

ATILIM UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE
ENGLISH CULTURE AND LITERATURE MASTER'S PROGRAMME

**REPRESENTATION OF TRAUMA AND IDENTITY FORMATION IN MARGARET
ATWOOD'S CAT'S EYE AND THE HANDMAID'S TALE**

Master's Thesis

Sarah Falah Mohammed

Ankara 2019

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Ankara 2019

ACCEPTION AND APPROVAL

This is to certify that this thesis titled Representation of trauma and identity formation in Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye* and *The Handmaid's Tale* and prepared by Sarah Mohammed meets with the committee's approval unanimously as Master's Thesis in the field of English Cultur and Literature following the successful defense of the thesis conducted in 20-06-2019.

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20-06-2019

Sarah Falah Mohammed

ÖZ

FalahMohammed, Sarah.Margaret Atwood'un *Cat's Eye* ve *The Handmaid's Tale* Başlıklı Eserlerinde Travma Temsili ve Kimlik İnşası, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Ankara, 2019.

Bu tezin amacı, travmanın temsilinin ve travmanın Margaret Atwood'un *Cat's Eye* ve *The Handmaid's Tale* başlıklı eserlerindeki kadın karhayanların kimlik oluşumuna etkisini analiz etmektir. Bu romanlar, travmanın temsili, kimlik oluşumu ve bu kavramları çalışmak için kullanılan yöntemler bakımından pek çok benzer ve farklı özelliklere sahiptir.

Teori bölümünde, psikanalizin kısa bir tanıtımı yer almaktadır. Bu bölümde, travma teorisinin detaylı analizi, travma ile yüzleşmek, ve travmanın anlatıdaki temsili gibi travma ile ilgili konulara açıklık getirilmektedir. Kimlik oluşumu ve kadın kimliği de bu bölümde tartışılmaktadır. Analitik bölümler, *Cat's Eye* ve *The Handmaid's Tale* kahramanlarının travmatik deneyimleri ve nedenleri, travmaları ile başa çıkabilmek için travmaları ile yüzleşmelerini ve tecrübeleri nedeniyle yaşadıkları kimlik krizlerini tartışmaktadır.

Sonuç, kadın kahramanların her ikisinde de travmatik nevroz yaratan sosyal ve politik faktörleri ortaya koymaktadır. Romanlardaki travma temsili ve yüzleşme yöntemleri arasındaki benzerlik ve farklılıkların yanı sıra, kahramanların kimlik inşası da bu bölümde sunulmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Travma, kimlik, Kadın, Offred, Elaine, Atwood

ABSTRACT

Mohammed, Sarah. Representation of trauma and identity formation in Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye* and *The Handmaid's Tale*, M.A Thesis, Ankara, 2019.

The aim of this thesis is to analyse the representation of trauma and its effects on the identity formation of the female protagonists in *Cat's Eye* and *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood. These novels have many similar and different characteristics in terms of representation of trauma, identity formation and the methods which are used to work through them.

In the theory chapter, a brief introduction of psychoanalysis is presented. A detailed analysis of trauma theory, witnessing trauma, working through trauma and representation of trauma in narratives related to trauma are explained in this chapter as well. Formation of identity and female identity are also discussed in this chapter. The analytical chapters discuss *Cat's Eye* and *The Handmaid's Tale* in terms of the protagonists' traumatic experiences and its reasons, witnessing their traumas in order to work through them and their suffering of an identity crisis concerning their experiences.

The conclusion proves that the social and political factors cause traumatic neurosis in both of the female protagonists. The similarities and differences between the representation of trauma and witnessing it in the novels and the identity formation of the protagonists are presented in this chapter as well.

Keywords: Trauma, identity, Female, Elaine, Offred, Atwood.

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to analyse the representation of trauma in the narratives and its influences on the identity formation of the female characters in *The Handmaid's Tale and Cat's Eye* by Margaret Atwood in the light of psychoanalytical criticism. This study also aims to illustrate how Margaret Atwood depicts her protagonists' traumatic experiences and identity crisis in the novels. This thesis will consist of a theoretical chapter, two analytical chapters, and a conclusion. The theoretical chapter will attempt to present and explain trauma theory. In addition, it also presents the concepts which are related to trauma and female identity. The following analytical two chapters will be dealing with the thematic comparison of the novels.

The theoretical chapter of the thesis will shed light on the introduction of psychoanalysis and its important concepts and theories. It will also express certain topics related to trauma theory, the individual and collective trauma by illustrating the difference between them in terms of the social and political structures that caused traumatic neurosis for the victims. Testimony is also an important process related to trauma since it is necessary for the victim to testify and witness her/his traumatic experience. By testifying and witnessing the traumatic event the victim will work through her/his trauma and have a new insight. Representation of trauma in narratives is also explained in this chapter by means of its depiction by the writers. Identity formation and female identity are analysed in terms of the formation of identity and how the traumatic experiences influence the identity of the victims especially female victims who are traumatized by social and political structures. All of these topics are mainly connected to traumatic experience which helps to

understand the psyche of the traumatic victim. This thesis will take into consideration Sigmund Freud's and Jacques Lacan's theories of human psyche and trauma theory, Cathy Caruth's trauma theory, and will refer to Judith Herman, Shoshana Felman and Luari Vickroy and other critics who developed trauma theory.

Society and political structures have a great effect in both of the novels to make the protagonists suffer from traumatic neurosis which mainly influences the formation of female identity since their identity is constructed according to the society, the analytical chapters will focus on this concept. Both of the chapters will present the traumatizing factors in the novels. The first novel, *Cat's Eye*, presents the social and individual factors that traumatize the protagonist. Being bullied by her friends is the main reason which traumatizes Elaine, the protagonist, in her childhood. The terrible behaviours and actions done by her friends traumatize her and influence her identity from childhood until adulthood. The second novel, *The Handmaid's Tale*, presents a patriarchal society in Gilead, and Offred who is a victim of a dystopian society and the protagonist of the novel, experiences many traumatic events and identity crisis throughout the novel. Furthermore, these chapters will explain the traumatic events that the protagonists experience and will analyse the influences of the traumatic experience on their identity which cause identity crisis in both of the protagonists, Offred and Elaine, before and after their traumatic events. Moreover, both of the protagonists work through their traumatic experience in two different ways: in *Cat's Eye*, Elaine works through her trauma by her paintings. She witnesses her traumatic experience and confronts with her fears by depicting them in her paintings, which make her gain a new insight and self-confidence which end her identity crisis. While in *The Handmaid's Tale*, Offred uses a different way to work

through her trauma. She uses her double voice by recording it in tapes to witness and recover from her traumatic experience and identity crisis. Consequently, the tapes which she records make her have a new insight and self-confidence.

The conclusion will present the similarities and differences between *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Cat's Eye*, in terms of their traumatic experiences and its reasons, which haunt them in their dreams, flashbacks that make them re-experience the event repeatedly, and these actions affect their identity and make both of the protagonists suffer from identity crisis. Different methods which are used by the protagonists to work through their traumas and identity crisis are explained in this chapter as well, by means of witnessing their traumatic experiences and recovering from them in two different ways.

CHAPTER ONE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Psychoanalytical criticism is a type of literary criticism which deals with discovering and analysing the connection between the artist and his state of mind or his personality, by searching the psychological sides of the character or the author. It uses psychoanalysis methods, a kind of therapy which aims to make people talk freely in order to unveil what is repressed in their unconscious mind, in analysing literature. Critics use theories which are mainly developed by Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). They used many examples of literature to express his ideas. Freud's main works depend on the realm of unconscious mind that is a part beyond the conscious that influences our actions. All of the forgotten traumatic actions and desires are actually repressed in the unconscious mind. For instance, Freud used the Greek myth of Oedipus to explain human psyche, especially the infant sexuality that is the relation between the mother and the infant. He also discusses the aspect of *The Merchant of Venice* in his "The Theme of the Three Caskets" and he analyses the characters of Lady Macbeth, Richard III and Ibsen's Rebecca West- the heroine of "*Rosmersholm*" in "Some Characters- Types Met with in Psychoanalytic Work". According to Freud the artist is a successful neurotic, he creates a world to fulfil his unsatisfied wishes or desires which are not acceptable in the real world that is society. These wishes or desires are repressed in the unconscious mind of the artist, eventually he makes them acceptable by the society through his artistic work "they dream aloud in public" this is what differentiates the artist from an ordinary neurotic person.

Freud's early work *The Interpretation of Dreams*(1895), is a text which analyses dreams, interoperates and focuses on the role of the unconscious mind. The book puts emphasis on the importance of dreams, Freud claims that dreams have two types of content explicit meaning, the first one is called manifest content which includes symbols to disguise true meanings of dreams. The second one is called latent content, unconscious thoughts, which attempts to expose true meanings of dreams. According to Freud, dreams represent the desires and wishes which are repressed in our unconscious mind "fulfilment of a wish"(Freud, 2.1.46). He argues that the dream-work has four basic processes: displacement, condensation, visual representation and secondary revision. Displacement is a form of observation which deforms the ideas which act as the controlling forces of the dream and changes them to more acceptable thoughts and ideas. Condensation means several thoughts, desires and impulses combined into one image in the manifest dream. In other words, two different latent thoughts are collected in a single manifest dream. Visual representation is a process of changing thoughts into visual images. Secondary revision means that the preconscious mind changes the latent thought into a rational form in our consciousness. As is stated above, Freud refers to the artist as a successful neurotic. He also makes the same connection between literary works and his theory of dream work in *The Interpretation of Dreams*,

The phenomena of repression and sublimation are particularly crucial to psychoanalytic criticism because Freud suggests that artistic creativity arises largely from special ability of artist to sublimate their frustrated erotic energies into the production of art.
(Guerin 31)

Freud describes the creation of art as a process of dreaming since the artist reveals his fantasies and desires which are repressed in his unconscious mind by sublimating, changing original thoughts in the unconscious and representing them as something else that is more acceptable in the society. Art is an area where these repressed desires can be satisfied, in other words artists dream aloud to fulfil their wishes.

For Freud's psychoanalytic theory, the mind is mainly structured into three parts conscious, preconscious and unconscious. The first part is the conscious mind it is what we are aware of in every moment, perceptions, feelings, thoughts. The second part and the most important part for Freud is unconscious mind, it includes all of the wishes, desires, traumatic events or memories that are out of awareness, and they are not easily recovered in the conscious mind. Freud states that our behaviours are mainly motivated by unconscious mind; it contains our primitive instinct for sex and aggression. Freud emphasizes in his *The Anatomy of Mental Personality* that even "most conscious processes are conscious for only a short period; quite soon they become latent, though they can easily become conscious again" (100). These primitive instincts often do not come into the realm of consciousness because they are not acceptable in our society and its values. Freud believes that things that are repressed in the unconscious can sometimes slip to the conscious in dreams, language or behaviour, and this process is called "Freudian slips". The last part is what Freud called preconscious, it is also considered to be a part of unconscious mind, which works closely to the conscious mind, anything that can easily become conscious without any trouble. They can be easily recovered or reproduced.

1.1. Identity Formation

In 1923, Freud came out with one of his most important personality theories which are about human psyche. He argued that human psyche consists of three parts the id, the ego and the superego, basically three different minds which have different desires and goals and they work in different principles that affect our behaviour and they form human identity as well. Firstly, the id is primitive and instinctive part of personality. It contains the natural drives including sex, life instincts and the aggressive, death instincts. It only has desires and wishes which should be satisfied and does not have any concern for limitations or rules of society; it operates with pleasure principle, and it does not touch the reality and works within the unconscious.

The id is, in short, the source of all our aggressions and desires. It is lawless, asocial, and amoral. Its function is to gratify our instincts for pleasure without regard for social conventions, legal ethics, or moral restraint. Unlocked, it would lead us to any lengths—to destruction and even self-destruction—to satisfy its impulses for pleasure. (Guerin 204-5)

For instance the infant knows only desire, his\her personality consists only of the id, as he\she grows the ego and superego will develop. Secondly, the ego moderates between the demands of unrealistic and unreasonable demands of the id and the real world or society. Unlike the id, the ego operates with the reality principle. The ego tries to satisfy desires and wishes of the id but in realistic ways that can be appropriate to the social norms, in other words, “the ego serves as intermediary between the world within and the world without” (Guerin 205). It is the balance

between the psyche and the world. Finally, the superego which represents traditions and values of society and the authority of father makes limitations against the fulfilment of desires and wishes of the id. It controls the impulses of the id especially the ones forbidden in society, like sex and aggression; it operates with morality principle. The superego consists of two systems the conscious and the ideal self or ego-ideal. The conscious punishes or warns the ego through the feeling of guilt. The ideal-ego is associated with rewarding and positive things that will be presented to child; it teaches him how to behave in society.

However, Jacques Lacan develops Freud's tripartite theory of human psyche: "... his view of unconscious mind not as dark and seething place of anarchic passions and drives but as a structure very much like language and therefore potentially available to far more systematic analysis than Freud himself had imagined" (Guerin 35)

Lacan states that the human psyche works in three orders. Firstly, "imaginary order", it is similar to Freud's pleasure principle which contains only desire and fantasies, it is the stage when the infant child cannot be independent from his mother. From this point of view, it is important to mention Lacan's analysis of "mirror stage". He explains that the infant six to eighteenth months old realizes herself/himself in the mirror nevertheless, she/he cannot recognize herself/himself till the age of fifteen months, when she/he realizes that she/he can separate herself or himself from the mother, "the infant begins to gain a sense of her own existence and establishes an awareness of the boundaries of her own body"(Guerin 36). Secondly, "symbolic order" is the field of symbols and language representation which shapes our identity,

similar to Freud's notion of "reality principle". Finally, the "real order" "On the one hand, consists of the physical world, including the material universe and everything in it; on the other hand, the real order also symbolizes all that a person is not" (Bressler 155). Eventually, it can be understood from Freud's and Lacan's theories that human identity starts to be formed from infancy, then society forms this identity by means of thoughts, ideas and appearance. So, in order to fit society, people usually try to form or shape their identity according to it, as a result, some of them have a psychological trauma which affects their identity in adulthood as well. There are many results of psychological trauma. First, when the culture and the norms of the society are different from the traumatised, consequently she/he tries to fit them so as not to be rejected. Second, when the traumatised creates protective fields for herself/himself from society because of the nightmares about the actions he faces, which are slips from her/his unconsciousness. By these protective shields she/he protects herself/himself from society and becomes unable to communicate with other people as a result he/she will have deep repression because she/he feels rejected or alienated.

1.2. Female Identity

Each woman has her own identity and self, nevertheless, patriarchal society or male-centred society does not accept this fact. In the patriarchal society female identity is defined by men; her identity cannot be separated from him. So, they lose their own identity when they become housewives, mothers or even a single woman in these societies which may lead them to identity crisis and it can develop into trauma. Judith Kegan Gardiner states that "The word "identity" is paradoxical in itself, meaning both sameness and distinctiveness, and its contradictions proliferate

when it is applied to women” (347). However, this has been a widespread concept in the nineteenth and twentieth century among female writers. Consequently, because of female writers’ rejection for the patriarchal society or male-centred society, their main concern has become the exploration of female identity, development of female identity, and defining female identity in such societies. According to Carolyn Heilbrun, in her *Reinventing Womanhood*,

For example, she claims that successful women are “male-identified” but it is a “failure” for a “woman” to take her identity from her man. Women never form a self because they “need never undergo an identity crisis,” yet they have an identity to lose: “the price of wifeness is abandonment of self.” (in Gardiner 247)

Elaine Showalter expresses that since 1920 “self-discovery” and “search of identity” are one of the main concerns in literature. (in Gardiner 437). Female identity is an offensive identity in male-centred society because their existence is connected to men in other words they take their identity from men. Simone de Beauvoir defines the situation of women in patriarchal society in her book titled *The Second Sex* “Be women, stay women, become women” (23). Instead of having an identity built by the society norms and tradition, since women identity is built by society and its rules in the patriarchal society, they are compelled to accept that identity. From this concern, power and superiority are associated with men, weakness and inferiority are associated with women. These are the basic principles of the patriarchal society. These principles are considered to be the main reasons for many psychological disorders like identity crisis or trauma which affect their adult life. This identity

starts to be formed in the family, the parents, and then by the society. Nevertheless, Bressler illustrates that

Feminist theorists and critics want to correct such erroneous ways of thinking. Women, they declare, are individuals, people in their own rights, they are not incomplete or inferior to men.... women must define themselves and articulate their roles, values, aspirations, and place in society. (182)

Female writers', theorists' and critics' believe that women have their own identity and rights. Eventually, their main concern is changing the values, tradition and thoughts of patriarchal society.

1.3. Trauma Theory

This section will explore trauma theory and its representation in narrative literature, which emerged in 1990s when a group of critics started to analyse social and cultural effects on trauma. Cathy Caruth's "*Unclaimed Experience*" became one of the most important studies in this field by integrating many essays of psychology, literature, and sociology to see the cultural and historical effects on trauma. The basic essays in her book are Freud's "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" and "Moss and Monotheism" and Lacan's reconsideration of trauma by analysing Freud's text. Along with Caruth, there are many critics who developed trauma theory such as Judith Herman, Shoshana Felman and Luari Vickroy. Trauma or to traumatize is a sudden or catastrophic event or experience which affects human psyche such as war, sexual abuse, violent behaviour, racism or patriarchal society but the point is people react and express the same traumatic experiences in different ways. For instance, Margaret Atwood makes her female protagonists narrate their traumatic experiences

differently like tapes in *The Handmaid's Tale* and the traumatizing painting in *Cat's Eye*.

Freud's notion of trauma has developed from his researches on the emotional disorder of adults and sexual abuse. He realizes that the psychic shock is one of the reasons that cause neurotic disorder and hysteria, in addition he discovers three processes: traumatic event, the person's experiencing traumatic event and how his\her psychological defence responds, either by forgetting or repressing it (Freud 1953, 17). Repressing the traumatic event means a powerful event which affects the unconscious mind. It is repressed but it returns in terms of repeated behaviours. For Freud, traumatic experience continues to reside in the unconscious like "foreign bodies" in human psyche as a threat that can be released or can slip from unconscious mind in any time. Trauma theory becomes an important critical concept in psychology during 1970s, especially after the researches and studies about the survivors of Vietnam veterans, Holocaust, refugees and sexual abuses. Then the American Psychiatric Association manual of mental disorders added the term "Post traumatic stress disorder" in 1980 and they defined it as a collection of stressful events, delayed stress syndrome or traumatic neurosis which haunts the survivor in their dream and in waking conscious (Lahey, 480). Every form of trauma as violence, witnessing violence, racism, oppression, rape and child abuse have cumulative effects that can be fundamentally life changing. However, different types of trauma produce different responses in every person. Freud's works on war neurosis and his theories about the repetition of traumatic events and how the latter affects the memory are the main reasons for the development of the trauma theory and how it influences the identity. Later on, theories of trauma that are used to explain and

analyse individual psyche are used to find the individual experience of collective trauma, which means making a connection between the experience of individuals and groups.

Freud's theories in *Studies of Hysteria* (1895) written with Joseph Breuer and his theories in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) are the basic trauma theories developed by modern critics later. A situation that occurs after experiencing a traumatic event like war, sexual abuse and life-threatening actions and violent behaviour is called "traumatic neuroses". Freud and Breuer state in their theory:

We may reverse the dictum "cessante causa cessat effectus" (when the cause ceases the effect ceases) and conclude from these observations that the determining process (that is, the recollection of it) continues to operate for years—not indirectly, through a chain of intermediate casual links, but as directly releasing cause—just as psychical pain that is remembered in waking consciousness still provokes a lachrymal secretion long after the event. *Hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscence.* (Freud and Breuer 1955:7)

According to Freud and Breuer, the act of remembrance is traumatic not the event itself since trauma develops from repressed, the unconscious, and slips to the conscious like nightmares, flashbacks and dreams. The act of remembering of the action comes to the consciousness after a period of passivity, eventually postpones the feeling of pain and the traumatic event can be clearly comprehended. In other words, the person is not fully conscious during the accident; the traumatic event is repressed till it returns. Eventually, the period of latency is not period of forgetting

but a repression and the trauma occurs after this period not during the event. Judith Herman illustrates in her book titled, *Trauma and Recovery*,

Traumatic events are extraordinary, not because they occur rarely, but rather because they overwhelm the ordinary human adaptation to life. Unlike commonplace misfortunes, traumatic events generally involve threats to life or bodily integrity, or a close personal encounter with violence and death. They confront human beings with extremities of haplessness and terror, and evoke the responses of catastrophe (33).

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Freud states that there are two features which influence traumatic neurosis: the first one is surprise or fright which is a factor that mostly exists in every traumatic neurosis. “Anxiety”, “Fear” and “Fright” have different meanings related to danger. “Anxiety” is a situation that a person feels to an expected danger. “Fear” demands a specific thing to be afraid of. “Fright” describes a situation that a person gets into when he examines a danger without being prepared for it, which mostly causes a traumatic situation to the person (6). For instance, Offred in *The Handmaid’s Tale* and Elaine in *Cat’s Eye*. The second feature that influences traumatic neurosis is the wound which works against the development of neurosis. In addition, traumatic neurosis has characteristics of bringing the person back into the traumatic experience “repeatedly” in their dreams, flashbacks or the time and place that the traumatic event has happened. It means the unconscious is unable or fails to control or to repress the unpleasing event; the person keeps thinking that he is re-experiencing the situation again and again eventually he feels like traumatic experience is forcing itself upon him. However, when the person

repeatedly examines these feelings of re-experiencing the event, he realizes what he sees or re-experiences is the forgotten or missing parts of his traumatic experience that is repressed in his unconscious. In this case the person can gain self-knowledge which can be achieved along with the “talking cure” as Freud states.

For Freud the term trauma is a wound which affects the mind not the body and it is not available to the consciousness till it forces itself again. As Cathy Caruth explains in *Unclaimed Experience*,

It is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us the reality or truth that is not otherwise available. This truth, in its delayed appearance and its belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language. (4)

During the traumatic accident or event, the person is not conscious about it because it happens “too soon” “too quickly” or “too fast”. That means, the person does not experience the life threatening event on the time but it is “one moment later” thus, the connection between the fear of death and the shocked mind is not a direct connection but the missing part of the event that is not experienced in time. The events which are not experienced in time will be repressed in the unconscious; they become the missing or unknown part. Judith Herman states that the psychological structure of traumatised person concentrates on the existence of an unspeakable event and turns the concentration from it (1). As is stated before when “the wound cries out” it tries to reveal the missing part, it belatedly returns to possess the survivor in flashbacks, dreams and thoughts. In other words the traumatic event will break the defence of the unconscious, eventually the unconscious mind will be unable to

repress the unpleasant event that is the process of return of the repressed and the survivor will experience the traumatic event as if it is happening at the moment or the consciousness will bear witness to the event. Cathy Caruth illustrates that “The story of trauma, then, as the narrative of a belated experience, far from telling of an escape from reality—the escape from a death, or from its referential force—rather attests to its endless impact on a life.” (7). It is difficult for the survivors to witness the traumatic event to see flashbacks of it and to put all the missing parts together. It is more difficult to express these parts in word, hard to find the language to explain the horrible thing that happened to them,

Trauma victims find themselves at a loss for words to describe what happened. This crisis of language goes hand in hand with a crisis of time perception. Trauma memories cause the distinction between past and present to collapse and, thereby, produce a different sense of time, a sense of being “frozen in time (Ehlers and Clark 334).

From this perspective, it would be important to analyse what is meant by being conscious for the survivor. The period of “latency” in which the impact of the traumatic experience is not visible but repressed, Freud describes this period as going through the event to repression to its return. The return of the traumatic event means re-experiencing the event repeatedly since the survivor was not fully conscious about it that time. Freud expresses that what is really traumatised for the survivor is a confrontation with the threat of death, since he\she experienced it directly at that time. The consciousness also confronts with the fear of death since the mind cannot bear the possibility of its death, it confronts with the act of surviving against the

traumatic event repeatedly in nightmares and flashbacks. What also affects the structure of human psyche are flashbacks because the unconscious mind re-experiences the events which traumatises her/him again and they could be life threatening at least to human psyche. So, how traumatic flashbacks and dreams break the unconscious mind?

Freud explains in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* that the unconscious mind has a “protective shield” against the outside world’s stimulus; there are layers in the protective shield that deal with the energies which have come from outside world. However, if these layers fail to prevent them, stimuli will break the protective shield and this happens only with strong stimuli like traumatic actions. According to Freud, there are no such protective layers towards inside like the layers for outside stimuli which reduce the effect of them inside. Nevertheless, the impulses or excitations that reach a deeper layer make the feeling in the pleasure principle rise and deal with them (21). Yet the process is not the same for the traumatic events, they break through the protective shield. It breaks the structure of the defensive region and switches off the action of the pleasure principle and makes a gap in the protective shield which happens because of the element of fright. Cathy Caruth describes this process as “a shock that appears to work very much like a bodily threat but is in fact a break in the mind’s experience of time” (Caruth 1996, 61). The element of fright comes into being because of the lack of anxiety and the person is not prepared for the action therefore the former causes a gap in the protective shield. From this perspective, when the stimuli reaches the zone of the pleasure principle the person will suffer from traumatic neuroses in dreams. This action contrasts the function of the pleasure principle since the wish fulfilment in dreams is brought by it. Yet

dreams of traumatic neuroses are not wish fulfilment in contrast, their dreams bring them back into the traumatic situation repeatedly,

That dreams are here helping to carry out another task, which must be accomplished before the dominance of the pleasure principle can even begin. These dreams are endeavouring to master the stimulus retrospectively, by developing the anxiety whose omission was the cause of traumatic neurosis. (Freud 26)

In this case, these dreams are not trying to have pleasure and ignore pleasurable situations since they are independent of the pleasure principle but these dreams are helping to reveal the forgotten and repressed parts of the traumatic experience by nightmares or thoughts about the action. This process ends when the pleasure principle gains the dominance in human mind. From this point of view, the element of fright which Freud defines as a traumatic event that affects the unconscious mind in an unprepared moment, does not simply refer to the dream itself but when the survivor re-experiences the event repeatedly in his dreams, he wakes up to another fright in his awaking time or when he is fully conscious, which means the awaking of trauma. So the conscious mind is not only surprised by the dream but with passing beyond it. Eventually, the confrontation of the conscious mind is not only with fear of death as is stated before, but with how having survived and waking to life without knowing it. So the question is how the survivor can move from trauma to self-conscious?

1.4. Individual and Collective Trauma

Individual and collective trauma results from a physical, emotional or life-threatening event(s) that affects human psyche. Individual trauma means a direct

strike to psyche which breaks the defences of the unconscious like sexual abuse, child maltreatment, domestic trauma, patriarchal society, loss and even religion in some cases. Mostly individual trauma results from childhood trauma when a child witnesses or experiences a massive action, like bullying, sexual abuse and violence, racism, war or desertion the child. For instance, Elaine in *Cat's Eye* has childhood trauma because she was bullied by her friend Cordelia.

While collective trauma means a direct strike to either essential unities of social life and damages chains that connect people together, or an entire society. For example, *The Handmaid's Tale* represents the individual trauma of Offred but at the same time the collective trauma of the entire society, especially women by means of religious tyranny and fanaticism in a dystopian society. Tom Maylon explains dystopian society in his book *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia*

Dystopian narrative is largely the product of the terrors of the twentieth century. A hundred years of exploitation, repression, state violence, war, genocide, diseases, famine, ecocide, depression, debt, and the steady depletion of humanity through the buying and selling of everyday life provided more than enough fertile ground for this fictive underside of the utopian imagination. (xi)

1.5. Working Through Trauma

In trauma-theoretical approaches to literature, a difference is often made between “acting out” and “working through” terms based on Freud’s theory of “mourning” and “melancholia” psychological reaction attached to loss and developed by critics like Dominick LaCapra. Melancholia is a process associated with “acting

out”, Freud describes this process as an everlasting melancholy and a repetitive-compulsion. When the person is “acting out” after a traumatic experience, it means he\she has not come to cope with experience or emotions involved in it, act of repeating the experience compulsively or living in the past. It is necessary to the traumatised person to “work through” in order to go back to their normal life. (LaCapra 65). “Mourning” is associated with “Working through”; mourning process is about starting a new life, shaping a new life out of what has been destroyed. Freud describes mourning as a productive process. As Freud states in “Mourning and Melancholia”, “when the work of mourning is completed the ego becomes free and uninhibited again” (154). The process of working through is the essential distinction between melancholia and mourning, melancholia destroys or brings the ego down on suffering. In working through the person tries to go through the traumatic experience to cure his\her wounded psyche by recovering the experience. In the article “The Instructive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma (in Caruth, 1995)” Bessel van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart express that “complete recovery” can only happen when “the story can be told, the person can look back to what happened then, when he gives it place in his\her life experience, and thereby in his personality” (179). In this process the person accepts what happened, he\she gains a critical distance towards the traumatic experience, in order to distinguish between past, present and future. Kalí Tal supported this idea in her *Worlds of Hurt* book, by stating that “trauma is a transformative experience”, and “those who are transformed can never entirely return to a state of previous innocence” (119). This process is one of the main characteristics of Margaret Atwood’s protagonists; they work through

their traumatic experience and gain more powerful personalities by looking back and talking about what happened then.

1.6. Testimony

Traumatic events are always described as unspeakable, unrepresentable or unimaginable experiences, for the traumatised person it is very hard to express the traumatic event in language. It is a very complicated and difficult act for them to speak about what has happened, however, it is very important to speak for the process of healing and to overcome the pain and suffering of the event. The traumatised usually feels that he/she has dual force upon him/herself, on the one hand, the force that makes him/her think that speaking or testifying is necessary, on the other hand the force which makes it impossible to speak about that event. Testimony is considered to be an important part of working through.

As is stated before, Freud explains that the person is never fully conscious during the traumatic action, thus he/she can recover the missing parts only by bearing witness to it. Nevertheless, this recovery happens only when the person tells or expresses it in a particular way, then the traumatic experience will be repeated again as if it is happening at the moment in even a more frightening way. So the survivor deals with the difficulties of re-experiencing the painful event although the memory does not save everything about the event since he/she was not fully aware at that time but it is so difficult for the survivor to forget the pain and the suffer of that moment until it returns. Considered from this angle, Freud suggests that repeating the traumatic event by testifying is necessary for the survivor for healing as well as to understand what has happened then.

Furthermore, in *Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, psychoanalysis, and History* (1991), Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub explain what the survivor examines when he/she retells the traumatic experience as well as the crisis that will happen later when the survivor cannot combine or relate what is in his/her mind and what happened in reality since the mind was not fully conscious during the action. Dori Laub states that,

The victim's narrative—the very process of bearing witness to massive trauma—does indeed begin with someone who testifies to an absence, to an event that has not yet come into existence, in spite of the overwhelming and compelling nature of the reality of its occurrence. (57)

Eventually, it will be a hard task for the survivor to speak about the experience and express it in a proper language. In addition, Felman emphasizes the connection between the speaker or survivor and the listener because while the traumatized testifies the listener will have experiential understanding of the traumatic event as well.

In the chapter "Bearing Witness, or the Vicissitudes of Listening," Dori Laub focuses on the effects of the testimony on the survivor and the listener from a psychoanalytic perspective. He concentrates on the risks of re-experiencing the traumatic action for the survivor while he/she is bearing witness and the testimony may remain incomplete (Testimony 68). Dori Laub states that "the listener to trauma comes to be a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event: through his very listening, he comes to partially experience the trauma in himself" (*Testimony* 57). When the listener does experience something from the traumatic event he/she

becomes “a co-owner of the traumatic event” but it is important to hear the testimony to understand what happened and to see the effects of hearing and experiencing the traumatic event on the listener as well. Yet, it is a very important process for the survivor to express his/her experience to a listener or even a reader as we can see in Atwood’s novels, her protagonists usually come to self-awareness by expressing their experiences to the readers either by a direct testimony or in an artistic way like paintings, they want to bear witness on what has happened to them in order to overcome their trauma and become stronger.

1.7. Trauma Narratives

How literary writings express or demonstrate trauma? One of the best ways to represent the experiences which helps to explain and understand conditions of human psyche is literary imagination, especially life threatening events which affect human mind, by fictionalizing and symbolizing them. Literary works express and match trauma and explain survivors’ situation after traumatic event in their fictional world which is personalized, historicized, psychologized at the same time. Literary approaches have the ability to coordinate the readers’ feelings and empathy on the one hand and critical thoughts on the other. As Vickroy states “literary and imaginative approaches [to trauma] provide a necessary supplement to historical and psychological studies” (221). Literary works depict the traumatic or frightful actions and make them more understandable, how the survivor acts during and after the action and how witnessing or testifying is important for recovery. In addition, Whitehead states in her *Trauma Fiction* book that trauma fictions express “the denied, the repressed and the forgotten” (82), from this point of view trauma fiction has social, cultural and political functions since they express what is rejected,

oppressed or forgotten by the society or history. They may also have a strong effect on the readers' imagination, emotions and thoughts depending on the contexts and main subject of the novel if it is individual, historical or political. Hubert Zapf states that,

[Twentieth century trauma narratives] remain connected, at least in principle, to a long tradition of literary representation of 'other people's pain', whose ethical implications are tied to their fictional status and to the fact that the other people and their fates whose pain the reader is witnessing or sharing are the fates of imaginary people in a degrammatized and meta-discursive space of textuality, which however may paradoxically enhance its communicational intensity and its signifying power towards a collectively experienced historical reality. (166)

So, trauma narratives especially in the Twentieth century express "other people's pain" whose life experiences are related to fictional characters' states, so the readers are sharing the same pain, suffering and fate of the characters by imagining their situation. However, each narrative expresses or represents different experience of individual trauma, cultural or social trauma. According to Dori Laub, the listener witnesses testimonies of others, eventually he/she will be affected emotionally by the survivor's testimony (62). This process is called "empathic unsettlement". Then Dominick LaCapra makes a distinction between "empathic unsettlement" and what he calls "vicarious" empathic experience in *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, he states that the first term "one puts oneself in the other's position while recognizing the difference of that position and hence not taking in the other's place" (LaCapra

87). The second term provoking a full corresponding with the speaker, is an unhealthy response. Thereafter Felman and Laub state that the reader of narrative trauma can experience empathic settlement as well, and they call this process “life testimony” that can affect everyone like an actual event (Felman and Laub). Nevertheless, Dori Laub illustrates that the “empathic unsettlement” of the listener is necessary of the victim since the testimony will be real and reliable,

The testimony of the trauma.... includes its hearer, who is, so to speak, the blank screen on which the event comes to be inscribed for the first time. By extension, the listener to trauma comes to be co-owner of the traumatic event: through his very listening he comes to partially experience trauma in himself.... The listener has to feel the victim’s victories, defeats and silence, know them from within, so that they can assume the form of testimony. (58-9)

Although, trauma is defined as unspeakable and impossible to be narrated, most trauma texts attempt to challenge these features. According to Cathy Caruth, transforming trauma into narration will be incomprehensible and it may distort its “truth” (153). In addition, she states that since repetition is one of the features of trauma, the survivor would be in a cycle of suffering during the process of narrating. Geoffrey Hartman also implies the difficulty of expressing trauma in a proper language, yet he also states that “literary verbalization, however, still remains a basis for making the wound perceivable and the silence audible” (Hartman 259). As the traumatic experience fights to be remembered and represented, writers express it in their works by conveying its meaning and making it more understandable. However, as Ann Kaplan demonstrates in *Trauma Culture* that “telling stories about trauma

may partly achieve a certain ‘working through’ for the victim” and also “permit a kind of emphatic ‘sharing’ that moves us forward, if only by inches” (37).

Trauma essentially is represented in a specific kind of novel, known as “trauma novel”. It refers to a work of fiction which represents a deep loss or a strong fear on individual or collective levels that affect the structure of human mind. Trauma narrative mostly works with the process of remembering and narrating. Trauma is conveyed by a protagonist and it represents a traumatic event experienced by the protagonist only. For example, Elaine in *Cat’s Eye* or a group of people like Offred and the other handmaids in *The Handmaid’s Tale* the novel may be either historical or prospectively imagined. Michelle Balaev states that individual trauma which is mostly caused by social, cultural, ideologic or political reasons, is depicted in the trauma novels by the protagonist and how he/she suffers from this experience in order to make them more clear and understandable for the readers. He says that

....the trauma novel provides a picture of the individual that suffers, but paints it in such a way as to suggest that this protagonist is an “everyperson” figure. Indeed, a significant purpose of the protagonist is often to reference a historical period in which a group of people or particular culture, race, or gender, have collectively experienced massive trauma. (159)

Eventually, by describing the pain and suffering of the protagonist it seems like he/she represents or characterizes “everyperson” figure, like referring to a group of people or a single person suffering from violence, war, slavery, rape, bullying. Moreover, the trauma novel offers various techniques to represent the emotional stages of the protagonists like “landscape imagery, temporal fissures, silence, or

narrative omission--the withholding of graphic, visceral traumatic detail” (Balaev 159). It emphasizes the psychological damages of the protagonist after the traumatic experience as well. The writers use the belatedness of re-living the experience in trauma since there is a “gap” of time and feeling between two actions to make the readers think about what will happen to the protagonist next. The variety of meaning concerning the traumatic experience, represented in the fictional works indicates that the writer has an alternative view of the traumatic experience which concentrates on the reformation of identity rather than its destruction (159).

Furthermore, the place of the traumatic experience is significant in trauma fiction in terms of remembering trauma which mostly addresses cultural and political issues related to individual and community. The place is not simply related to the traumatic experience but it has the function of arranging the feelings and memories of the survivor, eventually there is a relation between the place and the survivor. Trauma fiction shows this relation by depicting the place of the traumatic experience in a very accurate way to convey the character’s identity and to understand the meaning of the traumatic experience for the survivor. Thus, the place is one of the best representations of trauma in novel because it represents suffering, remembrance and loss for the survivor , and when the protagonist faces these things in that place he/she expresses what is in his/her mind and internal crisis to understand and explain the traumatic experience.

Moreover, trauma psychiatry is occupied with literary narratives. Trauma therapy has two approaches such as exposure therapy and cognitive therapy: “Exposure therapy is based on the idea that (repeated) confrontation with the trauma is vital to recovery, while cognitive therapy aims at reorganizing the patient’s

cognitive structures which have been affected by trauma, that is, to overcome posttraumatic patterns of negative perceptions and destructive thoughts” (Schönfelder 82). Usually exposure therapy is connected to literary works, and there are two kinds of its techniques: “vivo exposure” and “imaginal exposure”. In “vivo exposure” the survivor encounters with trauma directly, it is related to situation and object. While in “imaginal exposure” the survivor encounters with trauma in his/her mind, memory, yet the confrontation takes place in his/her imagination not in reality (Rothbaum and Foa 494-96). Nevertheless, the most important thing in these processes is re-living the traumatic experience by controlling it, rather than how it is represented by talking, writing, painting or drawing. By taking the re-experiencing under control, the traumatic action will lose its effect over the survivor little by little.

CHAPTER TWO

REPRESENTATION OF TRAUMA THROUGH ART IN *CAT'S EYE*

Margaret Atwood (1939) is a Canadian novelist and poet. She was divided between Toronto where her family lives and in a country in northern Canada where her father, an entomologist, did his researches, just like her protagonist in *Cat's Eye*. After finishing her study in University of Toronto, she took her master degree in English literature from Radcliff College, Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1962. She wrote poetry collections, *Double Persephone* (1961), *The Circle Game* (1964) and *The Animal in the Country* (1968). Her novels are all centred on female protagonists, *The Handmaid's tale* (1985), *Cat's Eye* (1988), *The Blind Assassin* (2000), *Surfacing* (1972), *The Edible Woman* (1969), *The Robber Bride* (1993), *Alias Grace* (1996), *Oryx and Crake* (2003).

Female identity is considered to be the main theme of Margaret Atwood's novels: "it is impossible to consider Atwood's work without considering the central importance she places on women as characters, with every one of her novels, except *Oryx and Crake*, featuring a female protagonist, and most of her short stories doing so as well" (Macpherson 22). Atwood's main focus is on women and society, especially female identity. Her protagonists act like a creative witness on the oppression of women in the society. She depicts the life of her traumatized female protagonists and puts them at the centre of her novels to show how the society traumatizes them by silencing them, and how these female protagonists rebel against the society and persons who traumatised them. In the novels Atwood draws images of women to represent their strong points not the weakness against the social and political norms. Traumatized experience brings them pain but they reach self-

consciousness and a new insight by telling the story of their experience, Laurie Vickroy states that “Often it is portrayed as an inner voice, working through trauma, and on the verge of being made public” (133). Atwood uses flashbacks to represent their traumatic past, she creates a circular structure which brings them back to their traumatic past in order to work through it. Another feature of Atwood’s novel is that she places a monstrous female character who wants to victimize other female characters in the novel like Cordelia in *Cat’s Eye* and Serena Joy and Aunts in *The Handmaid’s Tale* in order to bring attention on women who victimize other women in the society.

1.1. *Cat’s Eye*

Cat’s Eye, Margaret Atwood’s 1988 novel is representation of trauma, development of identity from childhood to adulthood, return of the traumatic memories and working through it by using, flashbacks, dreams and especially artistic methods. The novel is distinctive in focusing on the protagonist’s journey into recovery from her trauma and towards her creativity; it is a typical *künstlerroman*, a subgenre of *Bildungsroman*. The *Bildungsroman* is a personal identity formation novel, while the *künstlerroman* is concerned with the formation of an artist. Moreover, the novel depicts the cultural and social traditions that shape and affect the protagonist’s identity and how she deals with her trauma. It also expresses the traumatised protagonist’s relation with women and men in her adulthood after experiencing the traumatic actions in her childhood and how all these elements of traumatic experience form problematized identity. Elaine Risley has a childhood trauma since she is bullied by her friends in primary school. As a result, she has experienced a difficult childhood because of her desire to be accepted by others and

more difficult adulthood. When she becomes a painter, her painting reveals and symbolizes all these repressed traumatic actions, at the same time, her paintings help her to gain a new insight and work through trauma.

The novel starts with Elaine's return to Toronto, the city which she grew up, for a retrospective show of her art. Her repressed memories about that place return also as soon as she arrives: "I can feel my throat tightening, a pin along the jawline. I've started to chew my fingers again. There's blood, a taste I remember" (Atwood 9). As a child, Elaine has never settled in a town or has a house because of her father is an entomologist, she has always travelled from place to place. Stephan, her brother, is her only friend until they settle down in Toronto after World War II. When they move to Toronto, she becomes friends with three girls Carol, Grace and Cordelia, who become her friend later. Since Elaine does not have any girlfriends before and she used to live in roads, she has difficulties in adapting the situation. She expresses that "playing with girls is different and at first I feel strange as I do it, self-consciousness, as if I'm only doing an imitation of girl. But I soon get more used to it" (57). She does not have interest in clothing or dolls before meeting them since she does not have friends before, "I'm not used to girls, or familiar with their costumes. I feel awkward around them, I don't know what to say, I know the unspoken rules of boys, but with girls I sense that I am always on the verge of some unforeseen, calamitous blunder" (47). However, she gradually begins to act, dress like them and structure her identity to be accepted by them. When Carol visits Elaine's house and sees how they are living and sleeping on the floor, she begins to talk about it in the school. With Cordelia's joining to their group, Elaine's suffering begins because

Cordelia bullies and insults her because of her lifestyle and behaviour, and start telling her that she should change everything related to her life and behaviour,

I worry about what I've said today, the expression on my face, how I walk, what I wear, because all of these things need improvement. I am not normal; I am not like other girls. Cordelia tells me so, but she will help me. Grace and Carol will help me too. It will take hard work and a long time (130)

Elaine starts to wonder if she acts properly because the girls tell her that she is not an ordinary girl like the others. Since they say that they will help her to improve herself, she accepts everything they do: "She passively succumbs to their game" (Goldblatt 277). In addition, they threaten her by saying that they will eliminate her from their group: "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 friend, my girlfriends, my best friends. I have never had any before and I'm terrified of losing them. I want to please them" (131). So she does whatever they want in order not to lose them and not to be excluded from the group. This is where Elaine's isolation begins which later leads to her trauma. Moreover, girls offend Elaine more by their speech, they keep eye on Elaine's every movement, they try to control her. Especially Cordelia causes Elaine have an identity crisis. She attempts to hurt Elaine by insulting her with speeches and behaviours which affect her identity formation negatively from her childhood into adulthood since she allows them to treat her in this way and she becomes their scapegoat in order to be as they want and not to lose them. For instance:

Cordelia brings the mirror to school. She.... takes it out of her pocket and holds the mirror up in front of me and says, “Look at yourself! Just look!” Her voice is disgusted, fed up, as if my face, all by itself, has been up to something, has gone too far. I look into the mirror but I don’t see anything out of the ordinary. It’s just my face. (158)

However, the most oppressive and traumatic treatments for Elaine by Cordelia can be listed as follows: the first one is when the three girls put Elaine in a hole where Cordelia digs it in her backyard as if they are playing burial Mary Queen, “I’m wearing a black dress.... I’m supposed to be Mary Queen of Scots, headless already” (107), but she observes that it is not a game. Elaine states that,

When I was put in the hole I knew it was a game; now I knew it is not one. I feel sadness, a sense of betrayal. Then I feel the darkness pressing down on me: then terror... When I remember back to this time in the hole, I can’t really remember what happened to me while I was in it. I can’t remember what I really felt. The point which I lost power. (107)

This is where Elaine’s identity crisis and the first traumatic action which affects her later has begun, she feels that she has vanished, at this point she loses her identity and power. Carol Osborne expresses that “When Cordelia and the other girls burry her, Elaine has no image of herself in the dark hole at this point she essentially loses her identity” (104). Fear of death and isolation are reactions experienced by trauma victim which is the same as Elaine’s response to be buried by the girls (Lifton 18). Elaine suffers from betrayal, sensibility and delayed trauma although she tries to

repress them. She starts to pull of her skin whenever she is stressed, moreover she holds her breath to faint. By fainting she thinks that she can escape from reality and unwanted situations: “Fainting is like stepping sideways, out of your body, out of time or into another time. When you wake up its late. Time has gone without you” (189). She splits from her body and escapes from the moment till it ends. Also, the cat’s eye marble which she finds and keeps in her pursue throughout her life is like a self-protection method that Elaine finds for herself. The cat’s eye marble symbolizes alienation, fear of the victimizer and also strength for Elaine.

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

When she has the marble in her hand, she can feel her thought changes, and it helps to remember her real identity and sense of an individual self. This defensive field she creates is a safe zone between herself and her victimizers also with the entire world (Davidson 47). When she finds it in her adulthood, her memories about her childhood trauma return: “I look into it, and see my entire life” (398). The second incident which makes Elaine confront with death is when Cordelia throws her hat down the bridge, and forces her to get the hat from ravine. When Elaine goes to get the hat, she falls into the icy water and almost dies, and the girls do not help her instead they run away. “Cold shoots through me Probably I’ve screamed, or some noise has come out of me, but I can’t remember hearing anything. I clutch the hat and look up at the

bridge. Nobody is there. They must have walked away, run away. That's why the counting to a hundred: so they could run away" (188). However, Elaine sees a woman that comes to rescue her from freezing to death, Elaine thinks that the woman is Virgin Mary who shows her the way for getting out of the icy water:

"it's the Virgin Mary, there can be no doubt. Even when I was praying I wasn't sure she was real, but now I know she is. Who else could walk on air like that, who else would have a glowing heart? She didn't want me in the snow. She is still with me, invisible, wrapping me in warmth and painless, she has heard me after all" (190).

This traumatic event affects Elaine's entire life although she represses all the memories and actions but she is deeply influenced by them and it can be seen in her paintings.

Most of Elaine's dreams demonstrate the traumatic events which traumatic survivors suffer from. They reveal her fears, isolation and threat of death especially after the accident of falling into the icy water. Her fears and anxieties appear only in her dreams; they represent her fear of death and its self-destructiveness. In one of her dreams she sees a dead, decayed raven which reveals her fear of death and her inner death, "I've seen dead animals before, dead frogs, dead rabbits, but this raven is deader" (144). In another nightmare, she dreams of falling of the bridge over the ravine and the cat's eye marble breaks through her, "it's [cat's eye] falling down out of the sky, straight towards my head, brilliant and glassy. It hits me, passes right into me, but without hurting, except that it's cold. The cold awakes me up" (145). This dream suggests her emotional numbing. Elaine needs to be saved, she calls her

mother but she cannot do anything. This dream takes her back to the traumatic accident and the marble that goes through her, represents the break of her protective field which makes her again feel the coldness of the water and confront with death. Elaine states that “None of my dreams is about Cordelia” (145), but her fears and anxieties are influenced by Cordelia.

Although Elaine is afraid of the girls especially Cordelia, she tries to repress and forget her suffering, fears and weakness, eventually she decides not to play with them, not to do what they want and not to allow them to control her,. When Cordelia tells her that she is rude, Elaine answers “I’m still a coward, still fearful; none of that has changed. But I turn and walk away from her. It’s like stepping off a cliff, believing the air will hold you up. And it does. I see that I don’t have to do what she says, and, worse and better, I’ve never had to do what she says. I can do what I like” (193). After acting bravely and ignoring Cordelia’s command when she tells her not to go, Elaine feels free and comfortable. She says that “I have been fooled. I have been stupid. My anger is as much at myself as at them” (193). She regrets for allowing the girls to bully her and for the cruel things they have made. This attitude ensures Elaine’s dominance over Cordelia in high school, her personality changes to be like Cordelia. When they were children, Cordelia used to frighten Elaine with stories of dead people. Nevertheless, Elaine begins to frighten Cordelia and her classmates in the same way Cordelia did. Elaine tells her that she is a vampire, “I’m just telling you the truth. You’re my friend, I thought it was time you knew. I’m really dead. I’ve been dead for years”(255), Cordelia nearly believes her. In spite of the fact that Elaine does not want to be like Cordelia, she does not want to change her personality. Yet, her personality unintentionally changes due to all the attempts

she makes to be accepted by Cordelia, Carol and Grace and many traumatic situations she experienced because of them. Moreover, when the drunken woman asks for help whose eyes are green just like Cordelia, Elaine forces herself to believe that she is not a bad person since she gives her money for her help, but she says that “I am fool, to confuse this with this goodness. I am not good. I know too much to be good. I know myself. I know myself to be vengeful, greedy, secretive and sly” (196). She starts to compare between her new identity, which emerges because of her trauma, and the old one. She is afraid of transforming into Cordelia and she does not trust Cordelia or any other women because “other woman is ourselves” as Mitchell expresses (in Palmer 129). As a result, Elaine actually does not trust her new identity. Even when Cordelia asks for her help to escape from the mental institution because she tries to commit suicide when they are adult, Elaine refuses to help her. She becomes angry since she wants to help Cordelia at first. Elaine shows similar attitudes to Susie, her classmate in art school, who becomes pregnant by Elaine’s lover Josef. Elaine finds her nearly dead and takes her to hospital but she puts the blame on Susie more than Josef. She remembers Mrs.Smeath’s speech, Grace’s mother, when she was talking about the girls’ behaviour towards Elaine “It serves her right” (337). Paradoxically, she is happier and more comfortable with boys than girls: “As a result of her experience as victim of displaced oppression, Elaine turns away from the ghettoized lives of girls and women and toward the largely separate sphere of the masculine, which she apprehends as a relatively safe haven from female machination” (Hite 136). She does not feel that she belongs to women, according to her, women are prejudiced, like Cordelia, Grace and Carol, and this

belief frightens her. But she sees that “the boys are secret allies” (181), and thinks that she can deal with boys.

Although Elaine can communicate with boys in high school, it does not help her with marriages. Her lack of self-confidence and her childhood trauma affect her identity formation from childhood to adulthood; they also influence her relationships and marriages. In art school she has an affair with her teacher Josef Hrbik; he has also a powerful identity similar to Cordelia. He tries to improve Elaine’s character and her style, just like Cordelia. He describes Elaine as: “an unfinished woman ... but here you will be finished”(298), he starts to tell her what she should put on “ you should wear purple dresses,...it would be improvement”(331). When he tries to change Elaine, she does not object to him because she used to obey the girls and she wants to improve and change herself by art. Yet, when she realizes that Josef will not help her to improve herself, she leaves him. As Osborne demonstrates, “No men in *Cat’s Eye* is given such a power; husbands, lovers, and even male psychologists do not provide the insight that Elaine must achieve by her own” (97). Later on, Elaine marries her classmate Jon, who has a daughter. Eventually, she has to take care of her daughter instead of painting, “I have lost confidence: perhaps all I will ever be is what I am now” (401). This situation makes her lose her own identity. Due to Jon’s betrayal and ending their marriage and her sense of losing identity, Elaine begins to hear Cordelia’s voice telling her to commit suicide and end her life,

Do it. Come on. Do it. This voice doesn’t offer a choice; it has the force of an order.... I know it wasn’t really there. Also I know I heard it. It wasn’t frightening voice, in itself. Not menacing but

excited, as if proposing an escapade, a prank, a treat. Something treasured, and secret. The voice of a nine-years-old child (373-74).

She cuts her wrist with knife but she is saved by Jon. This condition symbolizes the return of the repressed and she cannot get rid of it until she faces her trauma and works through it. Her second marriage is with Ben, who is a travel agent. Elaine cheats on Ben with Jon when she comes to Toronto for her retrospective art. When Jon's girlfriend comes and sees them, she does not say anything but she throws a paper bag full of warm spaghetti and goes out. Elaine expresses her emotion by saying "I did not pity her at all. In a way I admired her. I admired her lack of compunction, the courage of her bad manner, the energy of simple rage" (197). Gernes states that "although she has become a successful, 'feminist' artist, she carries with her childhood presence who continually surface in her work" (144). For a long time Elaine feels that she is worthless in her relationship with women because of Cordelia's behaviour towards her. She utters these words, "I feel I am without worth, that nothing I can do is of any value, least of all to myself" (45).

Moreover, when Elaine has two daughters, her fear and anxieties continue. She worries about her daughters; she thinks that they can also experience bullying and identity transformation. She fears that her daughters may suffer from what she experienced before. She wants to protect her daughters from what she has suffered because of her friend: "Most mothers worry when their daughters reach adolescence, but I was the opposite. I relaxed, I sighed with relief. Little girls are cute and small only to adults. To one another they are not cute. They are life-sized" (129). This is another incident which is influenced by her childhood trauma and identity formation.

Elaine's traumatic experience influences her identity, dreams, her relationships with her friends, husband and daughter, then these experiences created her art. Her paintings help her to depict her childhood trauma and her identity as a woman. Her paintings bear witness to her past, to the girls' terrible behaviours, traumatic actions and help her to recover from what is repressed in her unconscious mind which makes her gain new perceptions, insight and finally work through her traumatic experience. Although her paintings represent all the cruel things that happen to her and her weakness, they give her a kind of self-control. They enable her to create a distance between herself and traumatic experiences by gazing, she punishes her victimizer in her paintings. (Vickroy 134). In one of her paintings called "Falling Women" describes three girls falling from a bridge. Three girls symbolize Cordelia, Carol and Grace, while the bridge depicts Elaine's falling from the bridge when she was child and confronted with death. The second painting is called "Half a Face", in which Elaine paints Cordelia's face but behind her face there is another face covered with piece of rag which is like a motto of head of an animal. The half face behind Cordelia's face represents Elaine's incomplete identity because of Cordelia. The third painting is Elaine's self-portrait titled "Cat's Eye". She says that "At a distance there are three small figures, dressed in the winter clothing of the girls of forty years ago. They walk forward, their faces shadowed, against a field of snow" (446). In this painting again it is simple to observe that Elaine is still haunted by her traumatic memory of Cordelia, Grace and Carol. The painting makes Elaine bring people and events from her past back to life and represent them differently. The fourth one, is "Unified Field Theory",

Stephen Hawking explains that the difficulties of constructing “a complete unified theory of everything in the universe” are met by “finding partial theories that describe a limited range of happenings and by neglecting other effects or approximating them by numbers (Tolan 192).

Elaine wants to create an identical unified theory in her life. She brings various images of her traumatic past and her artistic vision. The last painting is “Virgin of lost things”, which portrays an unknown cloaked figure holding a big version of cat’s eye marble: “The picture reconciles the opposites of heaven, earth and water, of the limited and infinite, of life and death, of the seen and unseen” (LeClaire 79). The Virgin hovers over the bridge with stars behind her and trees around her. Then she describes what is below the bridge, “the clear blue water, because the creek flows there, underneath the earth, underneath the bridge, down from the cemetery. The land of the dead people” (431). Death represents Elaine’s confrontation with her consciousness with the fear of death after the traumatic experience in the bridge. It may also symbolize the loss of the people she loved once, such as her brother, father, mother and her friends. Furthermore, death represents her forgotten or repressed memories in her unconscious mind, and the recovery of them by her paintings and The Virgin in this painting gives a new insight to her. As Vickroy states “ Having once helped Elaine evade death in the ravine water, she is symbolically linked path toward insight and escaping thralldom to the traumatic past” (140). Elaine breaks through her traumatic memories by her paintings. When she revisits the bridge, she states that

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. I am the older one know, I'm the stronger. (419)

She realizes herself as a mature woman, her fears and isolation are vanished once she witnesses and confronts with all of her traumatic experiences and works through them.

... Cordelia I want to see. There are things I need to ask her... I need to ask her why.... She will have her own version. I am not the centre 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 (411).

To sum up, when Elaine works through her trauma and identity crisis by testifying and witnessing them by remembering her forgotten memories of her childhood and through her paintings, she wants to confront with Cordelia in order to ask for the reason of her terrible behaviours. Moreover, Elaine expects that Cordelia may also have fears, loneliness and pain when she was a child, consequently, she wanted Elaine to experience the same things. Elaine wants to see her and hear Cordelia's story, since she realizes that her fears and pain do not belong to her but to

Cordelia. As Elaine regained self-knowledge and self-confidence, she wishes to see Cordelia in order to show her the benefits of new sight.



CHAPTER THREE
REPRESENTATION OF TRAUMA IN PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY IN *THE*
HANDMAID'S TALE

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Margaret Atwood depicts a patriarchal society where women are oppressed by men. Atwood represents a dystopian future at the beginning of the twenty-first century in Republic of Gilead that has replaced the United State of America. As a result of the low birthrates, caused by pollution, women with “viable ovaries” (Atwood 186) become handmaids. They bear children for the infertile wives of the commanders. However, in order to understand the politics of Republic of Gilead it is important to refer to the term dystopia. The dystopian genre is a direct opposite of utopia. Gregory Claeys states that “[d]ystopia’ is often used... to describe a fictional portrayal of a society in which evil, or negative social and political developments, have the upper hand, or as a satire of utopian aspirations which attempts to show up their fallacies...” (107). Atwood’s novel is a typical dystopian fiction in terms of politics, social living and religion; she depicts a misogynic theocracy, a nightmarish society and the oppression of women in Gilead. As Carol Ann Howell states “...Gilead is a totalitarian regime run on patriarchal lines derived from the Old Testament and seventeenth-century American Puritanism plus a strong infusion of American New Right ideology of the 1980s” (127). The regime imposes extreme gender roles: women cannot read and write, moreover they cannot have job, property or money. In addition they put women in groups who dress in different colors that symbolize the class or group they belong to. The novel is narrated by the perspective of the protagonist, Offred. She witnesses her victimization in Gilead by recording her story, memories of her life before the

regime, her past at the education center and her condition as a handmaid in the Commander's house. She suffers from identity crisis and PTSD, haunted by her traumatic experiences' flashbacks and dreams. The novel consists of tapes that Offred narrates her story and addresses future audience at the end of the novel in "Historical Notes" where Offred's story has been examined in a lecture in 2195, two centuries after the fall of Gilead. Offred becomes a handmaid in Gilead after her failing to escape with her daughter and husband to Canada. Her name Offred comes from her owner's name the Commander Fred. They meet in the Ceremony with the companion of Serena Joy, the Commander's aging wife. The Commander invites Offred to his office and asks her to play scrabble with him at night. He gives her magazines and talks about the outside world which is forbidden in Gilead. In addition, he gives her clothes, makeup and takes her to Jezebel, a secret night club where the Commanders go. When Serena Joy discovers that Offred went with the Commander outside, she calls the Eye. Meanwhile, a black van arrives to take Offred. Nick, the Commander's driver and the person whom Offred has an affair by the request of Serena Joy, tells Offred that the persons in the van are the agents of Mayday, a secret liberation group. Offred's end and future is ambiguous since the novel ends after the persons' taking her from the Commander's house.

The protagonist, Offred, attempts to work through her traumatic experiences and to find out her own identity in the patriarchal society of Gilead by the act of remembering, re-experiencing and testifying them. Throughout the novel the traumatic events and identity crisis of Offred are narrated by her. She witnesses her own identity formation and traumatic actions in order to survive. Remembering what happened is the only way for Atwood's protagonist to overcome her traumatic

experiences and identity crisis to gain new insight. From this perspective it is important to illustrate and analyse Offred's experiences in Gilead as a handmaid and her traumatic experience when she loses her daughter and husband.

Although Offred narrates the story, she does not reveal her real name before the regime since it is not allowed to be used by the new regime. Her identity is defined by her owner, the Commander, her new identity is given and formed by the Gileadean regime therefore she has an identity crisis.

“My name isn't Offred, I have another name, which nobody uses now because it's forbidden I keep the knowledge of this name like something hidden, some treasure I'll come back to dig up, one day. I think of this name as buried. This name has an aura around it, like an amulet, some charm that's survived from an unimaginable distant past. (108)

Offred's real name is like her real identity that belongs to her past before the regime and oppressed or “buried” by the patriarchal society. She believes that by using the name which belongs to Commander, who is in military and a supporter of the regime, she adopts his name, Fred and the name is combined with “Of”. Her identity and existence is connected to him. As is stated before, the Gileadean regime divides women into different groups defined by their job such as Handmaids, Marthas, Wives, and it dehumanizes women. For instance, the Red Center which educates women to be Handmaids who are responsible of reproduction, bearing children for the Commanders. Offred and many other women are imprisoned there to be “nuns of fertility” (Ketterer 209). As Hilda Staels conveys in her critical essay “Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*: Resistance through Narrating,”

Everything and everyone is substantiated. People's identity is supposed to coalesce with the coded concepts and the predicated state by which they are defined. Handmaid's are supposed to merely think of themselves 'as seeds,' as objects with a procreative function that should save the world from threat of sterility, as 'two-legged wombs, that's all: sacred vessels, ambulatory chalices.'

(Staels 116)

Women in Gilead begin to lose their identity since they have to be like productive machines or sexual objects for men in order to bear children for them. Another thing that affects female identity and self-esteem in *The Handmaid's Tale* is clothing, in addition to dividing women in groups, each group is dressing in a particular colour which makes them hide their identity. Offred says "everything except the wings around my face is red: the colour of blood, which defines us The white wings too are prescribed issue; they are to keep us from seeing, but also from being seen" (11). Handmaids are not allowed to see anything around them, in other words, they have to act like they are invisible. Moreover, there are Econowives besides the other groups, they cannot be neither Handmaids nor Marthas. They are "in striped dresses, red and blue and green and cheap and skimpy, that mark women of poorer men These women are not divided into functions. They have to do everything, if they can" (32). They are responsible of finishing the works of Handmaids, Marthas and Wives. The other group are Aunts who are responsible of teaching the rules and politics of Gilead and they repress the identity of women who will become Handmaids. Aunts are "post-menopausal or unmarried sterile women" (Ketterer 209). Other group are women who do not belong to any of these groups named "Unwomen". Mostly, they

are infertile, black or homosexual women, who are sent to “Colonies” to clean “the toxic dumps and the radiation spills” (323). Finally, women who can be seen in car only, they cannot be seen in streets are Commanders’ Wives. From this point of view, women in Gilead are not identified by their own identity but as a group. In other words, their existence is related to the group they belong to and the colour they wear. They are divided according to their benefits for Gilead.

The passivity of women’s in male-centred society affects or even destroys their individual identity and self-confidence. Offred remembers the time before the Gileadean regime when she could communicate with people and dress as she wants. For instance, some Japanese tourists come to see the system in the Republic of Gilead because they are eager to see the Handmaids and their red clothes, Offred sees their clothes and lifestyle. She remembers the time before the new regime “I used to dress like that. That was freedom. *Westernized*, they used to call it” (38). Another example is when she sees the Commander reading a book, she describes her feelings by saying “He has something we don’t have, he has the word. How we squandered it, once” (114). Gilead prevents any communication or interaction between human being, they should be passive. For instance, flat surfaces are the only things that the handmaids are allowed to see, their eyes should not see anything else. Moreover, choosing clothes, communicating with each other or reading and writing are not the only things that are prohibited in Gilead. Choosing your own death is also prohibited, they do not have the right to take their life, since it means freedom for Gilead. Offred says that,

I know why there is no glass, in front of the watercolour picture of blue irises, and why the window opens only partly and why the

glass in it is shatterproof. It isn't running away from they are afraid of. We wouldn't get far. It's those other escapes, the ones you can open in yourself, given a cutting edge. (10).

So, when Offred remembers the old regime that she could control her own life and how her freedom and identity are restricted, she says "Is that how we lived, then? But we lived as usual. Everyone does, most of the time. Whatever is going isn't the same as ignorance; you have to work at it" (74). Offred represents that they have lived in ignorance during the old regime like in Gilead. She was passive at that time as well, she did not do anything to support women's rights, although her mother was a feminist activist. In Gilead women are prohibited from reading, writing, even thinking and sharing ideas, Offred says that "we learned to whisper almost without sound" (4). Since the patriarchal society forces women to be silent and prevents them from being active and free, women lose their self-confidence and oppress their feeling, thoughts and the horrible traumatic action which they experienced before and during the new regime. Their memories of past and desires should be erased. According to Aunt Lydia, who is one of the instructors in the Red Centre, there are two kinds of freedom: freedom to and freedom from. "In the days of anarchy, it was freedom to. Now you are being given freedom from. Don't underrate it" (33). According to Hilda Staels the meaning of freedom from is "the constitution of an identity and from the struggle for self-definition" (457). They think that the old regime was not safe for women, they should protect and defend themselves from the malevolence of men. While in Gileadean regime, the rules protect women from bad things since they do not have rights like wearing whatever they want, having a job, money or property. Eventually, according to the new regime there is no need to

protect themselves, women, since they are protected by the society and their rules. While the situation is different for Offred and the other women, she describes her situation in Gilead by stating that “I am like a child here, there are some things I must not be told. What you don’t know won’t hurt you” (70). She ignores the reality and stays passive in order not to be hurt, if she does not know anything she will be safe in this nightmarish society. She is treated as an object, she should not speak, listen, see and think just like an object, “My self is a thing what it must present is a made thing, not something born”(86). She is important only because she belongs to the Commander not because she is an individual person. These things affect Offred not just physically but psychologically as well. Kernis emphasizes that

Self-esteem is an important psychological construct because it is a central component of individuals’ daily experience; it refers to the way that people feel about themselves, which reflects and effects their ongoing transactions with their environment and the people they encounter in it. (1)

Getting used to her situation in Gileaden regime is Offred’s only chance to be safe. She ignores the whole situation and tries to get used to her new passive identity since she loses her own individual one, even if she is against the new regime and influenced by her traumatic experience, she acts as if she is passive. For example, when Ofglen, another Handmaid, who is a member of underground organization which is called Mayday, asks Offred to tell and get information about the Commander when she goes into his room she does not help her. According to J. Brooks Bouson, Offred is “the victim of circumstances, not an agent capable of directing the plot of her own life”, and Maroula Joannou “sees Offred’s primary goal

as physical survival” (in Weiss “Offred’s Complicity”). Furthermore, Handmaids and the other women in Gilead are always watched by The Eye, the secret police in the new regime, and they should keep in mind that they are constantly observed by them. Since she loses her faith and identity in this patriarchal society, she does not struggle to change the whole situation. All she wants is just surviving from her current condition.

Though, Offred’s acting passively, her thoughts about the Gileadean society and her situation as a victim in it may be regarded as active in terms of her identity formation. She is a minor activist. She does not feel that she belongs to this society, she does not trust anyone and is very susceptible. She does small activities, for instance she steals butter for her skin,

I rub butter over my face, work into the skin of my hands. There’s no longer any hand lotion or face cream, not for us. Such things are considered vanities.... As long we do this, butter our skin to keep is soft, we can believe that we will be touched again, in love or desire.

We have ceremonies of our own, private ones. (125)

According to Wheeler “for Offred the small feat of nourishing her dry skin is an act of defiance against the systems that oppress her Despite her position as a slave-like vessel for childbearing, she refuses to surrender her true identity” (1). Offred’s memories of her past are also a kind of rebellion against the new regime, they make her believe that “there must be resistance, a government in exile. Someone must be out there. I believe in the resistance as I believe there can be no light without shadow; or rather, no shadow unless there is also light” (134). In addition, Offred’s friendship with Ofglen, with her rebellious friend Moira and her affair with Nick are

all examples of her activism, however she does not take part in active resistance. Stephanié Barbé states that,

Significantly, the rebellious females of Offred's world are all defeated: Ofglen commits suicide in order to protect the Mayday under... ground; Moira's escape attempt is thwarted and she is imprisoned in the city's brothel; Offred's own mother is glimpsed in a film-documentary about the dreaded toxic-waste colonies. To survive, Offred seems to suggest, one must surrender. (in Petterson 12)

Their failure in challenging the Gileadean regime makes other women feel desperate and lose their self-confidence. When Ofglen is captivated and replaced by another Handmaid, Offred states that "One and one and one and one doesn't equal four. Each one remains unique" (248). This statement also proves Offred's minor activity, since she believes that each person is a unique person and he/she should not be identified by groups. Offred's acts are passive in spite of her relations with other activists but she does not do anything to change the rules or system. It is the main concern of Gilead to make women passive and lose their individual identity.

Moreover, Offred and the other women are alienated. Since, they are identified according to their roles or benefits like serving and reproducing and each one belongs to a group. They lose their individual identity and have a sense of alienation. They are alienated from their own identity. They are only treated and seen as sexual objects who bear children, "We are containers, it's only the inside of our bodies that are important. The outside can become hard and wrinkled, for all the care, like the shell of a nut" (124). In Gilead women are only related or identified for their

body not for their mind and individuality. According to MacKinnon “objectification is bad because it cuts women off from full self-expression and self-determination- from, in effect, their humanity” (in Nussbaum 250). Their female identity vanishes since they are objected by the society.

In *The Handmaid's Tale* women are not oppressed and alienated by men they are treated in the same way by women, just like the protagonist in *Cat's Eye*. For instance, Aunts have the highest status among the other women in Gilead. Their main job is oppressing the identity and desires of women who will become Handmaids. They are creating women who obey their Commanders. This may be regarded as one of the main concerns of the Republic of Gilead. Aunts can also use violence against the Handmaids if they break the rules or do not listen to them. They can put “some kind of spill or drug” in their food to keep them calm (91). Karen Stein states in her book *Margaret Atwood Revisited* that Aunt Lydia and the other Aunts are the only power in Gilead that control “women appetites for freedom and knowledge, slimming down their minds and behaviours to be acceptable to Gilead’s standards”(82). They do not use violence only physically but also psychologically, they treat the Handmaids as an object or machine by saying “Remember. For our purpose your feet and your hands are not essential” (118). Offred and the other women in Gilead are alienated and rejected in many different ways. She is separated from her life before the new regime, her family, she has lost her identity and self-confidence. She is not rejected only by men but by women as well. She has no one to trust except her friend Moira, who has been her friend before the new regime. Joseph Porfert emphasizes that “the success of the patriarchy depends on female self-regulation, which is marked as female collaboration, and the women of Gilead are

trained to place their allegiance to men before their allegiance to women” (68). This is exactly what the Aunts teach the Handmaids in Red Centre. They force them to be loyal and obedient to men and their patriarchal society. It is the system of Republic of Gilead.

In addition to all these horrible situations and identity crisis that Offred experiences as a handmaid, she is haunted by dreams and flashbacks of her traumatic experience of losing her daughter and her husband Luke. She lost them when they were trying to escape to Canada. They were captured by the new regime’s police and she does not know anything about her daughter or Luke, she even does not have an idea if they are alive or not since she hears a gunshot just before fainting. When Offred talks about this action, she states later that it happened many years ago but she tries to remember the details. Since she was not fully conscious during the action, the details are repressed in her unconscious mind. Eventually, she is belatedly experiencing the action by forcing herself to remember it. In one of her dreams she has fully experienced the traumatic action when she lost her daughter,

I can see her, going away from me, through the trees which are already turning, red and yellow, holding out her arms to me, being carried away. The bell wakes me; and then Cora, knocking at my door. I sit up, on the rug, wipe my wet face with my sleeve. Of all the dreams this is the worst. (97)

She remembers holding her daughter’s hand when they were trying to escape from the new regime’s police in the forest. Nevertheless, when Cora wakes her up, she realizes that it is a dream again. She is suffering from experiencing the traumatic event repeatedly. Even when she dreams about her past life with Luke, she says

“Luke, I say. He doesn’t answer. Maybe he doesn’t hear me. It occurs to me that he may not be alive” (96).

In spite of the ambiguous ending of the novel, since Offred’s destiny is not clear, but the tapes that are mentioned in the “Historical Notes” which are recorded by a Handmaid named Offred indicates her survival from Gilead, her traumatic experience and finally her new insight. The novel ends when a black van comes to take Offred because of Serena Joy’s discovery about the Commander’s and Offred’s secret meetings in his office. Meanwhile, Nick tells Offred that she can trust him and the persons who come to take her, “it’s all right. It’s Mayday. Go with them” (305). However, Offred’s last words are not clear but ambiguous, “Whether this is my end or a new beginning I have no way of knowing: I have given myself over into the hands of strangers, because it can’t be helped. And so I step up, into the darkness within; or else the light” (307). It is never known if Nick is “her saviour or betrayer” (Gottlieb 109). The end is open, it could be considered a negative or positive ending.

To conclude, Offred works through her trauma by retelling her story, witnessing her traumatic experiences and also observing her identity formation during her living in Gilead. E. Ann Kaplan states that “Recording and formulating a narrative through memory partly enables Offred to work through her trauma.”(67). By recording her testimony in tapes, Offred has recovered her memories of loss which makes her work through her traumatic experience and from being melancholic person. The “Historical Notes on *The Handmaid’s Tale*” which is the last part of the novel and it is represented as “ *partial transcript of the proceedings of the Twelfth Symposium on Gileadean Studies, held as part of the International Historical Association Convention, held at the University of Denay, Nunavit, on June,*

2195”(379). It represents and explains how things return back to normal after the Republic of Gilead’s fall, and it is composed of the talk by Professor James Darcy Piexioto from Cambridge University. He compiles thirty fragments of Offred’s tapes recording, which analyse the division of her story into forty-six different parts under fifteen subtitles. The tapes contain Offred’s narration of Pre-Gilead and her past in Red Centre, where she explains her present “reality” as a Handmaid. By recording her voice Offred wants the listener/ the reader to witness her traumatic experience during this patriarchal regime, “I wait. I compose myself,” she says. “My self is a thing I must now compose, as one composes

a speech.”(86). Testifying and using her double voice to reveal her experience, makes her fully recover from her trauma, gain her self-confidence and have a new insight. Although she is a minor activist, she does not claim her rights or does not have desire to change the new regime, but she could keep her individuality and identity by testifying her story. She succeeds in keeping her “sanity”, “Sanity is a valuable possession; I hoard it the way people once hoarded money. I save it, so I will have enough, when the time comes.”(140). Theodora Hermes states that “ in this dystopian world where language is manipulated and guarded and women are not permitted to be reader or writer, Offred’s ability to relay her story seems like a victory in her effort to resist the Gilead society and maintain her own personal identity”(11). As opposed to other women who could not escape from Gileadean regime, Offred does escape from Gilead and succeeds in protecting her identity and to work through her trauma by retelling her story, “I would like to believe this is a story I’m telling. I need to believe it. I must believe it. Those who can believe that such stories are only stories have better chance. If it is a story I’m

telling, then I have control over the ending” (39). In spite of her sorrow for telling such a horrible story about her and other women’s condition in a male-centred Gileadean society, she states, “I’m sorry there is so much pain in this story. I’m sorry it’s in fragments, like a body caught in crossfire or pulled apart by force,” (343). Then she explains how she should get rid of these bad memories,

But I keep on going with this sad and hungry and sordid, this limping and mutilated story, because after all I want you to hear it ...By telling you anything at all I’m at least believing in you, I believe you’re there, I believe you into being. Because I’m telling you this story I will your existence. I tell, therefore you are. (343)

Offred believes that if she witnesses her experiences in Gilead, she can work through from her traumatic loss and her identity crisis. She searches for a listener to witness her trauma and she achieves it by recording her voice.

CONCLUSION

The Handmaid's Tale and *Cat's Eye* by Margaret Atwood reflect on terrible traumatic experiences, identity formation and transformation especially of the female protagonists and working through traumas by testifying in different ways. Both of the novels have been analysed in the analytical chapters in terms of the thematical representation of trauma and identity formation of the female protagonists, although each of them is influenced by different traumatic experience and identity crisis in societies and cultures. Both of the protagonists react and recover from their traumatic experience in different ways as Freud states in his essay *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. In *Cat's Eye*, Margaret Atwood represents the protagonist, Elaine who is bullied by her friends in the school in her childhood which causes her to suffer from a deep repression and identity crisis from her childhood into adulthood. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood depicts a dystopian and male-centred society which divides the women into different groups under terrible circumstances that make them suffer from traumatic neurosis and identity crisis.

In *Cat's Eye*, the protagonist Elaine Risley suffers from traumatic neurosis and identity crisis since she was bullied by her friends Carol, Grace and Cordelia which affects her till adulthood. Since she does not have any girlfriends before her moving to Toronto, she tries to adapt to their values and habits in order not to be excluded from the group. The girls especially Cordelia treat her horribly because they tell her that they will help her to be like the other girls and Elaine does whatever they want in order to be like them, eventually her identity changes or transforms to fit her friends and the society that she lives in. However, the most horrible event which makes Elaine go through a traumatic experience is her falling from the bridge

into freezing water because Cordelia forces her to go and take her hat which she throws into the water and she is almost frozen to death in the water. Elaine's experience of this traumatic event affects her identity formation greatly. Her traumatic experience returns to haunt her in flashbacks and dreams when she returns to Toronto after a long time for her retrospective art show since the traumatic event is belatedly experienced because the victim is not conscious during the action so it is repressed in her unconscious mind, as is stated by Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and Cathy Caruth in *Unclaimed Experience*. Elaine's missing or repressed memories of the past return as soon as she arrives, she begins to witness her past and confront with her fears. Her traumatic experience and being bullied by her friends influence and transform her identity and make her lose her self-confidence in adulthood. She does not trust anyone especially women, therefore, she does not have close relationships. She does not feel comfortable with women; she rather likes being with men, because of her childhood experiences.

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Margaret Atwood represents a future dystopian, patriarchal society that oppresses and traumatizes women in a great deal. Offred, the protagonist of the novel, suffers from traumatic neurosis and identity transformation like Elaine in *Cat's Eye* but in different circumstances. The Gileadean regime oppresses women and puts them into categories like Handmaids, Aunts, Wives, Marthas, and Unwomen. They are divided according to their benefits and roles in the new regime, which affect their identity as women. The main concern of Gileadean regime is to make women passive and make them lose their individual identity in order to fit the new patriarchal society. Offred is haunted by her dreams and flashbacks of her past life and her traumatic memory of losing her daughter and

husband, Luke. Since she loses them while they were trying to escape to Canada from the new regime but they were captured by the police. She does not know if they are alive or dead, her dreams are mainly influenced by this traumatic experience. Moreover, Offred is suffering from identity crisis, her old identity before the new regime and her new identity in Gilead keep to conflict within her. Offred like the other handmaids cannot control her life and her body since they are used as “container” to bear children for the Commander’s. She is treated like an object or slave. She, like the other women in Gilead, does not have right to read, write, speak and even think; all these things are forbidden in Gilead. Consequently, Offred loses her individual identity and her self-confidence.

For Freud, Shoshana Felman and other critics mentioned in the theoretical part, remembering and witnessing the traumatic experiences and memories of past, are an important process of working through trauma and identity crisis. It helps the survivor to work through trauma and gain new insight. When Elaine in *Cat’s Eye* becomes a painter, her paintings depict mainly her traumatic memories of being bullied by Cordelia, Carol and Grace. Each one of her paintings reflects her fears, thoughts and emotions of her past. However, Elaine witnesses her past through her paintings which are considered to be as the essential reasons for her working through trauma, identity transformation and gain self-knowledge. While Offred in *The Handmaid’s Tale* witnesses her traumatic experience and her identity crisis by recording her voice in tapes, “talking cure” help her to work through her trauma and her identity crisis. By witnessing and confronting with her fears and all the horrible events that she goes through, Offred gains her individual identity, and self-confidence.

To conclude, Margaret Atwood presents trauma and identity formation of the protagonists *Cat's Eye* and *The Handmaid's Tale* moreover, there is a critical moment in her novels where the protagonists make a distance with the trauma and become aware of their real situation. The social conditions in *Cat's Eye* make Elaine suffer from her childhood till adulthood since she was trying to adjust them, and the social and political conditions of the patriarchal society in *The Handmaid's Tale* make Offred suffer from identity transformation and traumatic neurosis. There is no similarity in the social and political structures in the novels. However, the common points between two novels are the fears and suffering of the female protagonists and their working through their traumas and identity crisis. In spite of the fact that, both of the protagonists use different ways to witness or testify their stories, their traumatic experience, identity formation and transformation, they get new insight, self-knowledge at the end. Both of the protagonists break their mute and passive characters and express the fears and traumatic actions in their mind and gain self-knowledge and power in their lives.

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