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A New Sense of Time in Female Development: Linearity and Cyclicity in Atwood's *Surfacing* and *Cat's Eye*

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A New Sense of Time in Female Development:
Linearity and Cyclicity in Atwood's *Surfacing* and *Cat's Eye*

BY

Diana L. Unes

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
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Chapter 1: Time and the female Bildungsroman

Traditionally, the Bildungsroman has followed male characters in a linear fashion through the lifelong process of seeking identity. Female characters have been ascribed prefabricated roles--wife, mother, housekeeper--with the assumption that these roles help women define and understand themselves; or women have been killed off or suffered from madness because they failed to fit these roles. Only recently have women in fiction been given a wider range of roles and the freedom to explore who they are. From the adventure tale to the confessional novel, we are seeing a less rigid structure and a more autonomous protagonist in fictions of female development. The self-exploration emphasizes a circular return rather than a linear structure: feminist critics argue the process of seeking one's identity is different for men and women. This difference is an area of focus for contemporary feminist novelists in their effort to clarify the roles of women in fiction. Margaret Atwood's Surfacing and Cat's Eye are two novels that explore this issue. Both novels suggest that female development involves not only a new conceptualization of experience, education, and maturity, but also a new sense of time. This new sense of time is what I want to explore. While feminist critics have discussed female development in many ways, they have not adequately analyzed Atwood's experimental use of time--one that involves Stephen Hawking and Julia Kristeva.

Annis Pratt, in Archetypal Patterns, was one of the first feminist critics to explore how female differed from

male development. At first glance the titles of Annis Pratt's chapters "the novel of development" and "novels of rebirth and transformation" seem as though they must be speaking specifically about Margaret Atwood's novels Cat's Eye and Surfacing. The two chapters do attempt to illustrate time and nature and their roles in the development of characters' identities and the attainment of inner reconciliation.

In her "development" chapter, Pratt discusses the Bildungsroman, "the novel of development," the search for meaning in life as represented in fiction. Pratt depicts the search for identity as a linear process, using such phrases as "delineates a turning point" and "bring the hero from childhood to maturity" (13). Pratt does acknowledge that for women the process is less linear than for men. The female Bildungsroman, she writes, makes "the woman's initiations less a self-determined progression towards maturity than a regression from full participation in adult life. It seems more appropriate to use the term Entwicklungsroman, the novel of mere physical passage from one age to the other without psychological development" (36). In trying to account for the non-linear process of women's development, Pratt is complicating the issue by suggesting that the only solution is to introduce the concept of the Entwicklungsroman, thereby eliminating the process of self-discovery. Atwood's novels Cat's Eye and Surfacing, however, do succeed in emphasizing women's psychological development without conforming to a linear structure.

More relevant is Pratt's "rebirth" chapter, which discusses Surfacing. Here Pratt refers to motherhood as eternal, an important notion suggesting that women are cyclical beings and therefore need more than a linear structure; however, the cyclicity that is implied in this chapter is vague. The focus is on "[turning] away from society and towards the universe as a whole, reconciling the spiritual to the physical through the vehicle of [nature]" (158). Neither chapter introduces the relationship of women to circular patterns, to cyclical time--a relationship I believe to be crucial to a woman's growth and "transformation." Given that the "novel of development" gives us a linear depiction of time and that "novels of rebirth and transformation" focus on the woman of nature, then perhaps combining the material of the two chapters to illustrate an eternal dimension of time will produce a more complete version of the feminine component of cyclicity and of women's relation to the earth, including the intuitive forces that guide women through development and self-realization.

Carol Osborne comments on the Bildungsroman using Cat's Eye:

Atwood revises the structure of the traditional bildungsroman and kunstlerroman, privileging what feminist psychoanalytic theorists have posited as a feminine way of achieving self-knowledge. Instead of following a linear plot that emphasizes separation from the past as the mark of maturity, Atwood creates a circular structure emphasizing the protagonist's return to the scenes of her childhood and her reunion, if only

in her imagination, with key figures from her past (95-96). Osborne goes on to describe the differences of male and female protagonists of the bildungsroman. While male protagonists separate themselves from their pasts, women make a conscious return to their pasts "embracing" themselves as they were then and as they are now, reinforcing Atwood's statement that "nothing goes away."

Lorelei Cederstrom agrees with my emphasis on the relationship of women and nature, and the necessity for a less linear structure. She equates timelessness with cyclicity and women, and she compares the linear world to men and modernization. She states:

In Surfacing Atwood [establishes] a new view of time, history and progress. A view of progress as beneficent is undermined as the protagonist discovers that she must regenerate time, destroying a view of life as a forward movement from point to point, establishing instead an awareness of life as a part of a timeless cosmic cycle

It is significant, she posits, that the process is described through a feminine consciousness, out of the masculine realm of time and history "into the primitive myths and rituals associated with the feminine unconscious....She learns that nature...is alive, our mother-the-earth, life giving reservoir for our unconscious needs" (24-25).

Martha Sharpe comes closest to my approach, introducing not only the elements of time and feminism, but also Julia Kristeva, positing that Kristeva and Elaine both work to broaden the boundaries of communication between women. Sharpe compares Elaine with Kristeva. The two women share the same "attitudes

towards time, towards other women, and towards feminism" (174). Elaine challenges linear time in her paintings as does Kristeva in her thoughts on space-time: "[Elaine] creates this space-time from her perceived position outside both the male-dominated art world and organized feminism. However, instead of suggesting feminism's demise, she can be seen as marking out the dimensions to which it must expand if it is to achieve broader relevance and engender solidarity among women. In this way, Elaine's dissidence resembles Kristevan dissidence because it is creative and constructive rather than a function of protest" (175). Sharpe suggests that Elaine paints in order to find a new way of communicating as Surfacing's protagonist seeks a new language and Kristeva strives for a broader definition of time.

Perceptions of time, one could argue, are influenced by gender. Einstein proved that time is relative. That is, the same measurement of time has a different meaning based on the position of the observer. Hawking comments on Einstein's theory of relativity:

Up to the beginning of this century people believed in an absolute time. . . However, the discovery that the speed of light appeared the same to every observer, no matter how he was moving, led to the theory of relativity--and in that one had to abandon the idea that there was a unique absolute time. Instead, each observer would have his own measure of time as recorded by a clock that he carried: clocks carried by different observers would not necessarily agree. Thus time became

a more personal concept, relative to the observer who measured it (143).

For both biological and cultural reasons, women view life from a different perspective than do men. As Cederstrom implies, linearity is to men as cyclicity is to women. Because of this difference in perception, and because historically men have been in control, women have needed to cope with the incongruency between the external world, a world encouraging white, sterile, cold, unfeeling, poker-faced response, and their own internal worlds, attuned to cycles and nature, warmth, emotions, and nurturing.

Of course, linear time is a truth; that is, clocks do not naturally run backwards. Time is cumulative. However, we cannot escape cycles either. The sun does rise every day. The moon is full every month. And every year we experience the death and rebirth of life during fall and spring. Because both cyclical time and linear time do exist in our present existence, they both need to be recognized so that the fluidity of time can be allowed to flow its natural course.

Unfortunately, man has tried to control nature by fighting it rather than flowing with it: suffocating the earth with concrete and pollutants, layering society with modernization and cumbersome controls. And in the same way that man suffocates the earth--the mother of all cycles--he has stifled the woman as well, either through pure exclusion or inclusion on the grounds that she think and dress like him--and not speak her mind. Her only means of survival has been to turn silently inward and layer herself with a protective shell, facing the linear path in isolation and

wondering if this was "normal." Luce Irigaray asks, "A language which presents itself as universal, and which is in fact produced by men only, is this not what maintains the alienation and exploitation of women in and by society?" ("Women's Exile" 62). Only recently have women given themselves the voice to express the differences that exist between men and women.

A compromise between linearity and cyclicity is imperative. Just as civilization is a necessary tool for preserving existence, nature provides the necessary ingredients for the tools to incorporate order into life's recipe. The relationship between the two is one of interdependence and neither can afford to abuse the other. As Jacques LeClaire states, "Civilization cannot be by-passed, and nature cannot be ignored" (LeClaire 23).

Margaret Atwood has recognized this relationship between linear time and cyclical time and suggests that women can no longer view time solely from the man's perspective, nor can women fit into the limited roles depicted in the Bildungsroman. In her two novels Surfacing and Cat's Eye, Atwood embodies a working model of time that celebrates feminine consciousness. I will illustrate Atwood's exploration of linear time, cyclical time, and timelessness, and I will clarify how this psychological and physical journey through time modifies traditional ways of writing about female experience. I will refer to Stephen Hawking as the authority on linear time, and to Julia Kristeva for her notions of cyclical time, drawing from Carl Jung's insights on the collective unconscious, which I will argue is equivalent to timelessness.

According to Stephen Hawking, everything begins in a state of perfect order and becomes disordered with the progression of time. The second law of thermodynamics explains that "in any closed system disorder, or entropy, always increases with time" (Hawking 144). This accumulation of disorder with time is known as the "arrow of time," distinguishing the past from the future (145). According to the Big Bang theory, before the universe a complete and perfect order existed. Perhaps (it is not certain what), a tiny ripple disrupted this order; hence, an explosion of energy known as the big bang occurred. Matter is energy and energy is matter. At the moment energy exploded, matter existed. The moment of matter and energy was the origin of the universe, the origin of time, and therefore the beginning of disorder (46).

Introducing a non-linear notion of time, Julia Kristeva posits that the two most important or significant aspects of time are cyclical time and monumental time. Cyclical time is repetitive, contained within life, and related to women's intuitive relationship with the cycles of nature. According to Kristeva, women have a subjectivity that "would seem to provide a specific measure that essentially retains repetition and eternity from among multiple modalities of time known through the history of civilizations . . . cycles, gestation, the eternal recurrence of a biological rhythm which conforms to that of nature. . ." Kristeva defines monumental time as eternal, "all-encompassing and infinite like imaginary space" ("Women's Time" 191). I refer to monumental

time as timelessness; that is, existing outside of the confines of time, outside of our perceptions of existence. In the same way, I believe Jung's collective unconscious can be viewed as timeless. The collective unconscious transcends individuals and time and place, consisting of universal and primordial images and ideas.

Hawking's and Kristeva's notions of time, as well as Jung's notion of the collective unconscious, can be combined to create a working model of time and order. Based on my reading of Atwood as well as Hawking, Kristeva, and Jung, I have derived the notion that disorder is a quality of time. My speculation is that if disorder is a quality of time, and if perfect order existed before time, and if the state before time is a state unknown, then that unknown is timeless and perfect order. If that unknown is timeless and perfect order, then the known, or life, is contained within time and is disorder. From this I can conclude that the arrow of time operates in our present state of being, our conscious existence, and that this present life is an ongoing process and collection of disorder.

While all humans may be inherently programmed to maintain order in their lives, men and women approach this task differently. Rachel Blau DuPlessis asserts that men have an "either-or" approach whereas women view the world from a "both-and" perspective. For men, the answer can be only one or the other. However, "she can be both. Her ontological, her psychic, her class position all cause doubleness. Doubled consciousness. Doubled understandings" (278). Because of this

difference in perspective, Blau DuPlessis continues, "the 'female aesthetic' will produce artworks that incorporate contradiction and nonlinear movement into the heart of the text. . .Artistic production. The making, the materials the artist faced, collected, resolved. A process of makings, human choice and necessity" (278, 280).

Keeping in mind men's either/or approach and viewing the "artwork" as women's self-exploration, the gender difference in maintaining order becomes clear: If life is layers of disorder, then generally men will simply "throw away" the layers, get rid of them, consciously choose either/or and move forward. Women, on the other hand, are generally more inclined to redefine the layers, reincorporate them into present existence, understand the meaning beneath the layers before recycling them. In the process of "shedding" these layers, in other words, women create a pattern of backward repetition. The backward repetition is a psychological process that functions to heal the discrepancies between the conscious and unconscious mind.

It is evident that the closer one is to the beginning or to the roots, the more order there is. Therefore, in order to maintain order, or to discourage entropy, one should stay as close to the roots, or to the basics as possible. That is, one should live with the barest essentials and try not to collect disorder. Of course disorder is inevitable and layers can be a protective mechanism against the disorder. For these reasons one must take the initiative to "re-view" one's life, a cycling back of sorts, in order to preserve as much

order as possible. The process of self-understanding is an ongoing reassessment of the person's own individual life, a redefining rather than a discarding of all previous knowledge. Because the conflict is ongoing and contained within both linear and cyclical time, or life, fluidity is necessary. Blau DuPlessis refers to such fluidity as "oscillation," a term she defines as "a swinging between two positions, a touching two limits, or, alternately, a fluctuation between two purposes, states, centers, or principles" (Writing Beyond the Ending 35). I regard these oscillations as natural components of time. More specifically, when both linear time and cyclical time are properly balanced--not equally balanced, but properly balanced--containing natural amounts of each quality of time per individual with women generally being more cyclical than men, for whom linear time dominates, then the oscillations are a reflection of the healthy tension and conflict that must exist in order for the ambiguous fluidity to maintain its flow. This oscillation is paramount to life. When the oscillation stops, we transcend cyclical and linear time, this time known as life, and we encounter timelessness. This timelessness is a moment perceived as infinite, forever.

In order to better visualize these oscillations, I will illustrate them by comparing them to pendulum swings between the extremes of past and future. In the space between the extremes exists the ambiguous middle area of life, or the present, where time and disorder are contained. The swinging of the pendulum represents the process of imposing order, of

reaching an extreme. As the pendulum reaches an extreme, it can only remain there for a moment before it must re-enter the down-swing. However, because the moment is a timeless extreme, the moment is perceived as infinite. The pendulum leaves the moment and swings through the gravity of life where a new process of establishing new order occurs, and the cycle continues. Life is a series of dichotomies, of pendulum swings between past and future, all of which are a means of achieving or imposing order while working toward the ultimate order, which exists beyond this life.

For human existence, the only true order a person possesses is before birth, in the same way that the universe was perfectly ordered before its "birth." In the mother's womb, perfect order exists. The womb contains the same eternal fluidity of timelessness but gives birth to life which is contained within time. Kristeva works to define what she calls the "signifying process" which she posits is a movement from the semiotic to the symbolic. She links the semiotic to the pre-Oedipal primary processes, "an endless flow of basic pulsions" which is gathered up in the chora, or womb (Moi Sexual/Textual Politics 162-63). The "basic pulsions" of the chora collect in the past, closest to the roots, to perfect order. The chora, or the womb, is "home," the roots of all humankind. In this sense, the womb can also be compared with the collective unconscious.

Kristeva reminds us that cyclical time and monumental time (timelessness) "are found to be the fundamental, if not the sole, conceptions of time in numerous civilizations and

experiences, particularly mystical ones" ("Women's Time" 192). In addition, Kristeva realizes that these two aspects of time, being linked to "female subjectivity" and "maternal" intuitions, "become a problem with respect to a certain conception of time: time as project, teleology, linear, and prospective unfolding--in other words, the time of history" (192).

Atwood acknowledges this problem in her novels. Linear time is the direction time travels, but this arrow is incongruous with Kristeva's version of women's time. Kristeva understands that a compromise must be reached, and Atwood pursues this compromise in Cat's Eye and Surfacing. In Kristeva's and Atwood's terms, linear time, then, is associated with man, the conscious, disorder, and civilization. Cyclical time is related to woman, the unconscious, moments of order, and nature. Timelessness is achieved when a healthy compromise exists between linear and cyclical time. This compromise creates the oscillations which lead to peak pendulum moments of perfect order, timelessness. Timelessness is linked to the collective unconscious, perfect order, and mysticism--the beyond.

Surfacing and Cat's Eye both illustrate this fluid compromise between linear and cyclical time in exchange for moments of timelessness and peace in this disordered space we know as life. Having accrued the layers of disorder, both narrators return home to find order, resolve inner conflicts within self and with their mothers. Each book emphasizes elements of cyclicity: nature, womanhood, motherhood; psychological oscillation between past and future; and resolution between the conscious and unconscious. Of Margaret

Atwood's novels, Surfacing and Cat's Eye most extensively illustrate linear time, cyclicity, and timelessness through their focus on psychological development and the importance of past and future.

Atwood introduces the oscillation between past and future by quoting Stephen Hawking in an epigraph of Cat's Eye: "Why do we remember the past and not the future?" In A Brief History of Time, Hawking explains that only in "imaginary" time (a mathematical concept that measures time using imaginary numbers) can there be no important difference between forward and backward direction, but that in "real" time, a very big difference exists (144). Hawking goes on to explain that it is the "arrow of time" that "distinguishes the past from the future, giving a direction to time" (145). We can only know the future if we can know every single moment and event of the past. Hawking explains, "If one knows what is happening at some particular time everywhere in the region of space that lies within the past light cone of p [the present] one can predict what will happen at p " (28). Because we cannot know everything about the past, we cannot "remember" the future. Moreover, if we could know every single moment of every event, we could physically move backward through time. In Cat's Eye Elaine's brother introduces this notion to her: "He says that if we knew enough we could walk through walls as if they were air, if we knew enough we could go faster than light, and at that point space would become time and time would become space and we would be able to travel through time, back into the past" (235).

The closest we can come to time travel is through our minds. Atwood's characters embark on this very psychological journey through time. Linear time and cyclical time together create the conflict and ambiguity necessary for providing the fluidity of eternal timelessness. Linear time provides us with the ordered past and cyclical time provides us with the continuation, the adaptability of motion, the oscillations. Order for linear time is in the past. Order for cyclical time is at peak pendulum moments of oscillation between past and future, order and disorder, cyclicity and linearity, unconsciousness and consciousness. Ultimately, these moments of perfect order allow us to transcend temporal and physical realms. In other words, these moments allow access to the collective unconscious: the omnipotent Mind of perfect order, of timelessness, that binds us. It is the timeless core of fluidity from which we come and to which we will return. It is the ultimate past.

Atwood's reference to time is necessary in order to show the process of female development. Chinmoy Banerjee, however, does not see the significance of Atwood's use of time in her novels and objects to her references to Hawking. Banerjee writes: "One has to admit the discussion of time is banal...[an issue] of glaring vulgarity and irrelevance." He charges Atwood with "double opportunism: the quotation of 'exotic' knowledge as intellectual decor and the use of conventional form for easy consumption" (521). On the contrary, I believe Atwood's use of time is pertinent to the novel not only as a representation of personal psychological growth through a mental and temporal

dimension, but also in relationship to all women everywhere searching for closure of the gap between conscious and unconscious existence; that is, eternal wholeness, cyclicity and progressions. Atwood's use of Hawking's physics in Cat's Eye is a springboard for Elaine's own thoughts on time. True, "despite her talk of time as a dimension, her narrative realizes time as a line," as Banerjee points out. However, what Banerjee misses is that Atwood is playing with this very inconsistency. The straight line of time is incongruous with the narrator's image of time, and the reason for the discrepancy is gender-based. The straight line of time has been the only time throughout history, man's history. Only when men and women realize that women are cyclical beings who encompass both linear and eternal time can the discrepancy become corrected--a goal that Atwood pursues in her use of time--a pursuit that includes both Surfacing and Cat's Eye.

In Surfacing, Atwood represents linear time through the paved civilization, the men's film "Random Samples," the narrator's layered state of disorder and cognitive dissonance; she shows us cyclical time through the diving in the water, the uncivilized state of the narrator's home, the new pregnancy, and the peak of disorder in woods; timelessness is achieved during her visions of her mother and father. In Cat's Eye Atwood represents linear time through the chronological structure of the novel, by taking us through Elaine's layering process, by contrasting old, uncivilized Toronto with new and paved Toronto. She shows us cyclical time through her return home for the retrospective of her art, her psychological journey to

the past through her artwork, the shedding process, and her peak moments of disorder: fainting and attempted suicide; moments of timelessness occur through her vision of the virgin mary, the cat's eye marble, and her return to the bridge.

The circular return for the protagonists in both novels results in an evolution out of the traditional, linear Bildungsroman. The oscillations and the moments of timelessness allow for the protagonists to reincorporate their pasts and to regain movement. The resolution they achieve is only momentary because the future contains much ambiguity. However, it is this resolution that allows them new motion, new fluidity necessary to continue their cycles through time.

Chapter 2: Surfacing

Margaret Atwood's Surfacing was published in 1972. In it, the narrator is notified of the disappearance of her father and must return home. Returning home invokes memories, creating a need on the narrator's part to restore a sense of order to memories of her relationship with her parents and the truth about herself and her previous abortion.

In Surfacing we are introduced to the narrator at her height of layers and disorder. She has returned to Toronto to begin her healing process. "Home" is significantly related to restoring order in her life. Going home means going backwards, retracing old steps that once seemed random and chaotic, realizing the pattern that exists, and restoring a sense of order. The process is cyclical. Also, the process is consistent with time's arrow. Order exists at the point of origin, at the roots. Home is origin. Home is where the seeds are sown, where the roots begin.

The tension between nature and civilization dramatizes the two kinds of time in Surfacing. Nature is to cyclicity and the unconscious as civilization is to linearity and the conscious. According to Lorelei Cederstrom, "Ego-consciousness at the expense of the unconscious, linear progress without renewal, are the norms of modern society" (Cederstrom 28). Linear time is represented in civilization by the "new road...paved and straight, two lanes with a line down the middle," (Atwood Surfacing 11) whereas cyclical time is represented by the old road which follows the natural contours of the land, "up and down the hills and around the cliffs and boulders" (11). Cederstrom re-emphasizes, "the loss of contact with the landscape in order to hasten movement

from point to point makes the road a symbol of ego-consciousness and linear history, facile movement without meaning" (28).

The novel opens with the narrator observing the decay of nature and the "success" of civilization. "The white birches are dying, the disease is spreading up from the south" (3). The dying birch trees symbolize the narrator's thick layers and stasis. The narrator is "stuck" in her cycle, immobilized. Coming home is the first step in healing and progression. Interestingly enough, the birch tree is a symbol of cyclicity: "In the Nordic tradition, Byarka (birch) is the symbol of the Earth Mother, and represents the feminine powers of growth, healing, and the natural world" (Hopman 76). Furthermore, at the end of the novel, as the narrator is ambiguously deciding whether to answer Joe's call, she "retreat[s] behind the trees, white birches clumped beside the path" (234). There is no mention of disease for these birches. According to Hopman, "Birch is the tree to select for the undertaking of new projects. The birch month. . .immediately follows Samhain, the Celtic new year. Her clean white bark is easily seen and makes a clear marker in a thickly grown forest. She will point the way to a clear purpose and a fresh start in life" (Hopman 78). Therefore, the diseased birches at the beginning of the novel symbolize the narrator's stasis, and the healthy birches at the conclusion of the novel represent the narrator's movement and reintegration. The diseased trees also symbolize the oppression of civilization over nature and of men over women.

A representation of linear time is David and Joe's film

"Random Samples" and David and Anna's relationship. To quote Cederstrom:

David and Anna, in particular, are typical of the worst the modern world has to offer. As representatives of a progressive view, they see life as a series of points along a line, any one of which can be frozen, made permanent and unredeemable. This is indicated in the movie Joe and David are making called "Random Samples." The movie captures experience as a movement in one direction only, any portion of which is as good as any other since there are no unifying principles or transpersonal values to be expressed in a random sampling (27).

The narrator has been stuck in this linear, conscious existence. Repressing her past at the unconscious level, she knows something is not quite right but what she is not sure: "No hints or facts, I didn't know when it had happened...I'd allowed myself to be cut in two...the other half, the one locked away, was the only one that could live, I was the wrong half, detached, terminal" (129). She needs to allow her natural cyclicity to continue so that her unconscious can unite with her conscious existence and "her two halves" can become one.

Cyclical time is fluid and ongoing. Cyclical time is also very significant for women, linked to ovulation, menstruation, and birth. Birth is origin. Women's fluids are many: blood, sweat, tears, amniotic fluid--the most cyclical

fluidity of all. In Surfacing the importance of the womb is indicated in the narrator's need to become whole again, to come full circle and allow her "lost child to resurface." The womb is also represented by the water. The narrator's "dive" into her unconscious is also a dive into the womb of the earth, the mother of cyclicity.

Jacques LeClaire writes of "enclosure" and "disclosure" in Surfacing. His enclosure relates to linear time and civilization. In the same way, disclosure parallels cyclical time and nature. Furthermore, LeClaire introduces the notion of mysticism and timelessness through shamanism: "the shamanic descent into the self and the natural world of Indian gods, parallels the descent into the lake and the unconscious...The inverted image of enclosure and drowning is turned into one of disclosure and harmony with nature. The surfer can now transcend human language and understand the ineffable, wordless language of the spiritual world" (21-22). He agrees with Atwood that "extremes are equally damaging, and that freedom stands somewhere between the two opposite images. . . The novel...speaks of the unavoidable compromise between nature and civilization, necessary..." (23).

When the narrator first returns home, her layers are a thick shell, a defense mechanism protecting her from the truth--up to this point she's too vulnerable to know that she has had an abortion. What she believes is that she had been married with a child, and that she divorced and gave the father custody. She believes that she

told her parents about the divorce. She never returns home after the abortion, and this leaves her with much guilt. She never had the chance to communicate her love or appreciation for her parents before they died. Now that she is home, she needs to tie up loose ends: "I needed to finish...to be exact, to condense myself to a pinpoint, impaling a fact, a certainty" (159). In order for her to "finish" she must "condense" herself. Condensing implies movement toward a beginning, moving backward. Normally, when a person speaks of finishing something, we understand them as moving forward, such as crossing the finish line of a race. The athletes do not run backward toward the goal. In the narrator's case, however, she's seeking a "certainty." So she has no choice but to move backward in order to reach that "pinpoint" of perfect order, existing only at the beginning of her time. At the end of a race, the runner is exhausted, drained of all energy, unable to take another step forward, clothing herself in her jogging suit, completely layered. If we could retrace the race backward, we would find that the further back we go, the more stamina and strength there is. At the beginning of the race, the runner has plenty of breath, is standing basically naked at the line, and is ready to move forward.

At novel's start, the narrator is obviously at the end of the race. She's drained and numb. She realizes for the first time that "she didn't feel much of anything" and "hadn't for a long time" (125). She watches other people express emotions and memorizes them, "rehearsing" them. The narrator

can imitate feeling; she cannot get beyond the imitation. She rationalizes, however, that "in a way it was a relief, to be exempt from feeling" (133).

At the height of her layers, the narrator finds her father's maps of the rock paintings. She feels compelled to follow out the search, hoping her father had left some sort of message or explanation for her. The drawings are on an underwater cliff, so she needs to dive beneath the surface. The resemblance of the water to the unconscious works in a number of ways. The mind itself contains layers. Our conscious mind is our existence as we know it, linear time and chaos. Our preconscious contains memories we have access to, existing just beneath the surface of consciousness. Our subconscious mind is an intuitive consciousness. Deeper yet is the unconscious, containing all of our repressed experiences. The knowledge here is emotionally charged and vivid, but we need to bring it to the conscious surface in order to be aware of it. The collective unconscious underlies and supplements all consciousness and is a primitive knowledge shared by all human existence. This consciousness, as Jung conceives it, transcends individuals and time and place, consisting of universal and primordial images and ideas (Jung 32-33). I think of the collective unconscious as the common denominator of humankind, the ultimate Home, and ultimate order, the mind that gave birth to conscious existence and that to which all consciousness will return.

However, while on earth the greatest form of timelessness or transcendence which can be attained can only

be momentary, temporary states of order. These moments, nonetheless, humans can perceive at the time as forever. According to Jung, a sense of completeness is achieved through uniting the consciousness with the unconscious contents of the mind. Out of this union arises what Jung calls the "transcendent function of the psyche" (Jung 146).

When the narrator of Surfacing returns to the island, she begins working through one pendulum swing between past and future. The pendulum motion represents the movement through space--places of events where layering process occurs; whereas, the diving into the water into her unconscious represents the movement through time--movement closer to the beginning of her bad time, facilitating the shedding of layers. The back and forth ambiguous fluid movement of life's pendulum, and the downward diving/upward surfacing through mind's time creates a vertical spiral, which synthesizes Kristeva's cyclical and monumental time with Hawking's arrow of time.

Consequently, the water represents not only our layers of consciousness, but its fluidity also represents mobility through time and clarity of insight. The narrator's own insight begins with her descent through the layers she has accumulated and her search for unconscious knowledge: "Reckless, I balanced and plunged...I hit the water and kicked myself down, sliding through the lake strata, gray to darker gray, cool to cold...pale green, then darkness, layer after layer, deeper than before, seabottom" (169). The different colors represent the different levels of consciousness she is traveling through. She sees her

father "below me, drifting towards me from the furthest level where there was no life, a dark oval trailing limbs" (170). When she breaks the surface of the water, memories of her abortion flood over her. She has united her unconscious and conscious. She has broken through all layers. She realizes she had repressed the entire incident. "I couldn't accept it, that mutilation, ruin I'd made, I needed a different version. . .a faked album. . .I'd lived in it until now" (171).

The narrator must face the fact that she had an abortion. This fact is devastating not only for obvious reasons, but also because this abortion broke the cycle of womanhood and motherhood. After her abortion, the narrator describes her lap as "deflated" (172). A deflated tire can no longer turn, can no longer move forward nor backward. A deflated tire becomes stagnant, stuck in time. In order for the narrator to progress, to survive, she must reinflate the tire, so to speak. She lets Joe make love to her, under the "moon" because "it's the right season" (196-97). The moon and seasons represent cyclical time. The narrator has restored the cycle, "I can feel my lost child surfacing within me....I ferry it secure between death and life, I multiply" (197, 204). The child is between "death and life," safely in eternal fluidity, perfect order, timelessness--for right now. Upon its birth, the child will undergo the process of life, as do all humans contained in time, contained in ambiguity, dotted with moments of perfection, moments of timelessness.

For this narrator, a cycle within a cycle occurs. The act of coming home is cyclical in itself; restoring her reproductive cycle is imperative for the narrator to ensure that her cycle continues. Achieving order, however, is not immediate for the narrator.

The abortion had also caused her to alienate herself from her parents. She had perceived herself as "a killer" (173). She couldn't tell her parents of her abortion because "of their own innocence." Moreover, she couldn't tell them of her pregnancy or even of her relationship with this married man. She had no one to whom she could turn. Her parents didn't "teach us about evil, they didn't understand about it, how could I describe it to them" (172). Trapped and feeling "evil," she repressed the entire incident, along with all feeling, going through life faking emotion. Now she realizes, "Since then I'd carried that death around inside me, layering it over, a cyst, a tumor, a black pearl" (173).

Giving up her sweatshirt as a sacred offering, she has removed all layers except her swimming suit. She is almost completely naked, at the roots. "Feeling has begun to seep back" into her. She is starting to heal. She wants to be "whole" (175), but she knows she is "not completed yet; there had to be a gift from both of [her parents]" (179). Margaret Homans writes, "Although confrontations with both parents are necessary, the novel clearly differentiates between her father's gift of knowledge, which requires the

intelligence necessary to read his signs, and the heritage of her mother, who is remembered as part of nature (Homans 196). Her father represents linear time and her mother, cyclical time. Her father's gift was the map. Her mother's gift was a saved scrapbook. In it was a picture drawn by the narrator of "a woman with a round moon stomach: the baby was sitting up inside her gazing out. Opposite her was a man with horns on his head like cow horns and a barbed tail" (190). The man is her father representing linear time, his horns and tail representing society's use of weapons and violence to combat disorder. The baby is the narrator before she is born, illustrating the significant relationship between mother and daughter and cyclical time and reinforcing the narrator's need to have her own child and continue the cycle: "Nothing has died, everything is alive, everything is waiting to become alive" (191). Furthermore, the illustration depicts linear and cyclical time as a natural and necessary dialectical tension whose conflict creates the energy that moves the pendulum to achieve moments of timelessness, a timelessness represented by the baby, the new life, the new wholeness, new forward movement to continue the cycle of life and time, a pattern of new order.

When the narrator is finally alone on the island, she strips herself of all layers. She is naked. "When I am clean I come up out of the lake, leaving my false body floated on the surface, a cloth decoy" (216). She is living truth, "the truth is here" (207), which is home, at the roots, primitive nature where no possessions and no burdens weigh her down.

She is aware of the essentials and lives by them, casting off the layers and artificialities of civilization and its "paved" roads, layers of concrete (11). She no longer has a name: "I tried for all those years to be civilized but I'm not and I'm through pretending" (205). She is a "natural woman, state of nature" (232), pure and cyclical, intuitive. She cries for the first time. She finally discards "the ring from [her] left hand, non-husband," discarding him (209).

The narrator transcends time, going into the past to a point which pre-dates the narrator's own birth, a point at which the narrator would have existed in ultimate timelessness. She sees her mother's spirit feeding the blue jays "standing there all along...she turns her head quietly and looks at me, past me, as though she knows something is there but she can't quite see it" (221). The bond between mother and daughter withstands all time, is cyclical and eternal. The two women bonded, but in times of their own--the mother sensed the presence of her daughter not yet born, the daughter sensed the presence of her mother after she had died. Each woman perceived the other when she was middle-aged.

She connects with her father in a more tangible manner; that is, she perceives him as he is now--his soul has merely transmigrated. Because of his death, he exists in nature. He is alive. She perceives this; she knows this. She has surpassed personal consciousness and has communicated with her parents at the level of the collective unconscious. "They've receded, back to the past, inside the skull" (231). Or, in Kristeva's terms, they've receded back to the semiotic. The

fluidity of timelessness exists in both the collective unconscious and in the womb. Whichever term is used, the importance rests in the understanding that it is the fluidity which allows for this transcendence.

The narrator's relationship with her parents has been resolved. She understands too that "their totalitarian innocence was my own." She lets them go, "they belong to themselves, more than ever" (231). The narrator has healed herself. She is able to progress. She knows to "refuse to be a victim"; she knows that "to trust is to let go" (234-235). She is whole now. She can leave "home" because now "home" is within her, part of her. She "reenters" her "own time" (233), and will continue the process called life.

Chapter 3: Cat's Eye

Atwood's novel Cat's Eye was published in 1988, sixteen years after Surfacing and in the same year Stephen Hawking published his book, A Brief History of Time. In Cat's Eye the narrator is at a mid-point in her life. Before she can move on, Elaine must search her past, recall repressed events and give order to these memories. By imposing order on these past occurrences, she is able to achieve a sense of closure. The closure is only momentary in that the future still contains much ambiguity. However, these 'moments' are perfect order, and therefore timeless. Cat's Eye and Surfacing are very similar. One main difference between them is that in Cat's Eye Atwood makes clearer allusions to time, representing Elaine's brother, Stephen, as the voice of Stephen Hawking. The second difference is that in Surfacing the novel begins with the narrator at her height of layers, whereas in Cat's Eye Atwood takes us through both the layering and the shedding process. Consequently, Surfacing can serve as a guidebook to the issues Cat's Eye explores.

In Cat's Eye Elaine oscillates between past and future. She refers to time as "a series of liquid transparencies, one laid on top of another. You don't look along time but down through it, like water. Sometimes this comes to the surface, sometimes that, sometimes nothing. Nothing goes away" (3). The quotation qualifies Hawking's definition of linear time by giving time a shape which can be looked through. Here, Atwood is introducing the notion that shapes allow more room for ambiguity than straight lines, and time is ambiguous, as is life.

The reference to time as fluid and layered illustrates the notion of oscillation as a process of self-understanding. The statement "nothing goes away" reinforces the idea that this process is ongoing and that knowledge of oneself is never destroyed but redefined. The oscillations allow for cyclicity, facilitating the narrator's journey to her past. The circular return gives Elaine access to the semiotic and allows her to reestablish the order and fluidity of the chora.

Cat's Eye dramatizes a series of returns: to the bridge, to her mother, to home. In the process Elaine achieves insight about her past and its impact on her life. In discussing Cat's Eye, I will first describe Elaine's layering process. Then I will discuss her moments of tentative break-through, and finally I'll focus on her retrospective, the bridge, and cat's eye: moments when the shedding process is dramatized as a break into timelessness.

As the narrator moves forward and backward between the extremes of past and future, layers are collected and shed, respectively. The accumulation of layers reflects an increase in disorder; conversely, the decrease in layers reflects a decrease in disorder, or an increase in order--a stripping to the true core of identity, to the nakedness of birth.

Having returned to Toronto, Elaine reflects on her present state of being:

this is the middle of my life. I think of it as a place, like the middle of a river, the middle of a bridge, halfway across, halfway over. I'm

supposed to have accumulated things by now....

But since coming back here I don't feel weightier.

I feel lighter, as if I'm shedding matter...

With all this lightness I do not rise, I descend. Or rather, I am dragged downward into the layers (13-14).

As a child, the bridge incident marked a turning point for Elaine, and later on at the return to the bridge, resolution will occur. Now, in "the middle of the bridge" she has not quite resolved the incident. She can turn away or move forward. We do not know at this point what she will do. The reference to the river is important because water, like the cat's eye, is fluid, lucid, associated with the unconscious, and echoes the earlier passage about time. Therefore, when Elaine speaks of descending into the layers, she is alluding to the metaphor of going deep within one's mind to bring unconscious knowledge to the conscious surface. The return home and the retrospective facilitate this "movement" through the layers.

The layering process seems to be more common for women than for men. As early as age ten, Elaine observes a basic gender difference. She has learned the hard way that girls do not resolve conflict in the same way as boys--a fact that may supply an explanation as to why women must always look backward at their pasts, shedding layers that have been built up over years and years; and why men less frequently seem to have this need to seek closure. Because women have been, generally, oppressed by society, women tend to internalize anger, learning that expressing anger does no good and/or results in harm.

Whereas men are allowed, even expected, to deal with any problems right away, women have learned to keep their problems to themselves and deal with them silently.

Elaine, for example, faces this problem. Female companions are a novelty for Elaine at eight years old; therefore, she is unfortunately unaware of the socialization process women must go through. Because she has never had any friends, once she meets Cordelia, Grace, and Carol, she's "terrified of losing them" (127). Even after the torment and the ridicule they inflict on her, she continues to believe in their pseudo-friendship. The girls' cruelty is a displacement mechanism to compensate for their own inferiorities. Because Elaine is socially naive, she is an easy target, a person over whom the girls can exert a power that they have over nobody else. They ridicule her, belittle her, and torture her with mind games. For some time, Elaine is submissive to these girls. However, the social pressure from her friends and the strain of being "perfect" begins to have a significant impact on Elaine. Elaine represses the emotional abuse inflicted on her by her "friends" as a child.

If the gender difference did not exist, perhaps Elaine could have faced the dilemma immediately and not have been forced to repress her childhood and carry it with her in the form of protective yet inhibitive layers. Unfortunately, it is this very gender difference which prevents Elaine from seeking help from her brother, the one person whom she trusts. Because boys are allowed to have enemies, mark their enemies, and then fight their enemies, this openness in

defining the enemy allows them to feel "hatred, and anger." Boys are allowed to "throw snowballs at enemies and rejoice if they get hit" (127). However, for girls the situation is different, and Elaine realizes that to seek Stephen's help would be pointless. "Cordelia does nothing physical" to Elaine, and so Stephen might think Elaine a "sissy". Whereas boys' strategy is to define the enemies, girls' strategy is "indirectness... ..whisperings". Consequently, Elaine knows she would appear to be "making a fuss about nothing" (167). Therefore, she represses this "nothing", remembering nothing until her unconscious forces her to.

In one repressed incident, the girls bury Elaine in a hole. She is wearing a black dress and cloak, pretending to be "Mary, Queen of Scots, headless already" (112). Elaine cannot remember the incident: "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. . . . I have no image of myself in the hole; only a black square filled with nothing, a square like a door. Perhaps the square is empty; perhaps it's only a marker, a time marker that separates time before it from the time after. The point at which I lost power" (112-113).

Throughout these childhood years, Elaine naturally collects more and more layers. The protective layers desensitize her, allowing her to view everything objectively, without emotion, almost numbly.

Elaine painfully learns that it's not just young girls who are mean, but females of all ages. She overhears Mrs.

Smeath say that Elaine deserves the cruel treatment from the other girls. Hearing this Elaine is overcome with a sense of "shame" and "hatred," a hatred she has never felt before in such "pure form" (193). She decides not to pray to God anymore (194). She decides to try praying to the Virgin Mary instead. Her prayers are "wordless, defiant, dry-eyed, without hope" (197).

Elaine knows something is not right but does not know who is at fault. Inevitably, she blames herself. She believes she's failing the perfectionism game. "What is happening to me is my own fault, for not having more backbone" Two things are happening here. The act of cutting herself down is simultaneously creating the act of building herself up--building the layers of protection: "I cannot afford the distraction of comfort. If I give in to it, what little backbone I have left will crumble away to nothing" (168).

Upon entering high school, she has "forgotten things...forgotten that [she's] forgotten them". Her layers at this point are very thick, so thick that the cat's eye marble is insignificant to Elaine during this time. The bridge gives her nothing more than an "uneasy feeling." She has "forgotten all of the bad things that happened," and she walks with Cordelia to school as though nothing was ever wrong. (215-217). As a result of Elaine's hardness, she is no longer the victim, so to speak, of her childhood. In a sense she becomes a victimizer. She's not "afraid of the older high school girls"; instead, she "despises" them, and she is "calm" and "surlly" (221, 222, 237). She is detached, learning "whoever cares the most will lose" (232). Making

fun of the Smeath family is rewarding, and she sometimes is shocked at her own "savagery." Anytime she hurts somebody, she wants the hurt to be "intentional;" she uses Cordelia "as target practice" and experiences a "triumph... energy has passed between us, and I am stronger" (250-252).

Plotting her future, Elaine decides she will remain single; "instead of marriage I will be dedicated to my painting. I will end up with my hair dyed, wearing outlandish clothes and heavy foreign silver jewelry. I will travel a lot. Possibly I will drink" (317). Elaine's self-outlook is layered in artificiality. Fake hair color, layers of "outlandish" clothing, the weight of "heavy" jewelry. Her outlook is also masked by escape: travel, alcohol, immersion in artwork. Moreover, Elaine's forecast lacks any references to happiness or love. She is so used to being detached and unhappy that she doesn't even realize love's absence in her hypothetical future. Shortly thereafter, Elaine is suddenly struck with the realization that she is "miserable" (318). Still she resists any remote signs of past memories. "I don't want to remember. The past has become discontinuous, like stones skipped across water" (322). She remembers her "mean mouth" and other high school instances, but none of the deeper, more carefully buried memories. By resisting the past, by resisting happiness, and even by resisting marriage and children, Elaine is resisting her natural relationship with cyclical time and is completely conforming to linear time. Worse, her linear time is fragmented, "discontinuous;" she needs both linear time and cyclical time to achieve wholeness, momentary timelessness, order.

Eventually, Elaine's life reaches a point where the layers have become so thick that they are preventing her from progressing in a healthy way. This point is crucial because here, in order for a person to survive and progress, she must turn backward, must begin the shedding process so that movement is possible. It is this process that is cyclical, that allows her to achieve the perfect order of the past.

At first pendulum moments at the extremes are Elaine's way of dabbling with cyclical time. She achieves not perfect order, but enough order to give her an escape from whatever present disorder is occurring. These pendulum moments eventually give her the strength to come full circle and reach the timelessness she seeks. For example, before Elaine begins her layering process, she first discovers that fainting is beneficial. A 'comfort' so to speak, that she can afford. Fainting gives her a "way out of places you want to leave, but can't...a stepping sideways, out of your own body, out of time or into another time. When you wake up it's later. Time has gone on without you" (183). Fainting allows Elaine momentary transcendence, a state of perfect order. Fainting supplies Elaine with the same comfort as her cat's eye.

Eventually, Elaine reaches a breaking point. The layers are so heavy that everything is a struggle. She must "push...through time, to work...to get money...to buy food." Finished with school, employed, and married, this period in Elaine's life is very difficult. She is tired and busy, has a baby to care for, and she and Jon are not getting along. She is experiencing major feelings of guilt and despair. Her

layers protect her yet prevent her from understanding the origin of these feelings: "Whatever is happening to me is my own fault. I have done something wrong, something so huge I can't even see it, something that's drowning me. I am inadequate and stupid, without worth. I might as well be dead" (394).

She only knows of one way to respond to these thick masses of layers she has constructed. Her only way out is to attempt suicide. Fainting is no longer a good enough means of escape for Elaine. With fainting one returns. Elaine does not want to return. She slashes her left wrist with her exacto knife. She hears a voice out-of-body "order" her to "do it" (395). Jon finds her and rushes her to emergency. Thinking about the voice she heard, Elaine realizes it as the "voice of a nine-year old child" (396). It is the voice of Elaine's alter-ego, Cordelia, surfacing from Elaine's unconscious, allowed temporary contact with the conscious during a vulnerable moment.

Attempting suicide is like the fainting in that both give her temporary control over a situation in which she previously had none, both employ action in contrast to merely existing, and both actions immediately precede a continued action--an approach to the situation. Fainting triggers the layering process, and the suicide attempt triggers her escape from Jon and her home. Both trigger flights from her past--an attempt at order that fails.

She feels she must leave. When she thinks of home, she thinks "it's nowhere I can go back to" (399). In this respect,

Elaine is still trapped in linear time. By moving away from home, she is moving away from order, from the roots, as in the arrow of time. By stating she cannot "go back" home, she is denying cyclicity.

However, cyclicity proves inevitable for Elaine. The midpoint of her life marks its turning point. She is called back to Toronto, her birth place, for her first retrospective, literally "long overdue" (242). Her art is a chronological representation of her past. During her retrospective, her memory is prompted by places, things in the city, and also by her paintings. When she painted them, painting was part of the coping process, the catharsis which allowed her to breathe during her layering process. Without this catharsis she might have suffocated from the layers sooner than she did. Interestingly, the point when she did break was at a point when she had stopped painting (394).

The shedding process begins as she sets foot in Toronto. "The fact is that I hate this city...And I can't believe its changed,... I could see it's still the same. Underneath the flourish..is the old city...watchful, calculating windows. Malicious, grudging, vindictive, implacable"(14). Elaine's description of the city is analogous to Cordelia's personality that Elaine has "forgotten."

The shedding process is hard and scary. She doesn't want to go to the retrospective but does out of politeness or professionalism. She walks in the gallery where her art will be displayed. She doesn't look at her paintings very

long so that she won't "start finding things wrong with them. I'll want to take an exacto knife to them, torch them, clear the walls. Begin again" (91). Elaine's sense of the past is quietly re-emerging. She fears she will find fault in her artwork--a depiction of her past--in the same way her friends found fault with her. And in the same way she "erased" her past, repressing it, she has the desire to erase her artwork.

Wondering if Cordelia will come to the retrospective, Elaine realizes she is afraid of Cordelia. Moreover, she is afraid of "being Cordelia...in some way we changed places, and I've forgotten when" (243). "When" was during Elaine's entire layering process, when she became victimizer in high school. Elaine does not want to be the victim of her childhood nor the victimizer of her adolescence. She needs to reconcile the two extremes. Seeing Cordelia might make this reconciliation more difficult. Because they share the same roles of childhood and adolescence, a power struggle would be likely to emerge in determining who adapts which role, when in fact the point is to reconcile the roles, not re-enact them. Elaine realizes this and is therefore "afraid of Cordelia."

Elaine continues retracing her old pathways. She meets with Jon. "I don't feel I'm being disloyal to Ben, only loyal to something else; which predates him" (390). Furthermore, "It's the last look, before turning away" from a place to which she won't return. After seeing Jon, the sense of closure is

apparent. "It's Jon's floor again, not mine. I feel I've returned it to him, along with whatever fragments of his own life, or of our life together, I've been keeping back till now" (407).

She revisits the schoolyard: "I climb the wooden steps, stand where I used to stand. Where I am still standing, never having been away...Ill will surrounds me. It's hard to breathe. I feel as if I'm pushing against something, a pressure on me, like opening the door against a snowstorm. Get me out of this, Cordelia. I'm locked in. I don't want to be nine years old forever (422). Elaine is trapped in a mental time warp. Now that the layers are being shed and her past is revealing itself, it is crucial for Elaine to find resolution. Remembering the past but not coming to terms with it could leave Elaine in mental anguish forever.

When she goes to the gallery an hour before her retrospective, she is able to look at her art; whereas the first time she couldn't. "I walk the room, surrounded by the time I've made...which is fluid, which turns back upon itself, like a wave" (431). This fluidity represents cyclical time.

Elaine realizes that her self--her present state of being is "what's left over" from the person she was when she painted her life. That "energy" has been released (431). Because the "self" that her art reveals is incongruent with the self that she is now, she is especially in a vulnerable position at this showing. She feels "scraped

naked" (434). The self she so carefully spent her life layering is exposing itself through her art. The self that is in the healing process is nearing the core of her existence, where protective layers do not exist. She is nearing perfect order.

Her final act of healing must take place at the bridge. She revisits the bridge. She remembers details: "That was where I fell in...there is the bank where I scrambled up." She remembers her vision of the Virgin Mary and acknowledges that it didn't happen, that there was only "silence and darkness" (442).

As a child, the bridge is where Elaine first experiences transcendence. This bridge incident marks the official beginning of Elaine's layering process. That is, Elaine experiences a moment of transcendence, like the moment a pendulum oscillates to an extreme; however, the pendulum is pulled by gravity and makes its downswing. The space of the downswing is ambiguity. When Elaine's transcendence ends, she finds herself back in ambiguity. However, this time she has the strength to turn away from her "friends" and does so, hardening herself against pain in the process.

When Cordelia throws Elaine's hat over the bridge, down in the forbidden ravine and orders her to go get it, Elaine is not afraid because this time she doesn't "feel anything as positive as fear" (200). After she makes her way to the bottom, she looks up and sees the girls have left her there alone. Her boots are water-logged with the icy water, her

jacket is wet, her mittens soaked, she is crying from the pain. The pain has reached an extreme too severe for her consciousness to endure. She passes out. "Nothing hurts anymore" (202). At this point Elaine experiences transcendence, perfect order: "I hear someone talking to me. [A] person standing on the bridge is moving through the railing, or melting into it. It's a woman...a long cloak...she's coming down toward me as if walking, but there's nothing for her to walk on...I can see the white glimmer of her face, the dark scarf or hood around her head...she holds out her arms to me and I feel a surge of happiness...Then I can't see her anymore. But I feel her around me...**you can go home now**, she says. **It will be all right. Go home.** I don't hear the words out loud, but this is what she says (202-203).

The fact that she envisions the Virgin Mary telling her to go home is significant. The Virgin Mary is a mother figure and mothers are a link in cyclical time. Mothers are figures of love, representing strength and safety. Mothers keep the cycle of life ongoing through birth. The womb is home to which we return, as in Kristeva's semiotics. Home is perfect order, the point of origin containing fluidity and life. When Kristeva writes of monumental time (timelessness), she is reminded of "various myths of resurrection which, in all religious beliefs, perpetuate the vestige of an anterior or concomitant maternal cult, right up to its most recent elaboration, Christianity, in which the body of the Virgin Mother does not die but moves from one spatiality to another

within the same time via...assumption (the Catholic faith)" ("Women's Time" 191). The fact that the Virgin Mary never does die reinforces the idea of timelessness, and the fact that she is the Mother reinforces the idea of cyclicity and the return to the womb.

Elaine is able to climb back up to the bridge. "Nothing hurts, not even my feet, not even my hands" (204). She believes she saw the Virgin Mary, but perhaps, she saw her inner self--clothed in the same garb she wore when they buried her in the hole. The strength of her inner being transcended physical boundaries. Down in the ravine just prior to her vision, she was vulnerable, stripped of all protection, she was at the core of her existence, she had oscillated to the most extreme point, to a point of perfect order which allowed her to transcend time. The strength that facilitated her climb from the ravine was an inner strength, an almost unconscious strength, a strength from beyond her physical capacity.

David Cowart writes that Elaine's vision is of her future self, "the Elaine Risley that she will honorably spend her life trying to become." Cowart responds to Hawking's question, "Why do we remember the past and not the future?" He states that "Atwood in fact does 'remember the future,' and her character Elaine Risley does so on at least one occasion, when a vision of her own future self saves her from freezing to death under the bridge. But it is the past, still, that has shaped Elaine; it is the past,

still, that she must transcend." (134).

Cowart observes the bridge from the perspective of time and space: "The spatial symbolism of the bridge now reveals an extra layer of meaning: below the bridge lies the first, spiritually 'buried' half of her life; above it the second, artistically fulfilled self. Perhaps too, one is to understand a division between the life in time, in the material universe below the bridge, with its stones and roots and galaxies--and the ultrapontine realm of transcendent beauty: the perfected self and the cat's eye" (134).

Cowart refers to the stream as "time itself" and the bridge as Elaine's life (132). Consequently, he reinforces the three types of time. The stream is linear time. The space beneath the bridge represents Elaine's unconscious, or cyclical time, and the space above the bridge represents timelessness. The bridge itself, in its first phase, is "rickety, rotten, falling down," according to Cowart, like Elaine's life. Later on, the bridge is replaced with concrete, representing "the new, harder, stronger Elaine" (133).

From this point forward, Elaine is indifferent to Cordelia, Grace, and Carol. She realizes she does not need them. "I feel daring, light-headed. They are not my best friends or even my friends. Nothing binds me to them. I am free" (Cat's Eye 207). She hardens herself. She opens her ears and eyes. "I can hear the hatred, but also the need...I

can see the greed in their eyes. She achieves a new sense of control over her own environment. "I hardly hear them anymore because I hardly listen" (208).

Later, during her retrospective, Elaine re-experiences all the negative emotions Cordelia imposed on her: "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" (443). However, she knows now that these were always Cordelia's feelings as well. Cordelia was just as unhappy as Elaine. The only difference between their unhappiness is that Cordelia created Elaine's misery while Elaine stood defenseless against her. Now, however, Elaine is "stronger." She re-experiences the same knowledge she had on the bridge years ago: "If she stays here any longer she will freeze to death; she will be left behind, in the wrong time. It's almost too late"(443). These words, spoken as though to Cordelia, are really meant for herself. She must move on and quickly, or she will never resolve this tender time of her childhood. She will be stuck in Cordelia's time forever, which would inevitably make her life unbearable and forever on the edge. Reaching out her arms, Virgin Mary style, she tells herself/Cordelia: "It's all right...you can go home now" (443). Elaine can finally go home, to peace, to perfect order. Elaine has transcended this time warp filled with mental torture. She has finally put Cordelia to rest. Her life will finally take on a semblance of order. "The snow in [her] eyes withdraws like

smoke." She can see clearly now. The lucidity of wholeness, like that of the cat's eye marble, surrounds her. "It's old light, and there's not much of it. But it's enough to see by" (445). Her past reveals itself years into the future, like the stars: the future that has become the present and has allowed enough illumination for transcendence in the same way the stars reveal themselves years later, allowing enough time for the order to assemble into place.

This illumination is symbolized by the cat's eye marble. The cat's eye marble is sacred to Elaine. She describes cat's eyes as "the eyes of something that isn't known but exists anyway" (67). Unlike her own life, the cat's eye always exists in a state of perfect order. The marble is spherical, eternal, whole. It possesses no beginning and no end; rather, the marble represents something beyond the past and present of this oscillating existence called life. The cat's eye gives her something definite to hold onto, a sense of power. The lucidity of the cat's eye marble parallels the water image, that of looking down through time, like water. In this case, time takes on the shape of the marble and looking "down through it" allows her to escape this time and create her own time. As Earl Ingersoll states, "The image of the cat's eye is central, since it represents a world into which she has been allowed access; at the same time, it is a world of inevitably distorted vision. Thus, the truth is not an entity to which we struggle to gain access so much as a way of looking and, in

the process, creating the text of that truth" (19).

At age ten, Elaine is realizing she no longer wants to please Cordelia, and she is mildly questioning whether or not she has to. She carries the cat's eye marble with her. "With the help of its power, I retreat back into my eyes" (166). She sees things the way she wants to see them. She looks at shapes and colors objectively, detached from the thing itself: "I look at their shapes as they walk, the way shadow moves from one leg to another, the blocks of color, a red square of cardigan, a blue triangle of skirt" (166). The fact that she is observing reality in fragments and objective detail is a good indicator that she is in the early stages of being in control and therefore protective of her vulnerable self. Moreover, her keen sense of observation is a practical tool--still in its early stages of development--which will later facilitate her detailed artwork.

Regarding her art, Elaine strives to illustrate lucidity. She basically wants to paint light. This is significant in the sense that like the cat's eye, her painting is a means of understanding her past, re-seeing her past with clarity and insight. Interestingly, only her recent works demonstrate such accuracy in representing lucidity and light. Only recently has she been able to review her past with such raw, clear truth.

Her painting titled Cat's Eye is a self-portrait in the same way that the narrative of the novel Cat's Eye is autobiographical, told in first person. As Elaine stared

into the marble as a child, into her inner-self, so does the painted and written art reveal her inner-most thoughts. And just as the marble allowed her to create her own time, the narrative creates its own time as does the painting. In the painting, behind her "half-head," in the center of the picture, a convex pier glass hangs in the empty sky, bending time. The section of her head seen in the glass is younger, and "at a distance, and condensed by the curved space of the mirror, there are three small figures, dressed in the winter clothing of the girls of forty years ago" (430).

Elaine's final painting of the series exhibited at the retrospective is titled Unified Field Theory. Its shape is vertical oblong, like the vertical spiral of time we get when combining Hawking and Kristeva. The scene is the bridge and the "Virgin of Lost Things" holding an oversized cat's eye marble. This picture represents the idea that Elaine was allowed to recover her lost past and "find" herself. The lucidity of the glass cat's eye marble represents the fluidity and order of timelessness. The title of the painting suggests the momentary closure, wholeness, that Elaine has achieved. She is no longer half a head; she is no longer fragmented. For this one moment, Elaine has transcended disorder and lives in peace.

Chapter 4: Ambiguous Endings

Rachel Blau DuPlessis asserts that contemporary women writers are turning to open-endedness in "concluding" their novels. They are breaking the traditional form of endings, breaking the limits men have imposed by "writing beyond the ending." Atwood is among these women writers who are redefining structure. While traditional novels emphasize a linear structure consisting of a beginning and a resolved ending, both Surfacing and Cat's Eye end in open ambiguity to emphasize the ongoing process of maintaining order within life. Life itself is an ongoing process of redefining rather than discarding knowledge and experience gained from previous events. This process occurs through pendulum swings between past and future, which Blau DuPlessis refers to as oscillations. Atwood's final chapter in each novel stresses the space between the extremes, the ambiguous middle area, present existence.

In the final chapter of Surfacing, the narrator reenters her "own time" (233), present ambiguity. As Joe searches for her, she lingers among the birch trees, the symbol of new beginning, "not hurrying, not running away but cautious" (234). She is careful not to touch either extreme. Likewise, Joe is balanced "on the dock which is neither land nor water." He too lingers in ambiguity, waiting for her response. "He won't wait much longer. But right now he waits" (235). In other words, soon Joe's own pendulum will swing to an extreme. He will leave the ambiguity of the dock, and will choose to move toward the land or the water. As Marianne

Hirsch states: "...the ending of the novel is curiously suspended just before the moment of return to civilization and to language" (Hirsch 145). We see this "suspension" as the narrator fights to "let go." Her mind and body are not quite in sync. She tenses forward, but her "feet do not move yet" (235). She realizes her love for Joe is "useless as a third eye or a possibility" (234). "Useless" from the perspective of linear time, which allows less room for variation, for "a possibility," than does cyclical time. "Useless" unless they "no longer live in spurious peace by avoiding each other, the way it was before, we will have to begin" (234). Linear time and cyclical time cannot survive individually. The two extremes must merge in order to create "the third eye" of timelessness and "begin" again.

States Hirsch: "The novel posits a place outside of language and civilization. There the narrator finds, however, that both indeed are necessary and decides to return, to Joe and the city..." (145). The narrator is understanding this necessity. She also knows she can "trust" Joe because "he isn't anything, he is only half formed" (235). He does not fall into the category of linear time and civilization, nor does he belong with cyclical time and nature. His consciousness and his unconscious have not been united. He is not whole--not yet. Because the narrator is only beginning to unite her own two halves, Joe and the narrator may be allowed the opportunity to "begin again," together, the cycle of life--with their unborn baby representing the wholeness and eternity of the cycle their two halves are seeking. However, just as in real

life we remain in present ambiguity, Atwood leaves her readers with the trees "asking and giving nothing" (235).

Similarly, at the conclusion of Cat's Eye, Elaine is in an airplane flying westward. She is suspended in ambiguity, neither at her birth home, nor at her present home. In this chapter Atwood plays with past and future. The two old ladies, "tough as thirteen," remind Elaine of "something that will never happen. Two old women giggling over their tea" (445). This chapter echoes chapter two, where Elaine and Cordelia are thirteen, not on a plane but on a streetcar, observing old ladies' clothing and behavior, and predicting the type of old lady each of them will be. The point of the final chapter is to show that the future is not predictable, as Cordelia and Elaine once believed; linear time is a fact of life: aging is inevitable, yet a physical "disguise;" and cyclical time exists as well, manifested in life's ambiguities.

The stars, like Elaine and Cordelia's friendship, "are not eternal as was once thought." The stars and the friendship are only echoes of the past, "echoes of light." The stars are approximately a million light-years away from the earth. In other words, it takes a million years for the light from the stars to reach the earth. This means that when we look at the stars, we are really seeing them as they were about a million years ago; we are looking at the past. Stars exist forever like the ambiguity of life, like the knowledge that knowing something does not necessarily take one closer to knowing everything, but is at least better than knowing nothing.

"It's old light, and there's not much of it. But it's enough to see by." The light of the past lends enough knowledge "to see by," to get by, to get through life's chaos and achieve moments of order in this ambiguous existence we know as life.

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