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BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

Bullying and Its Impacts in Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye*  
Šikana a její následky v díle *Cat's Eye* od Margaret Atwood

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## **ABSTRAKT**

Bakalářská práce se zabývá způsobem ztvárnění šikany v díle *Cat's Eye* (1988) od kanadské spisovatelky Margaret Atwood. Cílem práce je přiblížit problematiku šikany převážně ve skupině dívek včetně jejich dopadů na účastníky v pozdějších stádiích života a porovnat ji s jejím vyobrazením v díle *Cat's Eye*. Kromě typických znaků šikany a jejích příčin teoretická část práce popisuje způsoby zvládnutí situace pomocí ego-obranných mechanismů, jež byly navrženy Sigmundem Freudem, a arteterapie, která se soustřeďuje na podstatu problému a zároveň pomáhá klientovi vyjádřit své pocity skrze kreativní aktivitu. Praktická část práce pak zkoumá, jakým způsobem vyobrazení šikany v románu *Cat's Eye* odpovídá jeho teoretickému uchopení v odborné literatuře. Konkrétněji se zaměřuje na hlavní postavy, které jsou obětí šikany a analyzuje jejich vypořádání se s celkovou situací právě skrze zmíněné terapeutické prostředky. Dále práce sleduje, jakým způsobem šikana celkově zapadá do tvorby Margaret Atwood, a zda se dá považovat za typické téma, nebo jeho variaci, kterými se autorka ve svých dílech zabývá.

## **KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA**

Margaret Atwood, kanadská literatura, šikana v literatuře, šikana, oběť, agresor, vrstevníci

## **ABSTRACT**

This bachelor thesis focuses on the subject of bullying in Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye* (1988). The aim of the thesis is to inquire into specific types and effects of bullying predominantly occurring in groups of girls with its long-term consequences on the individuals and compare it with the depiction of bullying in the novel *Cat's Eye*. Besides the characteristic features of bullying and its consequences, the theoretical part of the thesis suggests two coping strategies, the Freudian defence mechanisms, and Art therapy, which concentrates on the core of the problem and simultaneously helps the client to express their feelings through the creative activity. The practical part then examines how the findings in the theoretical part correspond to the illustration of bullying in the novel *Cat's Eye*. To be more precise, it focuses on the protagonists of the story, who are the victims of bullying, and analyses how the characters are trying to overcome the trauma via the therapeutic strategies mentioned. That aside, the thesis explores how bullying falls into the whole literary creation of Margaret Atwood and whether it can be considered a typical topic, or its variation, with which she deals with in her novels.

## **KEYWORDS**

Margaret Atwood, Canadian literature, bullying in literature, bullying, victim, bully, peer group

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## 1 Introduction

The works of contemporary Canadian author, Margaret Atwood, an internationally acknowledged writer as well as the author of the novel *Cat's Eye* (1988), address global and topical issues. These primarily consist of national identity, gender roles, ecological concerns, or power politics (Wynne-Davies 1-3). Apart from that, most of Atwood's literary works look into the issue of asymmetric, imbalanced relationships in terms of power, be it among friends or the wider social frameworks (Wynne-Davies 42). These relevant topics, in fact, enhanced her continuing popularity. Her most notable and successful book *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) is proof enough as its story centres around the problems in society which are still ceaselessly discussed worldwide (Cain).

When reading *Cat's Eye* (1989), I sympathized with the protagonist Elaine, therefore, felt a strong urge to inquire into the more detailed study of female friendships, especially amongst little girls. What intrigued me the most, however, was the unique relationship between Elaine and Cordelia, who are, in fact, simultaneously best friends as well as the worst enemies. As I found this bond unusual I decided to scrutinize their uncommon relationship with intention to comprehend it and possibly find the reason behind its development.

After careful examination, the relationship between the two girls indicated signs of bullying, which turned out to be in accordance with the information found about the novel. In Jordison's *Guardian* article "Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye* Is a Sharp Study of a Very Female Torture" it is in fact stated that the novel is presently considered one of the best and the most realistic literary interpretations of bullying as it depicts not only the agonies of childhood cruelty but also a meticulous analysis of power dynamics within female relationships. At the same time, the story of the novel *Cat's Eye* can be, in fact, interpreted in two ways – Cordelia, the chief bully, is either perceived as a real tormentor or a hallucination created in the mind of the victim and the narrator Elaine. As this thesis is going to observe and compare how bullying functions in real life to how bullying is illustrated in the novel, it will, therefore, follow the first interpretation.

The aim of the thesis will be to try to affirm the fact that the novel depicts bullying and to explore the issue within its complexity. In order to question the authenticity of the

portrayal of bullying in the novel, psychological studies are needed to be discussed in the theoretical part of the thesis. The major works which are going to be used are: Dan Olweus' *Bullying at School: What We Know and What We Can Do* (1991), which lays out experiments conducted at schools; Dennis Line's *The Bullies: Understanding Bullies and Bullying* (2007), in which the characteristic features of bullies are discussed; Valerie Besag's *Understanding Girls' Friendships, Fights And Feuds: A Practical Approach To Girls' Bullying* (2006), a perfect analysis of girls' relationships within a peer group; and Sally Kuykendall's *Bullying* (2012), focusing chiefly on health consequences and the impacts of bullying on both the victim and the bully. The psychological analysis shall function as a foundation for the practical part in which the interpretation of bullying is going to be looked into and compared in terms of an extent to which the portrayal of the novel corresponds to the findings from the works mentioned earlier.

In addition, the major focus will be placed on the role the novel plays in terms of coping with the traumatic consequences of bullying. Apart from that, another objective will be to explore how all aspects of bullying fit in Margaret Atwood's other literary works and topics. Fundamentally, the thesis will question whether bullying can be considered as one of the author's typical themes which are usually addressed in her novels.

The theoretical part of the thesis shall primarily concentrate on the nature of relationships amongst girls as *Cat's Eye* depicts four girlfriends and their process of maturing in a peer group, in other words, in an environment in which bullying occurs in this novel. Furthermore, the work will try to examine the psychological research done into the issues of bullying with its health consequences, which can be carried into adulthood, and give the reader an insight into the matter while concentrating mostly on the key factors.

The practical part shall then observe these instances in the novel *Cat's Eye* and compare the portrayal of bullying with the discoveries of the official researchers observed in the theoretical part by applying four criteria concluded from the psychological analyses of bullying, which will presumably concentrate on the depiction of bullying and the relationship within a peer group, the cause of bullying, the impact of bullying on a victim, as well as, a bully since the protagonists Elaine and Cordelia take both these positions, and the coping strategies used to overcome the trauma.

Since bullying is an extremely complex issue, which is problematic to discern, the presented typical features of bullying ought to help the readers to notice the first signs of bullying in their lives forthwith. This way, the process of bullying can be preferably put to an end in its early stages before any fatal damage is inflicted. Moreover, this thesis may help its readers to understand the phenomenon of bullying, including its causes and why some are more susceptible to becoming a victim than others. It should also guide them towards the realisation whether they have ever participated in the process of bullying in any way, be it in their childhood or adulthood.

## 2 Theoretical Part

### 2.1 *Cat's Eye* within the context of Margaret Atwood's works

Margaret Atwood, an eminent Canadian writer, poet, novelist, and an author of more than forty fiction books just as other literary genres, is a Canadian literary icon known to the world (Viner). She was one of the first writers who tried to analyse Canadian literature in her book *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (1972), where she also introduces the theory of victimisation. The theory was strongly inspired by the wilderness of Canadian nature and its principles are applicable to the situations across whole countries, minority groups, and individuals. Victimisation and survival are the most common topics observable in the majority of her works (Wynne-Davies 11). The protagonists of the stories gradually move between the four victim positions which are as follows:

- Position One: To deny the fact that you are a victim.
- Position Two: To acknowledge the fact that you are a victim, but to explain this as an act of Fate, the Will of God, the dictates of Biology (in the case of women, for instance), the necessity decreed by History, or Economics, or the Unconscious, or any other large general powerful idea.
- Position Three: To acknowledge the fact that you are a victim but to refuse to accept the assumption that the role is inevitable.
- Position Four: To be a creative non-victim (Atwood, *Survival* 36-38).

The linearity of these positions is not predestined as the theory itself should only be suggestive, not accurate. Some characters do not have to even take all the positions, others can be on the verge of two positions while occupying them both simultaneously (Atwood, *Survival* 39). According to Margaret Atwood, the most significant position is the last as the creative process, and namely writing, represents the author of the book (Atwood, *Survival* 40). Through creativity, the individuals can become free as they express themselves (Atwood, *Negotiating with the Dead* 52) and their work of art becomes a mirror or a reflection not only of themselves but also of the readers (Atwood, *Survival* 15-16).

Furthermore, Atwood uses the mirror technique on her characters as she tends to look at them as if they were doubles, duplications, or reflections. These polarities point out even

to the situation in *Cat's Eye*, where the main characters represent a bully and a victim, in other words, two opposing camps. They are reflections, one cannot exist without the other, and they need each other. The dualities are usually demonstrated through family relatives, twins, or best friends, while one possesses the qualities the other lacks (Tomanová 21). Even in terms of her theory of victimisation, focusing on the Position Four which is freed throughout the creative process, writers are for Atwood the core example of double identities (Atwood, *Negotiating with the Dead* 37).

Generally, Margaret Atwood is considered a feminist author since most of her novels centres around female characters "... who question patriarchal discourses" (Wynne-Davies 11), who are victims that struggle to find their identity, who are usually alienated from the society, and who are on the verge of insanity (Wynne-Davies 17). However, they are not always depicted in the positive light as it can be observed in the novel *Cat's Eye*, where the female characters can become both a friend of the enemy and the enemy of a friend (Viner).

A majority of her readers tend to come to the conclusion that it is Margaret Atwood herself behind her female leads. Nevertheless, she claims that none of them were ever inspired by her personal life (Viner). That aside, *Cat's Eye* is proclaimed to be her most autobiographical work. The readers have noticed several similarities between the protagonist Elaine and Margaret Atwood ("Cat's Eye"). She, likewise Elaine, spent most of her childhood in the wilderness since her father was an entomologist and frequently travelled between Toronto and Ottawa. In addition, she started school later than other children. Elaine was also primarily educated outside school by her mother before her family had to move to Toronto. At the age of sixteen, Atwood made a definite decision about pursuing a career of a writer just like Elaine chose to become a painter, and they both divorced their first husbands ("Margaret Atwood Biography").

In her interview for BBC Radio 4, Atwood stated that people tend to tell their own life stories to themselves at various points in life as if it was a book which is to be closed when the story is finished. The viewpoint is going to be different as individuals age and she herself claims that only now has she become able to forgive certain people she held grudges against. This aspect is also noticeable in the novel *Cat's Eye* in the main protagonist Elaine, a woman in her fifties, who is finally able to forgive her bullies.

In conclusion, the typical topics Margaret Atwood touches upon her works are primarily concerned with the theme of survival which goes hand in hand with her theory of victimisation as most of her female leads are depicted as victims fighting for their lives. These characters can be freed only through creative activity, namely writing, or art like in *Cat's Eye*. Moreover, Atwood shows great interest in the theme of dualities. In other words, two similar people who simultaneously possess contrasting qualities. Due to several similarities between Atwood's personal life and the protagonist Elaine, *Cat's Eye* is considered to be her most autobiographical work.

## 2.2 Bullying and its characteristics

Smith describes the act of bullying as “a form of aggressive behaviour – behaviour designed to hurt another” (Smith). However, this is not an established definition. In fact, many attempts have been made to agree on a universal definition of bullying, however, without success. As there are many types of bullying, the experts have differing opinions. Since some crucial characteristics may be overlooked or interpreted incorrectly, it is very challenging to come to a unanimous consensus (Lines 17). Although the descriptions of bullying vary in many aspects, there are some features they frequently share. These are as follows:

The act must have:

1. been done on purpose;
2. been a malicious intent;
3. been performed repeatedly over time;
4. involved an imbalance of power between the victim and the bully (Kuykendall 31).

In *Bullying at School: What We Know and What We Can Do*, Olweus refers to bullying as “negative action” (9) by which he covers the fundamental types of bullying that can be identified. These can be either physical (e.g. hitting, kicking, punching) or verbal (e.g. threatening, teasing, name-calling). He mentions one additional category which includes naughty gestures, making faces, or exclusion from a group. Moreover, we can distinguish direct and indirect bullying as well. Physical attacks are typical for the direct type of

bullying, whereas, being ignored and isolated from the group are examples of the indirect type. The latter instances are of less visibility and therefore require closer surveillance (10).

Lines mentions additional classification of bullying types – strategic bullying and bullying for approval. Name-calling, violence, and physical assault are typical features of the strategic type. An example is a group of people against one individual with the intention of his or her mortification. It has the advantage of blaming bullying on teasing or fun. Some people bully for approval, in other words, to obtain popularity. It is an innate part of human nature to seek success and approval of a superior, whether it is a parent, a teacher, an idol, or peers. (65-70).

It is also important to note that even though bullying is in most cases observed on the school ground, it commonly occurs outside school where the chances of being caught are much smaller (Dunn 84). Bullying can occur almost anywhere, whether in the playground, among family members, in work, or even over the Internet. *Cat's Eye* features a combination of locations where bullying is carried out. Predominantly, the bullies tend to choose their houses since they can cover spiteful actions without difficulty, yet places such as the road to school, the bus, or church are used as well. However, school still represents a dangerous area for the victim as the indirect bullying can be conducted with the help of henchmen.

### **2.2.1 The cause of bullying**

Studies have been done addressing the issue concerning the causality of bullying; at what stage of life it emerges, what the possible causes of the problem are and why some individuals are more susceptible to show the symptoms than others. Since there is no established principle but rather various diverse conclusions based on experiments, this thesis will shortly mention the cause, which is commonly acknowledged as the primary reason for the occurrence of aggressive behaviour.

The most widespread conviction is that the familial roots, as well as the regular exposure to truculent behaviour, are the most vital factors for the transformation of the child's character. Even medical surveys have discovered that "... stress increases cortisol levels, which can impact normal neurological development, which can put someone at risk for acting aggressively" (Kuykendall 71). If the traditional family structure is damaged, in other words, if one of the parents is missing or there is violence of any kind present, this

environment the child is exposed to will inevitably shape their character. It is in the early stages of a child's development that he or she learns the most by observation and therefore, is more susceptible to follow the parents' example.

Parenting techniques play another remarkable role in influencing the child's possible alteration in behaviour. In fact, there are two dominant principles that parents can adhere to – authoritarian and authoritative. The differences lie in the fact that the first style is more predisposed to awaken the aggressive behaviour as it consists of a strict, controlling, disciplinal approach to parenting, whereas the second attitude has been addressed as democratic, more propitious and helpful for the child. If a son or a daughter misbehaves, the authoritative parents will scold their child, however, with good intention of teaching him or her a lesson lest such behaviour should occur in the future again. Contrarily, the authoritarian parents will, either physically or verbally, punish their child without explaining why the action was wrong, and additionally, he or she will not receive any emotional support (Cherry, "Authoritative Parenting"). This kind of treatment will most likely lead to children who are prone to truculent behaviour, are obedient and good at following rules but lack abilities to set personal standards as well as their limits (Cherry, "8 Characteristics of Authoritarian Parenting").

What goes hand in hand with parenting techniques is the relationship between parents and their children. The reason for its prodigious importance is the fact that it lays the foundations for the later ability to form relationships with other people and to maintain them. Parents who are negligent and distant to their children are ensuring the development of aggressive behaviour and the subsequent inability to cope with frustration (Tocai and Chipea 61). Studies have shown that bullies have, in most cases, "insecure relationships with their parent(s), characterised by inconsistent parental attention to their children's needs, and parental rejection and insensitivity" and most importantly have "less affectionate and supportive fathers" ("Children Who Bully At School"). These children are naturally expected to be antisocial and show fewer emotions in general.

### **2.2.2 Typical characteristics of bullies**

In order to better understand Cordelia's behaviour in the novel, it is crucial to analyse the key factors of a bully. By doing so, it shall be, therefore, easier to notice various aspects

of her personality and determine the inclination towards the malicious intent carried out on her friend Elaine.

In general, bullying can be mistaken for teasing, which differs in the fact that both camps mean well, they want to be part of the action, and on top of that, they consider it fun. This type of behaviour is mostly visible among the opposite sexes when one likes the other and wants to show affection. However, when the participation is not sought, and the individual is assaulted in some way, he or she finds it unpleasant or undesirable, it can come under the umbrella of bullying.

According to Lines in *The Bullies: Understanding Bullies and Bullying*, anyone can become a bully, regardless of their race, gender, origin, age, or religion. What actually contrives a bully is their aggressive behaviour towards the victim, which can alter under different circumstances (61). Those who bully are by no means recognised as people who are anti-social in general. On the contrary, they possess many great qualities. Their overall personality is strong, they are easy-going, intelligent, and have healthy confidence. Despite the positive features mentioned, other features such as the support of violence, lack of empathy, or the feeling of dominance and power over others can be awoken at any stage of a person's life. However, they are ordinarily observed at a very early age and can be brought along into adulthood (Kuykendall 59-60). This aspect is visible not only in Cordelia's case, but also in Elaine's.

Olweus claims that perpetrators usually pick fragile, defenceless individuals as their targets and may impel henchmen to do the harassment for them while they observe and control the whole situation from a distance (58). In addition to that, Olweus presents a list of common characteristics which the aggressor might possess. In order to be classified as a bully, the individual must exhibit at least one of these features. The attacker may:

1. be of a robust figure or be physically stronger than the victim as well as physically fit and successful in sports; be of the same age or slightly older than the victim;
2. be in need of the feeling of superiority and a necessity to control other people with power or threat; be able to accomplish their goals; boast about their supremacy;
3. be choleric, be liable to get upset easily; be reluctant to follow any rules and be apt to cheating;

4. be generally aggressive; make others feel in danger; be great talkers which they exploit when in a difficult situation;
5. give an impression of a tough individual who is scarcely intimidated by others; show no affection or empathy towards their victims;
6. be confident, sometimes overconfident; they are hardly insecure;
7. succumb to vandalism, drugs, alcohol and stealing at a very early age;
8. be popular or notorious, usually have a group of companions who follow him or her;
9. be ordinary, above or below mediocre student in elementary school, yet in junior high school or secondary school they have a tendency to deteriorate gradually and may form a negative attitude towards school altogether (58-60).

More characteristics are added to those already mentioned by other researchers, for instance, Dunn claims that most of the bullies "... are quite likely to be victims of some kind of abuse, children who are not succeeding at school, who lack a sense of self-worth, and come from families in which there is already bullying" (85). Nevertheless, these are not fixed features, therefore, some aggressors may be different. They can, in fact, be empathetic and rather hard-working, others behave as bullies due to a misfortunate event which happened to them, for example "... rejection by a friend, problems with a teacher or a parent" (85). Therefore it can be said that the characteristic features are variable and so the potential bullies may possess unique qualities. Due to the inconstancy, the determination of the typical features becomes highly intricate.

### **2.2.3 Typical characteristics of victims**

Just as the characteristic features of bullies can be identified, the attributes of victims are no exception. The typical mannerisms are supposed to guide the reader towards the identification of these aspects in the particular characters who are locked in the victim position. In the novel *Cat's Eye*, these characters are predominantly Elaine and Cordelia who both become victims of bullying. The characteristics of victims, which are going to be looked at, shall function as an outline for the reader in order to comprehend the behavioural patterns of the girls in various situations.

The victims are usually labelled as sensitive individuals who are peaceful and not habituated to arguments or violence at home. In fact, they usually do not protect themselves

when bullied, and are mostly fearful (Dunn 85). In addition, they usually consider themselves inferior, not good enough, dull, and unattractive (Olweus 32). They are mostly the unpopular individuals in the group or a class in school and barely have any friends. Furthermore, the victim does not have to be a single person necessarily, more people can be involved (Olweus 9).

Moreover, Olweus distinguishes two types of victims – passive or submissive and the provocative victim. The latter is of lesser occurrence. Typical features of passive or submissive victims are insecurity, weakness, lack of assertiveness, and inability to hit the bullying back at the aggressors. The provocative victim, on the other hand, is a mixture of anxiety and aggression. They are usually hyperactive and therefore claim other people's attention with their provocative behaviour, which may result in bullying (Olweus 32-33). Lines adds more details to the description of the provocative victim. These victims struggle to make friendships and to maintain them. They are unable to recognise rejection or accept it, and even though they are aware of the unwillingness of others to make contact, they fight their way through despite the fact it hurts their feelings (100). The signs of the victims vary with every individual as well as the environment in which the bullying is being carried out. Nevertheless, the categorisation is by no means obliged to be always applicable.

#### **2.2.4 Girls' relationships in a peer group**

As Besag states in her work *Understanding Girls' Friendships, Fights And Feuds: A Practical Approach To Girls' Bullying*, peer groups play a significant role in the character development of an individual. It influences the members as they carry specific roles within the group. Moreover, based on their position, they possess predetermined power. Being a member of the group involves a list of rules, morals, codes, and attitudes which must be followed if the person wants to maintain the membership (19-22). Before joining the group, the individual may overlook or consider the rules insignificant since what matters to them the most is the desire to be accepted by others. Therefore, it can be said that to some degree the peer group shapes a person's personality.

The process of the personal gain of social skills and simultaneous desire to maintain a membership in the peer group creates room for conflict (Besag 22-23). In most cases, girls consider friendship a competition. They fight over who is going to become the very best

friend of the other girl and classify their friends according to their popularity. For instance, a girl can have a best friend, the very best friend, the very best friend in the world, and the list goes on. The position usually changes based on the current state the relationship between the girls is in. If they are not on speaking terms, then the previously labelled very best friend might move down the classification ladder and become only the best friend, or fall right at the bottom and turn into an enemy (Besag 5).

When taking bullying in the peer group into consideration, it can be directed by the most influential girl. By doing so, she is capable of achieving two goals - excluding the one she does not find agreeable as well as questioning the loyalty of her friends. The ones that join the leader confirm their fidelity and friendship, the others do not have many chances of staying in the group. Nevertheless, there is great distress always present as the position of any girl within the group can change overnight, and thus any member can become the next victim. That is the reason why they all watch one another in case there is a shift in mood signifying their possible downfall (Besag 53). When the child is excluded from the group, he or she have then no opportunity for other social development as they are not participating in most of the activities that could help them acquire the needed skills.

Speaking in general terms, the relationships between girls are considered to be complicated and inconstant. One moment they are best friends, the next moment the hatchet is dug up without any significant reason given (Besag 4). When it comes to the victim of aggressive behaviour, girls are more likely to choose someone from the circle of acquaintances or friends. In addition, they like to play the game covertly and therefore, fight at places where the chances of exposure are minimal, such as lavatories, via technologies, or they try to disguise the row with friendship (Besag 7).

### **2.2.5 The nature of comparison and the influence of a peer group**

The natural process of comparing the individual's life with the ones of other people has even more immense effect on girls than anyone else. It is a complex psychological as well as a cognitive process that modifies the identity of the girl and makes her question her own existence (Besag 53). The paramount aspect that is generally being mostly assessed is appearance since that is the quality which humans value the most. This whole process of comparison and pigeon-holing may be exploited so that the stability within a peer group is

maintained and usually results in aggressive behaviour or bullying. It is a strategy to secure dominance over relationships while preserving the group's reputation. This approach, however, can only be achieved by constant monitoring, whether via e-mail, text, telephone, or in person. The inferior members are thus obliged to be always available and if they do not wish to lose their position, they must keep up with the newest trends of the superior girls. The monitoring allows the early unearthing of the feasible changes in the relationships and their overall perseverance (Besag 54).

### **2.3 Consequences of bullying or being bullied**

Bullying can be labelled as a traumatic experience for it damages the individuals emotionally, socially, psychologically, and physically. It leaves not only the victims, but also the tormentors affected by their positions in the process. The impacts on the bullies differ from the victim ones, however, the extent of the damage done remains the same. As the main characters of the novel *Cat's Eye*, Elaine and Cordelia, take both positions of the tormentor as well as the victim, their experience gradually leaves several scars on their lives.

The later consequences of bullying differ based on the type of bullying that has been carried out on the victim. Physical violence conducted by the bullies will most likely result in the victim applying more aggressive behaviour, whereas emotional or verbal violence is expected to mainly affect the psyche of the individual. Such actions as ostracism, name-calling, gossip, or public humiliation lead to depression, eating disorders, or even proneness to suicide (Kuykendall 4). By all means, these are not the only scenarios that can emerge. Some other problems, such as worries, anxiety, tetchiness, and argumentative behaviour are probable to develop as well. Most of the participants who experience bullying during their childhood carry these consequences and behavioural patterns into their adulthood (Stuart and Jose 186).

However, bullying does not have to affect the individual only in a negative way. Depending on the victim, he or she can absorb the pain, oppose their enemies, and transform the scars into weapons due to which they gradually start rebuilding their confidence and self-esteem. Put another way, "victimisation builds a character" (Kuykendall 131). Bullying experience, in most cases, pushes the victim forward in his or her personal development. They learn how to become steel when facing difficult situations or people and how to

approach them, how to handle future disputes as well as how to interact with people based on the previous obligation to deal with the bully, who may sometimes become a lifelong friend (“Positive and Negative Effects of Bullying.”). Arnold and Fisch add to this, “The closer the relationship is between victim and perpetrator, the more severe the trauma” (10).

### **2.3.1 Consequences of victimisation**

The experience of bullying brings severe, either short- or long-term, health, psychological, or social consequences. Health, or physical, consequences consist of anything noticeable on the victim’s body, whether it is an outcome of a physical attack or a body reaction to an alarming event; such as bruises, broken bones, headaches, nausea, lack of appetite, or an overall increase of pain sensitivity. However, some of these instances can be indicated by psychological stress. Anxiety, depression, passivity, insomnia, difficulty concentrating, and memory problems are examples of psychological consequences. Some of the long-term consequences concern post-traumatic stress disorder or suicidal thoughts (Kuykendall 63-64). As for the impact on the social life of the individual, he or she is inclined to absenteeism, loneliness, and seclusion (Rigby 584).

There are several symptoms a victimised child may show which are usually observed but not diagnosed as symptoms of childhood trauma. These are as follows:

- medical complaints or somatisation;
- nightmares and sleep disturbances;
- hypervigilance and extreme startle responses;
- apathy and emotional numbing;
- fear, anxiety, and depression;
- changes in consciousness, such as daydreaming or dissociation (Arnold and Fisch 19).

Other possible symptoms are unobservable as they concern the biochemical changes in our brain. Evolutionary, a child’s brain does not mature completely until the age of eight, therefore, any psychological or emotional stress in connection to trauma is intractable. Consequently, mental health outcomes are probable to be more detrimental than in the case of a full-blown brain. Traumatized seven- to fourteen-year-olds might evince symptoms of

annoyance, nightmares, rebellious behaviour, and reservation. Sometimes resistant and refractory behaviour accompany these symptoms. Adolescents are prone to experience a vexatious rekindling of intrusive memories, therefore, they try to avoid places, people, or thoughts that could cause re-living the trauma (Arnold and Fisch 19).

### **2.3.2 Consequences of perpetration**

Perpetration brings just as severe consequences as victimisation. There is a tendency to succumb to alcoholism, vandalism, criminality, deviant behaviour, domestic violence or aggressive treatment of their spouse, weapon carrying, inclination towards mobbing, depression, and fighting (Kuykendall 66-67). Social development of the individual is negatively affected if the vicinity fails to terminate the abuse. The predator then becomes accustomed to his or her behaviour and starts to consider it normal within the limits of the social conventions. However, with this kind of attitude, the percentage of crossing the border is much higher, and the perpetrator usually ends up inclining towards the criminal activity. The overall social interaction is breached, and therefore, the person may fail to succeed in creating trustful friendships (Stuart and Jose 186).

Apart from the bully and the victim scenarios, there is a third possibility - being a bully and a victim simultaneously. In this particular case, the bully-victim individual will presumably suffer the consequences of perpetration as well as victimisation. According to Kuykendall, provocative victims come under this classification with their use of aggression to oppose their bullies. As they have fewer friends, they are obliged to deal with the stress on their own. Frequent display to stress-evoking situations may lead to several chronic, predominantly mental diseases (68).

## **2.4 Coping strategies and possible therapy**

With the consequences mentioned in the previous section, it is only natural for the stricken individual to try to survive, to overcome the anxiety, depression, or any other symptom he or she may indicate. People mostly seek specialists to help them get over their scars of trauma. Nevertheless, there is always someone who rather chooses to undergo the process of cleansing by themselves, or they apply the coping strategies unconsciously.

### **2.4.1 Freudian defence mechanisms**

The main characters in *Cat's Eye* suffer from the consequences of bullying and carry these with them throughout the whole novel. As they struggle to cope with their traumas, they eventually intuitively opt for certain coping strategies. One of these noteworthy coping strategies that are applied by the characters are Freudian defence mechanisms. They are a strategic weapon for people to ensure psychological survival as overwhelming emotions make one feel as if vitiated from within. They are to secure the balance between the emotional outbreak and the individual's mental stability. Arnold and Fish divide these defences into levels, gradually ascending in their effects (92-93).

The first level of defence is ignorance of anxiety, which makes it impossible for the individual to cope with frustrating situations and emotions. The second level consists of projection (Arnold and Fisch 93). Projection is a process when a person attributes his or her unacceptable thoughts or feelings to other people (Vaillant 238). The third level deals with phobic avoidance. Put another way, some may have irrational fears of people or places and try to stay away from them. The last level is repression. Repression is an active defence similar to amnesia which enables the individual to blot out any traumatic memories. However, if the person desires to fight the trauma, there is a need for remembrance of the experience. It is also notable that unlike children, adults are more mentally and physically prepared for the treatment as they are sufficiently equipped to confront the deleterious aspects of these memories (Arnold and Fisch 93-94).

### **2.4.2 Art therapy**

Art therapy or art psychotherapy are ways of dealing with anxiety, stress, illness, life challenges, trauma, or personal development. In *Art Therapy*, Edwards defines Art therapy as follows: "Art therapy is a form of psychotherapy that allows for emotional expression and healing through nonverbal means" (3). The essential turning point lies in the guidance of a client towards reflection, a better understanding of themselves and the origin of their anguish, which may lead to a more satisfying quality of life (4).

Art therapy tends to be interchanged with Occupational therapy due to the fact that both disciplines are historically linked. Nevertheless, the contrast between them is in the medium used. While Art therapy relies on the visual aspect of arts being painting,

sculpturing, and drawing, Occupational therapy puts other practices in use, such as dancing, singing, drama, or creative writing. Furthermore, Art therapy enables the client to choose their own equipment they wish to work with, unlike Occupational therapy. Another distinction would be the importance of the final artwork. Occupational therapist belittles the significance of it as their primary goal is to obtain information about the client from his or her engagement with the work (Edwards 6).

Edwards states that “Clients seen in art therapy frequently complain of feeling disconnected or alienated from themselves or other people. At other times, they may feel overwhelmed or persecuted by them” (43). In fact, relationships appear to be the most problematic area as clients bear feelings of desire or fear formerly experienced in connection to people who are dearest to them. It is believed that these experiences, whether affirmative or negative, naturally internalises into one’s soul. They are, in most cases, buried in the individual’s unconsciousness, yet actively influence their consciousness. It is the Art therapist who is responsible for uncovering the concealed experiences and for addressing them in order to ensure client’s better self-understanding (44).

Art therapy is a perfect practice for those who struggle expressing their feelings verbally. In fact, there are instances of experience which are impossible to limit only to words. Emotions, feelings, suffering, and pain are, particularly beyond words. Art creates an opportunity for a person to communicate these sensations through another medium, which can easily be comprehended by other people (Edwards 8).

### **3 Practical Part**

Owing to the psychological research done into the matter of bullying, it is possible to conclude that bullying is a repetitive pattern of negative action carried out by bullies with intentions to harm, humiliate, and diminish their victim. Apart from the general features of bullying, the participants, the bully and the victim, possess their own typical attributes by which they can be recognized. Being a complex issue, there are other aspects of bullying which must be taken into consideration when identifying its occurrence, predominantly its causes as well as their influences on the individual's behaviour. The most frequently ascribed reason behind bullying is the familial background with the parental strategy applied during the child's development process.

As bullying is typically conducted by several people who target one individual, the relationship amongst peers plays quite a significant role. Within a peer group, there is a certain set of rules which are to be followed if members' positions in the group are to be maintained. Such pressure leaves them in constant fear since their reputation is at risk due to the ceaseless alterations of the group's climate. Moreover, the strong need for acceptance makes the liberation of the individual from an antagonistic group much more difficult.

Furthermore, bullying can impact its participants with dire consequences on their physical as well as mental health. These scars are usually carried from childhood into adulthood, yet they can develop at any stage of a person's life. Nevertheless, they tremendously influence the individual's behaviour, state of mind, and social skills. Only certain coping strategies and therapy may help them in overcoming the trauma, whether applied unconsciously or guided through with the help of a specialist.

Based on these discoveries, it is possible to state four main aspects that are crucial in analysing the occurrence of bullying in a peer group. These are as follows:

- the characteristics of bullying conducted by a peer group and the overall relationship within this group
- the cause of bullying being the familial roots and the parental strategies
- the impact of bullying on a victim as well as a bully
- the coping strategies and therapy used to overcome the traumatic experience

Therefore, the following practical part shall look into the depiction of bullying in the novel *Cat's Eye* through the previously stated aspects and compare these psychological findings with the fictitious portrayal while predominantly concentrating on the characters in the novel.

### **3.1 *Cat's Eye***

*Cat's Eye*<sup>1</sup> is a story about friendship, family, but also about time as it is driven by sudden memory recollections of childhood trauma. The plot of the novel takes place and revolves around an art exhibition which the narrator of the story, almost a fifty-year-old painter Elaine Riskey, is about to launch in Toronto. The primary plotline is heavily interrupted by flashback sequences, which are triggered by the return to the hometown, showing Elaine's troublesome childhood, mainly focusing on the power dynamics in a peer group between herself and her other three friends Carol, Grace, and Cordelia. Cordelia is the leader of the group as well as a chief tormentor of Elaine, who becomes a victim of bullying. However, after the ravine incident, the bully-victim roles reverse. The novel depicts the need for power and dominance. It also drags families into the bullying process which results in the infliction of long-lasting wounds on the friends. As the protagonist Elaine is aware of being in the early stages of Alzheimer disease, and the story is based on her personal remembrances, it is safe to consider her to be an unreliable narrator. The artworks in the exhibition, a retrospective, are the result of the author's coping with the trauma of her complicated and tough past.

### **3.2 Interpretation of bullying and the relationships within a peer group**

This part of the thesis will deal with the typical features of bullying, namely concentrating on the strategies taken by the tormentors. Apart from the key factors of the bullying process, it shall inquire into the attributes of both bullies and the victims. Furthermore, it will focus on the characteristics of a peer group due to the fact that most of the negative action is carried out particularly within the peer group of the four childhood friends Elaine, Carol, Grace and Cordelia. The overall mood in the peer group and the actions taken by the girls will be mostly focused on and analysed in more detail.

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<sup>1</sup> The following page references are expressed with an abbreviation CE in parentheses in the text.

### 3.2.1 The interpretation of bullying

As noted in the theoretical part, bullying is universally seen as a malicious act of aggressive behaviour which is repeatedly performed, while prominently showing an imbalance of power between the bully and the victim. This fundamental characteristic can be spotted in the peer group of the four girls, as Grace, Carol and mainly Cordelia purposely torment Elaine, the chief protagonist of the story, over several years while making her feel deflated via various bullying strategies applied. One of the strategies can be a disguise of bullying with fun and games, which leads to the circumstances in which Elaine for the first time realises that "...[she] lost the power" (*CE* 126). Perceiving the whole situation as a game and also as a part of the drama performance which is supposed to represent a burial of Mary Queen of Scots, Elaine, chosen to be buried in one of Cordelia's holes dug in the garden, is placed inside and later covered with the wooden boards. Little did she know that her friends would leave her in that dark place. As she is abandoned by the girls and unable to escape, she feels betrayed, trapped, and distressed. This traumatic episode affects her later position in the group as she has displayed weakness, which is perceived by Cordelia and exploited in the upcoming years, making Elaine her major target. Moreover, the presence of imbalance of power is likewise noticeable in Grace and her attitude towards playing games. If any of the girls do not want to follow her wishes, she mentions that she has a headache. It is an unpleasant situation as it makes the other girls feel responsible for her condition. By doing so, she preserves her dominance and power over them while making her rules absolute, if the girls want the game to pass off without difficulties. Grace's approach to playing games can be, therefore, labelled as inimical and makes her look as if she was a despotic leader.

There are two major types of bullying which can be conducted on the victim – the direct, consisting of hitting or kicking, and the indirect, represented by teasing, threatening and name-calling. Strategic bullying, for which a group against one individual with the intention to mortify is typical, and bullying for approval, through which the bully's endeavours are to impress a certain authority, are other types of bullying which can be identified. In terms of the bullying conducted by the peer group, the majority of the actions correspond to the indirect type of bullying since the girls mostly employ name-calling and teasing, which is depicted through Cordelia, for instance when she remarks, "What rhymes with Elaine? ... Elaine is a pain" (*CE* 158). Threatening is applied obliquely, or it can be

said that it is based on the group's rules, since the girls make Elaine think that the bullying is their secret they are obliged to protect. If Elaine were to reveal it, she would be cast out of the group forever. The overall approach of the group, therefore, marks the strategic type, since all the previously mentioned aspects represent its typical features, including the fact that all the vindictive activity is carried out by several people, in other words, Cordelia, Grace and Carol, against one victim, Elaine, with the intention of her mortification. In addition, bullying for approval can be observed in the group as well, particularly in the behaviour of the two henchmen Grace and Carol as they both desire to please Cordelia with their obedience and devotion in the process of bullying. When Cordelia assaults Elaine, both girls are always present and ready to give a helping hand or even function as tools through which Cordelia manages to achieve her goals while having them do the job. To some extent, even Cordelia might bully for approval. Since she grows up in a complicated and rather hostile family background, the feeling of acceptance is achieved through the negative action by which she obtains power and dominance.

Besides the types of bullying, various strategies can be used in the tormenting process as well. These consist of naughty gestures, blaming the bullying on teasing, and predominantly ostracism. The strategies may help the bullies to cover their tracks while using other activities as disguises. In the novel, the girls make sure that bullying is not noticeable to other children mainly through games, teasing, dominance and rules. All these aspects have already been discussed in the preceding paragraphs. Games being Elaine buried alive as a part of a drama performance, teasing through name-calling, and rules as they delude Elaine into believing that the bullying is their secret, which she is forbidden to impart to anyone.

Ostracism is an effective strategy affecting mostly the psyche of the individual, leaving him or her with the impression that they are unable to reach the standards of the group and attribute this flaw as their fault. Moreover, it makes them feel worthless, depressed, and desperate for attention. Therefore, the individual's need for acceptance is crucial for this strategy to work properly. The girls start to exclude Elaine from the group when they go home from school or vice versa. She is only allowed to walk either in front of them or behind them as she is not worthy enough of their presence. Sometimes they state that she is not

allowed to talk to them because of what she said before and must figure it out herself in order to be forgiven. Elaine is fully aware of the fact that, as long as she follows their commands, her acceptance by the group is guaranteed.

Bullying can be carried out almost anywhere, whether on the school grounds, at work, or amongst family members. Even though the bullying in the novel is primarily performed in the neighbourhood outside school, for instance in their family houses where the chances of disclosure are minimal, some of the selected places are still connected to school. They target Elaine on their way to and out of school or on a school bus. The girls are prodigiously careful in their choices of the environment where they want to conduct their dire attacks and they manage to successfully conceal it as most the teachers do not seem to notice the bullying. For instance, Miss Lumley spots that Elaine's handwriting is becoming uglier and cannot help but point it out, "You must try harder" (*CE* 150), which are the exact words she had been told by Cordelia many times before. The hostile approach of Miss Lumley suggests that she is not aware of the terror Elaine is put through. Had she known, she would have presumably treated her in a more subtle way.

Although most of the bullying takes place outside school, Elaine still considers it a dangerous place with threats on almost every corner. She states herself that "the children who come on the school bus, who eat their lunches in the cellar instead of going home, are considered a little foreign, and are in danger of finding themselves without a partner when the bell rings and it's time to line up" (*CE* 55). It must have become a general convention acknowledged among students since the main reason why Carol befriended Elaine in the first place was the fact that Elaine was the only girl from her classroom who was also commuting to school by bus. Therefore, it can be said that Carol had doubts about her position and was worried about how she would be perceived by others. It is not only Elaine in the group who seems to be insecure about her position within a peer group or a society, but other members of the peer group are too.

As it has been noted earlier, family functions as an environment in which bullying can emerge as well. In fact, the imbalance of power, especially between siblings, is quite crystal clear in the novel. Although the relationships between Elaine and other family members are mostly friendly, there is an instance during which her older brother Stephen is establishing

his superior position. As he excels in life and is abnormally intelligent, he has a tendency to look down on others, especially on women. Sometimes he has a need to educate Elaine so that his sister does not fall into the unintelligent category. By having qualities her sister lacks, he establishes a more powerful position. Although their abilities differ, they never mean harm and they like each other.

In Cordelia's family, the power dynamics between her and the two older sisters Perdita and Miranda are evident as well. Being the youngest child, Cordelia is expected to be just as competent as her two sisters. Nevertheless, she fails to do so as the sisters excel in everything they do, are more intelligent as well as more beautiful than her. In fact, Perdita and Miranda pick Cordelia as their victim. They are humiliating her by making jokes and lippy comments while also disparaging her, even in front of her friends, for instance, "Pull up your socks, Cordelia, or you'll flunk your year again. You know what Daddy said last time" (*CE* 247). The two older sisters do not seem to like the youngest Cordelia since they never showed any form of affection towards her. Therefore, it can be assumed that they deliberately targeted Cordelia and so bullying can be considered present amongst the siblings.

In addition to the bullying present in the family, parents might presumably affect the friends of a particular member. Such aspect is lucid between Elaine and Grace's mother, Mrs. Smeath, who is told to have a bad heart. Elaine hates Mrs. Smeath due to the fact that she was conscious of the bullying but instead of giving a helping hand, she only stated, "It serves her right" (*CE* 213). The previous notion of her bad heart can be, therefore, perceived as a metaphor for her being a rotten individual, with no heart, no feelings, or empathy for others. Elaine builds a hostile attitude towards Mrs. Smeath, especially because she noticed Elaine eavesdropping on her conversation with the Aunt Mildred about the bullying and yet has not even apologized. As a result, Elaine realises that it is not just small girls who are deceitful, cruel, and evil, but also grown-ups, whom she originally considered allies. This observation might lead to the presumption that to some extent children can tend to seek acceptance by adults, in other words, outside the peer's reach. As they may be considered more observant, experienced and empathetic towards others, compassion and understanding are expected from them. Yet Mrs. Smeath contradicts these aspects with her abrasive behaviour towards Elaine.

The victims usually comprise of sensitive and peaceful individuals who are by no means accustomed to violence or conflict. In fact, they may not even fight back when bullied. Furthermore, the general assumption is that victims are unpopular individuals with minimal friends, filled with feelings of worthlessness, inferiority, and diffidence. Being the victim of bullying, Elaine experience perpetual feeling of insecurity as she fears the following days, which are to be spent with her bullies. She is dreading what they will criticise about her next, how they are going to judge her choice of clothes, or comment on her style of walking for according to them, all of these areas need improvement. Elaine's insecurity likewise manifests itself in her early wishes to befriend girls. She is concerned about her ability to form such relationships due to the fact that she notices she is different. Her personality resembles that of a boy's, as she used to spend her early childhood in the companionship of her brother and father. She is not scared of heights, insects, or climbing like other girls are. Later on, Elaine feels the need to change the tomboy side of her personality in order to eliminate any obstacles that might come into her way of fitting into the group. Nevertheless, these features can be considered as the reason why she is picked as a victim since she does not seem to reach the standards of other girls despite her endeavours.

Furthermore, there are two types of victims which can be identified – passive or submissive and the provocative victim. The passive or submissive victims are diffident, show weakness, and eschew violence if possible, whereas the provocative victims strive for friendships and their maintenance. Moreover, they are incapable of recognizing rejection and accepting it. In Elaine's case, she does not even consider the girls her enemies since she is of the opinion that only physical violence defines hostility. The notion of the friends not being considered Elaine's bullies points out to the formerly mentioned features of victims, namely avoiding any conflict or violence. "They are my friends, my girlfriends, my best friends. I have never had any before and I'm terrified of losing them. I want to please" (*CE* 142). This comment indicates a combination of the passive or submissive victim, lacking assertiveness and power to fight back, and the provocative victim, dealing with the struggle to maintain the friendships and the fear of having to seek it elsewhere. Therefore, it can be said that Elaine falls into the fuzzy boundaries between these two types of victims.

The unpopularity of the victim is blatant in the disparity between Elaine and her peers. She is able to notice certain aspects about Cordelia which are not particularly positive, things Cordelia would probably like to keep concealed. It can be illustrated on the occasion when Cordelia's family is introduced. When her two successful sisters are mentioned, Elaine asks whether Cordelia is also gifted like them. Cordelia ignores the question, instead pretends she did not hear and turns away. The fact that Elaine is the only member of the group noticing these features and asking about them makes her less likeable as she is, though unintentionally, targeting the most vulnerable spots. It can be then considered as another reason why she is picked as a victim since Cordelia might perceive these questions as personal attacks, intended to humiliate her, and is trying to protect herself with the offense.

The typical characteristics of bullies consist of strong personality, inclination towards violence, lack of empathy towards their victims, the feeling of superiority, and the necessity to control others with power or threat. They tend to have a group of companions who obey them and pick fragile, weak individuals as their victims that are, in most cases, of similar age. These features are chiefly visible in Cordelia's behaviour as she dominates over other girls with her knowledge she gains by observing and listening to her older sisters. She is a respected leader who controls the whole climate in the peer group through threats and violence. By doing so, the other members fear her powers. In fact, the peer Elaine, who is almost of the same age, functions as an illustration of what they can be put through and so the other members of the group rather follow Cordelia's orders. After the ravine incident, during which Elaine almost froze to death, Carol and Grace grow to be more distant and polite towards Elaine as they realize what they are responsible for. In contrast, Cordelia has shown her true colours as a bully. Besides regularly losing her temper, she displays no compassion or empathy like other girls since she wishes to continue in Elaine's torment. Although Carol and Grace represent bullies, they can also be considered Cordelia's victims. In fact, both girls do not seem to meet the typical aspects of bullies, on the contrary, their qualities differ and are rather positive. Therefore, the typical features of bullies stated may not always correspond to all the realisations.

The bully and victim roles change with the girls starting secondary education. The shift could be assigned to the fact that traumatised children may later in their teenage years

evinced symptoms such as annoyance, rebellious or refractory behaviour, and reservation. The rebellious behaviour becomes evident in Elaine when she develops a “mean mouth” (*CE* 276) with which she ensures a steady position amongst the girls in school. The vicious mouth is used only to those who provoke her. In fact, most of the time she performs it primarily on Cordelia who is chosen as her “target practice” (*CE* 277) even though she does not even goad Elaine. She is targeted due to the fact that Elaine discovered that she has not only changed in her appearance but also in her attitude, showing more weaknesses than strength. On finding this opening, Elaine decides to pay her back, clearly manifesting the example of annoyance. The reservation is predominantly observable in Cordelia, as she is only sometimes capable of a counter-argument, however, in most cases she only retorts, “That’s cruel” (*CE* 278), tries to laugh the uncomfortable situation off, changes the subject, or lights a cigarette.

### **3.2.2 The influence of a peer group**

As it was previously established in the theoretical part, peer group strongly influences the individual as it states specific rules and standards. These must be followed if the individual wants to maintain his or her membership. There is also the need for belonging which can be found in Elaine’s desperate attempts to live up to the group’s expectations. Despite the fact that at first, Elaine finds it challenging to feel confident around girls, she eventually adapts to their behaviour by imitating their mimics and playing games with them. She realises she does so only to please them and be accepted by them. In addition, she changes her fashion style so that she matches her friends better. An alternative feeling of acceptance is discovered in church, which Elaine visits with the Smeath family. When she prays, she feels accepted by God, she has a feeling of belonging as well as being loved by him. Moreover, after Elaine decides to put an end to her job of wheeling a baby Brian of her neighbour Mrs. Finestein in order to prevent him to be exposed to bullying, she buys with the money she has managed to raise each of her friends a sweet. There is no regret in spending it this way since it feels like she can buy their affection, as she herself states, “In that moment, just before giving, I am loved” (*CE* 160).

In addition, girls tend to consider friendship a competition. In other words, they contend with each other in terms of their popularity, deciding who is considered the very

best friend, which is illustrated in Carol, who claims that Elaine is her best friend. Moreover, she regards Grace as her other best friend “who is sometimes her best friend and sometimes not” (CE 60). This remark indicates the tendency girls have in labelling their friends. The rank is adapted to the situation the relationship is in as the relationships between girls are inconstant and therefore, may change unexpectedly overnight. In other words, Carol considers Grace her best friend when they get along well and changes her status when they are not on speaking terms.

Focusing on the bullying in a peer group, it is usually executed by the most powerful member who can simultaneously achieve several goals, namely excluding the victim while verifying the loyalty of other members. Similarly, by stating the rules and standards, the stability of a group is ensured through continual monitoring of members as it allows exposure of possible changes within the group. As it was stated in the paragraphs about typical characteristics of bullies, Cordelia is the most powerful girl, yielding power over Elaine and other members of the group while using Carol and Grace as her henchmen. They are also exploited as her sources of information. In other words, Carol and Grace become Cordelia’s eyes for their duty is to observe Elaine and report on her. They comment on what she eats, how she eats, how she sits, or what she says. As Elaine does not meet the standards of the group, she is incessantly monitored, commented at, and reprehended. The improvement strategy enables Cordelia to ostracize Elaine from the group and question the allegiance of Carol and Grace. The constant surveillance, as well as the assessment and judgement of the girls may have additionally reinforced Elaine’s insecurity about herself.

The position of the girl within a group can change unexpectedly. Therefore, there is always fear present amongst the members as they consider others a possible threat. That is the reason why the victim position is soon taken by other girls since Cordelia decides that they need improving too. Carol is picked as the next prey and Elaine takes her post instead. It gives Elaine pleasure since she is convinced that Carol deserves to be punished for what she has done to her. The tables have turned, it is an eye for an eye now. However, this modification does not last long due to the fact that Carol knows her way out. She is deliberately annoying others and as a result is soon freed from the torment. After this,

Cordelia seems to be growing increasingly fed up with improving and suggests they behave as if it never happened.

### **3.3 Familial roots as the cause of bullying**

Family is the core environment in which the child is raised and by which he or she is most influenced. In the early stages of personal development, the child learns the most through observation, namely of his or her parents. In addition, the parental strategy taken to bring up the children forms their later personality and behavioural patterns. The two types of parenting styles the parents can adhere to are authoritative and authoritarian. The first approach is rather democratic in the upbringing of the children, using namely milder techniques, such as discussion, to steer them to obedience. The authoritarian strategy, on the other hand, focuses on securing obedience through violence without any communication involved. Moreover, the relationship between the parent and the child is crucial in his or her later development. In *Cat's Eye*, there are four different families that are followed as they step by step reveal their skeletons in the closet.

Carol's family is a financially comfortable household supporting two parents and two girls. Although the financial stability of the family is ensured, the emotional side does not seem to be as successful. In fact, threatening and physical force is ordinarily applied, for instance, by Carol's mother, "Just wait till your father gets home!" (*CE* 194). If Carol misbehaves, she receives painful whipping with a belt from her father and sometimes is spanked by her mother. Therefore, it can be assumed that Carol's relationship with her parents is not ideal, as they communicate with her through violence rather than words. Moreover, both her parents seem to spend most of the time away from home, and so the bond between them and their children is not strong enough. She also attends piano lessons during which she is hit when she makes a mistake, and there are strict rules of what Carol can and cannot do. These rules indicate her tendency to become Cordelia's henchman. In addition, the grumpy, stern mother, and aggressive father are suggesting Carol's inclination towards bullying as she is regularly exposed to violence.

The presence of violence is not evident in Grace's family. Nevertheless, Mrs. Smeath, Grace's mother, appears to be rather strict about rules, and Grace as the oldest follows her mother's example. In fact, there seems to be quite a close relationship between the mother

and the daughter. In addition, as Mrs. Smeath regards Elaine and her family as non-religious heathens, Grace presumably just takes after her mother's opinion. Therefore, it can be said that in terms of bullying, Grace's mother functions as an accomplice since she is presumably supporting her daughter in the negative action taken towards Elaine. Moreover, just like in Carol's family, Grace's father is barely spotted in the house. Due to his absence, Grace tends to lean to her mother more. Grace's tendency to become a henchman of the bully could be assigned to the need to follow a specific authority, whether her parents, God, or Cordelia.

Cordelia's family, just like the families of Carol and Grace, prefer the authoritarian approach towards raising their children. The parents are strict, controlling, rather aggressive when the children misbehave, and unsupportive when they do not reach the perceived parental perfection. Because of the authoritarian parental strategy, there is a constant pressure as all the children are trying their best not to disappoint their parents. "I'm disappointed in you" (*CE* 86) is a common phrase used by Cordelia's mother when the girls do not manage to reach the parents' expectations. If their father is involved, the beating is inevitable. The display of violence and the fear caused by the parental approach can be considered as the possible switch of the aggression in the child. Cordelia even uses her father's words when bullying Elaine, for instance, "Wipe that smirk off your face" (*CE* 203). She is trying to reflect what she sees, vent the situation on someone else, who she can make suffer in the same way. As a result of the authoritarian parental strategy, Cordelia develops feelings of insecurity and alienation. These are illustrated through Cordelia's need to dig holes in the back of their garden. There is a desperate need to be alone, to be away from the threat her family symbolises, to feel safe. Cordelia probably bullied Elaine because she herself was targeted by her father. "When I was really little, I guess I used to get into trouble a lot, with Daddy. When he would lose his temper. You never knew when he was going to do it" (*CE* 299).

Elaine's family can be described as rather stable and supporting, following the authoritative style of parenting, which concentrates on the growth of the child in a democratic way rather than an aggressive one. Both her parents love their children, they do not scold them, but support them in their decisions even if they do not agree with them. Instead of dispiriting their children, the parents try to talk to them, make them think about

their choices. It can be observed during the time Elaine decides to regularly visit the church with the Smeath family, to which Elaine's parents react rather negatively, however, ultimately grant her the permission to go. They are both in agreement that she should be given a choice to create her own opinion about religion and not just blindly take over their point of view. The rather free parental strategy led to excellent academic achievements, successful careers, as well as personal growth.

Despite the fact that the relationships between the parents and the children in Elaine's family can be considered rather stable, they are not perfect either. What seems to lack is the attention and predominantly support needed during the bullying. The parents failed to address the problem in its early stages and yet have not provided Elaine with sufficient skills for her defence. Therefore, it is her own task to harden herself, to stay strong and not susceptible to any comfort or sorrow for her shield that remains would break. In addition, the rather distant relationship with her mother did not help the circumstances either. Elaine herself admits that she and her mother did not communicate with each other as their relationship was not close. However, her mother was observant, in fact, she noticed the changes in Elaine's behaviour and appearance. She was worried, yet desperate as she was clueless of how to help her daughter, which is illustrated through her words, "I wish I knew what to do" (*CE* 186). Elaine is provided with suggestions to find different, kinder friends instead as well as with encouragement to learn to stand up for herself "for not having more backbone" (*CE* 186). It leads towards the realisation that it is actually Elaine's fault that she is targeted by the bullies. Furthermore, the unsatisfied relationship with her mother and the failure of both parents to provide support can be considered the cause of Elaine becoming both the bully as well as the victim.

The most visible difference between all these families mentioned is the role of the father figure. This notable absence in the early stages of the children lives can result in them becoming bullies as their need for attention is not satisfied. While the fathers of the other girls tend to stay in the shadows, representing hard-working breadwinners, who are the core authority of the whole family yielding the most power, Elaine's father is portrayed more as a role model, someone she can rely on, someone she can look up to. He has got the authority, yet at the same time he symbolises a sanctuary. In fact, she is not at all intimidated by him,

on the contrary, she loves him. Furthermore, he has never raised a hand against her or her brother but chose a milder tactic instead.

On the contrary, Cordelia's father is the main source of her fear. His attitude towards her is impersonal, distant, and rejecting. The disapproving approach of Cordelia's father may have culminated into bullying as well as the problem to cope with frustration. Cordelia does not have anyone at home she could rely on, unburden herself. Even her sisters despise her and are impertinent, so she lashes out instead as her qualities are not acknowledged. The father's attitude is visible during Elaine's visit when she is invited for dinner. She can sense his affection towards her as she is a thriving, intelligent student. It is something Cordelia cannot give to her father. In fact, she had tried to impress him many times before, but it was never enough since "she is somehow the wrong person" (CE 295).

### **3.4 The aftermath of bullying**

As it was stated in the theoretical part, bullying of any kind can bring many, either negative or positive, consequences on the individual. These can mostly consist of depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, eating disorders as well as susceptibility to suicide. The mentioned examples are typical for the victims since bullies tend to rather develop deviant behaviour, including vandalism or criminality in general, domestic violence and problems with integration into society. Many of the consequences can be, in fact, carried from childhood into adulthood. The impacts of bullying are going to be discussed and analysed through the eyes of the major characters Elaine and Cordelia, in other words, a victim and a bully.

#### **3.4.1 Consequences of being a victim**

One of the most prominent consequences of being a victim is Elaine's insecurity about herself, especially when surrounded by other women. The underestimation, the feeling of unworthiness and meaninglessness accompany Elaine on every step of her life. She expresses her feelings rather blatantly, "I feel I am without worth, that nothing I can do is of any value, least of all to myself. *What do you have to say for yourself?*" Cordelia used to ask. *Nothing*, I would say. It was a word I came to connect with myself, as if I was nothing, as if there was nothing there at all" (CE 47). She is supposed to be an adult now but still feels trapped in her childhood. In fact, she refers to herself as an "adult in disguise" (CE 15).

Elaine has been carrying the trauma up until now when, as an older woman, is about to throw her first retrospective in Toronto. She should be confident, enjoying the fact that she is finally recognised as a painter. However, she is haunted by the memories of her childhood as they gradually come flooding back, prodding her into coping with the agonies of her past.

Her reserved attitude towards women is apparent in most of the encounters with them as she is left with the scars of her childhood trauma of being bullied by girls. These girls gave rise to Elaine's assumption that females, in general, mean harm, mortification, and disparagement, as according to her "[w]omen collect grievances, hold grudges and change shape. They pass hard, legitimate judgments ... Women know too much, they can neither be deceived or trusted. I can understand why men are afraid of them" (*CE* 445). The female relationships are generally regarded as complicated, as discussed in the preceding chapter 3.3. Nevertheless, the bullying experience might have caused the development of defensive reactions when under attack. An example would be the first time she meets with the female leading the team of her retrospective. Elaine feels insecure, judged, belittled, and is on alert most of the time. When a female interviewer comes to write an article about her retrospective, she is not comfortable during the interview and shows it through her answers, which gradually become more aggressive as she feels to be attacked by the questions. The aggressive behaviour may, therefore, suggest a defensive mechanism and a result of being a victim, who eventually learnt how to fight back. In addition, the struggle to form a stable relationship with women could be also ascribed to the consequences of being a bully, as Elaine, at one point in her life, tormented Cordelia.

Focusing on the consequences of being bullied, they do not necessarily need to be of a mental kind. Other aspects, physical ones, which are visible on the body, are most likely to develop while being bullied. One of the examples is self-harm, which is evident in Elaine's behaviour. The peeling of her skin, as well as the nibbling of her hands, is supposed to help her concentrate on the physical pain rather than the mental one, which is caused by her bullies. The tendency to hurt herself is carried into adulthood just like many other inclinations which developed in the course of this critical part of her life. During the interview for her retrospective, in account of being outraged, she starts picking on her nails and is afraid her teeth will start chattering since she is imagining dialogues that are not

happening, “Your clothes are stupid. Your art is crap. Sit up straight and don’t answer back” (*CE* 106). These sentences are only Elaine’s mental representation of what the women might be thinking about her. They resemble the words of her former bully Cordelia, and so indicates the impact of her childhood present in her life as an adult.

However, these minor tendencies are not the only instances indicating self-harm. Other more serious inclinations, namely the suicidal thoughts which may develop as a consequence of being bullied, are demonstrated on the two female leads, Elaine and Cordelia. In case of Elaine, it was bullying and the pressure of the peer group, which culminated to the point when she started contemplating suicide. The strong suicidal thoughts are more obvious when she is ostracised and enjoined to walk behind her bullies, “I think about becoming invisible. I think about ... jumping off the bridge, smashing down there like a pumpkin ... I would be dead, like the dead people” (*CE* 184-185). The thoughts suggest an escalation of her feelings of insecurity, anxiety, doubt, and fear. It is as if she lost hope in life, being wholly devastated. In fact, the thoughts may also be regarded as a foreshadowing of the actual attempt in her adulthood when she is overwhelmed with circumstances concerning her marriage, namely the involved cheating and the overall struggle to maintain the relationship. Not only Elaine, but also Cordelia, who is also a victim of bullying, have the propensity to commit suicide. As her life seems to be falling apart, she reaches, yet unsuccessfully, for suicide as a deliverance of her pain and problems.

The victim of bullying can also develop certain eating disorders, which are most of the time accompanied by nausea and lack of appetite. An eating disorder might be, to some extent, considered a representation of self-harm. It may also function as a strategy for the victim to avoid certain unpleasant situations. The disorder is predominantly evident in Elaine, not only because she is gaunt, but mainly because of her attitude towards food. She feels sick whenever she eats, yet still finishes her food in order to prevent any suspicion of being bullied that might arise from her parents. It could be said that she is processing the stress through her stomach, as she states that “[her] stomach feels dull and heavy, as if it’s full of earth” (*CE* 161). The notion chiefly points out to the lack of appetite as she does not even seem to desire food. There is one instance in which the stress and mostly fear of meeting her bullies escalate to such an extent that she vomits. As a result, she stays at home and

realises that it is one of many ways how to avoid being targeted. The eating disorder is taken with her to the adult life and emerges when she leaves home. She regularly eats junk food and has no balanced diet because “[she] need[s] to remember what bad for [her] is like” (*CE* 209). The last comment points out to the presumption that the eating disorder may be comprehended as a tool of self-harm. Moreover, it could be marked as a coping mechanism for dealing with stressful situations and may also function as an escaping strategy.

Apart from the eating disorder, other escaping strategies or coping mechanisms can be developed during the bullying process. These include changes in consciousness, namely dissociation. It is blatantly portrayed in Elaine as she acquires an ability to faint on demand, which is mainly exploited to avoid unpleasant situations she is exposed to on a daily basis. At one point, Elaine is even capable of seeing her body lying on the ground as if she was a ghost watching from afar. There is also a build-up melancholy or passivity developing as she comments on her injured body, “The sight of my own blood on the wet white washcloth is deeply satisfying to me” (*CE* 204). However, up to a point, Cordelia may also be using dissociation through drama as she is attempting to alter her identity, not showing her flaws and suffering.

One of the other aspects which can affect the victims are nightmares and dreams. The protagonist regularly describes her dreams, which sometimes correspond to what is happening to her. After the ravine incident, Elaine dreams about being chased by many people who are shouting at her, but is suddenly saved by an invisible hand which pulls her into the air, where nobody can reach her. The people keep shouting, but it becomes inaudible to her. This dream resembles her situation, being chased by the girls, called names, demeaned. Only now, when the bullying is put to an end, is she safe just like on the stairs and she no longer cares about what her bullies say. She even has several dreams about Cordelia after she sees her for the last time. In her dreams, Cordelia is falling from a bridge or a cliff with her arms outspread and she never lands. The fact that Cordelia appears in most of the dreams could lead to an impression that Elaine is still haunted by her tormentor. On the other hand, it may signify Elaine’s worry as she was not able to help her friend in a critical situation. The interpretation of Cordelia falling might be perceived as her being lost in life, with no willpower to survive due to the attempted suicide, or could even be dead.

Another explanation of the dream might be that she has successfully escaped the mental institution and therefore, become free. Looking at it from a religious point of view, the fall may symbolize either Cordelia falling into hell for all her sins or the Fall of Man.

Bullying does not have to be interpreted only negatively. The positive aspect of bullying, which makes the person strong, more confident, and pushes the individual in their personal development, can be observed as well. The improvement is visible when Elaine survives the life-threatening situation at the ravine which the girls put her through. She realises that there is and never was an obligation for her to listen to these girls. She finally becomes ready to retaliate as she walks away from them, starts to ignore them, and forms friendships with other, kinder girls. She understands that “[t]hey need [her] for this, and [she] no longer need[s] them” (*CE* 229). As a result, Elaine hardens herself, starts to grow as a person, and becomes stronger. In other words, she transformed her scars into weapons. However, after her realisation of being in a victim position, she becomes angry with herself for not being able to counterattack the bullying earlier.

Thinking outside the box, would Elaine be a successful painter were she not bullied? Owing to the authoritative parental strategy applied, she has strong predispositions for a successful career in general, and she might have become an entomologist just like her father. Not only that, her whole life would probably embark on a different journey and include different people. Nevertheless, bullying could still affect her even if she was not targeted in her childhood since it can develop during any stage of an individual's life. Still, the book is possible to be read from another perspective, not as a realistic depiction of bullying, but rather as a tool to help the suffering individuals to come to terms with their traumas since the negative experience managed to form a new, more confident, stronger, and assertive person.

### **3.4.2 Consequences of being a bully**

As previously stated, being the aggressor in the bullying process brings its consequences as well. These usually consist of delinquency, vandalism, deviant behaviour, depression, tendency to succumb to drugs, problems with relationships, and the deterioration in school performance. In Elaine's case, the consequences of bullying are demonstrated through her struggle to form stable relationships, not only with females but also with males.

Despite the fact that Elaine is overconfident around boys since she knows them too well, she grapples with maintaining the relationships with them. In fact, her first marriage with Jon ends in tatters for she runs away from her husband. As their arguments increased in intensity they resorted to throwing things at each other. Additionally, Jon puts more weight into the marriage with his mistress, whom he brings to the house regularly. The violence in their relationship can be ascribed to the fact that Elaine was once a bully herself, and this position has driven her towards aggression. As their opinions do not seem to meet, and they both demand a superior position in the relationship, which is considered to be an aspect of bullies, the conflict is inevitable. Furthermore, the way she abandons her husband resembles the same approach taken towards the bullying - leaving and ignoring her bullies for good.

However, the consequences of being a bully are predominantly observable in Cordelia. The rebellious phase starts with her being expelled from school for being insolent. Later, she starts to shoplift from a small local store regularly. To Elaine's surprise, Cordelia brags about the items she has managed to steal as if it was her greatest accomplishment. The major problem is, however, that Cordelia is of the opinion that what she does is by no means wrong and she, in fact, enjoys it. This thought represents another aspect of bullies. As they conduct the crime repeatedly, it becomes a regular pattern which progressively leads to the consideration of the behaviour being within bounds of social conventions. Furthermore, she does not seem to excel in school, gradually flunking her subjects, picks up smoking, and has difficulties with concentration. The reason behind Cordelia's worsening could be assigned to the depression she suffers from, as she herself was also a victim of bullying. Not being appreciated despite constant endeavours to please her father, she succumbs to the decay while losing the determination to improve. Therefore, her defiant behaviour could be perceived as a coping mechanism, which facilitates the vent of her frustration. It can be assumed that the consequences of bullying and being bullied brought Cordelia to her overall downfall. As she does not have any predispositions for a successful life, in account of not having any education, a stable career, presumably not even good health, or supportive family, she eventually gravitates to an attempt to commit suicide. In the end, the previously lively and dominant Cordelia is left alone, bound to be doomed.

### **3.5 Overcoming the trauma**

There are many tools which can be used in order to overcome a traumatic experience. Art therapy was suggested in the theoretical part as one of many ways how to heal the affected individual through a creative process. Both Elaine and Cordelia use art as a medium through which they can express their deepest fears, thoughts and feelings. It ultimately helps them to cope with their struggles and trauma. Besides Art therapy, Freudian coping mechanisms is another method used to describe the process of overcoming the effects of a traumatic experience.

#### **3.5.1 Freudian defence mechanisms in *Cat's Eye***

To cope with her trauma, Elaine unconsciously uses few of the Freudian defences. The most visible one is the phobic avoidance as she moves away from Toronto, where she wants to leave her past and start anew in Vancouver. By moving away, she is not reminded of the trauma through the places and people she encounters and therefore, can cope with the experience. Another form that it has taken is the creation of an irrational fear of people, in her case of Cordelia. To be more precise, Cordelia might have been a hallucination projected in her head. As an adult, she seems to be haunted by Cordelia as she sees her everywhere she goes, sometimes in fear, sometimes in the hope of meeting her. She even questions their relationship in terms of how she would react if they met, whether she would hug her or rather strangle her. Nevertheless, what Elaine longs for in her life simply seems to be a friend she could share her feelings with as she states, “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 498).

The second Freudian defence applied by Elaine is repression, more precisely repression of the childhood memories. Nevertheless, this type of defense is only temporal so she needs to address the trauma directly through reliving her memories. Despite the fact that Elaine repressed her childhood memories in the early stages of her life, she is unable to escape the symptoms of the trauma that she still carries inside her unconsciousness. For instance, the sight of Cordelia lying in the snow and making a snow angel just like she did during the day Elaine almost died, makes her feel uncomfortable as if all the reminiscent memories were being revived. Similar situation sets in when Cordelia mentions digging the

holes in which Elaine was buried alive and her body starts to react with a shrunken stomach, feelings of shame, guilt, terror and disgust with herself. By retracing her childhood, she is able to come to terms with her past, to finally forgive Cordelia for what she has done, and to move on.

It is not only Elaine, but also Cordelia who uses the Freudian defences. Cordelia projects her negative attributes, features she lacks, on Elaine as they both are different yet, at the same time, similar in many aspects. Elaine is an outcast amongst girls with her tomboy personality while Cordelia is an outcast in her family, where she feels outshined by her older sisters and considers herself a failure as she has never managed to satisfy her father with her actions. By choosing projection, she bullies her friend, maybe even unconsciously. Since she wants to be freed of her struggles, she commutes them onto her victim. When Elaine stands up to her bullies, she notices a certain aspect behind Cordelia's bullying, "I can hear this for what it is. It's an imitation, it's acting. There was never anything about me that needed to be improved. It was always a game, and I have been fooled" (CE 229). By which she meant that it was all about Cordelia, who herself needed to be improved and Elaine only functioned as a mirror or a reflection. The mirror images signify one of the topics Margaret Atwood applies in her literary works. The dualities are portrayed through the two best friends, who are at the same time the worst enemies. Both girls notice certain qualities about themselves, which one has, but the other lacks. The realisation of the polar attributes, in fact, brings them closer as they in their teenage years become best friends. Yet, due to their extremely complicated friendship, which was impaired in its early establishment by bullying, their paths part as neither of them is capable of maintaining stable relationships.

### **3.5.2 Art therapy in *Cat's Eye***

Art therapy functions as a method through which the affected individual can express his or her deepest feelings and emotions by means of non-verbal communication. It shall guide the person towards a better understanding of themselves, their past, target the origin of the pain and eventually result in triumph over the trauma. Art therapy is for the first time intuitively applied by Elaine during one of the lessons with Miss Stuart, a new teacher, who asks her students to draw what they do after school. She draws herself in her bed in the night while vigorously colouring the paper in black. In other words, she expressed her feelings

unconsciously, vented them on paper, but she does not seem to realise. The drawing represents her internal struggle with the bullying since she most likely feels the safest in bed where none of the girls can approach her. Miss Stuart notices the fact that it is not what one would expect from a child to draw about their joyful moments. In fact, she probably noticed that something negative is happening in Elaine's life, however, she does not seem to show interest in trying to help her since she only touches her student on the shoulder as if it was an act of compassion, understanding, or support. There is no further questioning or concern to learn about the situation from the teacher's side, and so she fails to provide Elaine with proper guidance through her struggles if Miss Stuart was put in the role of a therapist.

In her interview about the retrospective, Elaine indirectly mentions the fact that her art has been inspired by her generation, her childhood. It is a retrospective, it looks back at her life, and this is her way of expressing the suffering she has been through and the experience she gained throughout her life up until now. In other words, she tells her story through her art. As Elaine's artworks chosen for her retrospective reflects her childhood trauma, it is crucial to pinpoint her paintings in order to better understand her way of processing the experience through Art therapy.

The first paintings suggesting the use of Art therapy are of Mrs. Smeath, Grace's mother. Owing to Mrs. Smeath, Elaine discovers that not only peers or small girls are involved in the bullying process, but adults can be malevolent as well. By painting Mrs. Smeath in various unpleasant situations and different backdrops, Elaine takes her revenge on the mother while venting her hateful feelings. Looking at the paintings after a certain period of time, Elaine eventually grasps that these repugnant paintings reflect her personality more than Mrs. Smeath's. She supports her realisation with a quote, "An eye for an eye leads only to more blindness" (CE 477). In other words, Art therapy helped her to understand herself better and to gradually dispose of the grudge she held for many years.

A vast majority of people undergoing Art therapy complain about feelings of alienation and disconnection from others, especially from those, who are dearest to them. Moreover, a strong desire to meet the beloved or the feelings of persecution may develop as well. This notion is fittingly demonstrated in another significant artwork presented during the retrospective, which symbolizes one of the most vital sequences in Elaine's life. It is

Cordelia's portrait called "Half a Face". Cordelia used to be Elaine's best friend, her bully as well as her victim who she, with the alterations of situations, liked or could not abide. Therefore, this portrait represents one of the closest people in Elaine's life. The process of creating it could help her express her opinion on Cordelia, at the same time it allowed her to show Cordelia's true colours, or simply take revenge on her. Elaine tried to reflect an effect of the theatrical mask since Cordelia used to be an actress. The most challenging part for Elaine was to capture Cordelia's daring eyes, so now they look rather frightened, which was not her original intention. Although Elaine's first design for Cordelia was to express boldness or impudence, she depicted her personality perfectly with the frightened look. Cordelia, in fact, was fearful. The situation in her family, the fear of failure, of disappointing, even despair to please can be assigned to the expression. It depicts her true feelings and her trauma, which Elaine noticed throughout years of their friendship.

The childhood trauma of being bullied by four girls, initially perceived as friends, is illustrated in the artwork called "Cat's Eye", which is Elaine's self-portrait showing her head in the foreground with her nose up and the eyes looking outwards. She has not painted herself as a child but as an adult by adding wrinkles and a few grey hairs. Behind her in the centre is an empty sky and a pier-glass, in which her back is reflected. In the distance in the mirror, there are three girls dressed in winter clothes. As they are walking, their faces are shadowed. Just like Elaine was ostracised by the girls, she stands outside the mirror, not being part of their group. Other interpretation of standing outside the mirror could be that the experience pushed her to turn her back on her friends as she, in the end, was able to fight back and walked away from the bullying. The mirror may signify the retrospective, looking back at her trauma and preferably coming to terms with what happened to her. In other words, it is a reflection of her current situation - growing old, yet still lost in the past. The shadowed faces of the girls may be a sign of concealment of their true intentions. It can also be interpreted as Elaine's uncertainty of their friendship. The title Cat's Eye could point out towards the eventual encounter with the marble at the end of the novel, which assured the awakening of the long-forgotten memories.

The representation of Elaine's agonistic experience, when she almost froze to death as she was cajoled into picking her hat from underneath a bridge, captures the painting called

“Unified Field Theory”, which depicts a wooden bridge and bare trees with a cover of snow on them. Above the bridge stands a woman in a black cloak, the sky after sunset behind her. Just like in “Cat’s Eye”, the woman’s face is partly in shadow. In the level of her heart, she is holding a marble, a cat’s eye with a blue centre. The woman presumably suggests her vision of the Virgin Mary, who helped her to gather all the strength in order to survive the perilous condition. Similarly, the marble might illustrate Elaine’s hope and source of her courage. Apart from that, the cat’s eye may also stand for all the aspects Elaine is lacking, whether an ability to maintain a healthy female friendship or a strong belief in religion. Other interpretation of the marble could be appointed to all the traumatic episodes of her childhood as Elaine used to carry the cat’s eye when she was bullied. It might as well point to the fact, that her brother Stephen once buried a jar of marbles underneath the bridge when he was a child and may be interpreted as a lost opportunity, or some sort of secrecy.

Unlike Elaine, who fights her trauma through Art therapy, Cordelia applies the Occupational therapy which does not stand on drawing or painting but rather focuses on other creative methods connected with movement and gestures such as dancing, singing, and drama. Out of all these options, Cordelia picks drama as her way out of the family situation. As she is not given enough attention and appreciation, she likes to pretend she is someone else. That way, she does not have to deal with Cordelia’s problems but only with the problems of the character. Drama was her favourite game when she was a child and she also used it as a tool when she bullied Elaine. Although, Cordelia chooses drama as her escape, her whole life seems to be a play. Even Elaine notices this about Cordelia, not only before the bullying, but also later when their positions change. “She knows the rituals, she knows how we’re supposed to be behaving, now that we’re in high school. But I think these things are impenetrable and fraudulent, and I can’t do them without feeling I’m acting” (*CE* 246).

## 4 Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to analyse bullying in the novel *Cat's Eye* and compare its portrayal to the real psychological discoveries. The interpretation of bullying in the novel is scrutinised with the help of several psychological studies, which concentrates on the participants of the bullying process and girls' relationships, especially in a peer group. Besides the comparison, the thesis was to question the function of the novel in terms of overcoming the trauma caused by bullying. That said, another purpose was to examine how the theme of bullying fits in the context of Margaret Atwood's literary works and topics.

Given the findings of the psychological studies, the theoretical part demonstrates that bullying can be regarded as a repetitive pattern with the intention to mortify the victim. Its causes are assigned to be familial roots and parental strategies since children mostly learn through observation, and in case of violence present, aggression may awaken within the child. The studies have also shown that peer group and the relationships between members represent an ideal environment for bullying to arise and makes it easier for bullies to apply certain strategies, such as ostracism or constant monitoring. Furthermore, it was discovered that bullying has irreversible consequences on the people involved in the process which may culminate into anxiety, suicidal thoughts, or eating disorders, which are typical for victims, and criminality, aggressive behaviour, or deterioration in school performance in case of the bully. Moreover, two coping strategies for the victims are suggested, namely Freudian defences and Art therapy. Most of the Freudian defences appear to be functioning only as a temporary solution since they do not challenge the trauma head on but rather conceal the original feelings. On the other hand, Art therapy straightforwardly addresses the issue and pushes the client towards healing through the creative activity as it allows to express grievous feelings non-verbally.

The practical part predominantly analyses the protagonists of the novel *Cat's Eye*, Elaine and Cordelia, using four aspects deduced from the previous part of the thesis as a base for studying the characteristic features of bullying in the novel. These are the interpretation of bullying in the peer group, the cause of bullying being the familial roots, the consequences of being a victim or a bully, and the coping strategies and therapy used to overcome the

trauma. Following the aspects mentioned, the analysis of the novel points to a correlation between the psychological findings and the portrayal of bullying in the novel.

The similarities were observed in the fact that bullying is regularly and deliberately conducted in the peer group of four friends who apply the typical strategies, being ostracism and monitoring, on their victim Elaine, which eventually lead to the development of tendencies typical for victims, being anxiety, eating disorders, and inclination towards suicide. Cordelia mostly suffers from the consequences of being a bully, as she flunks school, picks up smoking, and starts to shop-lift. Another connection found is that each of the girls opts for previously suggested coping strategies. Art therapy is predominantly applied by Elaine, who selects painting as a method of expressing and dealing with her feelings. Cordelia, on the other hand, uses drama as she wants to repress her true, imperfect identity with a new, more likeable one. Freudian defence mechanisms are used by both girls as another coping strategy. While Elaine represses her childhood memories and is influenced by phobic avoidance as she moves away so that she is not reminded of her trauma, Cordelia uses the projection of her flaw attributes on Elaine. As for the cause of bullying being a familial background and parental strategies, the families of bullies show a regular presence of violence, bullying, strict rules, and unfulfilled relationships between parents and their children, which resulted in the girls' aggressive behaviour. The findings in the theoretical part and their illustrations in the novel should broaden the reader's knowledge about bullying, presumably make it easier for them to notice the characteristic features and even to self-reflect on their lives.

The bullying experience as a whole hints at the characters' struggle to survive. In fact, survival, together with the theme of victimisation that is constantly present throughout the victim position in the bullying process, are considered the most typical topics Margaret Atwood uses in her works. Atwood's theory of victimisation, which is introduced in *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (1972), presents four victim positions. The last position is regarded as the most dominant one since it enables the individual to become free through a creative process. In *Cat's Eye*, creativity is blatantly noticeable owing to the continuous presence of paintings, drawings, and drama. However, Atwood brings writing to the fore and places it at the top of all types of creative activities. To put it

differently, the whole novel could be regarded as an additional tool or method which can be used to cope with trauma since the author expresses not only themselves, but also his or her feelings. Since *Cat's Eye* is considered Atwood's most autobiographical novel, these features are mainly noticeable through the protagonist Elaine, as she resembles Atwood not only in her life but also in her ability to forgive others. Through self-reflection, Elaine is able to address the agonistic parts of her past, presumably perceive them differently now as a person of higher age, who has experienced other, more horrendous obstacles in life, and is finally able to overcome her trauma.

Besides the theory of victimisation and survival, Atwood seems to be interested in dualities, in other words, people who are extremely similar, yet at the same time completely different. They are often represented by characters, who are friends, relatives, or twins. They, in most cases, have opposing qualities which function as mirror reflections. In the novel, the dualities are represented by Elaine and Cordelia, two best friends and simultaneously the worst enemies, who also illustrate an asymmetric relationship.

As most of the characteristic features of bullying portrayed in the novel *Cat's Eye* are in agreement with the psychological findings demonstrated in the theoretical part of the thesis, it is safe to claim that the novel as a whole represents a reliable psychological source since it offers quite a realistic depiction of bullying. In addition, considering all the discussed topics Margaret Atwood deals with, many of them can be found in the novel, including the connection between bullying, survival, and victimisation. Therefore, it is possible to regard bullying as a theme and also a motif typical of Atwood's literary works.

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