

# The Postcolonial Uncanny: The Unrepresentability of Subject Formation in Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye*

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**Abstract**

This article explores *Cat's Eye* by Margaret Atwood through the theoretical framework of the uncanny to interrogate the unrepresentability of subject formation. Drawing on Sigmund Freud's formulation of the uncanny and its postcolonial reconfiguration by Homi K. Bhabha, the article argues that the novel resists coherent representations of selfhood grounded in stable notions of home, nation, and identity. Although Elaine Risley remains geographically fixed within her native country, she inhabits a persistent condition of unhomeliness, experiencing estrangement within spaces conventionally associated with familiarity and belonging. The uncanny operates as a disruptive and destabilizing force that renders the familiar unfamiliar, thereby exposing identity as contingent, fractured, and constructed rather than unified or secure. Through an analysis of mimicry and camouflage as strategies of accommodation and survival, alongside the recurring figure of the double or doppelgänger, the article demonstrates how subjectivity emerges as divided, repetitive, and marked by internal displacement. These uncanny mechanisms foreground the limits of representation by revealing subject formation as a process shaped by dislocation, doubling, and deferred coherence. Ultimately, *Cat's Eye* articulates subjectivity not as a stable or recoverable essence, but as an ongoing, incomplete process that remains fundamentally resistant to full conceptual or narrative representation.

**Keywords:** The Uncanny; mimicry; camouflage; double; doppelganger

## Introduction

Elaine in Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye* exemplifies the experience of "subjects not-at-home" as she lives the life of an immigrant in her own hometown and country. Through Elaine, Margaret Atwood challenges the representation of self, home, and nation as they are often associated with safety, immunity, and comfort. The familiar myth of self, home, and nation turns into the uncanny state of unfamiliarity. The uncanny, as it is primarily discussed by Freud and reconsidered by Homi Bhabha, is the frame through which the novel will be studied. Bhabha's perception and translation of the uncanny is especially significant since "unhomeliness" is the one feeling that is perpetually experienced by the character and is crucial in the process of her subject formation.

This article argues that in *Cat's Eye*, the process of subject formation in relation to the concepts of self, home, and nation is unrepresentable. In other words, the irrepresentability of subject formation can be foregrounded through dislodging the uncanny. The uncanny situates the character in a state of ambivalence in her perception of herself, home, and nation by challenging their presumed integrity.

Elaine Risley gets back to Toronto, where she grew up, for a retrospective of her paintings. She is the narrator of her traumatic childhood. Elaine, like the unnamed narrator of *Surfacing*, feels lost in the city of Toronto where the three

bullying playmates tormented her. The idea of mimicry will be discussed in the novel to explain how the protagonist mimics the dominant culture in order to merge into it and how mimicry functions as camouflage. Finally, the idea of the double will be discussed to demystify the integrity of self as well. Atwood portrays the subject first as a victim but eventually resists her portrayal as a mere victim in order to extend the possibility of evil even within the victimized.

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## Literature Review

Recent scholarship on *Cat's Eye* has examined various aspects of identity formation and subjectivity, yet important questions remain regarding the representability of the subject itself. Aleksandra Vukelić's "Othering, Resistance and Recovery in Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye*" analyzes the processes of exclusion and recovery that shape Elaine's development. By focusing on othering as a social and psychological experience, the study demonstrates how identity emerges through encounters with difference and marginalization. However, Vukelić ultimately treats recovery as a possibility, implying the reconstruction of a relatively coherent self. Such an approach leaves insufficient attention to the ways in which the novel continuously disrupts the possibility of subjective coherence through repetition, estrangement, and internal division. The present study extends this discussion by arguing that Elaine's subjectivity remains

fundamentally unstable and resistant to complete representation.

The article "The Sociopolitical Gaze on Shame in Cat's Eye" explores the role of shame in shaping Elaine's social identity and self-perception. Its emphasis on interpersonal power relations and emotional experience illuminates the social mechanisms through which subjectivity is produced. Nevertheless, the study remains primarily concerned with the sociopolitical dimensions of shame and does not fully address the psychoanalytic and postcolonial dynamics that render identity intrinsically unstable. By bringing Freud's concept of the uncanny into dialogue with Bhabha's notion of unhomeliness, the present study shifts attention from the social production of identity to the structural impossibility of its complete representation.

Likewise, Michelle Gadpaille's "Odalisesques in Margaret Atwood's Cat's Eye" investigates visual representation and questions of spectatorship, emphasizing the novel's critique of representational practices. Although Gadpaille demonstrates how Atwood challenges conventional modes of seeing and representing female subjects, the study does not explicitly examine how these representational disruptions relate to the formation of subjectivity itself. The present article builds upon such insights by arguing that representational instability is inseparable from the uncanny constitution of the subject. Through the interconnected operations of

mimicry, camouflage, and doubling, the novel reveals subject formation as a process that continually exceeds narrative and conceptual representation.

Taken together, these studies contribute significantly to understanding identity, gender, shame, resistance, and representation in Cat's Eye. However, they do not fully theorize the relationship between uncanny unhomeliness and the unrepresentability of subject formation. By synthesizing Freud's psychoanalytic account of the uncanny with Bhabha's postcolonial reformulation of unhomeliness, mimicry, and ambivalence, this article addresses that gap and demonstrates how Cat's Eye represents subjectivity as an ongoing, divided, and fundamentally incomplete process.

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### Cat's Eye, "Darkness Brings Home the fathers"

Cat's Eye is Atwood's 1988 novel about Elaine Risley, who returns to Toronto for a retrospective show of her paintings, where she reminisces about her traumatic childhood and friendship with Grace, Carol, and Cordelia, the trio of bullying girls who occupy most parts of Elaine's recalling of her past. In returning to her childhood home, Elaine asserts that she feels overwhelmed by the city; she abhors the city as she describes its "watchful, calculating windows"; the city seems "malicious, grudging, vindictive, implacable. In my dreams of this city, I am always lost" (Atwood,

Cat's Eye 11). This peculiar sensation reminds us of Freud's actual description of his uncanny experience in a "provincial town in Italy" (Freud and Strachey 3689). It is all about the sense of "helplessness" which comes from being lost in a familiar place. Freud describes his futile effort to escape the place, which was occupied by "nothing but painted women" who "were to be seen at the windows of the small houses" (ibid), and how his effort to escape the place brought him back right to the same place and put him in the state of uncanny "helplessness": "I hurried away once more, only to arrive by another *détour* at the same place yet a third time. Now, however, a feeling overcame me which I can only describe as uncanny" (ibid). Elaine's experience is of the same uncanny helplessness as she finds herself lost whenever she pictures the city in her dream. Hers is the feeling of being lost in her hometown which is supposed to be the most familiar to her but turns out to be the most unfamiliar.

The novel's main focus is on Elaine's representation as a victim, outsider, and the other of the game of power by her trio of girlfriends, which is in parallel with the postcolonial implications of the novel. Miss Lumley, Elaine's first teacher, is a defender of the British Empire:

The sun never sets on the British Empire...Before the British Empire there were no railroads or postal services in India, And Africa was full of tribal warfare, with spears, and had no proper

clothing. The Indians in Canada did not have the wheel or telephones, and ate the hearts of their enemies...The British Empire changed all that. It brought in electric lights. (Atwood, *Cat's Eye* 77)

Miss Lumley's perception of the British Empire is unintentionally challenged by Elaine as she cites a song which says: "Britons never, never, never shall be slaves!" and immediately says: "because we're Britons, we will never be slaves. But we aren't real Britons, because we are also Canadians" (ibid). But it is not all about being British or Canadian; becoming a slave is not solely a matter of extra-cultural matter in relation to different nations but, most uncannily, an intra-cultural issue. Where Elaine mostly feels like a slave is not in relation to the British Empire but within her own culture with the girls of nearly the same age as her. The idea of "home" as unsettling and unhomely in *Cat's Eye* reminds us of Atwood's earlier fiction *Bodily Harm* (1981) in which Rennie problematizes one's birthplace and homeland as conventionally associated with convenient and comfortable familiarity:

Rennie is from Griswold, Ontario. Griswold is what they call her background. Though it's less like a background...than a subground, something that can't be seen but is nevertheless there, full of gritty old rocks and buried stumps, worms, and bones; nothing you'd want to go into. Those who'd lately been clamouring for

roots had never seen a root up close, Rennie used to say. She had, and she'd rather be some other part of the plant. (Atwood, *Bodily Harm* 14-15)

This implies how unhomely one's home might become, as is the case with Elaine when she says, "until we moved to Toronto I was happy" (Atwood, *Cat's Eye* 19). Elaine of *Cat's Eye* has spent lots of summers in the northern part of Canada due to her father's job as an entomologist who used to spend a lot of time searching in the wild. Elaine's nomadic life, which was spent in motels and roads kept her away from the social conventions she was supposed to learn as a girl, though that was more favorable to her rather than the entangled life in Toronto: "I feel trapped. I want to be back in the motel, back on the road, in my old rootless life of impermanence and safety" (31). For Elaine, the nomadic life of fluidity and instability is much more convenient than the stable life of Toronto, with the girls to whom Elaine soon enters into a power game: "but I'm not used to girls, or familiar with their customs. I feel awkward around them, I don't know what to say...with girls I sense that I am always on the verge of some unforeseen, calamitous blunder" (44).

Elaine is soon criticized by one girl, Carol, in the group of the trio girls (Grace and Cordelia) for some family specifications which intensifies Elaine's sense of being an outcast, an Other: "Carol tells everyone at school that our family sleeps on

the floor. She gives the impression that we do this on purpose, because we're from outside the city" (46). Elaine is sarcastically invited by Grace's mother, Mrs. Smeath, to join them for going to church on Sundays: "Grace says your family doesn't go to church... Maybe you'd like to come with us. To our church"(91), "she emphasizes our, as if there are other, inferior, bareheaded churches" (92).

Soon Cordelia joins the girls, and Elaine's torturing group is complete. In a significant scene, Cordelia digs a hole in her backyard and makes Elaine play the role of Mary, Queen of Scots and then buries her alive; in the other scene, Cordelia makes her fall into the ravine as she persuades Elaine to catch her hat, which Cordelia threw into the ravine. As Cordelia's dominance over Elaine intensifies, Elaine starts having nightmares and enters into a masochistic act of peeling her skin off. This is probably how she translates power into a more momentary and bearable version, now that she cannot escape it as she enters a process of internalizing and normalizing oppression on the part of the girls:

Cordelia had such power over me; I peeled the skin off my feet. I did it at night, when I was supposed to be sleeping...I would begin with the big toes....then with my fingernails, which I never bit because why bite something that didn't hurt, I would pull the skin off in narrow stripes...I would go down as far as the blood...the pain gave

me something definite to think about, something immediate. It was something to hold on to. (108)

Atwood seems to problematize what has been conventionally perceived as the innocence and cuteness of small children. As the grown up Elaine will tell us later, "little girls are cute and small only to adults. To one another they are not cute. They are life-sized" (112). Recalling Freud's definition of the uncanny, "the specificity of the sensation of the uncanny lies in the fact that something is frightening, not because it is unfamiliar or new, but because what used to be familiar has somehow become strange" (Masschelein 3), Elaine's living in Toronto restructures her view of home, friend, and enemy. It disturbs her view of the enemy as being unfamiliar and far-fetched:

I know about enemies. There are enemies in the schoolyard; they yell things at one another and if they're boys they fight. In the war there were enemies. Our boys and the boys from Our Lady of Perpetual Help are enemies. You throw snowballs at enemies and rejoice if they get hit. With enemies you can feel hatred, and anger. But Cordelia is my friend. She likes me; she wants to help me, they all do. 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. (Atwood, *Cat's Eye* 114)

Elaine categorizes her enemy as boys and the enemies in the war to whom we usually feel anger and hatred, but it is also possible to come to know that the enemy is also at home; in other words, home is the enemy. In the summertime, occasionally, when Elaine's family moved north, she felt the most liberated, free from the game of power by the three girls; she was no longer watched:

I've begun to feel not gladness, but relief. My throat is no longer tight, I've stopped clenching my teeth, the skin on my feet has begun to grow back, my fingers have healed partially. I can walk without seeing how I look from the back, talk without hearing the way I sound. I go for long periods without saying anything at all. I can be free of words now, I can lapse back into wordlessness, I can sink back into the rhythms of transience as if into bed. (138).

In such an unhomely state, Elaine mostly associates herself with immigrants like Mr. Banerji, her father's Indian postgraduate student whom she assumes is alien to their culture and custom: "He's a creature more like myself: alien and apprehensive. He's afraid of us. He has no idea what we will do next, what impossibilities we will expect of him, what we will make him eat. No wonder he bites his fingers" (123). She wonders how Mr. Banerji copes with all that, probably not because of Mr. Banerji himself, but because she is

also bearing the same situation a foreigner is probably suffering from:

My wish to see him is anxiety, and fellow feeling. I want to see how he is managing, how he is coping with his life, with having to eat turkeys, and with other things. Not very well, judging from his dark, haunted-looking eyes and slightly hysterical laughter. But if he can deal with whatever it is that's after him, and something is, then so can I. Or this is what I think. (150).

Elaine finds herself interested in their art class with the Scottish Miss Stuart where they are asked to "draw pictures about foreign countries: Mexico with cactuses...China with cones on the heads...India with ...silk-draped women balancing copper urns, and jewels on their foreheads" (Atwood 154). She associates her otherness with the foreigners in her own country: "I like these foreign pictures because I can believe in them. I desperately need to believe that somewhere else these other, foreign people exist" (ibid). She is also interested in Mrs. Finestein, the Jewish neighbor for whom she babysits, though Elaine refuses to do so later because she is afraid of Cordelia, who as Elaine imagines, might harm the baby in order to bully Elaine.

As a result of the unsuccessful pairing with the group of the girls to whom she shall conventionally associate, Elaine, even in her adulthood, refuses to ally with the supposedly related social groups either as a woman or a

painter. Elaine finds herself in love with Mr. Hrbik, her painting teacher, who is called a "D. P." by the students: "they call him a D.P., which means displaced person, an old insult I remember from high school. It was what you called refugees from Europe and those who were stupid and uncouth and did not fit in" (267). She seems to understand Mr. Hrbik's misery and is resentful when he is mocked by other students. She even thinks that Jon, her classmate and her later lover and husband will find it humiliating to find that Elaine has affairs with Mr. Hrbik.

Even in her adulthood as a painter she refuses to be categorized as belonging to a specific line of thought. In response to a young interviewer and in relation to her painting when asked "well, what about, you know, feminism...a lot of people call you a feminist painter" (85) she is reluctant to consider it as a "meaningful classification" and says that " I hate party lines, I hate ghettos. Anyway, I'm too old to have invented it and you're too young to understand it, so what's the point of discussing it at all" (ibid).

Elaine's reluctance to the sense of belonging to the preconceived social groups makes Cat's Eye close to Bhabha's view of the uncanny. Bhabha used the uncanny to characterize the possibility of the relationship between the individual living in his or her hometown to that of a migrant," the idea of the uncanny helps Bhabha think about the possibility that this last sector of humanity, forced into remaining static, has a

relationship to home which is actually similar to the migrant's" (Huddart 57). This implies that home is not always the secure place promising comfort; rather, it can dislocate and disorient. This experience is "productive" in itself by disturbing stability as is clear in Elaine's disapproval of hotels: "I don't like the neatness of hotels, the squeaky-clean bathtubs. I don't like hearing my own voice echo in there, especially at night. I prefer the shedding and disorder and personal dirt of people like myself, people like Jon. Transients and nomads" (Atwood Cat's Eye13).

### Mimicry as Camouflage

As time goes on Elaine adopts the strategy of mimicry in order to imitate the discourse of the dominants so that she might not lose the sense of belonging to the norms: "playing with girls is different, and at first I feel strange as I do it, self-conscious, as if I'm only doing an imitation of a girl. But I soon get more used to it" (49). To imitate the language of the dominant, Elaine soon needs the required signs: "I begin to want things I've never wanted before: braids, a dressing gown, a purse of my own" (51). Having an unconventional mother and spending much time in the wilderness of northern Canada, Elaine does not fit into the customs and culture of the dominant. The colonized subject, therefore, starts copying and imitating the dominant discourse though he or she remains a contradictory figure. In Sharpe's words, "the mimic man is a contradictory figure

who simultaneously reinforces colonial authority and disturbs it" (Ashcroft 99). Thus the mimic man is an uncanny figure in his contradictory state, in his being neither one nor the other, in his liminality. The mimic man is an uncanny figure since he is somewhere between copy and original. Mimicry is uncanny in its dual nature: the role which is adopted by the subject in order to look like the dominant makes him apparently similar to the discourse of the power system; thus gives him the joy of familiarity, hence acceptability. Yet this familiarity is not stable, since this is uncannily the type of familiarity which at times becomes the most unfamiliar and strange and leads the subject, secretly and even unconsciously, to yearn for his hybrid nature. Elaine tries hard to observe the standards of the girls, though at times revives part of herself which she misses: "sometimes I still go into my brother's room and lie around on the floor reading comic books, but I never do this when any other girl is there. Alone I am tolerated, as part of a group of girls I would not be. This goes without saying" (98).

Falsehood as a form of mimicry seems inevitable in such a power-dominated environment. Falsehood is a social and cultural state which includes mental and physical involvement on the part of the subject who practices it. In Atwood's *Surfacing*, mimicry is practiced in the form of an unreliable narrator. This causes the narrator to constantly reconstruct her past and present life, which naturally leads to

a series of incongruous narratives. But in the case of *Cat's Eye*, the narrator does not lie literally but directly engages in lying in its technical sense; the narrator constantly enacts her false self. Falsehood is temporally a refuge for the subject which eventually leads her to acquire her hybrid nature. It is noteworthy to mention that hybridity in itself is not a stable anchor; it is in fact an uncanny state with the difference that at least the individual comes to terms with her state as forever dwindling among many given and taken identities. This will be elaborated in the next section.

In order to mimic, Elaine adopts falsehood both mentally and physically. To be "improved" to fit into being "normal", Elaine memorizes the Bible in the way Grace and other girls approved of. She is constantly watched by Grace in Sunday school and reported to Cordelia as "she didn't stand up in Sunday school yesterday" (Atwood, *Cat's Eye* 118). Elaine is confused to differentiate good from bad. In other words, the colonial subject cannot judge good from bad by her own standard:

I exude the wrong kind of goodness; I see myself shambling crookedly, I make an effort to stand straighter, my body rigid with anxiety. And it's true that I got ten out of ten, again, and Grace only got nine. Is it wrong to be right? How right should I be, to be perfect? The next week I put five wrong answers, deliberately. (ibid)

So far, it has been emphasized that the uncanny best characterizes the experience of the individual

quite like an immigrant and the colonized. In other words, one's homeland becomes uncannily unhomely and strange. This has been illustrated through mimicry as inevitable for the subject to survive. Mimicry is fundamentally an uncanny concept which is crucial in the discussion of self and other which finally leads to the investigation of the double in the following section. As David Huddart declares, for Bhabha, the mimic man mimics no fixed identity. In fact, Bhabha's idea of mimicry...needs to be thought of as a process that mimics no fixed, final, foundational identity. The colonizer has no absolute pre-existent identity which can be mimicked, and the colonized likewise has no real identity which he or she is betraying through mimicry. (48)

Two key factors are of crucial importance here: first, mimicry is a process and second, there is no fixed identity to be mimicked. It is exactly this lack of originality which makes the colonized aware that the process of mimicry is a never ending and inconclusive one. Elaine in her first encounter with Cordelia recognizes that she is actually like the grownups not like children: "but her mouth evens out when she smiles. She has a smile like a grown-up's, as if she's learned it and is doing it out of politeness. She holds out her hand. "Hi, I'm Cordelia. And you must be ..."(Atwood, *Cat's Eye* 68). Elaine suspects that Cordelia's behavior is out of her learning something, "I stare at her. If she were an adult, I would take the hand, shake it, I would know what to say. But children

do not shake hands like this" (ibid). Later, Elaine extends the idea of imitation to Cordelia's family, especially her two sisters: "her two older sisters have this habit also. It's hard to tell when they mean to be taken seriously. They have an extravagant, mocking way of talking, which seems like an imitation of something, only it's unclear what they're imitating" (70). Elaine remarks that "just about everything in here is imitation something else" (199). As they grow up and start dating, Elaine asserts that Cordelia thinks of the boys as "dim" and that she is not really her own self when conversing with them:

Her attempts at conversation with them are a performance, an imitation. Her laugh, when she's with them, is refined and low, like a woman's laugh on the radio, except when she forgets herself. Then it's too loud. She's mimicking something, something in her head, some role or image that only she can see. (232)

Through the lens of the uncanny, mimicry becomes a process which disturbs the boundaries of power and destabilizes what was considered as authority. On one hand, there are "intermediaries or collaborators with whom the colonial power can work in the exercise of its authority; on the other, these intermediaries come to seem a little too similar to the colonizer, undermining ideologies of superiority" (Huddart 51). The idea that anyone could be almost white but not quite" confirms the possibility of repetition which in itself is another

way of undermining authority and a source of menace for the colonizer. Grace's incessant pressure for Elaine's perfection in Sunday's school disturbs Grace simultaneously: "she only got five out of ten on Bible" (Atwood, *Cat's Eye* 118) which Cordelia translates as Elaine's "getting stupider" (ibid) though Elaine asserts that she just made five wrong answers deliberately not to offend Grace; to look exactly like her. In other words, Grace wants Elaine to mimic them in the matters of the Sunday school, yet is frustrated to see that Elaine is leveling with them, "I indeed got ten out of ten, again, and Grace only got nine...the next week I put five wrong answers, deliberately" (ibid).

Elaine's knowing that Cordelia is also imitating something like herself reduces Cordelia's power to her own level. She considers Cordelia and the other two girls as the ones who could be disobeyed, or they have the potential to be disobeyed since they, themselves, are also sentenced to power. Elaine sometimes refuses to accompany the girls by making small lies and "excuses" such as "I have to help my mother"(115). Elaine's apparent lies and excuses in order to avoid the girls more importantly lies in her disbelief in Cordelia's absolute power as she finds that even Cordelia is an "improviser".

In a colonized space, the process of mimicry is directed to the discussion of the double in terms of subject formation. In fact, the double uncannily

foregrounds the unrepresentable realities of subject formation in a colonial space.

### The Double/ Doppelganger and Name

Freud believes that "Man" is never identical to himself. This is in line with Atwood's assertion at the beginning of *Cat's Eye*, "there is no one I would ever tell this to, except Cordelia. But which Cordelia? The one I have conjured up, the one with the rolltop boots and the turned-up collar, or the one before, or the one after? There is never only one, of anyone" (Atwood, *Cat's Eye* 6). The split identity is rooted in Man. Bhabha explores the idea of the uncanny double to unsettle the colonial identity. In this light drawing a solid line around the colonial identity seems impossible since the colonized and the colonizer are each other's double. The emphasis is on "the recognition of similarity, and their doubling qualities brought about an uncanny feeling, the sense that something long denied was gradually making itself felt" (Huddart 60).

One of the most significant presentations of the double is in relation to "the name". "The name is double" as Royle mentions (191). The name is simultaneously one's name and somebody else's name, a stranger's name. This implies that any one always already has a stranger within himself. Apart from the stranger, the self seems to have no existence; the self and the stranger become one, thereby, inseparable. In Royle's words, "whether one loves or hates one's name, one is already in a

double bind; for the name is always in some sense the name of a stranger. One's name is something at once crucial and superfluous, at once a part of, yet also apart from, oneself" (ibid). It was already mentioned that there is no fixed pattern to be imitated by the colonized. For the colonized also, there is no fixed identity to betray. In the discussion of the double the interaction between the colonizer and the colonized even becomes more significant. Elaine tells us that Cordelia ought to be Cordie, but she's not. She insists, always, on being called by her full name: Cordelia... none of the girls at school have names like that. Cordelia says they're out of Shakespeare. She seems proud of this, as though it's something we should all recognize. (71)

Cordelia's name, according to Royle seems "crucial" to her but is at the same time "superfluous". Knowing that Cordelia is an allusion to Shakespeare's *King Lear*, her name reminds us of the dismissed girl who incessantly tries to win the father though she cannot. Due to her treacherous sisters, Cordelia feels sympathy toward "Cordelia" and at times shuns her. Cordelia and Cordelia are each other's double. She seems to repress that aspect of Shakespeare's Cordelia which is weak and "disappointing" to the father. Cordelia cannot dismiss and suppress "Cordelia" because in doing this she would deny and dismiss herself. To mention Freud, the double is "the uncanny harbinger of death" (Freud and Strachey 3687) and, as Royle adds, "one may want one's

double dead; but the death of the double will always also be the death of oneself" (190). To illustrate the idea of the double and the name, Royle quotes from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* in which Juliet yells about Romeo: "O be some other name" and adds Derrida's comment on it as follows:

Aproper name does not name anything which is human, which belongs to a human body, a human spirit, an essence of man. And yet this relation to the inhuman only befalls man, for him, to him, in the name of man. He alone gives himself this inhuman name. And Romeo would not be what he is, a stranger to his name, without this name. (191)

This diabolical attitude of the name negates Elaine's pondering upon Cordelia's name as she thinks that if they named her Jane or something else things might change the other way:

Why did they name her that? Hang that weight around her neck. Heart of the moon, jewel of the sea, depending on which foreign language you're using. The third sister, the only honest one. The stubborn one, the rejected one, the one who was not heard. If she'd been called Jane, would things have been different? (Atwood, *Cat's Eye* 249)

Cordelia and Cordelia are each other's doubles in sharing their experience about their father, yet Cordelia seems to be reluctant toward

Shakespeare's in being fragile and weak and a failure to win the father. Cordelia projects this sense of fragility upon Elaine as her double. It is worth mentioning that the double is a process; it is not the story of two people's relation. It has no origin and no end, especially in a colonized space such as *Cat's Eye*.

In the colonized space of the novel, Cordelia and Elaine become each other's double. On the one hand, Cordelia becomes the victimizer whose haunting torture lasts long in Elaine's life. Cordelia seems to hate Elaine and tries to "improve" her in a mocking way. Through Elaine's mocking and torturing Cordelia, is in fact mocking and suppressing that weak aspect of herself, yet she never dismisses Elaine totally. She is in need of Elaine as her double since, in dismissing Elaine, she will discard herself. As Biddy Martin and Chandra Mohanty argue, the concept of home is based on two notions: "being home" and "not being home", Being 'home' refers to the place where one lives within familiar, safe, protected boundaries; 'not being home' is a matter of realizing that home was an illusion of coherence and safety based on the exclusion of specific histories of oppression and resistance, the repression of differences even within oneself. (196-97)

Thus, it is not far from imagining that the concept of home entails home, nation, and family and the self, turning them into cultural and political spaces rather than neutral ones. Cordelia's

haunting presence acts as a fracture within Elaine's sense of safety within herself making her feel not at home with herself. Elaine is also Cordelia's double. She is apparently the victim, the other, the abject, but at times it is the other way around. Elaine and Cordelia are one, inseparable like one's relation with one's name. Cordelia represents Elaine's dark double which undermines Elaine's stable identity as victim and innocent. There are many references to the motif of "twin" as Elaine points to her relationship to Cordelia, she says:

She will have her own version. I am not the center of her story, because she herself is that. But I could give her something you can never have, except from another person: what you look like from outside. A reflection. This is the part of herself I could give back to her. We are like the twins in old fables, each of whom has been given half a key. (Atwood, *Cat's Eye* 388)

Elaine thus asserts that she is the "reflection" of Cordelia though she is not the center of her. The notion of the double undermines Cordelia's cruelty and Elaine's innocence as taken for granted. In their biology class, Elaine appears to Cordelia as harsh when cutting the worms in order to draw a diagram of the worm. This stands for the presence of evil within the self. It intensifies that the evil is not necessarily out there, but within the seemingly most familiar which is the self:

I pin my worm at either end and make a slick vertical cut; the worm twists as they do

on fishhooks. I pin the worm's skin out to the sides. I can see its worm heart, which isn't the shape of a heart, its central artery pumping worm blood, its digestive system, which is full of mud. "Oh," says Cordelia. "How can you." Cordelia is becoming mushier and mushier, I think. She is becoming a drip. I do her worm for her, when the teacher isn't looking... Cordelia can't do the frog either. She says she feels sick to her stomach just thinking about putting her dissecting knife through its skin. She looks at me, pale, her eyes big. The frog smell is getting to her. I do her frog for her. I'm good at this. (234-5)

As was mentioned earlier, Elaine and Cordelia illustrate Royle's perception of the double that "whether one loves or hates one's" double, "one is already in a double bind" (191). Elaine never rejects and forgets Cordelia since, in doing that, she would reject and forget herself. She tells us about Cordelia as Elaine tried to ignore her that "I know she has expected something from me, some connection to her old life, or to herself. I know I have failed to provide it. I am dismayed by myself, by my cruelty and indifference, my lack of kindness. But also, I feel relief" (248). Elaine moves from Toronto to Vancouver in order to escape the familiar, to forget and create a safe home which she cannot.

Unlike the narrator of *Surfacing*, who actually lies in remembrance of the past time,

Elaine does not seem an unreliable narrator. The prevailing torture of her childhood is so haunting that she rhetorically asks herself and wonders if she ever did these things or not: "did I really sit on the floor of Grace's bedroom, on her braided bedside rug, cutting out pictures of frying pans and washing machines from the Eaton's Catalogue and pasting them into a scrapbook? Already it seems implausible, and yet I know I did it". (65)

She seems to be willing to use the uncanny feature of memory to betray her; to put her in the dangling state between reality and fantasy so that she might be able to erase the torturous moments of her past which, of course she cannot. We will see it how it would haunt her throughout the novel later. Even when her dying mother recalls the girls and mentions "those girls gave you a bad time" (327), she incessantly replies "what girls" or adds that she has no idea or "what day" and projects her deliberate forgetfulness to her mother's getting pills and finally comes up with saying "oh, yes" which she believes is only a pretention, "'Oh yes," I say, pretending I know what she's talking about. I don't want to confuse her. But I am growing confused myself. My memory is tremulous, like water breathed on" (373). To Elaine, there are several diseases of memory. Forgetfulness of nouns, for instance, or of numbers. Or there are more complex amnesias. With one, you can lose your entire past; you start afresh, ... You are introduced to your relatives, your oldest friends, as if you've never met them before; you get a second

chance with them, better than forgiveness because you can begin innocent. With another form, you keep the distant past but lose the present. You can't remember what happened five minutes ago. When someone you've known all your life goes out of the room and then comes back in, you greet them as if they've been gone for twenty years; you weep and weep, with joy and relief, as if at a reunion with the dead. I sometimes wonder which of these will afflict me later; because I know one of them will. (249)

To Elaine, disease of memory seems inevitable and implicitly undeniable and deliberate. She is intentionally practicing forgetfulness which is of course a failure because in erasing the past, Elaine will erase part of herself which she finds impossible: "people exclaim over what they think is the quaintness of the past. The past isn't quaint while you're in it" (344). In her return to Toronto, Elaine finds herself once again haunted by Cordelia's uncanny presence, the haunting double which signifies the return of the repressed.

One's double does not have the capacity of full presence. It is through the uncanny that one can just foreground the unrepresentable reality of one's subject formation. This is implied in Elaine's search for Cordelia when she is supposed to have a role in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*: "I watch for Cordelia, and when Prospero's attendants come on, with music and jittery lighting effects, I peer hard, trying to see which one she is, behind the

disguise of costume. But I can't tell" (289). Back to Toronto for her retrospective show, she is incessantly waiting for Cordelia to appear among the crowd though she would not or if she would, Elaine could not tell: "I examine this writing from every angle, trying to figure out if it could be Cordelia's, disguised. If it isn't, if she's no longer at the rest home, where has she gone? She could ring the doorbell at any minute, call on the phone. She could be anywhere" (343). In the exhibition Elaine thinks "it's time for Cordelia to appear but she has not appeared"(388). Yet she is sure that Cordelia exists though she does not fully appear. Cordelia lives inside Elaine; she is Elaine: "the sound of my breath comes to me, to me, a disembodied gasping, as if it's someone else breathing. Cordelia has a tendency to exist" (390).

In the very last pages of the novel, Elaine's yearning for the lost Cordelia and, in fact, her dark double heightens and takes its most uncanny form. This is probably the most significant scene where Cordelia appears in a hallucinatory way as Elaine walks back to the old bridge and ravine where they used to walk back home from school:

I push away from the cement wall, and the sky moves sideways. I know that if I turn, right now, and look ahead of me along the path, someone will be standing there. At first I think it will be myself, in my old jacket, my blue knitted hat. But then I see that it's Cordelia... I know she's looking at me, the lopsided mouth smiling a little, the

face closed and defiant. There is the same shame, the sick feeling in my body, the same knowledge of my own wrongness, awkwardness, weakness; the same wish to be loved; the same loneliness; the same fear. But these are not my own emotions any more. They are Cordelia's; as they always were. (392)

In reimagining Cordelia, Elaine's darker side resurrects. Though she attributes the wrong feelings to Cordelia and considers herself free from her, she confesses that "this is what I miss, Cordelia: not something that's gone, but something that will never happen"(394). In her assertion about Cordelia, one can once again recall Royle's "double bind" embedded with oneself and the double, and that the double is unrepresentable, which can be foregrounded through the uncanny.

In search of the lost and absent double Cordelia, Elaine remains transient and incomplete and more than one. Elaine is neither one nor the other; she is neither this nor that. Bhabha quotes Freud that "the 'double' is the figure most frequently associated with this uncanny process of 'the doubling, dividing and interchanging of the self'" (Bhabha 295). In reference to her painting of Cordelia, which she called "Half a Face," Elaine mentions that the eyes sabotage me. They aren't strong eyes; the look they give the face is tentative, hesitant, reproachful. Frightened. Cordelia is afraid of me, in this picture. I am afraid of Cordelia. I'm not afraid of Cordelia. I'm afraid of

being Cordelia. Because in some way we changed places, and I've forgotten when. (Atwood, *Cat's Eye* 213)

The double indicates an ungraspable fracture in the homogeneity of the self which assures the possibility of "otherness" in every body and everywhere. The way of ordering self and other is uncanny since through uncanny we understand that the way of ordering our knowledge of things are not natural but constructed. Atwood's *Robber Bride* likewise problematizes the fixity of the notion of family, nation and self as untroubled through the uncanny.

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### Conclusion

The refashioning of the perspective of home, nation and the self through the uncanny in Atwood's fiction leads to the disturbance of the illusory familiarity and comfort associated with such concepts. The concept of home either in its metaphorical or external aspects tends to be non-static and ephemeral. Regardless of its geographical considerations, home becomes unhomely as the individual is subject to live the life of a migrant in his or her own hometown and feels as the stranger to his or her own language and culture. Though this might not be rewarding, it provides the possibility of rethinking those aspects of subject formation which remain unrepresentable. *Cat's Eye* depicted characters who are not foreigners to the country of their living but are situated in such a position. This

apparently might represent them as victims but the uncanny soon disrupts this feeling and leaves the victim with his or her dark double the so-called victimizer to shatter any fixity and stability. *Cat's Eye* first depicts how the characters are conditioned as foreigners in their own home and nation and immediately shatter their sense of victimhood to assert that any sense of safety within home, nation and the self would lead to illusory prioritizing and categorizing which hides the unrepresentable aspects of our subject formation. For instance, not knowing that "the other" is in fact the double of the self leads to the recurrent denial of the possibility of evil within us.

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