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**URBAN SPACE, CITY
LIFE AND IDENTITY
CONSTRUCTION
IN MARGARET
ATWOOD'S CAT'S EYE**

Бимберг Кр. Город, городская жизнь и структурирование идентификации в романе Маргарет Этвуд «Кошачий глаз». В статье анализируется седьмой роман Маргарет Этвуд «Кошачий глаз» (1988). Он был опубликован вслед за международным бестселлером «Рассказ служанки», но не получил такого литературного внимания. В романе «Кошачий глаз» ретроспекция protagonista и рассказчика от первого лица о своем детстве переплетаются в Торонто 40-х годов. Действие охватывает период до 80-х годов и постепенно перемещается в Ванкувер. Тема детства переходит в обсуждение идентификаций Элейн Рисли в социальных ролях девочки, дочери, друга, студентки, возлюбленной, художницы, женщины, жены и канадки.

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The central event which the novel's action revolves around on the time level of the present is Risley's Retrospective at the "Sub-Versions" gallery in Toronto in the 1980s. It is a survey exhibition of the paintings she did over the past decades, designed to celebrate her lifetime achievement. The event brings the protagonist back to the city where she spent the most important part of her childhood. The decisive but unintentional 'minor' effect of Elaine's visit is that it triggers off a retrospective of her whole life. Private and professional development, place and time are inextricably bound up with each other in the mode of presentation. The city of Toronto is (re-) constructed in this fictional narrative in various meaningful ways. It does not just function as a backdrop for the action. The narratively re-created and fictitiously appropriated cityscape is an essential coordinate in the (re-) construction of the complex identity of the main protagonist and narrator. This socio-cultural and geographic perspective is further complemented, modified and differentiated by the contrast of Toronto to other places such as Vancouver, Montreal, the wild northern bush of Canada, as well as non-Canadian locations like Britain, the US and Eastern Europe.

In the (re-) construction of the cityscape of Toronto, the sense of place — along with that of time — is prominent. This gives Elaine's identity formation a concrete spatial and temporal dimension which agrees with the concept of time employed in the narrative¹.

¹ Time is conceived of not as a line, but as a dimension, like space. This space time is time in space. It implies the possibility of travelling backwards in time and existing in two places at once. The image of time is that of a series of liquid transparencies laid on top of each other. As a consequence, one would not look back along time, but through it, like water.

Among the places and territories in which Elaine's earlier or former life stages were conducted are: her parents' house, the homes of her girlfriends, her and her brother's schools, the Zoological Building where her father used to work, the College of Art, Elaine's apartment on Harbord Street, the Swiss Chalet on Bloor Street, Josef's place, Elaine's, Jon's and Sarah's first home on a side street west along Bloor Street, Grange Park, Jon's studio on King Street near the waterfront, and downtown locations such as Queen Street. Among them are mystical places of childhood that Elaine and her former girlfriends were not allowed to go to for various reasons, i.e. because they were dangerous or forbidden, in any case gendered territories.¹ Though realistically represented in the text, these are not just locations in the physical sense of neutral material objects. Embodying concrete and special experiences made by Elaine, they are at the same time sites of a lived past experience recollected at present and loaded with social meanings which are constantly assessed anew and reinterpreted. In other words, they are integral parts of the ongoing processes of a refiguring of identity and the rewriting of a life and a *life*. The sites, together with their shifting meanings, constitute a kind of mental landscape in the protagonist's consciousness. This landscape is filled with memories, emotions, thoughts, ideas, insights, and images. It is more than the beholder sees literally or physically, but extends to deeper layers beneath the surface of material reality – which is made up of imaginative ingredients as well.

The temporal dimension is meaningfully integrated into the construction of the cityscape. As Elaine looks through the different layers of time, the city's 'time layers' are revealed as well, so that temporal and spatial layers become interlocked and time is literally and physically space – time space. Toronto's *zeitgeist*, its look and feel in childhood and youth are vividly conveyed to the reader. These references do more than fulfil the functions of period character or atmospheric factor. They place the protagonist's identity formation within a concrete socio-cultural context (conveyed through the sense of time and history), thus revealing its conditioning. Elaine's identity is thus shown to have been crucially shaped by World War Two and its aftermath. The narrative (re-) construction integrates food/meals, songs, radio programmes, houses, schools, building styles, interior design and furniture, art, leisure-time activities, clothes/fashion, colours, smells, sounds, and lan-

¹ There is no trespassing on the site of the newly built houses across from her girlfriend Carol's home (because of the typical dangers on building sites, 65), into the ravine in the neighbourhood of Elaine's home (because of men threatening girls, 51; later a girl is found murdered there, 259). The cemetery and the creek in the ravine are awe-inspiring because of Cordelia's made-up myth of dead people having been dissolved in the creek (79). King Street is a place Elaine and her friends never went to as teenagers because of the dingy warehouses, rumbling trucks and dubious alleyways (16), Queen Street is another place they never used to go to, rumoured to be the haunt of grubby drunks (19).

guage of the 1940s (followed up to the 1980s), all of which enhance the touch and feel of the period.

Inherently the stages of urban (re-) development and the accompanying socio-cultural changes of the city are thematized. Toronto is presented as having undergone tremendous changes, some to its advantage, some not. They have transformed the town from an unexciting place, a provincial backwater lacking entertainment, into a modern multicultural city with an international, world-class appeal. As a consequence, familiar sites and sights have changed, old buildings been pulled down (e.g. the Zoological Building, Elaine's first school, Eaton's, the store on her way to school) or replaced by new ones. In other cases, places have been altered almost beyond recognition (e.g. Simpsons department store) or subjected to new functions within changed urban surroundings (e.g. Jon's studio). New locations such as shops and galleries and ethnic restaurants have emerged and supplanted the old cityscape. All this gives the city a new look on the surface of the present beneath which the old places and the associated memories of Elaine's past are hidden but occasionally resurface. Over time the meanings of the old places shift through the 'layers of time'; the sites are made void of social meaning or filled with new meanings. A good example is Elaine's return to the ravine where she was almost killed as a child. She was driven into this situation by her three girlfriends who were bullying her at the time and watched on from a hill as she almost froze to death. On Elaine's return, this landscape is the same and not the same, filled with the same, but slightly altered, objects and new people and events: the houses on either side are the same, the muddy path has been replaced by a hand railing and a concrete walkway. The smell of the fallen leaves is still there, but the nightshade vines, the weeds and the debris have been cleared away. The willow trees are the same but they have grown as Elaine has grown. The bridge is the same, but also different, made of concrete now instead of wood. The ravine contains more bushes and trees than it used to. The junk in the creek has been cleared out.

Beneath this current physical or material landscape, slightly, but not fundamentally, different from that of the past, another landscape emerges — emotional, psychological, mental, The landscape of memories resurfaces, evoked through smells and latently threatening to the Elaine of the present:

Nevertheless there's a rustling, a rank undertone of cats and their huntings and furtive scratchings, still going on behind the deceptive tidiness. Another, wilder and more tangled landscape rising up, from beneath the surface of this one. We remember through smells, as dogs do. (441)

For this narrative link of smell and memory, Atwood exploits the fact that our most intense recollections of the past derive from olfactory impressions. The neurological reason is to be found in the limbic system: it controls acts mo-

tivated by one's physical urges, as well as emotional reactions, and is vital for the brain's memory functions. Olfactory sensations are directly transmitted by the limbic system to the brain, where they get stored as memories.

On the surface, everything about the ravine looks better and neater now, and the place has become much safer for children (441, 442). The physical change for the better suggests that there is no longer any cause for anxiety because the original physically and mentally threatening landscape has vanished, or at least has been supplanted in the process of Elaine's coming to terms with her childhood. The narrative development seems to confirm such a reading of the passage: Cordelia, whom Elaine seemed to see a moment before, is no longer there. Instead, a middle-aged woman with a terrier smiles at her.

There's nothing more for me to see. The bridge is only a bridge, the river a river, the sky is a sky. This landscape is empty now, a place for Sunday runners. Or not empty: filled with whatever it is by itself, when I'm not looking. (443)

The quotation emphasizes the phenomenon of multiple meanings of places — the more 'objective' physical, the subjective mental, and the metaphorical or symbolical one. The fact that a place can have different meanings for the same person at different times suggests that it is a site of ambiguity or ambivalence (comparable to the deceptive nature of memories that the narrative so frequently accentuates: the same event is interpreted differently by different people or by the same person at different times). This is true, for instance, for the Park Plaza Hotel in Toronto: Elaine meets different people there during the different time layers of her life — Cordelia at Murray's (319), Josef in the Roof Garden (323 ff.), finally Jon in the roof bar (388 ff.). Whereas the bar has not changed much inside and still looks like a high-class Regency bordello, the skyline of Toronto has changed tremendously. The hotel is no longer the tallest building, but a squat leftover, dwarfed by the surrounding towers such as the CN Tower — a type of architecture one used to see only in science-fiction comic books. Seeing it pasted flat against the monotone lake-sky, Elaine feels she has stepped not forward in time but sideways, into a universe of two dimensions (388, two layers of time or space — cf. the transparencies laid on top of each other).

So gradually the old material, as well as the mental map of the city in Elaine's consciousness, are supplanted by a new map. This process is accompanied by reinterpretations and reassessments of life, memories, and of the cityscape. Elaine, for instance, notices the typical colours of the evening and the familiar weather, but also that downtown the streetcars no longer run. In the past, the flat-roofed, dowdy buildings were the closest for her and Cordelia to urbanity. This part of the city is no longer flat or dowdy, but is shabby-genteel at present (8, 9). The difference between then and now can be calculated exactly in material terms: the prices for ice cream, for example, have risen by ninety-five cents

(13). In the past Toronto had the image of a dull city — at least it was fashionable to say so. By calling it provincial, self-satisfied or boring, one could distance oneself from it. Now one is supposed to say how much it has changed (13, 14). Elaine in fact never believed either version. First of all because Toronto was never dull for her — it was rather an ambivalent mix of misery and enchantment. Besides, she does not believe in the change. Toronto is essentially still the same for her — precisely because she has always been able to detect the true identity beneath the misleading surfaces of people and places:

Driving in from the airport yesterday in the taxi, past the flat neat factories and warehouses that were once flat neat farms, mile after mile of caution and utilitarianism, and then through the center of the city with the glitz and the European-style awnings and the paving stones, I could see it's still the same. Underneath the flourish and ostentation is the old city, street after street of thick red brick houses, with their front porch pillars like the off-white stems of toadstools and their watchful, calculating windows. Malicious, grudging, vindictive, implacable. In my dreams of this city I am always lost. (14)

The passage once more underpins the intersection of personal and urban identity.

It is not easy for Elaine to orient herself in this city both old and new, familiar and altered. Visiting Simpsons department store is another return to her childhood with the accompanying impression of being in two places at the same time, physically and mentally. Her gradual recognition of the old store beneath its new appearance and her recollection of former experiences linked to the place is a crossing for her of the layers of time. She penetrates the surface of things trying to retrieve their former identity together with her own self in childhood and youth. The physical status of the buildings is ambivalent: the outward features preserve the past to some extent and are thus repositories of time (cf. others such as the photo, album, purse, marble, and steamer trunk, but of course the buildings are more subject to change than a photo is). The new Simpsons department store is thus synonymous with a childhood transformed. Moving about the place is a dreamlike, surreal experience: you visit the land of your past, but everything is altered, to a greater or lesser degree, and you try to relate your blurred memories to it, to detect the past and the familiar beneath the altered surface of the present (117–22, 159–62).¹ As a result, the distance and the difference between past and present can be assessed. Cityscape, childhood, memories, images and reflections are superbly interlocked in the mode of presentation. The fact that these old places and sites have been 'taken away' from Elaine in one way or the other challenges her sense of identity, which is irretrievably bound up with Toronto. This makes her feel literally *displaced*.

¹ Other experiences of that kind are Elaine's old route home from school, today's schoolgirls in those streets, the houses with porches and pumpkins, and the ravine.

The experience calls for a readjustment of past and present in her identity formation, a refiguring of personal and urban identity.

The new cityscape is not presented uncritically because of the trends accompanying the urban transformation or giving rise to it, such as consumerism, commercialization, Americanization, incessant new market and consumer trends, the monopolizing and incapacitating of the customer, the pressure exerted by *zeitgeist* and fashions, new phenomena of demolition, the serious pollution of Toronto, Lake Ontario and the Lower Great Lakes.

The old emptiness of Toronto is gone. Now it's chockfull: Toronto's bloating itself to death, that much is clear. The traffic is astonishing, there's honking and barging, people drive right out to the middle of the intersections and sit there when the light changes. I'm glad I'm on foot. Every building I pass down here among the warehouses seems to cry *Renovate me! Renovate me!* (44/45)

The city looks as disguised or alienated from its true self to Elaine as she herself does in the photo on the poster advertisement for her Retrospective on which somebody had drawn a moustache (20). At the same time, however, she is conscious of the fact that quite a number of changes were already taking place at the time of her childhood and adolescence.¹ Nor are negative trends of behaviour exclusively a current phenomenon, as she knows. She recalls that taking drugs already presented itself as a possibility when she and Jon were students (190). By contrast, Elaine's girlfriend Cordelia retrospectively links the happy part of her childhood to the old cityscape, merging both to represent a golden age of youth. This happens during a much earlier meeting when the end of their school days is approaching and their lives are starting to take different directions. Cordelia reminds Elaine of how they used to take their pictures at Union Station before the subway was built (277). This reinterpretation of her life happens not without good reason: at the time when their meeting takes place, Cordelia has already spoilt her school career and is about to ruin her last chances of study at a university as well. She is already aware of her lost chances, that the past cannot be re-established or corrected and is irretrievably over, that the present is difficult and the future uncertain. Looking back across the divide of her failure, the time before it appears as carefree – a falsification of the past, of course.

All these experiences illustrate that Toronto is also a mental, emotional and psychological landscape, a state of consciousness bound up with Elaine's identity. As a socio-cultural space the city is narratively (re-) constructed to mean highly diverse things over time. It is alternately a vague notion of Elaine's (33), the first permanent residence after a phase of mobility, restless-

¹ These are, for instance, the building of the subway, the new building of Burnham High School, the new houses of her family and her friends' families, the new high-rise buildings on Avenue Road, north of St. Clair, where her fellow-student Susie lives.

ness and anarchy with her parents and brother (22 ff.), and the site of conflicting emotions.¹ She feels locked in psychologically because of being bullied by her girlfriends, whereas her surroundings are unsuspecting or complacent. This period is followed by yet more complicated relationships (with Cordelia, Josef, Susie, and Jon) and professional stagnation as a painter. Already as a child, she is afraid of being unable to stand the place any longer, fearing to implode under too much pressure. She senses that the future is closing on her like a lead door. The image illustrates the hopelessness, the lack of future prospects, and the fatalistic inevitability associated with this city (152, 165). Toronto is also the site of her suicide attempt at the time of her first marriage to Jon. After that, at the end of winter, she has the feeling that if she stays she will die. The comment that “It’s the city I need to leave as much as Jon, I think. It’s the city that’s killing me.” (397) brings out very clearly the connection between personal and urban identity. The physical impact of the city is so strong that Elaine even connects her present adult fears to her former childhood anxieties of being driven to suicide or self-annihilation by her friends. She knows that she is capable of such a thing. Though she is afraid and ashamed of the idea, she also cherishes it. She compares it to the secret bottle stashed away by alcoholics. Suicide is an exit, a weapon (397), just as fainting (‘sidestepping the body’) was during her childhood bullying. When she finally plucks up courage and leaves, escaping from Toronto (the place of her actual suicide attempt) to Vancouver (‘the suicide capital’, 44) with her daughter Sarah, she again crosses the landscape of her early childhood, literally and symbolically distancing herself from her past and her former selves in childhood and youth, putting space and time between herself and the city. It is a psychological landscape filled with special subjective meaning for her as an individual beholder:

The train runs northwest, through hundreds of miles of scraggy forests and granite outcrops, hundreds of small blue anonymous lakes [...] there is the landscape of my early childhood, smudged and scentless and untouchable and moving backward. [...] This looks like emptiness and silence, but to me it is not empty, not silent. Instead it’s filled with echoes. *Home*, I think. But it’s nowhere I can go back to. (398/99).

In the same way that Vancouver is characterized geographically as an end point (“You keep going west until you run out. You come to the edge. Then you fall off.”, 44), she also understands that she has come to the edge of her present unsatisfactory life. As in childhood, when she often felt that she could or would

¹ These are personal disappointment (her parents’ new house looks like a leftover from the war amid rubble and devastation, 33–35, 63, 150), emotional stability and psychological entrapment within her family, and unhappiness in her social relations with her girlfriends.

be driven over the edge by her girlfriends' bullying, she senses that she could fall now as well (cf. *Falling Women*: not falling, but drowning).

At present, back in Toronto for the opening of her Retrospective, she describes that terrible psychological effect of inhibition that Toronto still has on her after all those years:

I'm not like this in other places, not this bad. I shouldn't have come back here, to this city that has it in for me. I thought I could stare it down. But it still has power; like a mirror that shows you only the ruined half of your face. I think about escaping, out the back way. I could send a telegram later, claiming illness. (432)

The phrase 'ruined half of your face' alludes to Cordelia as her alter ego, mirror, double, and twin (cf. the story of the pretty and the ugly twin sisters in the horror comic book, 225). Back in Jon's studio she feels that she is "dragged downward, into the layers of this place as into liquefied mud" (13). She admits that she still cannot do things in that city that she could easily do elsewhere.¹ Toronto at the time of the Retrospective is an interim place where she hangs suspended between past, present, and future. She feels she is killing time in Jon's studio; she has almost forgotten what she is supposed to be doing there. She is impatient to be gone, back to the west coast, the time zone (cf. time layer) where she now lives her life. But she cannot do that yet. She anticipates the coming evening, the opening of the show as something to get through without disaster (407). After the opening, back in Jon's studio she is glad to be out of the city the next day, not a moment too soon. There is too much old time there (436).

These passages demonstrate that Elaine's coming back to Toronto is far from easy. The physical return to places of her childhood and youth provokes especially intensive recollections and responses that would not have happened otherwise, or certainly not in the same way. These are accompanied by a revival of old feelings of inferiority, guilt and shame. The visit to her old school as a site of former oppression causes renewed feelings of being locked in. Furthermore, the fact that her old school has been demolished, erased, wiped from space (an erasure of time space), hits her in the stomach. She is bewildered as if something has been cut out of her brain and feels dog-tired. The physical erasure of the old building and the postmodern look of the new also mean emotional loss: there are no cruel secrets any more. When she stands on the hill, which has not gone, she feels as if she has never been away. The voices of the children from the playground could be any children's voices, from any time. Once more she feels locked in and asks Cordelia to get her out of this. She does not want to be nine years old forever (421–22). In contrast to the liberating experience of revisiting the ravine, this landscape — also the same and altered simultane-

¹ She is too intimidated to buy any food at Simpsons (161). She has more stamina elsewhere in situations of public self-exposure — she could brazen them out, but here she feels scraped naked (434)

ously — oppresses her. Elaine's identification with the place of her old school, and the difficult childhood memories it stored and preserved for her, is so vivid that she feels as if part of her personal identity — precarious as it is — has been taken away from her together with the demolition of the building.

What Toronto does for Elaine at present in a positive sense, however, is that she comes to understand the link between these phases of her life and the places which incorporate them with her subsequent development. She grasps how she became what or who she is at present. In other words, the city and the reflections caused by that *locus* do for her identity what is often the genuine business of autobiography: the discovery of an underlying pattern or coherence of a life, its meaning, importance and purpose, and the literary or artistic re-working of all this into a *life*. Like autobiographical writing, the return to Toronto has a therapeutic function, putting the autobiographical subject at ease and reconciling it with the present consequences of the past. In the novel, Elaine is in the lucky position of having been able to do part of that important work of reappraisal through her profession, with the help of her paintings (tripartite structure of experience, recollections and paintings, the Retrospective).

Eventually the 'prison door' opens completely (it did so partly before, with Elaine's escape to Vancouver) in various ways. The return to the ravine becomes a second act of self-liberation (she had already withstood the pressure of bullying and stepped out of her childhood dilemma immediately after her childhood accident). Now she understands two things: First, there never was a Virgin Mary who saved her in the ravine. Second, the same feelings of awkwardness, shame, sickness and weakness that she feels again now that she revisits the ravine, and for a moment believes she sees Cordelia there, are not her own emotions any more. They are Cordelia's, as they always were (443). This insight is an answer to Elaine's troubling question as to why Cordelia bullied her (Cordelia had only projected her own sense of helplessness about adult oppression on to Elaine). Elaine is the older one now, the distance in age has disappeared, and she is stronger. If Cordelia stays here any longer, she will freeze to death and be left behind in the wrong time. Therefore she tells her it is all right and that she can go home now.

Toronto provokes more acts of self-liberation in Elaine. Also, Elaine sleeps one more time with Jon, her first husband — a true emancipation from a formerly sickening relationship which had driven her to her suicide attempt. She feels she has returned his floor to him "along with whatever fragments of his own life, or of our life together, I've been keeping back till now" (407).

At the opening of the Retrospective, looking at her pictures again, she can see herself through the eyes of Mrs. Smeath, the mother of one of her girlfriends, whom she had hated so much because of her complicity in the bullying. She understands the true nature of their relationship now:

It's the eyes I look at now. I used to think these were self-righteous eyes, piggy and smug inside their wire frames; and they are. But they

are also defeated eyes, uncertain and melancholy, heavy with unloved duty. The eyes of someone for whom God was a sadistic old man; the eyes of a small town threadbare decency. Mrs. Smeath was a transplant to the city, from somewhere a lot smaller. A displaced person; as I was.

Now I can see myself, through these painted eyes of Mrs. Smeath: a frazzle-headed ragamuffin from heaven knows where, a gypsy practically, with a heathen father and a feckless mother who traipsed around in slacks and gathered weeds. I was unbaptized, a nest for demons: how could she know what germs of blasphemy and unfaith were breeding in me? And yet she took me in.

Some of this must be true. I have not done it justice, or rather mercy. Instead I went for vengeance.

An eye for an eye leads only to more blindness. (427)

All in all, Elaine fully recognizes that she has made a narrow escape from the past because she could easily have been pushed over the edge and become a Cordelia, a Susie¹ or a bag lady in the street.

Significantly, identity formation and construction transgress the landscape of the city and are complemented by broader perspectives. Elaine's father is a field-researcher specializing in forest insects, whose family lives with him in the north for some time and later accompanies him from Toronto on trips to the north.² The landscape of the north functions as a contrasting spatial and social model to the cityscape and urban life. The wilderness is a parallel world symbolizing the dichotomy of nature and civilization. It is a physical landscape, realistically represented, with a different look, smell and feel than Toronto. The family's lifestyle there contrasts sharply with that in Toronto. They live a primitive, outdoor life with different habits and even different meals and have occasional contacts with the first nation. This uncomplicated way of life provokes and satisfies the natural and the early scientific curiosity of Elaine and her brother. The parents seem to be their true selves in their clothing, speaking and in the way they move about differently there. By contrast, their lifestyle in Toronto appears as a disguise, unnatural and unhealthy.

At the same time, the north is likewise a mental landscape, an emotional and psychological state of consciousness. First of all it is a refuge: the family can live there "like nomads on the far edges of the war" (26). Elaine feels temporary relief there at the time of her bullying (153). The landscape affects all the

¹ Susie is a former girlfriend of Josef's whom Elaine rescues after she had tried to carry out an abortion..

² This is an autobiographical parallel to Atwood, whose father was an entomologist who uprooted the family in the summer to follow him around the bush country of northern Ontario and Quebec. Cf. Sage 1999: 25, Kuhn: 2005: 10, Karrasch 1995: 25, Benson 1997: 63, New 2002: 49.

family members positively. Closer to nature, parents and children seem to live more authentic lives than in the city. Later, after Elaine and her brother have left their parents' home, the parents sell their house in Toronto and move up north. Her father goes back to research and a life in nature (349/50). At that time he refers to Toronto as overpopulated and polluted, with the lower Great Lakes being the world's largest sewer. Up north you can still breathe (350). Yet ultimately the north is also no more than a spatial and a time layer. It is not spared from change either; the roads are becoming too crowded because of too many trailers, as Elaine's mother mentions in a letter (350). However, the dominating image of the north is one of rural simplicity, an Arcadian, pastoral parallel world in harmony with nature (22, 32, 68–73, 152–56).

Another contrasting model is Vancouver, characterized as a refuge after Elaine's narrow escape from Toronto. Offering her a way of sidestepping (this time across the continent), it is an emergency exit from impending insanity to normalcy, stability and even security. Vancouver is fashioned in terms of contrast to Toronto in geographical, socio-cultural, personal, psychological and professional terms: it is located in the west, whereas Toronto is located in the east. This position is cunningly mirrored in the arrangement of Elaine's pictures at the Retrospective (her older pictures are hung on the east wall, her new ones on the west wall, 427). British Columbia is as far away from Toronto as she could get without drowning. The unreality of the landscape with the picturesque mountains on the coast and the bay seem to encourage her psychologically. The landscape does not feel real, but rather stagy. Elaine's stay there feels like a vacation, an evasion, though she insists she lives her 'real' life there (14, 15, 399–404). In front of her is the Pacific, which sends up sunset after un-set, for nothing. At her back are the improbable mountains, and beyond them an enormous barricade of land. Seen from that perspective, Toronto appears as lying behind an enormous barricade of land, at a great distance, burning in thought like Gomorrah, at which she dare not look (404). It symbolizes dangerous ground, a past not mastered yet (before she revisits Toronto). Back in Toronto, Elaine juxtaposes the fireplace and the back garden in her Vancouver home with Ben to her former Toronto home with Jon (89). Those two stages of her life, with their contrasting experiences, are also like two time and space layers or two transparencies laid on top of each other. Elaine wishes she were back in Vancouver with Ben. Her new life with her little daughter had been made easier there because the cost of living in Vancouver is lower than in Toronto. Vancouver's inhabitants have their own markedly defined socio-cultural identity. At first Elaine is treated with a resentful edge — she is from what is known as 'back east', which is supposed to confer unfair advantages (400). Later she enjoys her undoubted success in that city.

By comparison, Montreal features less prominently in the novel. It is rendered as a place more sophisticated in matters of lifestyle than Toronto; in the past it boasted much better restaurants and wines than Toronto.

The discourse of identity in *Cat's Eye* is eventually expanded to include the category of nationality. An important subtext is the juxtaposition of Toronto/Canada vs. Britain. This is done through references to everyday life,¹ the arts,² colonial history and the British Empire.³ The Canadianness stemming from the British legacy is an incongruent mix of old trappings of the British Commonwealth at school and in daily life, of unreflected patriotism on the part of teachers, attempts at pseudo-Scottishness at High school, and a lively interest in the lives of the British monarchs. The relations with Canada's neighbour, the US, are also addressed. The image of the US is ambivalent. From the Plaza Hotel, Elaine and Josef see the lake and the US. The US is just a thin fuzz on the horizon (324). Elsewhere, however, it is presented as a place of exciting, upcoming trends in art (298) and film (324). The American draft dodgers in Jon's front room are depressed because Toronto is not the US without a war on, but some limbo they have strayed into by accident and cannot get out of. "Toronto is nowhere, and nothing happens in it" (355). Elaine only briefly goes to New York once – for a group show. She feels sane there, compared to other people in the streets who seem to be talking to themselves (402). Quite to the contrary, her brother Stephen's development – he is getting ever more Americanized – is presented as precarious because he is becoming ever more successful as a scientist but at the same time is increasingly losing contact with everyday life.

Last but not least, Europe is brought into the discussion about national identity. The culture of modern and postmodern Toronto, with its ethnic restaurants, art galleries, boutiques and shops, is understood to have been modelled according to various influences from Europe. Besides, Elaine's first lover, art teacher Josef Hrbik, comes from Hungary. He has left the country and often has nightmares about his past there, but does not tell her about the war or how he got out of Hungary during the revolution. Josef has no country. It no longer exists for him, whereas Elaine, as he says, comes from a country that does not yet exist (324) and has no gaiety or soul. Elaine is his country now (318). He fashions her into his surrogate home country. Actually, he more accurately colonizes her: he warns her through self-made myths (like Cordelia) not to betray or leave him, remodels her according to his image of women, models her into an art object (associated with the style of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood), enforces his hedonistic European lifestyle on her, and peda-

¹ British pubs are juxtaposed to Canadian beer parlours (296, 297).

² Neither England nor Paris are regarded as a non plus ultra in terms of art production. Toronto is a dump anyway; only New York will do (298). The Stratfordian Shakespeare festival is an attempt to achieve an international profile.

³ The monument on Queen Street in honour of the South African War about ninety years ago raises the narrator's question as to whether anybody remembers the event (331). Cf. also the references to the visit of Princess Elizabeth, the pictures of the monarchs at school, the patriotism of Elaine's school teachers, the WW II relief measures.

gologically brainwashes her according to his totally different experiences as a foreigner and much older person who belongs to a different generation: “This country has no heroes, [...] You should keep it that way” (317). Elaine feels utterly miserable under the pressure of these enforced, inauthentic identities of both Josef and Toronto. This is illustrated through a food-and-meal metaphor in which the snail she is eating might well be a synecdoche for her own immature, insecure and imprisoned personality at that time: “I eat another tinned, inauthentic snail. It strikes me with no warning that I am miserable” (318). Josef in turn feels miserable because of his professional stagnation. As he sees it, painting itself is a hangover from the European past. It is no longer important. He is convinced that to do something really important you would have to work as a film director in the US (324). His later leaving Toronto for the US is also a desperate escape from a city that kept him hooked up both personally and professionally.

Canadianness, as thematized in this manner in the novel, represents a split national identity – doubtful, inauthentic, a fake construct composed of heterogeneous bits and pieces. It is characterized by a condescending, patronizing, often hostile attitude towards other countries and people, and a lack of acceptance of the otherness or difference of foreigners, their cultures and their lifestyles (cf. Banerji, Josef Hrbik, the Finesteins). This picture reflects very well the socio-cultural reality of post-war Canada. Only very slowly, over decades, is a new, multicultural Canadian identity – not altogether unproblematical – seen to emerge, an historically and geographically defined “ethnic mosaic” connoting no longer British hegemony, but acceptance of differences without discrimination (cf. Renger 2005: 18).

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