night course called “Life Drawing”. Her teacher, Mr. Josef Hrbik arranges the picture of "live naked woman" for students to draw for fluidity of line. This assignment given to his girl students is intended for sexploitation. Elaine is aware of how art is being used by male painters as “a vehicle for sexual wish fulfillment- a way of making woman an object for man's contemplation and erotic desire”. Elaine feels that “Life Drawing" class is a theory class of drawing themselves naked. As Stephen Ahern puts it: “Her art teacher Josef is a walking catalogue of patriarchal myths of feminity: he feels women should live for him only and has an objectivizing, pre-Raphaelite vision of women as "helpless flowers, or shapes to be arranged and contemplated". He is a demon lover of the Heathcliff variety. Elaine is frightened by the image of the massiveness of her body, such as "folds across her stomach", "dark nipples" and "saggy breasts". She is afraid of being turned into the model of a "naked lady".
She is so moved by the sight of the picture, that she discovers the "crooked nature" of her teacher. His intention to teach them painting is double-edged. She learns to draw objects very well, but cannot reproduce life on canvas. She receives constant encouragement from her teacher, but in truth it is tinged with his craving for sex. He says: "you are an unfinished woman... but here you will be finished." Molly Hite comments: "Her drawing instructor Josef's dicta, that she is both an "unfinished woman" who make of you," suggest that insofar as she remains sexually female, she remains subject to the goal of "improvement." She feels ill-at ease with the girl art students, who are under false pretences to become teachers of art. She views the entire life drawing course as pretentious and also ludicrous. Yet, it is quite educative to her. Sharp rightly says: "The realm of the imaginary and creative, that Elaine explores in her life-drawing class is central in her life, and more real to her than either path towards teaching or home making - that leads from art and archaeology."

Elaine realizes the true personality of Mr. Josef Hrbik in the victimization of Susie, her fellow art student, who commits suicide because of her illicit pregnancy. Elaine drive him away from her life, due
to Susie's suffering. The disappearance of Joseph leaves Elaine to begin her romance with Jon, a fellow art student in "Life Drawing". She is trapped into marriage with him by her pregnancy. Thus, they come together by accident, "a lot like a traffic accident"33. She says: "I don't yet see Sarah as a gift I have given him, but one he has allowed me. It's because of her that we got married, ... for the oldest of reasons"34. She is reminded of the victimization of Susie to male chauvinistic forces and refuses to end up like her. Their marital relationship is almost "amazing and agonizing and almost lethal"35. She becomes a silent buried mother within the confines of her house. She says "If I were to win them, the order of the world would be changed, and I am not ready for that. So instead I lose the fights, and master different arts. I shrug, tighten my mouth in silent rebuke, turn my back in bed, leave questions unanswered. I say, "Do it however you like"36. She realizes that he is "hardly the angel"37. When she detects his affairs with all those "skinny girls". Jon, who has pretended to offer his wife equality and comradeship, now resents her working at night, because it disturbs his sleep. Elaine realizes, that he would even prefer her to stop painting. Thus, she feels that her creativity and individuality are thwarted by her inconsiderate
husband, who himself is a painter. Her attempts to develop independence as a female painter are met with “limitation and immurement, training in menial and frustrating tasks, restrictions of the intellect and limitation of erotic activity”38. Jon, the male chauvinist, underrates her paintings. She suspects this: “In his mind, what I paint is lumped in with the women who paint flowers. Lumped is the word”39. Jon goes to the extent of dismissing her as “mad”, because she is a female painter. She immediately refuses to accept gender stereotyping: “once it (being called a painter) was a shaming thing to say, and crushing to have it said about you, by a man. It implied oddness, deformity, sexual malfunction”40. Elaine confronts his emotions: “I’m not mad because I’m a woman. I’m mad because you’re an asshole”44.

She is aware of how male painters are insensitive towards women’s talent - artistic temperaments and tastes - because of their sexist attitude and professional envy. She suffers “all those explosions, that recklessness, that technicolor wreckage”42 caused by her husband.

With her marriage and childbirth, Elaine’s dreams of establishing a balanced and healthy relationship with a fellow-painter turns
sour. She participates in the women artists' conference on “anger” towards men. There, she learns how women painters are confined to the four walls of the house and oppressed by the male painters who exist “in the shadows, like the sinister men who lurk in ravines”\textsuperscript{43}. She is also aware of how they are underpaid and their work is ridiculed and dismissed as being too feminine. This kind of discrimination shown against their work is also pointed out by Atwood in her “On Being Woman Writer: Paradoxes and Dilemmas”. She says: “...... good equals male, and bad equals female. I call it the lady painter syndrome... when She's good (male painters) call her a painter; when she's bad (they) call her a lady painter”\textsuperscript{44}.

Elaine realizes, how the status of women painters is degraded by the male artists as second-rate, in spite of the intrinsic merit of their work. She is amazed by the rage of the women artists at the seminar. She says: “Rage can move mountains.... it's shocking and exciting, to hear such things emerging from the mouths of women”\textsuperscript{45}. She feels guilty and awkward, as she still lives under the authority of a male painter and tries her best to compromise all the time with him. She does not feel any sense of solidarity with her fellow painters, even though
she joins the feminist group. She says: "I have no right to speak. I feel as if I'm standing outside a closed door while decisions are being made, disapproving judgements are being pronounced inside, about me. At the same time I want to please." She feels enlightened and thereby empowered by the proceedings of the conference. She rebels against the attitude of her husband and refuses to "conform to the socially approved role of wife and mother, the only role to which every social institution consigns her automatically, simply by virtue of her birth." She divorces Jon.

Soon after the "broken home", Elaine leaves for Vancouver with her dear daughter, Sarah where she marries for a second time, Ben, a travel agent who appreciates his wife's paintings. He encourages her and extends to her a lot of moral and financial support. She is invited to take part in several women's conferences and group shows, organized by women. Her close association with many women's groups and activists creates in her a fear of turning into a lesbian. Therefore, she avoids the gatherings of lesbians in seminars in order to protect her "sanctity". She thins silently, Don't boss me around. She proclaims: "I am unorthodox, hopelessly heterosexual, a mother,
quisling.... I still shave my legs. She appreciates lesbians for their comradeship, undaunted optimism and indifference towards men. However, she labels herself 'timid', even while she is moving in the direction of feminism. She says: "I am like someone watching from the sidelines, waving a cowardly handkerchief, as the troops go boyishly off to war, singing brave songs." This statement establishes Elaine's stance as a feminist, who cannot be pigeonholed into any specific category.

Elaine begins her career as a painter, who has social concerns. She wishes to have a "home" in the heart of every human being, by virtue of her timeless creations. Her own experiences teach her, how cruel women can be to each other. She realizes her own complicity in her teacher's sexual exploitation and oppression of Susie and the wreckage of Cordelia, who becomes the bouncy rotten cabbage. Elaine feels, that it is a betrayal of sisterhood. She paints the defiant, almost belligerent stare of Cordelia at patriarchy in her picture, "half a face" which is the voice of "the unheard". It is from the sad tale of Susie and Cordelia's romantic fall, that Elaine learns that pregnancy is the scary experience, "the sexual booby trap", that women can fall into. She wishes
to make reparation to sisterhood, through her painting called “falling women”.

“Falling women” is about men like Josef and Jon, who cause women to fall, from their excellence and then, virginity. It shows, how innocent women become prisoners of male community, because of some suggestion of downward motion, against one’s will and hurt themselves. In other words, it reveals the “buried female dangers” of romantic fall: “Falling women” depicts three women falling from a bridge, their skirts opened into bells by the wind onto sharp rocks that are really dangerous men, who were lying unseen, jagged and dark and without volition, far below. It warns women to protect themselves from victimization and survive with dignity as human beings.

Elaine’s painting, “Life Drawing” is a tableau, that brings out the abuse of women by male painters. It criticizes the ideology of Joseph and Jon, the male painters, particularly the former, who is Elaine’s Life-Drawing” teacher and the latter, her first husband. They stand stark-naked in the picture and their bodies are luminous with wonderful bums. Each of them is seen painting a voluptuous model, a picture of a woman in nude. By painting “Life Drawing”, Elaine points out
the gender politics - the sexist behaviour of male painters. In real life, Joseph is a seducer of his own art students. He makes assault on women in the guise of teaching art, whereas, Jon is a commercial painter to whom womanliness and the beauty of woman's body are desirable values. They disregard women's intelligence in favour of their bodies. Thus, the history of women artists is a submerged history of a masculine order. This painting questions and challenges the gender bias in male at history.

Water and its associations - whether religious, sensual or scatological - are significant in both Kunstlerromans. Thus, for instance, in both *A Portrait* and *Cat's Eye* the youthful protagonist is forced into the water by bullying schoolmates; both emerge from the water with much difficulty, and fall ill thereafter; and the bullies apologize to them in much the same way and for the same reasons. This incident is a turning-point in both their lives. Stephen realizes the reality of his isolation and the fear and hypocrisy of a society, that does not understand artistic genius, while Elaine learns to outgrow the pain and hurt, rejects for the first time her victimization, and opens out to an intensely emotional and religious experience, that contrasts so strongly with the pettiness of the conventional piety of the Smeaths. Throughout her life, thereafter Elaine
turns our lady of perpetual help for succour, the God of Christian iconography is always male and cannot provide the emotional support she needs.

At each stage in life, then Elaine finds emotional strength in water, while for Stephen water provides for both his dissatisfaction with conventional ideas about Virgin Mary and his epiphanic vision of a wading girl, seen as a sea-bird and a dove, but something that transcends her appearance and passes into his soul; and he realizes that he is destined to become a poet. Both reject conventional religion, but where Stephen learns to dissociate feminity from Virgin Mary, Elaine dissociates her from patriarchal notions of the godhead, and links her, instead, with the Earth Mother and the Mother Goddess, reasserting thereby the close interrelationship between feminity and creativity. The difference between masculine and feminine art; as Elaine points out in an interview, art is androgynous, universal and timeless.

Atwood takes an even harder look than in Lady Oracle at the position of women in a so-called post-feminist society, for women take to writing rather than to the other arts primarily because, as Virginia Woolf suggests in The Death of the Moth, writing materials are cheap,
and writing itself, less disruptive of conventional social requirements for women. Atwood's shift in focus from writing to painting is in a sense also a reflection of the way, in which the kunstlerroman genre itself has concentrated on writers and has only from the late nineteenth century onwards begun to use other kinds of artists. Perhaps the early preference for writers was because, as Beebe believes, they had achieved social respectability at a time, when the other arts were considered merely crafts, Elaine is however, very particular about being called "painter" rather than "artist", a pretentious term that overlooks the labour and the pain of creativity - an important statement about the nature of art, that the novel as a kunstlerroman makes. The Surrealistic quality of Elaine's imagination, incidentally, makes her the archetypal female protagonist, and her creator a typical woman novelist.

Art, thus expands Elaine's heart and awareness and shows her how to sublimate the suffering of women in kitchen. Elaine makes a series of paintings about her departed mother. The whole series is captioned pressure cooker. Pressure cooker is a kitchen device, which is used as a symbol for the seething discontentment among women owing to their subjugation. Elaine suggests through this symbol, that one day
this discontentment would blow up to cause a severe damage to sexual relationships, if it is allowed to pent up. By painting her mother, Elaine wants to bring her departed mother back to life. She is made to be "timeless". It depicts a stereotyping of women in negative and trivial domestic roles. In other words, it brings out female slavery in kitchen. As Sharpe says: "Elaine's symbolization of her private experiences in her paintings speaks volumes to other women".

Elaine also paints things: a silver toaster, her mother's wringer washing machine, a coffee percolator, "Still lifes" out of memories. They reveal the anxiety and insecurity lying in those things themselves, which symbolise feminine roles. They are suffused with the anxiety of women. Even in the context of modern technology, the burden of the roles of women is not lessened. Thus, Elaine makes an attack on the attractive kitchen gadgetry, which even while promising more comfort to women do not cease to be symbols of women's oppression. In this way, the painting as Atwood says; is "a mixture of fact and imagination".

Elaine's painting, "Three Muses" is a triple portrait of the three adult Muses, who are kind to enrich Elaine's vision of painting and who are themselves aliens: Mrs Finestein, the Jewish neighbour; Mr.
Banerji, the scientist from India; Miss Staurt, the teacher from Scotland. All the three appear as the Magi, presenting respectively, their humble gifts of love—"an orange" symbolising an optimistic note of women's professional aspirations, a slide with spruce budworm eggs representing microscopic vision of female dangers, "a globe" offering global vision of women - to Elaine who is unseen being outside the picture. By depicting two female Muses and one male Muse in the picture, Elaine deconstructs gender-power. It is deconstruction of "perceived gender and its relationship to perceived power". Elaine continually turns "to painting to resolve problems she encounters in real life, just as scientists use imagery time to resolve problems with real time." 

Cat's Eye painting is Elaine's "Self-portrait". It shows the retrieval of the dignity of women's life. The top half of the portrait is Elaine's face and behind her a convex pier-glass "like an eye", that shows things otherwise unseen. Elaine's struggle toward a sense of identity is symbolised by a convex mirror, suggesting "the power of an eye, that sees things whole and a mind that comes to terms with the world through words or through art."
The cat's eye vision of Elaine enables her to look back through time and to remember her paintings. She sees them now as she tries to see time, looking down through a shape, "like a series of liquid transparencies, one laid on top of another". True retrospective vision alters her vision of the past. As Earl G. Ingersoll says: "Atwood shows us in Elaine Risley, a painter as well as a writer, who may seem in a conventional sense to be exploring the truth of her past, but who in a truer sense is creating, or writing, a past as she chooses now to see it, rather than as it might have once existed". She returns to Toronto for Retrospective exhibition of her paintings at subversions, the Space-time Art gallery of Ontario run by a bunch of women. Elaine's Retrospective is 'writing' her experience into art. In short, Elaine seems to make a final statement on man-woman relationships, through her paintings presented as a chronicle at the Art Gallery.

With the Retrospective of paintings and her interview in Toronto, Elaine emerges as a feminist painter. The heroic achievement of Elaine as a painter is displayed by her mustaches-worn portrait at the entrance of the gallery. It shows woman's revolutionary power as painter and ridicules and deflates the chauvinistic male-art world. It also drives
home the message that: "Talent is not something you are born with, any more than is genius. It is something, which is acquired by dint of effort; if you have to face up to difficulties, and if you struggle to overcome them, you are forced to excel." Elaine's paintings reveal "naïve surrealism with a twist of feminist lemon." In her interview for the Living section, "the women's pages" in a woman-oriented newspaper, Elaine makes it clear that she is an outright feminist. As a painter, she is neither a hard-core feminist nor an anti-feminist, but a clear-sighted person. Thus, Elaine has "a very individualistic view of the world. She pursues her art as a means of personal expression, caring little for the external inducements of money and fame." Elaine refuses to be drawn into any ideological framework of feminism. She says: "what indeed... I hate party lines, I hate ghettos. Any way, I'm too old to have intended it and you're too young to understand it, so what's the point of discussing it at all?"

Generally, in male chauvinistic lingo a woman is compared to a cat as it is known for its cunning. But, in one stroke, Atwood changes it into a positive symbol by referring to its eyes, which can see in darkness. It is this extraordinary visual capacity, which she endows her protagonist with to help her see and expose the truth tucked
away under the darkness of patriarchal ideologies dominating the world. Since she takes upon herself this task with greater objectivity, it is difficult to pigeonhole her.

The cat's eye vision of Elaine turns its focus on new issues of women and examines them and turns them over and over in the light of truth. Elaine, who is herself an alien, a newcomer, sees through an alien's eye the unknown world. Metaphorically speaking, the cat's eyes are not the eyes of cats, but the eyes of Elaine, a woman painter, who is unnoticed in her native city of Toronto, but exists and paints in Vancouver like "the green eye of the radio or like the eyes of aliens from a distant planet". Symbolically, she is in two places and times at once as time is not a line but a dimension, like the dimensions of space for her. The Cat's eye marble treasured as a talisman in her childhood empowers Elaine, by letting her see people as it sees them. Bloom of colored petals in the center of cat's eyes symbolise Elaine's vision of the world of women. She says: "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 colors, without feeling anything else about them. I am live in my eyes only."
Elaine is endowed with a vision to see through the cat's eye, the victimization of women. The cat's eye vision guides Elaine towards the creation of surrealist paintings, which are luminous. Thus, the art has an air of soothing, retrieving and transforming existing gender relationships. It offers a new perspective on life. She proffers the marble of luminous vision - a globe at the end of the Retrospective. Doris Lessing says: "Elaine enables us to see ourselves as others see us."  

Flying back to Vancouver, Elaine looks out of the plane window, sees the stars in the night sky glowing like the cat's eye and leaves for us an optimistic and progressive note" "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 night, and there's not much of it. But it's enough to see by".

Thus, Elaine brings a world and the light to see it by means of her paintings, which are true to life. Elaine’s paintings sum up "portrait of the artist as a woman and a survivor". The vision of Elaine is broader, so as to throw over board all the baggage of paternalistic society. She wishes a society, which does not disfigure and disqualify women from excellence. She condemns a psychology, which reduces
women to the status of a spiritual cripple. What leads a Universalist vision to this painter is her belief and hope that "man and maid, freed from all false feeling and a version, will seek each other not as opposites, but as brother and sister, as neighbours, and will come together as human beings."  

The title of the novel, so different from the traditional Bildungsroman use of the protagonist's name, is thus an extended metaphor for the survival that the genre celebrates. Thus, Cat's Eye like her earlier novel Surfacing is a statement, not merely against male chauvinism and patriarchal ideology but against authoritarianism manifesting in different forms. Atwood tries to go beyond in her concerns.
REFERENCES


5. Marthe 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 50 (Fall 1993) : 175.


10. Sharon Rose Wilson, Margaret Atwood’s Fairy - Tale Sexual Politics (Jackson: Uni. of Mississippi Press, 1993) 304.
11. Margaret Atwood, Cat's Eye (NY: Double day, 1988) (147).

12. Ibid., 148.


15. Howells, 153.

16. Sharpe, 177.


20. Ibid., 271.

21. Ibid., 15.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid., 289.


26. Molly Hite, Optics and Autobiography in Margaret Atwood's Cat's Eye, Twentieth Century Literature 41.2 (Summer, 1995): 140.
CHAPTER-VI


29. Ibid., 287.

30. Ibid., 286.


32. Sharpe, 182.


34. Ibid., 356.

35. Ibid., 280.

36. Ibid., 358.

37. Ibid., 391.


40. Ibid., 362-63.

41. Ibid., 363.

42. Ibid., 280.
43. Ibid., 360.

44. Margaret Atwood, On Being a Woman Writer: Paradoxes and Dilemmas, Second Words: Selected Critical Prose (Toronto: Anansi, 1982) 197.

45. Margaret Atwood, Cat’s Eye (NY: Doubleday, 1988) 361.

46. Ibid., 361.


49. Ibid., 399.


51. Quoted in Miles, p.1.


53. Pratt, p.11.

54. Sharpe, 174.

55. Wilson, 296.


57. Sharpe, 183.
CHAPTER-VI


62. Ahern, 10.

63. Margaret Atwood, Cat's Eye (NY : Doubleday, 1988) 94.

64. Ibid., 61.

65. Ibid., 151.


67. Margaret Atwood, Cat's Eye (NY : Doubleday, 1988) 446.


69. Rainer Maria Rilka, Letters to a Young Poet (Edinburgh, 1945) 23.

213