

**UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DO RIO GRANDE DO SUL
INSTITUTO DE LETRAS
PROGRAMA DE PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO EM LETRAS**

NATÁLIA PACHECO SILVEIRA

**I-WITNESS: AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND FICTION IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S
*CAT'S EYE***

**PORTO ALEGRE
2023/2**

NATÁLIA PACHECO SILVEIRA

**I-WITNESS: AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND FICTION IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S
*CAT'S EYE***

Dissertação de Mestrado em Estudos de Literatura –
Literaturas de Língua Inglesa – submetida ao Programa
de Pós-Graduação em Letras da Universidade Federal do
Rio Grande do Sul como requisito parcial para a
obtenção do título de Mestre em Letras.

ORIENTADORA: PROFA. DRA. SANDRA SIRANGELO MAGGIO

PORTO ALEGRE
Janeiro de 2024

UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DO RIO GRANDE DO SUL

REITOR

Carlos Bulhões

VICE-REITORA

Patrícia Pranke

DIRETORA DO INSTITUTO DE LETRAS

Carmen Luci Costa e Silva

VICE-DIRETORA DO INSTITUTO DE LETRAS

Márcia Montenegro Velho

CHEFE DA BIBLIOTECA DE CIÊNCIAS SOCIAIS E HUMANIDADES

Juliani Menezes dos Reis

CIP - Catalogação na Publicação

Pacheco Silveira, Natália
I-WITNESS: AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND FICTION IN MARGARET
ATWOOD'S CAT'S EYE / Natália Pacheco Silveira. --
2023.
107 f.
Orientador: Sandra Sirangelo Maggio.

Dissertação (Mestrado) -- Universidade Federal do
Rio Grande do Sul, Instituto de Letras, Programa de
Pós-Graduação em Letras, Porto Alegre, BR-RS, 2023.

1. Ficção autobiográfica. 2. Margaret Atwood. 3.
Fama e identidade. 4. Literatura canadense. I.
Sirangelo Maggio, Sandra, orient. II. Título.

NATÁLIA PACHECO SILVEIRA

**I-WITNESS: AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND FICTION IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S
*CAT'S EYE***

Dissertação de Mestrado em Estudos de Literatura –
Literaturas de Língua Inglesa – submetida ao Programa
de Pós-Graduação em Letras da Universidade Federal do
Rio Grande do Sul como requisito parcial para a
obtenção do título de Mestre em Letras.

Porto Alegre, 23 de janeiro de 2024.

Resultado: Aprovado com conceito A

BANCA EXAMINADORA:

Profa. Dra. Deborah Mondadori Simionato
Doutora em Estudos de Literatura pelo PPG Letras UFRGS

Prof. Dr. José Carlos Marques Volcato
Universidade Federal de Pelotas

Profa. Dra. Lis Yana de Lima Martinez
Doutora em Estudos de Literatura pelo PPG Letras UFRGS

Profa. Dra. Sandra Sirangelo Maggio (Orientadora)
Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Durante minha jornada acadêmica pude contar com o apoio de pessoas muito especiais. Expresso minha profunda gratidão aos meus pais, cujo incentivo e apoio me guiaram nesta jornada. A meu parceiro Ícaro, cuja compreensão, paciência e encorajamento constante foram fundamentais ao longo destes anos. Agradeço também aos meus amigos pelos momentos de riso, de conversa e de apoio emocional, sem os quais seria muito mais difícil ultrapassar todos os desafios. Por último, e não menos importante, deixo um agradecimento especial a minha orientadora, cuja dedicação e experiência foram cruciais para o desenvolvimento deste trabalho. Cada um de vocês contribuiu de maneira única para meu percurso acadêmico, e sou imensamente grata por isso.

APOIO DE FINANCIAMENTO EM PROJETOS DE PESQUISA

Meus estudos durante o período de pós-graduação, bem como o presente trabalho, contaram com o apoio financeiro da Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (CAPES). / This study was financed by the governmental agency *Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento Pessoal de Nível Superior (CAPES)*.

“Time is not a line but a dimension, like the dimensions of space. If you can bend space you can bend time also, and if you knew enough and could move faster than light you could travel backwards in time and exist in two places at once. [...] But I began then to think of time as having a shape, something you could see, like a series of liquid transparencies, one laid on top of another. You don't look back along time but down through it, like water. Sometimes this comes to surface, sometimes that, sometimes nothing. Nothing goes away.”

Margaret Atwood, *Cat's Eye*.

RESUMO

Esta dissertação explora a interação entre elementos autobiográficos e ficcionais no romance de Margaret Atwood *Cat's Eye*. A análise está estruturada em três capítulos, cada um mergulhando em dimensões distintas desta relação. No primeiro capítulo, o estudo navega pelos conceitos apresentados em diferentes ondas de estudos autobiográficos, examinando a evolução de ideias em torno de tais narrativas, estabelecendo paralelos e distinções com o romance analisado quanto ao que se alinha ou se afasta desses arcabouços teóricos. O suporte teórico ocorre a partir de Misch (1907), Olney (1980), LeJeune (1975), Gusdorf (1980) e outros estudiosos de diferentes ondas. O segundo capítulo dirige o foco para a figura pública de Atwood e sua relação dinâmica com a fama. Ele disseca as implicações das escolhas da escritora na formação de sua persona pública e como essas escolhas ressoam em elementos da obra. Esta seção visa descobrir as maneiras como Atwood trabalha com sua vida pessoal no domínio público e qual o impacto de sua fama nas dimensões autobiográficas do romance. York (2006) e Cooke (2000) são os principais suportes nessa seção. O terceiro capítulo trabalha com a proposição apresentada por Cooke (1992), fazendo uma leitura de *Cat's Eye* como uma autobiografia fictícia. Essa parte do estudo examina como Atwood desafia noções convencionais de autobiografia no romance, bem como outras contribuições relevantes nessa linha. Estudos como os de Ingersoll (1991), Hite (1995), De Jong (1998) e Banerjee (1990) foram trazidos por sua relevância e conexão com o tema desta tese. Busco contribuir para a compreensão mais ampla de como autores negociam suas experiências pessoais no âmbito da ficção, oferecendo novas perspectivas sobre as diferentes formas como a autobiografia e a ficção autobiográfica se apresentam.

Palavras-chave: Literatura canadense. Margaret Atwood. Ficção autobiográfica. Fama e identidade.

ABSTRACT

The aim of the present thesis is to verify how the interplay between autobiographical and fictional elements is put to play in Margaret Atwood's novel, *Cat's Eye*. The analysis is structured into three main chapters, each delving into distinct dimensions of this relationship. In the first chapter, the study navigates through the concepts presented in different waves of autobiographical studies, examining the evolution of ideas surrounding autobiographical narratives. Drawing parallels and distinctions, it scrutinizes how the novel aligns or diverges from these theoretical frameworks, offering insights into the nuanced ways autobiographical elements manifest within the narrative. Theoretical support is assessed mainly from Misch (1907), Olney (1980), LeJeune (1975), and Gusdorf (1980). The second chapter shifts focus on Atwood's public figure and her dynamic relationship with fame. It dissects the implications of the writer's choices in shaping her public persona and how these choices resonate within *Cat's Eye*. This section aims to uncover how Atwood negotiates her personal life within the public domain and the impact of her fame on the novel's autobiographical dimensions. York (2006) and Cooke (2000) provide the main support in this section. The third chapter engages with the proposition put forth by Cooke (1992), proposing the reading of *Cat's Eye* as a fictive autobiography. This part of the study explores Cooke's arguments, examining how Atwood challenges conventional notions of autobiography and narrative closure within the novel. Studies by Ingersoll (1991), Hite (1995), De Jong (1998), and Banerjee (1990), are brought for their relevance and connection with this theme. This study seeks to contribute to the broader understanding of how authors negotiate their personal experiences within the realm of fiction, offering new perspectives on the different ways autobiography and autobiographical fiction present themselves.

Keywords: Canadian literature. Margaret Atwood. Autobiographical fiction. Fame and identity.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	10
2. ON THE GENRE AUTOBIOGRAPHY	18
2.1 <i>Telling the lives of great men: The first wave of autobiographical studies</i>	18
2.2 <i>Bringing in new voices and perspectives: The second wave of autobiographical studies</i>	30
2.3 <i>The third wave of autobiographical studies</i>	36
3. ATWOOD'S LIFE AND PUBLIC FIGURE	50
3.1 <i>Elaine Risley and Margaret Atwood</i>	50
3.2 <i>Atwood and literary celebrity</i>	61
4. <i>CAT'S EYE</i>	70
4.1 <i>Reading a Fictive Autobiography</i>.....	70
4.2 <i>Other Considerations on Cat's Eye</i>	74
5. FINAL REMARKS	79
6. REFERENCES	86

1 INTRODUCTION

Studying the work of Margaret Atwood has opened many academic possibilities for me, for this prolific author manages to include a series of enlightening topics in her books. That being so, the novel analysed in this thesis, *Cat's Eye*, which is dense in many aspects, sheds light on subjects such as girlhood, motherhood, art, painting, intertextuality, multimodality, and culture, among others. Choosing to investigate one of these topics does not diminish the importance of the rest of them; however, I would like to point out how the tension — or the lack of it — between opposites is one of the main tropes of this work, in my view.

Cat's Eye tells the story of Elaine Risley, a middle-aged famous painter from Toronto who goes back to her hometown for a retrospective exhibition of her works. The plot points to a very nostalgic, autumnal narrative, focused mainly on Elaine's attempt to reconnect with herself at that stage of her life. While in the city, the protagonist reflects on her trajectory and especially on her relationship with her three childhood best friends: Carol, Cordelia, and Grace. In the past, their friendship quickly turned when Cordelia came back into the group after being away for a trip, resulting in a traumatic experience for Elaine, who was first accepted by her peers and then subjected to their persecution.

Many years after that, while the painter awaits her exhibition, she hopes that Cordelia, with whom she had the most intense connection — both negatively and positively — will attend the event. At the end of the narrative, Elaine realizes that she will not meet Cordelia again and that she will not be able to question her about the reasons behind the abuse she was made to endure. The painter decides to visit the bridge in the ravine next to her old home, where she was left to die by her friends decades ago, something that pivoted her detachment from the group. She sees young Cordelia on the bridge and lets her “go home” before Cordelia “freezes in time”, where she does not belong (Atwood, 2009, p. 475).

While there is an evident healing process presented in this scene — Elaine, who is now “older and wiser”, can be forgiving with the figure of the child who caused her significant trauma —, there is also a deep sense of loss. The closing of the novel depicts what lies beyond the painter's forgiveness: her acknowledgment of the impossibility of making amends, of having a genuine companionship with her old childhood and teenage friend. While on a plane going back home, Elaine sees two old women and reflects: “This is what I miss, Cordelia: not something that's gone, but something that will never happen: two old women giggling over their tea” (Atwood, 2009, p. 477).

To begin with, the title evokes both the book — a fictive autobiography, a term coined by Cooke (1992) — and a self-portrait made by Elaine, highlighting how these two media are part of the novel. On top of that, there is the evident opposition between Elaine and Cordelia, who, at some point, switch places in their power dynamic, something that accentuates, even more, how they seem to be always on different ends. Another polarized aspect in the narrative is gender relations, especially during Elaine’s college years, when she is confronted with taking sides with her female classmates — known as “woman painters” — or with her male classmates, who constantly mock the women in the field. A last point of interest in this dynamic is the tension between autobiographical and fictional aspects of the novel, which is of main importance to me. In sum, I understand that all these references nod to the same theme: *opposition* or even *reflection*.

Bringing these contributions to the main scope of this thesis, I see that the tension between autobiographical and fictional elements is also a way of turning this metaphorical mirror to the reader: as with any artwork, the way one interprets it frequently talks more about the person than about the work. However, going even further, I argue that Atwood purposely puts us in this position — choosing to read the novel as an autobiography in disguise, or as a sort of confession, or as completely fictional — and uses it as a narrative device. As pointed out by Hite, the novel plays with our perception of truthfulness and realness — just as young Elaine and her girlfriends tell stories claiming that they did happen, the novel claims to *not* be true — as exposed by its pretextual note,

This is a work of fiction. Although its form is that of an autobiography, it is not one. Space and time have been rearranged to suit the convenience of the book, and, with the exception of public figures, any resemblance to persons living or dead is purely coincidental. The opinions expressed are those of the characters and should not be confused with the author’s. (Atwood, 2009, n.p)

Along with the standard text of this type of note, there is an interesting addition: “Although its form is that of an autobiography, it is not one”. This sentence raises two questions: to begin with, why would it be necessary to state that this work is *not* an autobiography; and, secondly, why is it needed to state, at the same, that it *is* one, at least in form? Critics such as Ingersoll (1991) view this inclusion as a way of Atwood’s protecting herself from potential lawsuits coming from people in the author’s life who would project themselves in *Cat’s Eye* — especially the ones who are negatively portrayed. Once again, this shows how the novel plays with its own ambiguity.

At the same time, the novel also has a clear referential aspect, typical of genres such as autobiographies — illustrated in this case by the striking resemblance between Elaine and Atwood. This points to the fact that the novel raises questions as to what extent it is based on the author's own life, an intriguing element considering Atwood's notoriety and stance on the use of biographical elements in her work, as I will further explore. Among the similarities between author and character, there is the protagonist also having an entomologist as a father, and living in Toronto's countryside during infancy; a brother, Stephen, being a renowned scientist in his area; her being an artist during the 60s and being frequently questioned on how her work is associated to themes such as feminism, for instance. In short, these and other features highlight the undeniable resemblance between the character and the author, with the main difference being that one is a fictional painter, and the other, a writer in the actual world.

Going further, the idea of bringing biographical aspects highlights two Atwoods: Margaret Atwood, the person, and Margaret Atwood, the author. I understand that it is relevant to establish a demarcation between these different dimensions through this study. The authorial persona engages with elements extracted from the personal life of the individual Margaret Atwood, deliberately intertwining reality and fiction. For instance, this can be seen by the incorporation of the entomologist father, a characteristic from Atwood's actual life, which was inserted into *Cat's Eye*. Hence, the term "Atwood", in different moments, will be employed to refer either to the private individual or the author behind the text, shedding light on the deliberate choices made by the author Atwood.

This analysis delves into the intricate relationships between the protagonist Elaine Risley and the multifaceted persona of the renowned author Margaret Atwood. Within the textual realm, we have the character Elaine, who serves as both character and narrator. Outside the text, we have various facets of Atwood. Therefore, the term "Atwood" is employed in distinct capacities throughout this exploration: firstly, to denote the person Margaret Atwood, the private individual; secondly, to represent the writer Atwood, the creator of the novel; and thirdly, to signify the public figure Atwood, encompassing the author's broader societal role and reception. Clarification will be provided to distinguish which dimension of Atwood is under consideration, when necessary.

As suggested by Cooke (1992), *Cat's Eye* plays with the prospect of the author within the text, approaching and distancing this figure as convenient. This creates an intriguing dynamic for both readers and critics, who are challenged to not only reconsider consolidated beliefs on autobiography, and any other referential genre for that matter but also to reevaluate

the habitual tendency to associate characters and events from fiction to an author's life. This subsequently may be also linked to the public's ambition to know each time more about public figures such as writers, which becomes even more interesting when keeping in mind that Atwood is considered a literary celebrity¹, and is one of the most interviewed authors from our time (York, 2006).

Working with the concept of a fictional autobiography also demands further investigation on what would be the differences between autobiographies and other fictional genres. This discussion has gained some considerable space lately², since scholars such as Eakin (2020) suggest how our relationship with technology has a direct relation to our way of seeing and documenting our own lives, in some way changing and diluting what the term "autobiography" means. Although *Cat's Eye* was published in 1988, its discussion on the arguable truthfulness of this genre is very contemporary.

Even before the recent debate, it would not be incorrect to point out that autobiographies have been a source of many inquiries as to their fictional and referential status, usually seen by the public as reliable sources on the life of a person of interest. This is the main dispute involving the genre in my view since academics usually lean to one side: considering it *less* fictional because of its nature or viewing it as *equally* fictional to other genres. Olney (1980) even brings up the idea that memory itself would be a great source of fiction in the first place. This challenges the idea that because of its referential aspect — usually connected to the process of remembering and transposing in different ways aspects from one's life to a narrative — autobiographies are more credible than other genres.

Despite the many discussions on how to define autobiographies, there is one aspect that seems to be a consensus on the genre: it is characterized as having referential dimensions. That means that, as a rule, autobiographies reference real people, places, and events, being based on the life of a single person, who, at the same time, is the narrator of the work. LeJeune (1975), for instance, creates a series of conditions that must be met for a narrative to be characterized

¹ The idea of literary celebrity is proposed and discussed by York (2006), as mentioned later in this thesis.

² Annie Ernaux's Nobel Prize in Literature significantly impacted the literary landscape, particularly in the context of autobiography and fiction. The author's works often explore the boundaries between these genres, presenting a blend of personal and fictional elements.

as an autobiography. This is defined as the autobiographical pact, proposed by the author to better understand and classify novels that are part of the genre. Some aspects listed by LeJeune are that the author of the novel and the narrator must be the same person and, hence, must share some biographical aspects, such as having the same birthday and place of birth, the same name, and age. This characterization is very interesting when considering *Cat's Eye's* status as a fictional autobiography, for one of the main aspects that would distance the novel from being classified as such is the fact that Elaine is a fictional character — despite the many similarities with its author — whereas Atwood is a real individual.

Having these considerations in mind and following Cooke's approach to *fictional autobiography* — a type of narrative to be read as *both* fiction and autobiography at the same time, I will explore how this genre is incorporated and appropriated in *Cat's Eye*. My objective here is not to exhaustively analyze the similarities between Elaine and Atwood, but to understand *how* these autobiographical aspects are incorporated into the novel. To do so, I will draw from scholars who study Atwood's work, *Cat's Eye*, and the many different approaches to autobiography and autobiographical genres. These works will better contextualize the narrative concerning its publication and connection to Atwood's life and public persona, as well as help to conceptualize the narrative better, once this is also a topic of interest.

To review conceptualizations about autobiography, a study of some of the main works in the field will be presented, as well as contemporary ones, which embrace new discussions on the genre. In this sense, works representatives from the first, second, and third wave of autobiography criticism will be analyzed and contrasted, to understand, among other things, how autobiography's status as fiction or nonfiction was established. In this sense, Misch (1907), who is known as the scholar who inaugurated the studies on autobiographies, classified the genre as representative of great characters' stories, which were men from the public sphere who influenced important historical events (Misch, 1907). To the author and his contemporary critics from the first wave, autobiographies were undoubtedly associated with history, which in essence erases any role of fiction in the genre.

With the arrival of the second wave of autobiographical criticism, autobiographies started to be seen much more as acts of self-creation rather than transcriptions of the past, made by an autonomous self (Smith & Watson, 2001). Having this in mind, although autobiography is not considered equivalent to history as before, Gusdorf (1980) reinforces the status of autobiography as an essentially referential work, strongly associated with the figure of the author, who, mandatorily, had to be the same character as the one in the narrative. Moreover,

although LeJeune (1975) is considered an author from the third wave of autobiographical criticism, his work supports the idea of an autobiographical pact, which implies the importance of the work's authenticity, in the sense that an autobiography must have verifiable pieces of evidence of its relation to the author's life — such as references to the autobiographical subject's birthday, name, and place of birth (LeJeune, 1975).

The works of Olney (1980) — which is considered transitional between the second and third wave of autobiographical criticism —, Eakin (1985), Eakin (2020), Smith and Watson (1998), and, finally, Smith and Watson (2001) are representatives of the more contemporary wave. These works tend to focus on the discussion about selfhood and truth, as well as studies on the interdisciplinary of autobiographies. The contributions of Smith and Watson focus on autobiographies written by a range of authors, considering how these narratives are related to gender, politics, sexuality, and pedagogy. At last, the works of Eakin are especially relevant to this thesis, since the author focuses on the links between fiction and autobiography. For the author,

The presence of fiction in autobiography is not something to wish away, to rationalize, to apologize for, as so many writers and readers of autobiography persist in suggesting, for it is as reasonable to assume that all autobiography has some fiction in it as it is to recognize that all fiction is in some sense necessarily autobiographical. (Eakin, 1985, p. 10)

To explore how autobiographical elements are incorporated with fiction in the novel, studies that comment on specific aspects of *Cat's Eye* will be investigated, in addition to the ones regarding autobiography. For this purpose, the works of Banerjee (1990), Hite (1995), and Ingersoll (1991) will be assessed. Firstly, Banerjee (1990) remarks on how Risley's autobiographical account is structured, pointing out several elements which contribute to the construction of a "literary braid", which encapsulates the subject as a network of signifiers, such as speech, memory, art, and dream. These notions show themselves relevant to this study since they review aspects of the novel that could be contrasted to how autobiographical accounts, in general, are structured, as well as how subjects in autobiographies are presented. Moreover, the work of Hite (1995) comments on how optics and autobiography are incorporated into the novel. Regarding this, the author points out how *Cat's Eye* brings the subject of visibility, "about who sees and is seen, about evading or controlling the gaze, about the seeing that is the precondition and product of art" (Hite, 1995, p. 136). In this sense, the novel, according to Hite, sheds light on the differences between the public and private spheres, especially on what concerns art and the creator's intention. These elements are also

part of the debate regarding autobiographies, as the genre is very associated with the dynamic between private and public life, as well as the author's intention in writing the narrative.

Finally, Ingersoll (1991) brings insights into how "The text raises questions about the representation of women, about writing as a woman, about autobiography, and about mother and daughters" (Ingersoll, 1991, p. 24). With that in mind, Ingersoll observes the fact that "Atwood offers the informed reader the lure of a few well-known features of her own childhood and the proceeds to invent an autobiography which is the experience of Elaine Risley, a character who may bear only the most superficial similarities" (Ingersoll, 1991, p. 24). According to the author, this "lure" plays with the reader's expectations, and with the fact that autobiographical fiction may be considered to be "truer" (Ingersoll, 1991). This work shows itself as pertinent for this study since it directly addresses some of the questions about the relation between fiction and autobiography which are intended to be deepened.

The main scholarly support on Atwood's public figure and its relation to *Cat's Eye*, among other works, is from Nathalie Cooke, one of the most prominent scholars on the author. She is a professor and associated dean at McGill University, in Montreal, as well as the author of *Margaret Atwood: A Biography* (1998). Her works bring important insights into how Atwood's life and career have been seen in the public eye, as well as into the biographical interpretations resulting from this scenario. According to her, Atwood is seen in three different ways publicly: as a literary lion, which is associated with comments made by people around the author such as that "representing Atwood is like representing a 'dynasty' of writers, that Atwood is 'larger than life', a 'genius', 'magnificent in what she creates and the expanded and exquisite way she lives her life" (Cooke, 2000, p. 17); as a tiger, "because she was perceptive enough to recognize the important social issues of her time and was not afraid to be the first one to speak up" (Cooke, 2000, p. 21); and, lastly, as a pussycat, which relates to Atwood's comic depictions of herself, represented through self-portraits and comments: "Atwood presents Atwood as a short and soft-spoken, buried under a mass of curls, as one who, like everyone else in the contemporary world, often feels rather small, perhaps even stumbling, as she is 'blown' by the winds of chance" (Cooke, 2000, p. 22).

All these depictions reinforce the fact that at some level all writers are double and have a public and a concealed side (Cooke, 1992). In the case of Atwood, as previously mentioned, because of her resistance to showing her private life, readers and critics have been eager to know more about her concealed side, which leads to the numerous biographical interpretations of her work, especially of *Cat's Eye*. Considering this, Cooke also brings interesting insights

on how autobiography has been appropriated in the novel, and, more specifically, on how Atwood plays with her position as author: “When we read *Cat’s Eye*, we are forced to redirect our attention from Atwood’s presence or absence in this seemingly autobiographical text to ourselves and, in particular, to assumptions, about autobiographical fiction itself” (Cooke, 1992, p. 165-166).

In addition, the work of York (2006) will also be incorporated, which comments on how Atwood has publicly responded to stardom and the many biographical inquiries related or not to her work. To the author,

With one swoop of a paper bag, Atwood negotiates those systems of celebrity that seek to define her and frustrates that long-standing desire for access to an authentic self. She has, in turning the camera-lens of the celebrity system back upon itself, found her own way of negotiating with the dead. (York, 2006, p. 40).

In this sense, the autobiographical illusion in *Cat’s Eye* seems to work with assumptions made about Atwood’s life, as well as it seems to be part of her response to this.

This thesis will be divided into three main parts. Firstly, a review of how autobiographies have been defined and classified will be made, to clarify how authors have been characterizing the genre and its relation to fiction. For this purpose, works that are considered defining for the beginning of studies on autobiographies, as well as contemporary ones, will be investigated. Regarding this, definitions of autobiography will be contrasted, to achieve a better understanding of how the studies on the genre have been evolving.

Secondly, with the theoretical support of the previously studied works, autobiographical elements in *Cat’s Eye* will be explored. Moreover, along with these elements, the implications of Atwood’s figure as the author of the text are also considered. Thus, studies that embrace Atwood’s public figure and its influence on the readings of the author’s novels will be investigated. That being so, my second chapter will focus on Atwood as a public figure and how this is connected to the novel, and my third chapter will explore a reading of the novel as a fictive biography, as well as other relevant contributions.

With this, my purpose is to explain what innovations regarding literary conventions usually associated with autobiographies were made in the novel, not only to expand studies on Atwood but also on the genre. Further, I also intend to explore how these autobiographical elements are incorporated into the novel, and what effect this provokes. In conclusion, this thesis seeks to unravel the interplay between reality and fiction within the context of *Cat’s Eye*.

2 ON THE GENRE AUTOBIOGRAPHY

This section is dedicated to the study of the genre autobiography. Different waves of critical thought on the subject are presented, with discussions on how they relate to life and fiction. That being so, some insights on the main ideas of prominent scholars are discussed, while commenting on how they contribute to the study of *Cat's Eye's*.

2.1 Telling the lives of great men: The first wave of autobiographical studies

As above mentioned, the beginning of the studies on autobiography focused a lot more on the genre's connection to history. Nonetheless, the subjects of these narratives were defined by Misch (1907) as great men of their time, whose lives would be used as inspiration to other people. In short, autobiographies were seen as part of the historical account and were consulted as sources of information on the lives of these figures. In his *The History of Autobiography in Antiquity*, Misch delves into the origins and development of the genre throughout time, passing different ancient civilizations. According to him, self-representation and the recording of personal experiences emerged in these early cultures, which would be of great interest when analyzing the historical roots of autobiographies.

The History of Autobiography in Antiquity was chosen as a representative of this wave of studies as it focuses on the foundational principles and early manifestations of autobiographical writing. Once this first wave sought primarily to uncover the historical and literary roots of the genre, Misch's work fits this purpose, as it examines the historical origins of autobiographical narratives in ancient societies. Using writings by figures like Saint Augustine and Julius Caesar, the scholar highlights how autobiographies are deeply connected to a human quest for self-representation and self-reflection, something of value especially to public figures such as the ones mentioned.

In sum, there are three main themes discussed by the Misch, which will be overviewed in this section. The first one is the emergence of self-representation, as well as its complexity. Misch explores how the concept of self-representation and autobiographical narratives can be traced back to oral traditions. That means that in many early societies, storytelling was a fundamental means of preserving and passing down personal and collective memories — individuals would recount their life experiences, often as part of communal rituals or

ceremonies, thus creating this form of self-representation. The scholar also proposes how the incorporation of individuals' life stories into mythology, for example, would enhance their role.

The insights provided highlight the historical depth of autobiographical storytelling, tracing it back to oral traditions. In my view, this perspective explores how self-representation and the act of narrating one's life are deeply rooted in human history, and how relevant they are to it. The idea that storytelling was a fundamental means of preserving and sharing personal and collective memories, as well as the incorporation of an individual's life stories into mythology ratifies how broader contexts and these narratives already had a connection.

A second topic proposed by the author is both the historical roots and the notable autobiographical figures in the genre. Misch affirms that in ancient Greece, the emergence of the exploration of individual experiences was closely tied to the development of philosophy. Philosophers like Socrates and Plato engaged in dialogues that examined the nature of human existence, ethics, and the pursuit of wisdom. While not autobiographies in the modern sense, these dialogues would represent a form of introspective thinking.

Moreover, Greek playwrights like Sophocles and Aristophanes would incorporate elements of personal and social commentary into their works, delving into the human condition and contemporary society. That being so, these theatrical works would also present the themes of identity, self-discovery, and human behavior. This combination in the works of Greek playwrights, I understand, previewed other literary works — including autobiographical ones — that would come later and explore even further how the personal and the public could be fused.

The purpose of that reflection was to draw the individual man away from a life of unthinking acceptance of the current ideas, conventions, and usages of his community, an attitude that had already been attacked by the criticism of the Sophists, and to make him the master-builder of his own existence within the community. (Misch, 1907, p. 112)

In this sense, there is the idea of the transformative power of reflective self-awareness. The notion of drawing the individual away from unthinking acceptance highlights a call to intellectual autonomy and agency. In the context of the sophist's criticism, it underscores a criticism against unquestioning conformity. I understand that the idea of becoming the "master-builder" of one's existence within the community also suggests an active and deliberate engagement with one's life, advocating for conscious choices and the construction of a meaningful reality.

As to the prominent figures present in these early writings, Misch references the Romans, among others: according to the author, they were prolific in documenting their lives through memoirs and letters. Julius Caesar's *Commentarii de Bello Gallico*, for example, and the letters of Cicero, as well as the philosophical writings of Seneca and Marcus Aurelius, encompass personal reflections from the authors. They also provide insights into the thoughts, experiences, and societal values of their time, something equally investigated by Misch.

I understand that Misch's exploration of both the historical roots and the notable figures present in these narratives reveals a significant — and overlooked — connection between the emergence of these types of individual reflection and the development of philosophy. In other words, he proposes how these writings are considered precursors to philosophical contemplation. Although the referred dialogues may not fit the conventional definition of autobiographies, they can be considered early forms of introspection and self-examination, which are integral aspects of later autobiographical narratives. All in all, I see how Misch reinforces the enduring connection between autobiographical elements and the broader landscape of intellectual and philosophical exploration, something that does not apply solely to these early manifestations, but that will be confirmed again even in other waves of autobiographical studies as a key element to the genre.

Associating this context to *Cat's Eye's* narrative, I see that just as Misch highlights how Greek playwrights used their theatrical works to delve into the human condition and contemporary society, Atwood also employs Elaine's experiences and artistic expressions as a reflection on the evolving cultural norms and different dynamics of her time, as I will further comment. Moreover, I also understand that the novel, even subtly, intertwines philosophical contemplation with personal reflection, much like the examples brought by Misch on Greek philosophers. The themes of identity and self-discovery echo the philosophical underpinnings seen in the mentioned dialogues.

On that note, it is relevant to highlight how Stephen, Elaine's brother, introduces another layer of philosophical reflection that resonates with Misch's observations. In my view, Stephen's observations on the universe and the nature of time reflect a philosophical curiosity that permeates the novel. As a renowned physicist, and even as a teenage student, Elaine's brother delves into the mysteries of the cosmos and the passage of time, mirroring the pursuit of the mentioned thinkers.

Time is not a line but a dimension, like the dimensions of space. If you can bend space you can bend time also, and if you knew enough and could move faster than light you could travel backwards in time and exist in two places at once.
 It was my brother Stephen who told me that, when he wore his traveling maroon sweater to study in and spent a lot of time standing on his head so that the blood would run down into his brain and nourish it. (Atwood, 2009, p.3)

Although the novel does not present the discussions in a traditional academic format but rather weaves them into the character's lives and experiences, especially Elaine's, this integration of scientific and philosophical reflection showcases how these two realms — personal experience and these inquiries — are interwoven, much as Misch suggests in his work.

Stephen's reflections on time and space, and time traveling, resonate within the narrative, as they seem to illustrate the process through which Elaine goes with her reminiscing. Stephen's notion of time as a fluid, interconnected entity where past, present, and future coexist in a continuum mirrors how Elaine's memories seem to flow — especially if we consider the relativity of time expressed by Stephen and the profound impact of the past events on Elaine's present. In this sense, I see that the novel brings together the ideas of memory, time, and identity.

De Jong (1998) also highlights some important contributions made by Elaine's brother concerning her art and trajectory. She proposes how Stephen's scientific enthusiasm shapes Elaine's imagination — for example, even some of her paintings have names such as *Picoseconds* and *Unified Field Theory*, which refer directly to Stephen's theories. However, De Jong goes even further and suggests that Stephen's ideas also shape Elaine's sense of self, giving her the needed language to define her experiences. From light-years, the Möbius strip, and the Klein bottle, to different dimensions and time traveling, the character's brother becomes a significant catalyst to Elaine's intellectual and artistic horizons. The choice of names for her paintings not only indicates a direct influence but also serves as a reflection of the intersection between science and art in her creative expression.

Additionally, De Jong's observation about Stephen's ideas shaping Elaine's sense of self is also worth noting. I see that it highlights how in incorporating these scientific concepts into her art and worldview, Elaine does not just adopt a different artistic language; she also transforms her self-perception. The utilization of complex scientific ideas becomes, then, a form of exploring even further her own life and character, allowing her to articulate and understand her experiences in ways that would transcend conventional expressions — it is important to not forget how these specific paintings, *Picoseconds* and *Unified Field Theory*, are part of one the

most autobiographical section of her work, something that confirms their deep connection to the protagonist's self-perception.

This also culminates in her retrospective exhibition, where she realizes she has been painting time: "I walk the room, surrounded by the time I've made..." (Atwood, 2009, p. 461). In my view, this realization encapsulates the connection between her artistic work and the overarching theme of time. It suggests that her paintings are not merely static images but representations of temporal experiences. In this context, the act of walking the room would be like navigating the different times portrayed in her artworks. Each painting would become a visual representation of moments, emotions, and herself. Ultimately, the retrospective nature of the exhibition would allow Elaine to confront all these diverse moments in the same space.

Moreover, the use of the phrase "surrounded by the time I've made" implies a sense of ownership and authorship over her narratives. Through her art, she has not only painted images but has also captured the essence of these fleeting moments — an idea teased by the novel, as I will further explore. This notion confirms how beyond visual records her paintings are also an exploration of the fluidity of time and her existence. In my next chapter, I will comment on this connection between Elaine's painting, her trajectory, and the novel's organization.

In conclusion, *Cat's Eye's* brings how Elaine's introspection and her brother's explorations encapsulate the essence of Misch's observations on autobiographical narratives: the novel also reveals the influence and the profound connection between the protagonist's experiences and broader philosophical contemplations. In other words, the novel not only reveals the connection between these two realms but also how they influence and enrich each other. Through her introspective journey and her philosophical musings, Elaine's account displays how personal — emotional, psychological — and intellectual elements influence one's life.

The third topic analysed by Misch is how cultural norms on autobiographical narratives would work in these ancient civilizations. He observes how in ancient Greece, for example, the focus on individualism, humanism, and self-reflection in philosophical and dramatic works would also influence autobiographical writings, as previously mentioned. In the same manner, the Roman context would also ratify this scenario. In sum, Misch's perspective underscores that autobiographical narratives in antiquity were to a significant extent shaped by the cultural norms and practices of their respective civilizations and times. As I will further comment on, he is one of the first to propose autobiographical narratives as a historical and documental sources, hence his focus on understanding the past through these works.

The author proposes that the genre served diverse purposes, going from personal expression and reflection to political and religious matters. As an example of this, Misch highlights inscriptions such as funerary epitaphs, which would serve as evidence of individuals' search for being remembered and celebrated after their death through writing. Moreover, he also underscores the essential connection between autobiographical writings and the broader context that surrounds them: in his view, these texts functioned as tools of self-promotion of individuals who wanted to shape their public perception, commonly people who were already in power.

Autobiography is unlike any other form of literary composition. Its boundaries are more fluid and less definable in relation to form than those of lyric or epic poetry or of drama, which, in spite of variations from age to age, from nation to nation, and from work to work, have preserved unity of form throughout their development, since their first emergence from the obscure and undifferentiated beginnings of literature. Autobiography is one of the innovations brought by cultural advance, and yet it springs from the most natural source, the joy in self-communication and in enlisting the sympathetic understanding of others; or the need for self-assertion. In itself it is a representation of life that is committed to no definite form. (Misch, 1907, p. 17-18)

Misch defines autobiography as essentially unique and dynamic, emphasizing how this distinct nature of the genre allows it to evolve in different ways than lyric poetry, epic poetry, and drama, which have more traditional forms and retained a certain unity, according to him. In other words, autobiography would emerge from this innate human desire for self-expression, once it reflects the diverse ways individuals may portray themselves through different periods and contexts — hence his focus, especially in the times in which he believes these values were developed.

Moreover, this multifaceted and adaptative nature of autobiography is also reflected in the selected examples: monuments, legal settings, confessions, and personal records — a variety of genres and mediums. In sum, by bringing such diverse examples, Misch reinforces how both the quest for self-expression and the context in which we live have a direct influence on autobiographical works and the way they are perceived.

Cat's Eye, in its turn, does not ignore this scenario. Studies such as the ones of Banerjee (1990) emphasize how Atwood manages to fit in a variety of cultural and historical references in the novel, creating what is coined by him as an *archaeology of manners*.

In *Cat's Eye* Atwood's concern with manners takes on temporal depth. While the voice of the narrator in the present narrative enacts a comedy of manners in its articulation of the cultural artifacts of present-day Toronto, the voice of remembrance performs an archeology of manners, setting out for each strata of the narrator's life in social time the artifacts that embody this time. The history of the narrator's identity thus becomes

consubstantial with the transformation of manners and space in Toronto. (Banerjee, 1990, p. 515)

Even though the novel, as above mentioned, challenges and subverts a series of ideas related to what autobiographies are and what is their function, I believe it only manages to do so by incorporating characteristic elements of it. In this sense, it is clear how the narrative brings the idea of recollecting relevant historical and social elements from the time (or times) being depicted, and this is one of the key elements when analyzing how it relates to the autobiographical genre as well. Banerjee's ideas highlight how *Cat's Eye* goes beyond a superficial concern and delve deeper into its temporal dimension. This duality of narrative voices also serves as a vehicle to explore how these changes took place across time, emphasizing the connection — or the lack of it — the protagonist maintains with both times.

Moreover, this voice of remembrance presents these events, artifacts, and people that mark and embody different phases of the protagonist's life. This movement ties Elaine's personal growth with the transformation of manners and spaces in Toronto, displaying how personal experiences and broader cultural and societal contexts also have an interplay. This scenario aligns with what is proposed by Misch: while he suggests the role of autobiography as a reflection of these contexts over time, Banerjee underscores how Atwood's exploration of manners connects Elaine's development with Toronto's development. These two ideas align when considering how the two propose that autobiographies — or a fictional autobiography, in the case of *Cat's Eye* — are not just personal accounts but also narratives that provide insights into their contexts.

Furthermore, the intertwining of the protagonist's identity and the changing manners and spaces also echo Misch's arguments on how this type of narrative reflects an individual's quest for self-representation, as Elaine's growth is shaped by these cultural norms and behaviors that surround her. While dealing with both her internal world and the external influences, there are at display Elaine's retrospection and the portrayal of Toronto's landscape. That being so, Misch's affirmation of the interaction between these two spheres resonates with the narrative.

On top of that, exploring how autobiographies are connected to public identity is something I will also comment on. In the case of Atwood, it is evident how the writer has been consistently working through and with her public perception, as proposed before. Critics and scholars have suggested that the writing of a novel such as *Cat's Eye* corroborates the idea that not only is Atwood conscious of such readings, but also that she purposely plays with these elements in her work. These ideas will be better elaborated in my third chapter.

Something equally highlighted by Misch is the role of autobiographical accounts as historical sources. To him, even from antiquity, they offered insights into the lives, beliefs, and experiences of individuals, working as documental sources. Although this idea might seem flawed today, the concept of autobiography as a valid historical source was not widely recognized in the 20th century, as proposed by Friedell (1930).

We have here a gradual presentation of historical figures through the historian's judgment on them being formed step by step; but with this gradualness of development is combined the process of change in those individuals themselves, observed by him from time to time and pursued stage by stage in the course of events. Here we have a pragmatic kind of analysis; it presents that type of a history of development which proceeds from reflecting on the past, not from re-living and thereby re-animating it. (Misch, 1907, p. 334)

Instead of considering these texts as merely personal expressions, the author explored their broader historical significance, focusing on how they provided these glimpses of everyday realities and thoughts. I understand that this previewed a more comprehensive approach to both historical interpretation and the autobiographical genre, as he acknowledged the multifaceted nature of these narratives and their potential.

Overall, Misch offers a considerable contribution to the earliest forms of autobiographical writing and their cultural, social, and religious dimensions. These elements are of main importance when considering the emergence and evolution of the genre both in ancient times and today. That being so, his work provides a foundation for understanding the origins of autobiographical literature and its role in shaping human expression through history, hence its status as one of the principal studies on the genre.

Connecting these contributions to today's context, it is relevant to mention how these ideas are not strange even to the contemporary reader, once they reflect the ongoing outlook most people have when thinking about autobiographies or even biographies as documental sources on the lives of their subjects. Going further, by challenging and subverting these conventional notions surrounding autobiographies and other referential genres, I see that Atwood delves into the subjectivity of this type of narrative, focusing on how memory and perception can be molded. This raises questions on both the reliability and the malleability of such works, something already being discussed by scholars on the subject, as I will explore in the next sections.

A second example chosen for this first wave is the work of Georg Lukacs entitled *The Theory of the Novel* (1916), which includes discussions on the role of autobiography within the broader context of the novel. In it, he explores the novel as a genre uniquely suited to capture

the complexities of modern life and its characters. Although this work focuses primarily on the novel, Lukacs also comments on how autobiographical elements can be integral to it.

In his view, autobiographical elements could be incorporated into novels as a form of enrichment and authenticity of the narrative, its characters, and settings. He argues that by drawing from their personal experiences, authors would incorporate these elements while still writing a distinct genre. Overall, Lukacs comments on the interplay between personal experiences, character development, and the contexts presented in literary works. Although he does not delve into the specifics of autobiography, his exploration of the novel's nature includes some insights on how autobiographical elements are within a novel.

Lukacs proposes: "Whether this distance [between novel and reality] leads forward or backward, upwards or downwards from life, it is never the creation of a new reality but always only a subjective mirroring of what already exists." (Lukacs, 2023, Loc. 299). Thereby, autobiographical elements would serve as a subjective mirroring of a pre-existing reality, touching on discussions such as the authenticity and truthfulness of these references. This would also imply that narratives are bound by the limitations of the author's experiences and perceptions.

However, it is important to point out how this notion has been reviewed through time: instead of considering such narratives — or any narrative — as a mere reflection of reality, studies nowadays focus on the creative process in which memories and personal narratives are filtered through the author's perspective. This creative element allows for the transformation of these references into a structured narrative. Moreover, *Cat's Eye* also plays with this idea of bringing elements from the author's life into the text, as I will expand on now.

Novels such as *Cat's Eye* raise questions about the malleability of autobiographical elements and to what extent they mirror or create reality, as suggested. I understand that this dynamic relates directly to what is proposed by Lukacs, once he highlights the novel's capacity to depict the multifaceted nature of life and to mirror what already exists. In this sense, I see there are two instances in which the narrative discusses this approach: in the novel itself, and some situations Elaine goes through. I will comment further on this in my third section.

Elaine's recollection serves as a mirror of her perceptions and emotions. Still, the novel weaves elements of fiction, symbolism, and artistic interpretation into it. Also, it is important to keep in mind how Elaine's paintings are a key element when understanding the novel's organization and significance. Hence, even concerning its own protagonist, the narrative makes a point of displaying how Elaine not only remembers but also expands on her life experiences.

I understand that, therefore, *Cat's Eye* takes this exploration a step further by delving into the idea that autobiographical elements can not only mirror but also shape and create reality, as it displays how Elaine's memories and artistic endeavors contribute to her evolving identity and understanding of the world around her. Simultaneously, the novel reflects, reinterprets, and even shapes the protagonist's reality it seeks to portray. This is part of the innovative aspect of the novel in my opinion, once it displays in two levels — both as the novel itself and the situations the protagonist goes through as an artist — how these life elements are at the same incorporated and constantly transformed.

As to the events Elaine undergoes in her artistic life, the novel also explores how her references are received and interpreted by the public. In short, *Cat's Eye* displays how the connection between these elements and artistic expression creates a dynamic interaction with the audience. Elaine's artworks, often inspired by her own experiences and memories, become open to interpretation by viewers who bring their perspectives and emotions. Not always the protagonist is attuned with these perceptions, something I will comment on further.

Lukacs also delves into the psychological dimensions of the novel's hero, positing a departure from conventional heroic archetypes. As he unfolds the novel's objectivity, Lukacs presents a perspective on the relationship between meaning and reality. His assertion that the novel encapsulates a "virile maturity" and a "distinctive structure of discreteness" draws attention to the role of this literary form in expressing different truths.

The novel is the epic of a world that has been abandoned by God. The novel hero's psychology is demonic; the objectivity of the novel is the mature man's knowledge that meaning can never quite penetrate reality, but that, without meaning, reality, would disintegrate into the nothingness of inessentiality. These are merely different ways of saying the same thing. They define the productive limits of the possibilities of the novel — limits which are drawn from within — and, at the same time, they define the historico-philosophical moment at which great novels become possible, at which they grow into a symbol of the essential thing that needs to be said. The mental attitude of the novel is virile maturity, and the characteristic structure of its matter is discreteness, the separation interiority and adventure. (Lukacs, 2023, p. 63)

Lukacs, characterizing of the novel's hero as possessing a demonic psychology hints at a departure from conventional notions of heroism, suggesting a more complex and morally ambiguous protagonist. The notion that the novel encapsulates the world's abandonment by God also aligns with existential themes often explored in literature. Lukacs's emphasis on the novel's objectivity and its struggle to fully convey meaning also speaks to the challenges writers face in representing reality. Overall, I see that Lukacs's perspective invites contemplation on the existential and philosophical dimensions inherent in the novel as a literary form.

Similarly, *Cat's Eye's* exploration of the complexities of human existence resonates with Lukacs's insights into the nature of the novel. Firstly, his characterization of the novel's hero as morally ambiguous finds echoes in the nuanced portrayal of Elaine. The protagonist's multifaceted identity and the challenges she encounters in navigating her narrative terrain align with his vision of a hero whose psychology is far from conventional. The existential underpinnings of his ideas about the novel as a reflection of a world abandoned by God find resonance within the narrative as well, where characters — especially Elaine — grapple with the voids left by absent figures and the meaninglessness that often permeates life. In my fourth chapter, I will comment further on how Elaine and Cordelia's relationship lacks closure, for instance, something which reflects this idea.

Furthermore, Lukacs's emphasis on the struggle for meaning in the novel finds a parallel in *Cat's Eye*, where meaning is elusive, and open to interpretation. In this sense, the focus of this thesis would also serve as an example of this, since the lack of boundaries between fact and fiction also illustrates this notion. That being so, like Lukacs's vision of the novel, the novel would become a space for contemplating the complexities of existence, the subjective nature of truth, and the quest for meaning, for instance.

Going further, Elaine's personal experiences, as recounted in the narrative, serve as the foundation of her character development. The autobiographical account, in this sense, spanning from childhood into adulthood, provides deep insights into her psyche, her struggles, and her sense of self. On top of this, and as above mentioned, Elaine's journey is linked to the cultural and historical backdrop of mid-20th century Toronto, where the protagonist grows. That being so, and as commented before, the shift in these norms and dynamics has a direct influence on the protagonist's growth and identity.

Thereby, Lukacs' notion of autobiography *within* the novel aligns with how Elaine's personal experiences are embedded in the narrative, as they work as a lens through which readers explore not only her character but also the broader contexts at play. Through this scenario, the novel explores personal and societal dimensions within the novel, serving as an example of how autobiographical elements contribute to the novel's narrative.

Although these elements within *Cat's Eye* do not correspond to the experiences of a real person, the novel maintains the form and structure of an autobiography, as stated in the pretextual note. This aspect blurs the boundaries between fact and fiction, in a sense making Elaine's journey work as an authentic experience to the narrative. In other words, I see that the

protagonist's memories and experiences, although fictional, are woven into the narrative in a manner that aligns with the conventions of the genre.

In conclusion, just as Lukacs underscores the novel's capacity to depict the multifaceted nature of life, *Cat's Eye* challenges conventional notions of truth and authenticity within autobiographical storytelling. His perspective of a nuanced understanding of autobiography as a component of the novel emphasizes the complexities presented in literary works, something also incorporated into *Cat's Eye*. In my view, while Lukacs explores the autobiographical elements as additions to the novel, Atwood plays with the nature and limits of such elements. The blurring of the lines between autobiography and fiction highlights the malleability of novels and the possibilities they offer. By doing so, *Cat's Eye* displays the novel's potential to transcend traditional conventions, which attests to the enduring innovation of the novel as a literary genre, something supported by Lukacs.

Both Misch's and Lukacs' works present valuable insights on the beginning of the studies on autobiographical narratives. By looking into the past and analyzing these early manifestations, as well as by reinforcing these narrative's potential as historical sources or as literary components, they contribute to a multifaceted understanding of the genre. While Misch emphasizes the intersection of cultural norms, philosophy, and personal reflection in ancient civilizations, shedding light on the origins of autobiographical expressions, Lukacs, on the other hand, underscores how it invites readers to engage with these complex narratives. Together, their works provide a foundation for exploring the intricate relationship between autobiographical narratives, literature, and history.

As to *Cat's Eye connection* to these reflections, I understand that both the ideas brought by Misch on the philosophical aspects of self-reflection and the inclusion of contextual references in these works are echoed in the narrative. In the novel, Elaine's introspective musings and her brother's explorations resonate with such ideas, for instance. Additionally, the novel integrates contextual references, connecting the protagonist's life with broader social and historical context, much like the cultural influences described by Misch. Lukacs' idea of autobiography within narratives also finds a parallel in *Cat's Eye*, particularly through the interplay between personal experience, character development, and the context that surrounds the narrative.

2.2 Bringing in new voices and perspectives: The second wave of autobiographical studies

With the arrival of a new wave of autobiographical studies, some considerations on the genre were greatly changed. This change is due mostly to the shift from a more traditional focus on the author's life to the surrounding contexts that shaped these narratives. Emerging in the late 20th century, scholars from this wave witnessed a growing interest in the diversity of autobiographical voices, especially the ones of marginalized groups that have been historically overlooked. Studies that targeted a feminist approach, for instance, played a role in making connections with how gender influenced the construction of identity and how this is reflected in autobiographical narratives. This will also be commented on by this research in the context of Margaret Atwood's work.

Moreover, an interdisciplinary approach was shifted towards at, drawing from fields such as sociology, psychology, and cultural studies. This made it possible for an approach focusing on the interplay between the personal and the social in these narratives. Studies such as the ones from Eakin (1980), and LeJeune (1975) showcase this interdisciplinary approach and how it enriches our understanding of such works.

All in all, this new wave marks a significant shift when approaching autobiographical literature. The focus on contextual influences and the inclusion of various voices and interdisciplinary methodologies broadened the scope of analysis, making it possible for different authors and perspectives to be included. This evolving perspective not only recognizes diverse identities but also emphasizes the intricate connections between personal stories and the contexts in which they unfold.

The works chosen for the analysis of this wave are James Olney's *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* (1980), George Gusdorf's *Conditions and Limits of Autobiography* (1980), and Philippe LeJeune's *The Autobiographical Pact* (1975). Olney's work offers a comprehensive collection of essays on the autobiographical genre, focusing especially on the theoretical and critical perspectives emerging from the second wave of autobiographies' studies. Gusdorf's essay explores the distinct conventions and characteristics of the genre, shedding light on the complexities of personal and more general influences within these narratives. Finally, LeJeune's piece proposes how readers engage with autobiographical narratives under the belief in the author's sincerity and truthfulness.

These works were selected for this part of the study as they represent key texts that mark the transition from the second wave of autobiographical studies to the emergence of a third wave. Each work addresses relevant aspects of this literature, such as its theoretical underpinnings, defining characteristics, and evolving relationship between author and reader.

In sum, they offer deeper insights into how the genre has evolved and adapted to changing literary and cultural contexts.

James Olney's *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* (1980) brings a compilation of studies on the genre and is considered one of the main references on the subject. The work focuses especially on the multifaceted nature of autobiographical literature — that is, the relationship between memory and identity, for instance, or the dynamic between the individual experience and broader contexts, as well as the subjectivity and self-consciousness typical of this type of writing. Olney's work also follows up with some previous discussions that continue to this day to be relevant, such as the nature of this type of writing.

It is only by an act of faith that one can sustain the claim or the belief that it is autobiography that is being held. In talking about autobiography, one always feels that there is a great and present danger that the subject will slip away altogether, that it will vanish into thinnest air, leaving behind the perception that there is no such creature as autobiography and that there never has been — that there is no way to bring autobiography to heel as a literary genre with its own proper form, terminology, and observances. On the other hand, if autobiography fails to entice the critic into the folly of doubting or denying its very existence, then there arises the opposite temptation (or perhaps it is the same temptation in a different guise) to argue not only that autobiography exists but that it alone exists that all writing that aspires to be literature is autobiography and nothing else. (Olney, 1980, p. 4)

Olney's introduction presents interesting ideas on the genre. He reinforces this paradox of autobiography being a literary form or not, as well as the difficulty of defining these works. Considering the quote above, Olney underscores this enigmatic nature of autobiography as a genre, and how it is challenging to categorize and define narratives that are part of it. Olney goes even further and suggests how it could easily elude classification, slipping away into ambiguity. This reflects how difficult it is for critics to establish these boundaries as to define what constitutes an autobiography. LeJeune also starts his paragraph with the questioning of the possibility of defining autobiographies, as I will further comment.

On the other hand, Olney also brings the temptation to argue that everything in literature is, in essence, autobiography. This implies how all creative writing — regardless of form or content — reflects the author's life and experiences. In sum, autobiography would be an all-encompassing genre, blurring the lines between different literary works. As previously mentioned, this notion is very interesting when thinking of works such as *Cat's Eye*, once I believe that one of the aspects that may have directly influenced the writing of this narrative, as I will comment on.

In other words, there is a direct connection between the ongoing debate on the definition of autobiographies and how the novel presents itself. Going further, I would even suggest how this is one of the most striking nods Atwood does to this discussion since it is specifically this ambiguity of autobiographies that is being explored. Between considering the genre as all-encompassing, or as simply not definable, everything could be an autobiography. By including such striking references to her own life, Atwood plays with this notion. If there are such considerable similarities between her and Elaine, the only aspect stopping the novel from being classified as an autobiography would be the difference between her and character — one is a writer and the other is a painter, as pointed out by Hite — and the fact that Atwood does not corroborate the novel as an autobiography.

As previously suggested, the writer is familiar with her readers and critics making assumptions about how she is constantly bringing references from her own life into her works. This would also be a way of making *everything* autobiographical, regardless of the author's intention in doing so. By blurring the lines between fact and fiction, I believe that Atwood is playing with these assumptions, highlighting how she, as a writer, can craft narratives that challenge conventional notions of autobiography while leaving these same readers and critics pondering about the relationship between her life and her art. All the included references only tease how autobiographical the novel could be, however, none of this has ever been confirmed.

In sum, I believe that *Cat's Eye* plays with the notions of self-representation and the ever-elusive definition of autobiography. Moreover, I see that the novel showcases how autobiography can be a dynamic form, constantly shaped by the perspectives and expectations of both the author and the readers — at the same time, Atwood dodges the definition by directly denying it in the introductory note and makes a narrative that resembles an autobiography with its narrative and content.

Gusdorf (1980) in his essay *Conditions and Limits of Autobiography* also touches on the topic of defining autobiographies. To him, these narratives must be considered as part of a distinct literary genre with its own conventions and characteristics. He recognizes that they have a particular form and structure that differentiates them from other forms of literature. This distinction, underscored by him, also implies a type of pact made between author and reader, wherein authenticity and truthfulness play a role. In this sense, Gusdorf's work considers how autobiographies are bound by a set of rules that both define and limit the genre.

The man who takes the trouble to tell of himself knows that the present differs from the past and that it will not be repeated in the future; he has become more aware of

differences than of similarities; given the constant change, given the uncertainty of events and of men, he believes it a useful and valuable thing to fix his own image so that he can be certain it will not disappear like all things in this world. History then would be the memory of a humanity heading toward unforeseeable goals, struggling against the breakdown of forms and of beings. Each man matters to the world, each life and each death; the witnessing of each about himself enriches the common cultural heritage. (Gusdorf, 1980, p. 30-31)

An interesting point made by the author, exemplified by the quote above, is that the act of narrating one's life story is an acknowledgment of the ever-evolving nature of existence. That being so, the autobiographer recognizes that the present is distinct from the past and that the future is uncertain. The awareness of these differences leads to a desire to solidify one's identity and experiences, preserving them in this narrative form. Gusdorf also articulates this scenario to the idea that history is a collective memory of humanity's journey toward this unknown future. This is very similar to what is proposed by Misch, who also ratifies the genre's connection to history.

On top of that, he proposes how through autobiographies individuals seek to make a significant contribution to this shared culture and history by witnessing their own existence. In a sense, these narratives would become a testament to the significance of each person's life and would enrich our understanding of the human experience. In sum, Gusdorf comments on the role autobiographies play in attesting to humanity's diversity, even in the face of changes and uncertainties.

In my view, Gusdorf revisits and builds upon some of the fundamental concepts present in the first wave of autobiographical studies. Specifically, he re-evaluates the role of autobiographies in documenting the lives of notable individuals. This aligns with the early emphasis of autobiographical studies on the narratives of celebrated figures whose lives served as sources of inspiration for others. Moreover, by focusing on the concept of individuals witnessing and preserving their own experiences, Gusdorf supports the idea that each person's life has significance and adds to human history.

Moreover, one of the ideas proposed by the scholar is that autobiographies would not be isolated monologues but rather dynamic dialogues between the author and their various selves, both past and present. In the narrative, the author keeps a continuous conversation by revisiting past experiences and reflecting upon them while being their current self. This would ultimately configure the most adequate way to express the human experience. This concept is also illustrated by the quote above, especially when considering the ideas that the individuals understand "that the present differs from the past and that it will not be repeated in the future" and that they "become more aware of differences than of similarities" between these two times.

Furthermore, Gusdorf emphasized the tension between subjectivity and objectivity in such writings. He argues that authors aim to convey their life experiences as accurately as possible, while, on the other hand, “One should not take the narrator’s word for it [for an autobiography] but should consider his version of the facts as one contribution to his own biography”. (Gusdorf, 1980, p. 36). Considering this, the balance proposed by him seems to remind us that while authors strive for accuracy, these accounts are inevitably shaped by the author’s perspectives and should be considered as one facet of their life stories.

As already mentioned, Atwood plays with this dynamic in her novel, both inside the narrative and outside it. Within the story, Elaine’s recollections, influenced by memory and emotions, often bring up the subjectivity represented in her work. As I will further comment on in the next chapter, not only the subjectivity in her paintings but also how it is perceived by others is a topic covered by the narrative, exemplified by her perception of the exhibition of her work.

Finally, the autobiographical pact proposed by LeJeune presents a framework for understanding how narratives can fit the autobiographical genre and what are the basic principles of it. I understand this work as an attempt to not only better define the genre but also the unspoken agreement between authors and readers that comes with this type of narrative. This reflects some of the ongoing debates on what is autobiography and what part the author intentionally plays in it. In sum, LeJeune’s work acts as a guide that encourages readers to critically navigate these texts with a focus on what elements hint at the connection between author and character. It also highlights the balance between an author’s intent and the reader’s interpretation in shaping the autobiographical narrative, something not ignored by *Cat’s Eye*, as I will further elaborate.

The Autobiographical Pact (1975) proposes that readers engage with autobiographical narratives with an inherent belief in the author’s sincerity and truthfulness: this pact, in theory, sets the foundation for the reader to be able to trust these narratives and the author’s commitment to making them as authentic as possible. Above all, the pact underscores how fact and fiction interact within autobiographical writing: while readers expect genuine personal accounts, the author’s selection and interpretation of events and even their stylistic choices may distance these narratives from this ideal. By commenting on the dynamic between these creative and subjective elements and the reader’s prospect, LeJeune’s work also explores how not only the events being recounted, but also the author’s intent is of importance when reading autobiographical literature.

One of the ideas proposed is that autobiographies are a *way of reading* as equally as a *type of writing*. It is, in LeJeune's words, a *contractual effect* (LeJeune, 1975, p. 45). In this sense, autobiographies would achieve their full realization with their publication, changing from a private act of introspection into a public engagement. Moreover, this idea of *contractual effect* also implies how autobiographies are an act of communication with readers, which signifies the author's willingness to share their narrative in a truthful manner.

All in all, *The Autobiographical Pact* prompts readers to critically engage with such narratives, recognizing that while there are elements coming from the author's experience, autobiographies are also constructed narratives shaped by many literary choices. In other words, these narratives are not rigidly bound to an objective reality but instead constructed and infused with the author's choices. LeJeune's idea of the autobiographer being both authors and character, as well as the one who writes and the one who was written illustrates well this idea. According to him, narrator and character are instances *inside* the text, while the author is who is part of the autobiographical pact. (LeJeune, 1975, p. 35)

This perspective, in my understanding, encourages readers to delve into the interplay between an author's life and their storytelling, contemplating how the narrative transcends being a mere mirror reflecting biographical events. Instead, it becomes an integral component of the author's creative vision and interpretive lens. This interpretation also accentuates the nuanced relationship between an author's life and their creations, in my view.

In my view, *Cat's Eye* plays exactly with the nuance LeJeune exposes with the pact. Rather than considering only aspects such as the factual account present in an autobiography, LeJeune proposes how the blend of memory and emotion shapes these narratives. *Cat's Eye* is also a novel about the nature of memory and the act of remembering — Elaine's account is not only strikingly connected to her presence in Toronto but is also pervaded by the suppression of her memories, which are surfacing with her comeback. That being so, I understand that the novel also nods to the fact that telling such type of narrative — being, in this case, a fictive autobiography, or a *Künstlerroman* — also reminisces about the nature of memory or even the experience of remembrance. The opening lines versing on the process of recalling are a great example of this, in which Elaine introduces this process:

[...] I began then to think of time as having a shape, something you could see, like a series of liquid transparencies, one laid on top of another. You don't look back along time but down through it, like water.
Sometimes this comes to the surface, sometimes that, sometimes nothing.
Nothing goes away. (Atwood, 2009, p. 3)

In sum, the second wave of autobiographical studies brings new perspectives into the genre, many of which bear direct relevance to the narrative of *Cat's Eye*. A notable evolution within this wave is the departure from a narrow preoccupation with the author's life solely as a historical source toward a deeper exploration of other influences. Furthermore, the second wave's embrace of an interdisciplinary approach, incorporating insights from sociology, psychology, and cultural studies, widens the scope for readings of autobiographical texts. Interestingly, *Cat's Eye* aligns with this wave's thematic focus by exploring societal norms, for instance, particularly those intertwined with issues of gender and identity, thereby resonating with the interdisciplinary underpinnings of this wave.

2.3 The third wave of autobiographical studies

With the foundation laid by its predecessors, the third wave of autobiographical studies rethinks how autobiographical narratives are created, shared, and consumed in an increasingly interconnected and technologically driven world. That being so, this wave elaborates on some ideas already brought up before, and brings in the contributions of this new and innovative context.

The scholars chosen for this wave are Olney (1980), Eakin (1985), Eakin (2020), Smith and Watson (1998), and, finally, Smith and Watson (2001). These works were selected once they cover a range of approaches and views on autobiographical writings and their status. The most recent work selected, Eakin (2020), elaborates on many reflections brought not only by the author himself but also by many other scholars on the subject throughout the years. That being so, not only these pieces review important contributions on the genre, as they add relevant insights and perspectives from various angles.

Olney's work from 1980 provides a foundational understanding of the second wave of autobiographical studies, setting the stage for the subsequent works. Eakin's work from 1985 delves into the complex relationship between memory, narrative, and selfhood, offering an insight into the psychological dimensions of autobiographical writing. Smith and Watson's works from 1998 and 2001 complement these discussions by examining the intersections between autobiography and cultural identities, expanding these studies by connecting them to sociocultural dimensions.

Lastly, Eakin's 2020 work stands as a contemporary synthesis of the many reflections and debates that have evolved in the field, as mentioned. It serves as a culmination of these

decades-long discussions, offering a perspective on the multifaceted nature of autobiographical writings and how they continue to evolve in a changing cultural and literary landscape. Together, these scholars and their works contribute to the ongoing conversation surrounding these narratives.

The first work to be explored is Olney's *Some Versions of Memory/ Some Versions of Bios: The Ontology of Autobiography*, a chapter in his book *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* (1980). Although the book was already covered in the section about the second wave of autobiographical studies, Olney's chapter is included here since it teases important concepts that resonate with the themes of the third wave. In this chapter, Olney delves into the ontological aspects of autobiography, specifically the nature of memory and the self. He explores how these narratives relate to their recollections: "This is what I mean when I said that in trying to remember the past in the present the autobiographer imagines another person, another world into existence" (Olney, 1980, p. 245).

I see that his assertion that autobiographers, in attempting to remember the past in the present, engage in the act of imagining another person and another world into existence resonates with the evolving discussions within the third wave, which increasingly emphasize the dynamic and constructed aspects of autobiographical representation. In other words, Olney's exploration aligns with the broader shift in the third wave towards considering autobiographical narratives as more dynamic.

Furthermore, his emphasis on the imaginative process involved in remembering suggests that autobiographical writing is not a mere recollection of facts but a creative act that shapes and reshapes the past in the context of the present. In my view, this nuanced understanding of autobiography's dimensions lays a foundation for better understand the dynamics between memory, identity, and the act of self-representation in literature.

To begin with, Olney explores how autobiographical works can defy a straightforward categorization. He asserts, "I maintain that just as it is possible to have a work that is 'autobiographical' without its being 'an autobiography' so also — nor am I being wantonly paradoxical — it is possible to have a work that is 'an autobiography' without its being 'autobiographical'" (Olney, 1980, p. 250). In this statement, Olney introduces a nuanced perspective that challenges rigid definitions of autobiographical writing. By distinguishing between the formal classification of a work and the actual content's autobiographical nature, he emphasizes the complexity and diversity of autobiographical narratives.

Moreover, by asserting that a work can be "an autobiography" without being strictly "autobiographical," he challenges conventional definitions and invites a more flexible interpretation of the genre. I understand that this viewpoint resonates with the idea that autobiographical elements can manifest in various forms within a work, even if the entire narrative doesn't adhere to the traditional structure of autobiography. Olney's approach also encourages an exploration of the intersections between fiction and autobiography, highlighting the nature of self-representation in literature.

In my view, the reflections proposed by Olney retake what is presented both by Misch and by the second wave of autobiographical studies in general, since they affirm how the nature of autobiographical writing can extend beyond rigid boundaries. Much like Misch, Olney challenges the notion that autobiography must conform to a specific set of rules, allowing for a broader and more inclusive understanding of the genre. I see that this aligns with the evolving landscape of autobiographical studies, especially in the context of the second wave, which often seeks to explore the complexities and nuances of self-representation.

Olney's emphasis on the dynamic nature of self-representation in literature makes it possible for considering autobiographical elements as adaptable to various narrative structures. This not only enriches the appreciation of autobiographical works but also encourages a more expansive interpretation of the ways in which authors engage with their personal experiences when writing different narratives. Overall, I understand that this perspective contributes to a broader conversation about the malleability of autobiographical expression.

On that note, *Cat's Eye* serves as an example of the dynamic and adaptable nature of autobiographical expression within literature, as previously discussed. Much like Olney's assertion that a work can be "an autobiography" without strictly adhering to traditional autobiographical structures, the novel challenges conventional boundaries in the representation of personal experiences. In *Cat's Eye*, the autobiographical elements are interwoven into a narrative that encompasses various modes of discourse, temporal dimensions, and layers of meaning.

The novel's exploration of memory, identity, and the construction of the self also aligns with Olney's broader perspective on the flexibility of autobiographical writing, in my view. Elaine's recollections and experiences, while presented in a fictional context, mirror the intricacies of autobiographical reflection, as also previously suggested. That being so, I see that the narrative reflects a deliberate choice to go beyond a linear and straightforward

autobiographical approach, embracing a more nuanced and multifaceted representation, including the presence of Atwood's own biographical elements, as I will further explore.

In this way, *Cat's Eye* also exemplifies how autobiographical elements can be integrated into diverse narrative structures. Ultimately, I see that the novel's narrative richness and complexity echo Olney's call for a more open-minded and flexible understanding of autobiographical expression in literature. In other words, just as he proposes a broader understanding of the genre, the novel illustrates how this could be put into a narrative as well.

Going back to Olney's chapter, a second topic covered is the connection between autobiographies and the notions of self and identity. Olney examines how individuals construct their identities through the act of remembering and narrating their life experiences. Also, he raises questions about how autobiography shapes our understanding of selfhood. According to him, these narratives are not merely accounts of events but also tools for individuals to construct their identities. In this sense, the act of remembering and narrating life experiences is central to the process of identity formation — individuals would often use this type of storytelling to reflect on their past, understand the events that have shaped them, and define their sense of self: “ (...) a creative memory that shapes and reshapes the historic past in the image of the present, making that past as necessary to this present as this present is the inevitable outcome of that past.” (Olney, 1980, p. 243.)

Olney questions how autobiography contributes to our comprehension of selfhood, positing that these narratives play a crucial role in the ongoing process of identity formation. Autobiographers, in his view, engage in a creative act of memory, one that goes beyond a straightforward recall of historical events. Instead, this creative memory actively shapes and reshapes the past in alignment with the contemporary context. The past, as presented in autobiographical works, becomes not just a series of events but dynamic and essential to understanding the present.

The example he provides, using Richard Wright as an instance of the “autobiographer of memory,” emphasizes the transformative power of this creative memory. Autobiographers, as creators of their life stories, craft a narrative that mirrors the complexities of the present, while also rendering the past. This perspective reinforces the idea that autobiographical narratives are not mere reflections but active agents in the ongoing construction of individual identity. It accentuates how the act of storytelling, particularly in the autobiographical form, serves as a tool for individuals to grapple with their past, comprehend the forces that have shaped them, and articulate their evolving sense of self.

This double referent “I” delivers up a twofold *bios* — here and now, there and then, both the perpetual present and the historic past — and it is the tenuous yet tensile thread of memory that joins the two “I”s, that holds together the two *bioi*, and that successfully redeems the time of (and for) Richard Wright. (Oney, 1980, p. 248) (original emphasis)

In this sense, Olney's exploration of the dual referent "I," existing both in the immediacy of the present and the distant past, signifies the intricate interplay between these temporal dimensions. The delicate yet resilient thread of memory serves as connection, weaving together these two "I"s and their respective life stories.

The emphasis on the "tenuous yet tensile" nature of memory also underscores its fragility and strength simultaneously. Memory, as Olney suggests, isn't a static recounting but an active force that not only recalls past events but redeems and reconstructs them within the context of the present. The phrase “both the perpetual present and the historic past” highlights the dynamic relationship between the two, emphasizing that autobiographical narratives, driven by memory, contribute to the continuous negotiation of identity across time.

This perspective aligns with Olney's assertion that autobiographical narratives are not passive reflections but dynamic tools in the ongoing construction of individual identity. In conclusion, by recognizing the transformative power of memory and its role in shaping the dual aspects of an autobiographer's life, Olney introduces a nuanced understanding of how the act of storytelling becomes a means for individuals to reconcile, reinterpret, and redeem their past within the present.

The tension between the realms of fact and fiction — shaping both the reception of these narratives and the intentions of the autobiographers — is illuminated by Eakin (1985), the second author chosen for this section of the thesis. In his work *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention*, Eakin dissects the dual roles autobiographers play as both artists and historians. Common assumptions connect autobiographies to the verifiable facts of a life. This dynamic between the referential dimension of life events and the narrative creativity inherent in autobiographical writing has led to different approaches by historians, social scientists, and literary critics.

Most readers naturally assume that all autobiographies are based on the verifiable facts of a life history, and it is this referential dimension, imperfectly understood, that has checked the development of a poetics of autobiography. Historians and social scientists attempt to isolate the factual content of autobiography from its narrative matrix, while literary critics, seeking to promote the appreciation of autobiography as an imaginative art, have been willing to treat such texts as though they were

indistinguishable from novels. Autobiographers themselves, of course, are responsible for the problematical reception of their work, for they perform willy-nilly both as artists and historians, negotiating a narrative passage between the freedoms of imaginative creation on the one hand and the constraints of biographical fact on the other. (Eakin, 1985, p. 3)

Eakin's observation provides an insight into the intricate dynamics that shape the reception and understanding of autobiographical literature. The assumption held by most readers, expecting autobiographies to mirror verifiable life facts, introduces a referential dimension that, as he notes, has impeded a comprehensive poetics of autobiography. This expectation often stems from the inclination to treat autobiographies as historical documents rather than as literary works. The mentioned dual role that autobiographers play as both artists and historians also complicates this. In this sense, Eakin points out the situation wherein historians and social scientists aim to disentangle factual content from narratives, emphasizing the verifiable aspects, while literary critics, in their pursuit of elevating autobiography to an imaginative art form, sometimes erase the boundaries between autobiographical and fictional genres.

In essence, the quote touches upon the fundamental tension inherent in autobiographical writing — the delicate negotiation between the author's artistic freedom and the demand for historical accuracy. Autobiographers, by virtue of their dual roles, navigate this passage, influencing the reception of their work. The distinction between autobiography and fiction becomes blurred in the eyes of literary critics and readers in this scenario. This multifaceted dynamic, as outlined by Eakin, brings to light the challenge autobiographers face in shaping the perception of their work, navigating different expectations.

Considering this in relation to *Cat's Eye*, Eakin's insights also offer a lens through which to examine the narrative — for instance, the assumption that autobiographies must contain strictly verifiable life facts is disrupted by the narrative, which weaves elements of the author's life with fictional constructs. Readers, conditioned to approach autobiographies with an expectation of historical accuracy, may find themselves in the same predicament Eakin describes when reading *Cat's Eye* and expecting to encounter Atwood's autobiography, for instance.

The writer, in this sense, would function both as an artist and a chronicler of her experiences. The novel would be where these elements intertwine with fictional narrative, challenging conventional expectations of the genre, as above discussed. That being so, reading the novel may be a dilemma similar to the discussed by Eakin, once it is an example of a work that defies easy classification, in my view.

Moreover, Eakin also proposes that “It is precisely such a narrative's claim to be a version of the author's own life, anchored in verifiable biographical fact, that distinguishes an autobiography for the reader from other kinds of texts which it may closely resemble in other respects”. (Eakin, 1985, p. 185) Therefore, the claim of a narrative to be a rendition of the author's actual life, grounded in factual biographical details, serves as a defining characteristic that sets autobiographies apart for readers. This distinction, as proposed by Eakin, elucidates the reader's expectation of a certain truthfulness and authenticity inherent in autobiographical works. In the context of *Cat's Eye*, this criterion becomes especially relevant as the novel navigates these blurred boundaries.

However, one aspect to be considered is how this claim is made, since I see that this is one of the key parts of how the novel defies classification. Eakin suggests that the claim comes from the narrative, but even so this could not be sufficiently specific. The pretextual note in the novel suggests that it is *not* an autobiography, as already covered, however, the parallels between character and author could also be considered — and frequently are — as hints to its autobiographical background. In this sense, I understand that the novel plays with this dynamic, denying and conforming, depending on the viewpoint, its factually.

Going further, in the case of *Cat's Eye*, the novel strategically challenges the conventional methods through which the claim of autobiographical truth is typically established. Eakin's assertion that this claim arises from the narrative itself becomes particularly intriguing when applied to this work. Rather than conforming to a straightforward autobiographical structure, the narrative introduces elements from its author's own life, creating a space where truth and fiction intermingle. Unlike traditional autobiographies that might rely on a linear presentation of facts, the novel employs a nuanced approach where the autobiographical claim is embedded. In my view, it is this deviation from conventional autobiography that leaves an opening for such diverse readings.

Moreover, this complicates the process of determining what constitutes verifiable biographical fact. The novel prompts the questioning of not only the authenticity of events within it but also the very nature of truth in autobiographical storytelling. In doing so, I see that it engages with the reader's expectations, offering a unique lens through which to explore its narrative.

In sum, in my opinion the engagement with reader expectations is not merely a stylistic choice but also a commentary on the nature of autobiographical storytelling — what seems to be suggested is that the quest for truth in literature, especially in autobiographies, is not a

passive but an interactive process where readers should question their own perceptions about autobiography when reading *Cat's Eye*. Therefore, this reflective engagement aligns with Eakin's notion that the claim of a narrative to be a rendition of the author's actual life is a defining characteristic, since it expands on how this claim — or this confirmation of a claim — is made. In other words, considering the novel, this claim is not handed over on a platter but part of a process where readers participate in the creation of meaning and truth within the text, starting with its own classification.

In essence, Eakin's observations highlight the tension that shapes both the audience's reception and the autobiographer's intent. The assumption that autobiographies must adhere strictly to verifiable life facts, as described by Eakin, forms the basis for the expectations readers bring to autobiographical works. This expectation becomes especially relevant in the context of *Cat's Eye*, as suggested.

Eakin's proposition that the claim to autobiographical truth arises from the narrative itself is also of special interest. Unlike traditional autobiographies that follow a linear presentation of facts, *Cat's Eye* employs a nuanced approach, embedding the autobiographical claim within the narrative and playing with it in its pretextual note. This departure from conventional autobiography is what offers diverse readings, I see, and allows for discussion on the novel's status.

Finally, I understand that the novel deliberately complicates the determination of what constitutes verifiable biographical fact. It not only questions the authenticity of events within its narrative — considering Elaine's life story — but also challenges the very nature of truth in autobiographical storytelling — considering the novel and its connection to Atwood. This reflective engagement, I argue, is not a passive action but a collaborative process where readers actively question and participate. In this way, the novel play with Eakin's notion that the claim of a narrative to be a rendition of the author's actual life defines it.

Moving forward, Eakin's second work, *Writing Life Writing: Narrative, History, Autobiography* (2020), delves into the relationship between narrative, history, and autobiography. Eakin navigates the interplay between individual narratives and the larger historical and literary contexts, while also dissects both the structural and thematic elements of autobiographies and the philosophical and historical dimensions that underpin the act of writing one's life. As previously mentioned, it is one of the most recent works selected for this analysis, so the discussions brought by Eakin also include how this process unfolds today, online and

offline. Although this discussion is not part of what is proposed by *Cat's Eye*, it can be considered as part of the third wave's evolution regarding autobiographical studies.

One of its central themes is the intricate relationship between these different elements. Eakin delves into the ways in which personal narratives intersect with larger historical and literary frameworks, challenging traditional notions of individual storytelling. The book also explores the complexities of truth and authenticity in autobiographical writing, also bringing the idea of narrative identity and the construction of the self through storytelling. Throughout the work, Eakin engages with philosophical inquiries about memory, representation, and the ethical dimensions of life writing.

To begin with, the scholar proposes how

(...) autobiography is not merely something we read in a book; rather, as a discourse of identity, delivered bit by bit in the stories we tell about ourselves day in and day out, autobiography structures our living. We don't, though, tend to give much thought to this process of self-narration precisely because, after years of practice, we do it so well. When this identity story system is ruptured, however, we can be jolted into awareness of the central role it plays in organizing our social world. (Eakin, 2020, p. 252)

In this sense, the quoted posits an insightful perspective on the pervasive influence of autobiography as a discourse of identity, extending beyond the traditional confines of literary narratives. In my view, the phrase "delivered bit by bit in the stories we tell about ourselves day in and day out" underscores the continuous and evolving nature of autobiographical discourse, suggesting an ongoing process of identity construction. The proposition that autobiography structures our living also introduces a nuanced understanding of the intricate interplay between self-narration and the organization of social reality.

Moreover, the acknowledgment that individuals may not overtly contemplate this process due to its seamless integration into daily practices emphasizes the habitual and perhaps subconscious nature of autobiographical storytelling. Although this is not the focus of this thesis, I understand that this conceptualization aligns with broader scholarly discussions on the performative aspects of identity and the role of narrative in constituting the self within a sociocultural context. These themes can also be considered in the reading of Smith and Watson works, which will be done next in this section. They consider relevant aspects of reading women's autobiographies, therefore including this type of debate.

Overall, I see that the quote offers a compelling argument regarding the pervasive and transformative influence of autobiographical discourse, especially when this discourse is problematic. I believe this is the case of *Cat's Eye*, considering how the novel accentuates the

relationship between personal narrative and different structures, including, but not being limited to, autobiographical writing. In other words, even though Eakin was not referring to this novel specifically, I see that it can also be potentially one example of this rupture that accentuates how we relate to these narratives.

Following, Eakin delineates the essential distinction between biography and autobiography, underscoring the inherent divergence between the two. He positions biography as an external observation of the subject, thus accentuating the intrinsic separation among individuals. This dichotomy not only underscores the significance of biographical writings, attributing to it a semblance of objectivity, but it also illuminates its primary constraint, which is its inherent inaccessibility. This perspective is useful when examining the contrasting dynamics between biography and autobiography.

What separates biography from autobiography is what separates us from each other, namely, our subjectivity and the envelope of the body that contains it. This fundamental difference in perspective—seeing the subject from the outside—establishes at once the value of biographical inquiry, its presumed objectivity, and also its principal limitation, for the experiential reality of the inner world of someone else is ultimately inaccessible and unknowable. (Eakin, 2020, p. 42)

In my view, Eakin's proposition triggers contemplation on the intricate balance between subjectivity and objectivity in these life narratives. The acknowledgment of the inherent limitations in capturing the inner world of an individual, as highlighted in the quote, resonates with broader debates within autobiographical studies, even in the first wave. The perceived objectivity of biographical inquiry, as suggested, is mixed with an acknowledgment of its principal limitation: the inability to fully fathom the subjective dimensions of another person's lived experiences. This tension between the objective and the subjective becomes particularly relevant when considering works like *Cat's Eye*, which navigates this interplay.

For instance, the novel being considered as a fictive autobiography — something on which I will expand on in my fourth chapter — is an interesting take considering this scenario. If the mentioned limitation between biography and autobiography is rooted on the inaccessibility of knowing the inner world of somebody else, the idea of a fictive autobiography — writing about a third person, a character, in the form of an autobiography, offers a unique perspective on navigating this intrinsic limitation. In other words, the concept of a fictive autobiography, as explored in *Cat's Eye*, introduces an intriguing layer to Eakin's proposition. By having a narrative that blurs the lines between objective observation and subjective experience, the novel challenges the conventional boundaries between biography and

autobiography. I argue that the fictive autobiography, in its essence, allows for a mediated exploration of the inner world of a character, inviting readers to engage with a narrative that intertwines the author's creative expression with the imagined experiences of the character. This narrative strategy, in my interpretation, complicates the dichotomy proposed by Eakin.

Moreover, when considering autobiographical elements in *Cat's Eye*, this tension between subjectivity and objectivity becomes a pivotal aspect of the narrative. I understand that Atwood invites readers to question the assumed objectivity of the biographical lens and challenges them to navigate how the author's perspective converges with the fictional inner world of the characters, without a direct connection of her *being* them — a type of statement commonly made about her, as previously commented. In outline, the acknowledgment of this dynamic, as proposed by Eakin, becomes a lens through which it is possible to examine how subjectivity and objectivity interact in autobiographical works like *Cat's Eye*, which do not fit the genre typically.

Finally, another contribution by author is on the idea of eye witnessing and the first person writing “I”. This is a key concept to this thesis, once I also bring the idea of this play between eye and I considering both the novel’s title and the idea of eyewitness.

To review some of the ways in which “eye” and “I” complicate eyewitness accounts is to suggest that the notions of fact, of truth, of “you- are- there” immediacy that we instinctively associate with the term eyewitness tend to mask the constructed, fictive dimension of such narratives. There is a gap, an intractable distance, that even the sharpest eye, the most straightforward “I,” cannot finally manage to close. (Eakin, 2020, p. 56)

Hence, Eakin's assertion explores of the intricacies inherent in eyewitness accounts, specifically underscoring the play between "eye" and "I." The proposition unveils conventional associations tied to eyewitness narratives, namely, the presumed objectivity, factual precision, and immediate access to truth that characterize such accounts. The delineation of an "intractable distance" implies an irreconcilable gap or separation, challenging the widely held belief that the observation of the first-person narrative can entirely bridge the divide between reality and its representation. Eakin's argument highlights the often-presumed transparency and unmediated access to truth first person narratives are believed to have.

His examination of eyewitness accounts, particularly the recognition of this gap, can also be connected to *Cat's Eye*, as Elaine navigates the complexities of memory and self-perception, subtly challenging the conventional notions associated with firsthand narratives. In this sense, the wordplay of “eye” and “I” in the novel would underscore the challenges of representing one's own experiences, as well as the inherent subjectivity in this. In *Cat's Eye*, the

protagonist's recollections are not presented as straightforward eyewitness accounts; instead, they are filtered through the prism of memory and personal interpretation. I understand that the novel delves into the intricacies of identity construction and the selective nature of memory, echoing Eakin's argument that even the sharpest eye and the most straightforward "I" cannot entirely overcome the gap in representing lived experiences.

Moreover, the notion of an "intractable distance" in Eakin's argument aligns with how the novel explores the emotional and psychological distances between characters, especially in the context of Elaine's friendships. This emphasizes the novel's focus on the limitations and complexities of relationships. This also resonates with the idea that, despite the narrative's attempt to provide an eyewitness account of Elaine's life, certain distances persist.

Lastly, this scenario could also be connected to the novel in relation to Atwood's life. The autobiographical elements included in *Cat's Eye* may mirror the challenges Eakin outlines in bridging the gap between personal experiences and their representation, or even between fact and fiction. In my view, the novel also discusses how the presence of autobiographical elements would or not change the way the novel is supposed to be read, and, as already mentioned, how these aspects are normally interpreted.

Moving forward, in *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, (1998) edited by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, the compilation endeavors to provide readers with a comprehensive selection of theoretical perspectives on women's autobiographical writings. The anthology brings together a diverse range of critical essays that explore the intersections of gender, identity, and autobiographical expression. With contributions from various scholars, the reader aspires to offer insights into the complexities of women's self-representation and the theoretical frameworks that have been employed to analyze autobiographical works produced by women.

The main themes woven throughout this anthology encompass a broad spectrum of theoretical considerations related to women's autobiographies. The collection delves into topics such as feminist literary criticism, the challenges and innovations in women's life writing, and the ways in which women navigate and negotiate their identities through autobiographical narratives. It explores the cultural, historical, and social contexts that shape women's autobiographical expressions, fostering a deeper understanding of the diverse and intricate ways in which women engage with the act of self-representation.

To begin with, the scholars propose how

The status of autobiography has changed dramatically in the intervening decades, both within and outside the academy. Women's autobiography is now a privileged site for thinking about issues of writing at the intersection of feminist, postcolonial, and postmodern critical theories. (...) the texts and theory of women's autobiography have been pivotal for revising our concepts of women's life issues-growing up female, coming to voice, affiliation, sexuality and textuality, the life cycle. (Smith & Watson, 1998, p. 5)

The quote reflects on the transformative trajectory of autobiography, particularly within the realms of academia and feminist discourse. The evolution of the status of autobiography, as outlined, underscores its contemporary significance. The assertion that women's autobiography has become a privileged locus for contemplating the convergence of feminist, postcolonial, and postmodern critical theories situates these narratives at the intersection of these relevant discourses. This positioning suggests that women's autobiographical texts also interact with broader theoretical frameworks that intersect and engage.

Moreover, the recognition of women's autobiography as pivotal in revising conceptualizations of various aspects of women's lives signifies its profound impact on the discourse surrounding gender and identity. The acknowledgment that these texts and associated theoretical perspectives have been of use when rethinking notions related to growing up female, finding one's voice, negotiating affiliations, grappling with sexuality, and understanding textuality and the life cycle emphasizes the multi-dimensional contributions of women's autobiography.

Therefore, the statement by Smith and Watson encapsulates the dynamic evolution of autobiography, especially in its intersectionality with feminist, postcolonial, and postmodern theories. I understand that it positions women's autobiography as a force in academic and cultural discourses, uniquely contributing to the ongoing revision of concepts related to women's lived experiences.

Continuing, this dynamic shift in the understanding and application of autobiographical theories, as delineated in this work, can also be connected to the exploration of women's identities in *Cat's Eye*. The quote, and, more generally, the anthology, by bringing together diverse theoretical perspectives, invites readers to consider the intricate ways in which women engage in autobiographical expression. This resonance is particularly evident in *Cat's Eye*, where Elaine's autobiographical narrative is deeply intertwined with questions of identity and self-representation, as previously mentioned.

The themes explored in the anthology, such as feminist literary criticism and the challenges of women's life writing, provide a lens for interpreting the complexities presented in the narrative. These narratives intricacies of growing up female, grappling with sexuality, and

understanding the life cycle, for example, as articulated, parallel the thematic intricacies that are present in the novel. *Cat's Eye*, in its portrayal of Elaine's life and relationships, aligns with the anthology's exploration of the cultural, historical, and social contexts shaping women's autobiographical expressions, I understand, thereby enriching the discourse on women's lives and identities. Moreover, their emphasis on diverse forms of self-representations also finds resonance in the novel's portrayal of the protagonist's sense of self and her personal history within other social and cultural contexts.

Following, Smith and Watson argue that "With the loosening of formalist New Criticism's hold on literary scholarship, several critics began reading autobiographies as literary texts, rather than documentary histories." (Smith & Watson, 1998, p. 7) Following, they bring an example already discussed in this thesis: "Gusdorf configured autobiography as unquestionably white, male, and Western" (Smith & Watson, 1998, p. 8). According to them, the idea of the artist and the model coinciding, with the historian tackling himself as object and as a great person would reflect this stance.

Smith and Watson's first assertion, in my view, encapsulates the shift in the approach to autobiographical studies. In other words, I see that there is a departure from the more restrictive methodologies of New Criticism, which treated autobiographies primarily as historical documents, emphasizing factual accuracy over literary analysis. The recognition of autobiographies as literary texts underscores an acknowledgment of the artistic and creative dimensions in these narratives. This shift is particularly relevant in the context of *Cat's Eye*, I propose.

Moreover, Smith and Watson's reference to Gusdorf's configuration of autobiography as "unquestionably white, male, and Western" (1998, p. 8) resonates with ongoing debates regarding the cultural and gendered dimensions of autobiographical discourse. Gusdorf's positioning of autobiography within a specific cultural and gendered framework suggests a historical bias that privileges certain voices and perspectives over others. This resonates with the broader thematic exploration in *Cat's Eye*, where Elaine's narrative, though deeply personal, is also influenced and constrained by norms, particularly those related to gender.

I see that there is a challenge to such limitations and a counter-narrative that subverts traditional expectations, echoing the shifting paradigms discussed by Smith and Watson in the academic discourse on autobiography. In this way, *Cat's Eye* would serve as an example that aligns with the evolving understanding of autobiography as more than just a documentary

history, embracing its literary and creative dimensions. These ideas are not exclusive to this wave, as other scholars propose similar readings of these writings.

On top of that, they also propose a review on the autobiographical studies, focusing on how women's contributions in this are being seen: "Theorists of women's autobiography have occupied a special place in calling for new autobiographical practices and critiques adequate to the texts of women's lives while exposing the blind spots, aporias, complicities, and exclusions in dominant theorizing of the subject." (Smith & Watson, 1998, p. 37). Some topics in need of review suggested by them are memory, spatiality, autobiography and nation, interdisciplinarity, and others.

I understand that their proposition encapsulates a critical stance within women's autobiographical studies. The acknowledgment of theorists of women's autobiography as occupying a distinctive position highlights their role in challenging conventional approaches to autobiographical theory. Moreover, the call for "new autobiographical practices and critiques" underscores a push for innovative methodologies that can better capture and analyse the diverse and complex narratives of women's lives.

Furthermore, I see that the emphasis on exposing "blind spots, aporias, complicities, and exclusions in dominant theorizing of the subject" indicates a commitment to unveiling and critiquing the limitations and biases inherent in the current theoretical frameworks. This aligns with ongoing debates about inclusivity, diversity, and intersectionality within autobiographical studies, more present in the third wave of studies. In relation to *Cat's Eye*, this critical stance resonates with the novel's exploration of the limitations and complexities of Elaine's narrative, in my understanding.

The suggestion to review a series of topics reflects a aim at expanding the scope and depth of women's autobiographical studies. The authors, in my view, are implying a recognition of the multifaceted nature of women's experiences and the need for nuanced theoretical approaches that can capture these intricacies. In essence, I understand that this proposal aligns with the evolving landscape of autobiographical studies, emphasizing a more inclusive and critical engagement with women's voices and narratives.

In sum, the evolving status of autobiography, positioned at the intersection of feminist, postcolonial, and postmodern critical theories, situates these narratives while they engage with broader theoretical frameworks. The recognition of women's autobiography as pivotal in revising concepts related to different issues also emphasizes its multi-dimensional contributions to the discourse on women's lived experiences.

This dynamic shift in autobiographical theories, as discussed in this work, connects to the exploration of women's identities in *Cat's Eye*, in my view. The anthology, by bringing together diverse theoretical perspectives, invites readers to consider the intricate ways in which women engage in autobiographical expression. This resonance is evident in *Cat's Eye*, where Elaine's autobiographical narrative is deeply intertwined with questions of identity and self-representation.

In my opinion, Smith and Watson's observations about the loosening of New Criticism's hold on literary scholarship reflect a departure from restrictive methodologies, aligning with the evolving paradigms in these studies. Gusdorf's configuration of autobiography as unquestionably white, male, and Western resonates with ongoing debates regarding the cultural and gendered dimensions of autobiographical discourse. In this sense, *Cat's Eye* would serve as an example that aligns with the evolving understanding of autobiography as more than just a documentary history, embracing its different dimensions.

Furthermore, the proposition for a review in autobiographical studies, particularly focusing on women's contributions and exposing blind spots and exclusions, indicates a critical stance within women's autobiographical studies. The suggestion to review such topics reflects a more inclusive and critical engagement with women's voices and narratives, something evident in more recent years. In essence, I understand that the dynamic evolution of autobiography, as encapsulated in the anthology, aligns with the concepts explored in this study, especially considering *Cat's Eye's* themes and discussions.

Moving forward, in *Reading Autobiographies: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, (2001) Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson present a comprehensive exploration of the complexities involved in interpreting autobiographical works. The anthology serves as a guide for readers and scholars seeking to investigate life narratives. By bringing together various perspectives and analytical frameworks, the collection aims to provide readers with a toolkit for engaging with autobiographical texts across diverse genres and cultural contexts.

The main themes explored in the anthology encompass a wide array of topics pertinent to the interpretation of life narratives. These include but are not limited to the construction of selfhood, the role of memory, the influence of cultural and social factors on autobiographical expression, and the dynamic relationship between truth and fiction in life storytelling. Through the lens of the contributors, the anthology delves into the multifaceted nature of autobiographies.

Before presenting some of the main ideas discussed by the scholars in this anthology, it is important to delineate distinctions among life writing, life narrative, and autobiography. The authors conceptualize life writing as a comprehensive term encompassing diverse forms of writing that center on a life as its subject. Such writing spans biographies, novels, historical accounts, and explicit self-references by the writer. On the other hand, life narrative is characterized as a somewhat narrower term, encapsulating various self-referential writings, among which autobiography is included. The authors propose that life narrative should be approached as a dynamic and evolving concept, a collection of continually shifting self-referential practices that engage with the past to contemplate identity in the present (Smith and Watson, 2001, p. 3).

Throughout this book, we try to make clear distinctions among life writing, life narrative, and autobiography. We understand life writing as a general term for writing of diverse kinds that takes a life as its subject. Such writing can be biographical, novelistic, historical, or an explicit self-reference to the writer. We understand life narrative as a somewhat narrower term that includes many kinds of self-referential writing, including autobiography. (...) Life narrative, then, might best be approached as a moving target, a set of evershifting self-referential practices that engage the past in order to reflect on identity in the present. (Smith & Watson, 2001, p. 3)

In the context of this study, I am bringing contributions by them on life narrative also in relation to autobiography, once, as exposed by them, these terms are intricately connected and often used interchangeably. The acknowledgment that life narrative operates as a "moving target" underscores the fluid nature of these practices, which extends to various forms of autobiographical expression. I see that this nuanced understanding provides a theoretical framework for examining autobiographical works and their relationship with broader concepts of self-representation, while at the same time highlighting the

Firstly, the scholars bring the discussion on the differentiation between life narrative — autobiographies being included here — and fiction. The tendency to label autobiographical texts as "novels" while sparing novels from being termed "autobiographies" reveals a common confusion that pervades these literary categorizations: I see that the complexity of this discussion also relies on the classification of life narratives as "nonfiction," a term that, rather than clarifying, introduces further ambiguity.

In other words, both life narratives and novels share narrative features typically associated with fictional writing, such as plot, dialogue, setting, and characterization. However, the contemporary literary scene witnesses a deliberate blurring of boundaries between life narrative and first-person novel narration by many writers — Atwood included. Amidst these complexities, Smith and Watson assert that historical differences between life narrative and

fiction are integral to comprehending the self-referential nature of autobiographical writing. This exploration delves into the nuanced relationship between truth and fiction within this type of work.

People often confuse life narrative and fiction. Typically, they call autobiographical texts “novels” though they rarely call novels “autobiographies.” A life narrative is not a novel, although calling life narrative “nonfiction,” which is often done, confuses rather than resolves the issue. Both the life narrative and the novel share features we ascribe to fictional writing: plot, dialogue, setting, characterization, and so on. Further complicating matters, many contemporary writers are interested in blurring the boundary between life narrative and narration in the first-person novel. Yet differences that have historically arisen between them are crucial to understanding how autobiographical writing is a self-referential mode. (Smith & Watson, 2001, p. 7)

I see that this quote illuminates the difficulties of classifying autobiographical writing and fiction. The shared narrative features between life narratives and novels can further blur the boundaries that traditionally separate these genres, as proposed before. However, Smith and Watson assert the historical differences between these genres are indispensable for comprehending autobiographical writing not only as a self-referential mode, but also as different from other types of writing. In this sense, the relationship between autobiographical truth and fictional elements within these narratives contribute to the ongoing debate on the nature and classification of life narratives.

Continuing, in the realm of autobiographical studies, the conceptualization and theorization of the term "experience" also has significance. The assertion that a narrator's experience stands as the primary form of evidence in autobiographical writings establishes the foundation upon which readers are encouraged to recognize the narrator as a sort of authority about their own lives. This perspective puts experience as a central element that not only shapes the narrative but also serves diverse rhetorical functions. As articulated by Smith and Watson, this can also be used as a persuasive tool with many effects. It functions to elicit the reader's belief in the narrative's authenticity, to validate specific claims as truthful, and, crucially, to justify the act of writing and publicly sharing one's life story.

It is important to theorize what we call experience because the narrator's experience is the primary kind of evidence asserted in autobiographical acts, the basis on which readers are invited to consider the narrator a uniquely qualified authority. Thus, a narrator's investment in the “authority” of experience serves a variety of rhetorical purposes. It invites or compels the reader's belief in the story and the veracity of the narrator; it persuades the reader of the narrative's authenticity; it validates certain claims as truthful; and it justifies writing and publicizing the life story. (Smith & Watson, 2001, p. 27).

Their emphasis on theorizing the concept of "experience" in autobiographical acts explores relationship between the narrator, the narrative, and the reader. The assertion that a narrator's experience functions as the primary form of evidence is significant within the broader context of autobiographical studies, as this perspective aligns with the traditional expectations of autobiographical authenticity, as the narrator's life becomes the locus of authority. In the case of *Cat's Eye*, I see that this conceptualization resonates with how Elaine's narrative is developed, where the emphasis on her personal experiences shapes the reader's understanding of her identity and the authenticity of her story. It is important to have in mind how this is also a discussion proposed by the novel, as I will further develop in my next chapter, especially considering how Elaine's experiences are perceived by others, more specifically her audience. In my understanding, the idea that the narrator's investment in the "authority" of experience serves rhetorical purposes also underscores the performative aspect of autobiographical storytelling, where convincing the reader of the narrative's truthfulness can be considered as a strategic element.

Following, they assert the existence of a distinct category within autobiographical acts — those that deliberately aim to distort the identity of the author and convincingly convey that the experiences narrated by fictive protagonists are genuine occurrences. The deliberate misrepresentation of the author's identity, as posited by them, introduces a layer of complexity to the already intricate relationship between the autobiographical narrator and the reader. This deliberate obfuscation challenges conventional notions of authenticity and truth within the autobiographical genre. In the context of works like *Cat's Eye*, this proposition shows how intentional misrepresentation can influence the reader's perception of truth in autobiographical storytelling: "But there are autobiographies that seek to misrepresent the identity of the writer and to persuade readers that the experience of fictive protagonists in fact occurred." (Smith & Watson, 2001, p. 31)

Smith and Watson bring forth the challenges surrounding authenticity, identity, and the delicate relationship between the life narrator and the reader. "Charges of autobiographical bad faith and the occasional emergence of hoaxes" (2001, p.3) serve as entry points into questions of the genuineness of experience and the integrity of identity. The centrality of these issues becomes evident when considering how the narrator, by claiming ownership of memories and experiences, tries to establish a connection between the text and the author as a living entity. In this sense, Smith and Watson explore how readers, in turn, attribute these memories to a

tangible, flesh-and-blood individual. However, this attribution hinges on a matter of mutual trust, forming the relationship between the autobiographical narrator and the reader.

The acknowledgement that memories and experiences can be inconsistent makes this relationship even more complicated, mirroring the inconsistencies often found in autobiographical narratives. These are valuable insights when applied to narratives such as *Cat's Eye*, where questions of trust, authenticity, and intentional manipulation play roles in the text.

Charges of autobiographical bad faith and occasional hoaxes reveal how complex questions of the authenticity of experience and the integrity of identity can become, how critical they are to the central notion of the relationship between life narrator and reader. Through the text the life narrator claims that the memories and experiences are those of the “signature” on the cover, the author. Readers ascribe these memories and experiences to a flesh-and-blood person. Ultimately, of course, the relationship comes down to a matter of mutual trust. Certainly we allow memories, and the experience made out of memories, to be inconsistent (as they are in many autobiographical narratives), probably because we understand our own as inconsistent. While we understand that the source text—the memories of the author—is not accessible or verifiable in any literal sense, we are unwilling to accept intentional duping. The situation of fiction is radically different: a hoax is unimaginable, unless one person claims to have written a fictional narrative actually written by another person. But in the case of autobiography, the hoax is a potent and politically charged possibility. (Smith & Watson, 2001, p. 32)

Smith and Watson's examination of these cases highlight the dynamics of authenticity, identity. The acknowledgment of these challenges also underscores how in autobiographical writings the narrator's experience is not only the primary evidence but also a rhetorical tool with multifaceted purposes. In the context of *Cat's Eye*, this exploration becomes particularly relevant as the novel explores how Elaine grapples with the authenticity of her own memories and the construction of her identity. The complexities introduced by Smith and Watson also resonate with the novel's thematic exploration of the unreliability of memory, the malleability of experiences, and the blurring between the character's experiences and the lived reality of the author. The trust between the reader and the narrator, a central aspect discussed by Smith and Watson, becomes a crucial when considering Elaine's account of her life, especially the novel's exploration of trauma, for instance.

Moreover, in a broader sense, Atwood's own use of her life can be considered in the light of Smith and Watson's observations. The intentional misrepresentation or manipulation of identity, as discussed by them, echoes in how there are elements from the writer's life into her narrative. This intertwining of fact and fiction in *Cat's Eye* could also be aligned with the nuanced discussions about intentional misrepresentation in autobiographical writings, I see.

In conclusion, the contributions made by the third wave of autobiographical studies provide relevant insights into more recent contributions on the genre. Starting with Olney (1980), his exploration of the blurred boundaries within autobiographical works gives a perspective that challenges rigid categorizations of the genre. His proposition that a work can be "an autobiography" without strictly adhering to being "autobiographical" introduces flexibility and complexity to the understanding of autobiographical writing is, in my view. This aligns with the evolution of autobiographical studies, especially in the second wave, which explores the nuances of self-representation.

In relation to *Cat's Eye*, much like Olney's claim that a work can be "an autobiography" without strictly adhering to traditional autobiographical structures, I see that the novel challenges conventional boundaries in the representation of personal experiences. In other words, the autobiographical elements in *Cat's Eye* are interwoven into the narrative, which adds even more layers of meaning. I understand that the novel exemplifies how autobiographical elements can be integrated into diverse narrative structures, echoing Olney's call for a more open-minded and flexible understanding of autobiographical expression in literature.

In particular, I understand that Olney's exploration of the dual referent "I," existing in both the immediacy of the present and the distant past, signifies the dynamic between these temporal dimensions. Memory, as he suggests, isn't a static recounting but an active force that not only recalls past events but reconstructs them within the context of the present.

In conclusion, Olney's contributions *Cat's Eye*, with its narrative richness and complexity, echoes and exemplifies Olney's call for a more open-minded and flexible understanding of autobiographical expression in literature. The novel engages with autobiographical elements in ways that challenge traditional boundaries, reflecting the evolving landscape of autobiographical studies.

Moving to Eakin (1985), his examination of the dynamics between fact and fiction in autobiographical literature sheds light on the challenges that both autobiographers and readers face in navigating the dual roles of artists and historians. The assumption that autobiographies should strictly adhere to verifiable life facts forms the basis for reader expectations, introducing a referential dimension that has limited the development of a poetics of autobiography, according to him.

Considering *Cat's Eye*, I see that Eakin's insights provide a lens to examine the narrative's negotiation between this artistic freedom and accuracy. The assumption that autobiographies must mirror verifiable life facts is disrupted by the novel's incorporation of

both the author's life and fictional elements. In my view, this challenges conventional expectations, and readers conditioned to approach autobiographies with an expectation of historical accuracy may find themselves in a predicament similar to what Eakin describes.

Eakin's proposition that the claim to autobiographical truth arises from the narrative itself is particularly relevant to *Cat's Eye*. The novel strategically challenges conventional methods of establishing this claim, deviating from a straightforward autobiographical structure, as I propose. Furthermore, the novel complicates the process of determining verifiable biographical fact, once it is not possible to determine to what extent it is autobiographical.

In essence, Eakin's observations highlight the tension shaping the reception and intent of autobiographical works. *Cat's Eye*, by deliberately challenging these expectations, exemplifies the complexities introduced by this interplay. The novel's unique approach to autobiographical storytelling aligns with Eakin's notion that the claim of a narrative to be a rendition of the author's actual life is a defining characteristic, once it also plays with this idea of a confirmation — or the lack of it.

Eakin (2020), by its turn, offer valuable insights into how the essential distinction between biography and autobiography, rooted in the inherent subjectivity of the latter, resonates with broader debates within autobiographical studies. In particular, the tension between subjectivity and objectivity becomes crucial when examining works like *Cat's Eye*, which navigate these specific tensions. Finally, I understand that Eakin's notion that autobiography structures living, even in everyday self-narration, invites a reflection on the influence of autobiographical discourse.

Moving to Smith and Watson (1998), I see that their analysis of women's autobiographies, now situated at the intersection of feminist, postcolonial, and postmodern critical theories, review concepts related to various dimensions of women's lives. The diverse theoretical perspectives brought by Smith and Watson also resonate with the exploration of women's identities in *Cat's Eye*, I understand, where the autobiographical narrative intertwine with questions of identity and self-representation.

The evolving status of autobiography also aligns with the shifting paradigms discussed by the authors. Moreover, their call for a review in autobiographical studies, particularly focusing on women's contributions and exposing blind spots and exclusions, indicates a critical stance within women's autobiographical studies. In essence, I see that the dynamic evolution of autobiography, as encapsulated in the anthology, aligns with the concepts explored in this study, especially considering the themes and discussions within *Cat's Eye*.

Finally, the last piece selected for this section was Smith and Watson (2001). In summary, they offer a guide for interpreting autobiographical works. Key themes explored encompass the construction of selfhood, the role of memory, the influence of cultural and social factors on autobiographical expression, and the dynamic relationship between truth and fiction in life storytelling.

Central to their discussion is the clarification of distinctions among life writing, life narrative, and autobiography, which are relevant in today's autobiographical studies. Life writing is presented as a broad term covering diverse forms of writing centered on a life, while life narrative, including autobiography, is seen as a dynamic and evolving concept engaging with the past to reflect on identity in the present. This understanding becomes a theoretical framework for examining autobiographical works and their relationship with broader concepts of self-representation, in my view.

Smith and Watson delve into the complexities of classifying autobiographical writing and fiction, highlighting shared narrative features that turn this process more difficult. The historical differences between life narrative and fiction are emphasized, contributing to an understanding of autobiographical writing as a self-referential mode. This exploration becomes particularly relevant when considering works like *Cat's Eye*, where this blurring takes place.

They also bring attention to intentional misrepresentation in autobiographical acts, challenging conventional notions of authenticity and truth. This deliberate obfuscation adds complexity to the relationship between the autobiographical narrator and the reader. This proposition finds resonance in the thematic exploration of truth, authenticity, and intentional manipulation in the novel, I argue, where the protagonist grapples with the reliability of her memories and the construction of her identity. On top of that, *Cat's Eye's* status as a fictive autobiography could also be included in this scenario. In sum, I see that they contribute to a more profound comprehension of the interplay between truth, fiction, and self-representation in autobiographical storytelling.

3 ATWOOD'S LIFE AND PUBLIC FIGURE

In this section, I will delve into Atwood's public persona and its relation to *Cat's Eye*, since the novel discusses many facets of being a notorious artist. Once again, the objective of this section is to understand how these references permeate the work, rather than pinpointing how Elaine's life and career may mirror Atwood's, or vice-versa. As a prominent figure of the literary world, Atwood's own public image and experiences can potentially be connected to not only how the novel progresses, but also to its context. Moreover, one of the themes treated by the novel is specifically artistry and fame, what leads to discussions such as the intersection of personal and artistic identities, the challenges of artistic recognition, or even the impacts of success on an individual's life. In this sense, I understand that the novel resonates not only with the experience of many artists, but also with Atwood's.

3.1 Elaine Risley and Margaret Atwood

As a first point of interest for this part of the analysis, there is the connection between Atwood's position as a well-known writer and the play with biographical approaches to her novels, more specifically *Cat's Eye*. As to investigate this further, it is first necessary to provide a better picture of the author's views on this, and of how this discussion is appropriated by the novel. Cooke (1992) pertinently asserts that every writer has a public and a concealed side, similarly to any other artist. Atwood also comments on this in *On Writers and Writing* (2015), asserting that there is a considerable difference between the person who does the writing and the person who lives life normally — the one who takes out the trash, walks the dog, and does the dishes. In sum, this picture is provided to ratify the fact that there are two different entities, author and person, and one should not be mistaken for the other.

What is the relationship between the two entities we lump under one name, that of 'the writer'? The particular writer. By two, I mean the person who exists when no writing is going forward — the one who walks the dog, eats bran for regularity, takes the car in to be washed, and so forth — and that other, more shadowy and altogether more equivocal personage who shares the same body, and who, when no one is looking, takes it over and uses it to commit the actual writing. (Atwood, 2015, p. 30)

Cooke's assertion about the public and concealed side of the artist also seems to highlight how artist often cultivate a public image or persona that aligns with their professional

identity. This public persona, being like the private one or not, is still an integral part of who the artist is and may reflect aspects of their work such as their public interactions and their reputation. For instance, a writer's public interactions can often mirror the theme, philosophies, or motifs explored within their literary works. In the case of Atwood, her public persona has been marked by a commitment to issues such as environmentalism, feminism, and social justice, themes that also permeate her literary creations. This alignment reinforces the interplay between these two spheres.

Further, Cooke's suggestion of the two-sided artist also raises questions on the authenticity and intent behind an artist's public persona — for example, to the intricacies of an artist's identity and the multifaceted ways in which their public image and personal life converge and diverge. In sum, her insights highlight the different roles artists may inhabit and how these boundaries are perceived by others.

It is no surprise, then, that these questions also pervade the author's work, being someone who has shown herself aware of these issues. Taking Atwood's own observation, if we truly consider that there is a clear difference between author and person, in the sense that these two may bear so much dissimilarity that they could not even be considered the same individual (Atwood, 2015), it will not make much sense to continue to associate an author's work to their personal lives, and vice-versa. In this sense, Atwood's statement in *On Writers and Writing* seems to endorse the view of separating completely person from artist, at least in what concerns personal identification, which is the focus of this specific quotation. Taking this statement even further, it would also make sense, for example, to discern authors from their characters, something that not always happens in literary reception nowadays, and a situation that Atwood herself dealt with³.

In other words, Atwood's acknowledgement of this duality accentuates the difference between the act of creating art and the ordinary, daily existence, where everyday tasks take precedence. This differentiation Atwood emphasizes holds significance when considering the context of her literary works. I understand that this idea of an author being a distinct entity from their private self implies that readers and critics should be cautious about overly associating an author's work with their personal life. In this sense, I see that Atwood appears to advocate for this demarcation, primarily concerning personal identification.

³ Cooke (1992) comments directly on this subject, by bringing an interview in which Atwood has to affirm that she is not crazy as the character in *Surfacing*, or fat as Joan in *Lady Oracle*, and so on. Such comparisons lead to the thought that all female protagonists written by Atwood are the writer herself.

Moreover, in her essay “Me, She, and It”, Atwood also delves into this problematic. She affirms:

Why do authors wish to pretend they don't exist? It's a way of skinning out, of avoiding truth and consequences. They'd like to deny the crime, although their fingerprints are all over the martini glasses, not to mention the hacksaw blade and the victim's neck. Amnesia, they plead. Epilepsy. Sugar overdose. Demonic possession. How convenient to have an authorial twin, living in your body, looking out through your eyes, pushing pen down on paper or key down on keyboard, while you do what? File your nails? (Atwood, 1994, p. 53).

This quote reflects her wit and satirical perspective on authors' reluctance to admit their presence in their works. By humorously accusing authors of trying to evade accountability for the consequences of their writing by pretending to be detached from their creations, the metaphor of an "authorial twin" suggests a playful and critical exploration of the dual identity of writers and the lengths they may go to distance themselves from the implications of their work. In my understanding, the mention of crimes and fingerprints implies that authors may try to disown or disavow the impact of their writing, much like a criminal trying to deny their involvement in a crime. Overall, the quote showcases the distance sought by writers between their public personas and their other versions.

Moreover, this insight becomes particularly intriguing when considering accusations that Atwood brings her own experiences into Elaine's character. In my view, it raises the possibility that Atwood, like the authors she humorously critiques, might be hiding behind her characters — Elaine in the case of *Cat's Eye*, creating a buffer between herself and the implications of the narrative. While the quote originally addresses the relationship between a writer's public and private life, I see that its application to scenarios where authors incorporate personal experiences into fictional characters is another possible reading.

Elaine Risley and Atwood share several similarities that contribute to the novel's complexity. While the novel remains as a work of fiction, these parallels are interesting points of exploration, especially when not considered simply as direct references, but as nuanced explorations of Atwood's own known biography. Among the aspects shared between the two, there are four topics that call the attention: the artistic pursuits and reflection on art and artists, the exploration of femininity, the interplay of memory, and the Canadian identity. I will comment on briefly on each one of these topics before expanding on the novel's approach to the differentiation between creator and creation.

To being with, both Elaine and Atwood are artists — while the protagonist is a renowned painter in the novel, Atwood is a celebrated author and poet in real life, as previously commented. Thereby, the depiction of Elaine’s artistic process, struggles, and achievements could be seen as a reflection — partial or not — of Atwood’s understanding of the creative world, even that not her own. Moreover, Atwood’s own contemplations on the role of art and artists in society also resonate with the novel’s examination of the relationship between an artist and their work, the influence of personal experiences on creativity, or the challenges faced by artists.

Following, another common aspect between the two is that both are known for their exploration of femininity and the female experience. Elaine’s journey on *Cat’s Eye* could also be used as a vivid example of how the author delves into these complexities — for instance, the nuances of growing up as a girl, the challenges of female friendships, and societal expectations regarding women.

Throughout the novel, Atwood portrays the nuanced aspects of growing up as a girl. Additionally, it also explores how female friendships work — especially how they are marked by intense loyalty, competition, and emotional complexity. The depiction of loyalty within these friendships is noteworthy, reflecting the deep bonds that often form between girls as they navigate the complexities of adolescence together. However, there are also the competitive elements that can underlie these relationships, in the way that even close friends may find themselves in subtle competitions, whether it be for societal approval, personal achievements, or other subtle forms of validation. In my view, this adds a layer of realism to the narrative, recognizing that friendships can be both supportive and, at times, subtly competitive.

Moreover, the emotional complexity embedded in these relationships is a recurring theme in the novel. The range of emotions that accompany female friendships, from moments of profound intimacy to instances of tension and rivalry, is also explored within the narrative. I understand that this exploration contributes to a broader conversation about the intricacies of female relationships and their significance in shaping the experiences of women as they navigate the journey from adolescence to adulthood. Atwood also comments on this in the novel: “Little girls are cute and small only to adults. To one another they are not cute. They are life-sized.” (Atwood, 2009, p. 133)

A third aspect would be the role of memory as a recurring theme in *Cat’s Eye*. As explored before, Elaine’s recollections are central to the narrative. In a similar vein, Atwood’s writing often explores the malleability of memory and the impact of the past on the present,

creating a parallel between her work and the character's experience. Novels such as *Lady Oracle* (1976), *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), or even *Surfacing* (1972) talk about memory — whether memories are vivid or fragmented, how they shape individuals, their unreliability, and so on.

Furthermore, *Cat's Eye* highlights the unreliability of memory. Elaine's own recollections of her childhood and formative experiences are subject to shifts, omissions, and emotional distortions. Atwood's portrayal of memory as a fluid and subjective construct resonates with many of the themes already discussed in this analysis. Overall, the theme of memory in *Cat's Eye* serves as a point of convergence between the novel and Atwood's larger body of work. In this sense, the novel explores how the past shapes its characters and their narratives, at the same time it underscores the complexities of recollection and its impact on our understanding of personal narratives. Elaine manages to better understand her journey and her relationships from this point of view, I understand.

As proposed by Ingersoll (1991), the text involves a shifting back and forth between invention and facts. According to him, the persona discovers that the past is only what is reconstructed for the purposes of the present. That being so, I understand that Ingersoll's insights suggest how Elaine's recollections are not passive memories, but active interpretations shaped by her ongoing self-discovery and quest for understanding. In other words, the past would not be a static record but a living narrative, changing and being reinterpreted as life unfolds.

Moving forward, both Elaine and Atwood are evidently connected to their Canadian identity. The novel's setting in Toronto and its exploration of Canadian culture and landscapes reflect Atwood's deep-rooted connection to her home country, I understand, as her writing frequently addresses Canadian identity and its significance. One example of this is her work *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*, which underscores the writer's engagement with Canadian literature and cultural identity. In *Survival*, Atwood examines the distinct features of Canadian literature, emphasizing the challenges and unique circumstances that shape the narratives emerging from it. This critical work delves into the complexities of survival in a vast and diverse landscape, comparing it to the evolution of Canadian literature.

Moreover, Atwood's exploration of Canadian landscapes in *Cat's Eye* — the vivid depiction of Toronto and the broader Canadian context in the novel — becomes another example of how the writer has approached the multifaceted experiences of being Canadian. Elaine's character, for instance, through her personal and artistic journey, could also be

considered as an example of how the themes of identity, memory, and the Canadian experience are examined in Atwood's oeuvre. In essence, *Cat's Eye* not only captures aspects of Canadian landscapes but also engages with the Canadian identity, reflecting Atwood's commitment to exploring and understanding these topics throughout her work. Many of Elaine's memories and critical reflections are evoked by her presence in these childhood and youth settings, indicating the significance of Toronto in this process.

A final connection would be the referenced artists at the beginning of the novel and their relation to both Atwood and Elaine's art. In the opening of *Cat's Eye*, Atwood mentions famous Canadian artists whose work serve as touchstones for Elaine's development as a painter. These artists, including Joyce Wieland, Jack Chambers, and William Kurelek, provide a reference to both the protagonist's art and the works present in the novel. Atwood's choice of these artist seems to be deliberate, as they represent different periods, and styles. Some of them even have closer connections to the writer, as it is the case of Charles Patcher, who even painted a portrait of her.

The paintings and other modern works of art in this book do not exist. Nevertheless, they have been influenced by visual artist Joyce Wieland, Jack Chambers, Charles Patcher, Erica Heron, Gail Geltner, Dennis Burton, Louis de Niverville, Heather Cooper, Willaim Kurelek, Greg Curnoe and popsurreal potter Lenore M. Atwood, among others; and by the Isaacs Gallery, the old original. (Atwood, 2009, n.p)

In this sense, just as Elaine grapples with her identity as a painter and the expectations placed upon her as a woman in the art world, Atwood's own experiences in the literary sphere reflect broader attitudes towards women in creative fields. This connection reinforces the novel's themes of identity, self-discovery, and the societal pressures placed on women's artistic expression. Moreover, by weaving these art references into the narrative, Atwood invites readers to consider how the art world, like the literary world, has often been a male-dominated space where women have had to assert their voices.

This is even more evident once Elaine enters art school, where she starts to notice how her male classmates behave towards women in the field: "Colin, who has manners of a sort, explains: 'If you're bad, you're a lady painter. Otherwise you're just a painter.' They don't say 'artist'." (Atwood, 2009, p. 312). This quote encapsulates the prevailing gender bias that Elaine confronts as a young artist. While at start she aligns herself with her classmates in the mocking of other women, later she is confronted by the prejudice she suffers when following her career.

On that note, I see that Atwood, through Elaine's experiences, highlights the cultural norms that have relegate women to the status of amateurs or "hobbyists" rather than serious artist. By drawing this parallel between Elaine's journey and Atwood's own struggles as a

female writer, there is an emphasis the broader issues of gender bias within creative fields, as previously mentioned. That being so, I understand that the protagonist's experiences shed light on similar experiences passed through many women.

Bringing the discussion on the artist's two sides to *Cat's Eye's* plot, I argue that the novel is equally critical of this kind of association, since it discusses the roles of reader & author, or, as in Elaine's paintings, of the artist and the seer, which can be associated not only to events presented inside the narrative, but also with the fact that the novel is

about art and the artist, and in particular about Margaret Atwood's own art and its relation to Margaret Atwood's own life. The implications of all these other themes as they are developed in the novel make this relationship particularly complicated and problematic, setting up two opposed accounts of the relations between artist and viewer or reader, and leading to two opposed accounts of the relations between autobiography and meaning in an aesthetic work. (Hite, 1995, p. 151)

Hite's contribution sheds light on an interesting dynamic which is part of the novel: the fact that it discusses and exposes the "complicated and problematic" relations between artist and viewer or reader. In other words, and as I will develop, *Cat's Eye* many times opposes the artist's account and the public's interpretations, which can be also understood as nod to Margaret Atwood's own works and experiences with reception. This, of course, also pays respect to the way the novel relates autobiography and meaning, as commented by Hite. Both topics deserve further comment.

To begin with, considering how *Cat's Eye* balances the artist's private intentions and the public's reception, one of the scenarios in which this tension is represented very well is when Elaine is confronted with different interpretations of her work. Charna, the gallerist who organizes the artist's retrospective exhibition, writes comments on each of Elaine's paintings, focusing on her main themes, characters, and symbols. The artist's first reaction is mainly of denial towards these comments, frequently resorting to biographical explanations — the works do not "mean" what Charna is saying but represent events and people from the protagonist's life.

Regarding this, there are two main factors to be considered. Firstly, the reader has a privileged view of Elaine's life through her autobiographical account, which means that the meaning of some of these paintings, beyond Charna's analysis, is also made clear. Further, "At the same time (...) *Cat's Eye* itself is built up of these autobiographical interpretations, inasmuch as the stories that motivated each painting are the key components of the narrative comprising

the novel as a whole.” (Hite, 1995, p. 153). In other words, because the novel is organized through Elaine’s paintings, which also name the chapters, there is a tendency to privilege the painter’s perspective on her own works, something ratified by the novel’s structure. This can be described as a movement that validates the equivalence between the events in the character’s life and the canvases representing them. As suggested by McWilliams (2007), “her [Elaine’s] painting plays a crucial role in her development in the novel. (...) [the paintings] are just such fragments of her past and play a major role in the way that they bear meaning in relation to the present (McWilliams, 2007, p. 31). From this perspective, it is possible to go even further and consider Elaine’s work as not just a way of representing these past events, but also as a way of relating these events to the present, and of interpreting them.

However, it is worth noting that the protagonist’s strangely naive posture is not able to take away the logical basis on which Charna makes her appointments. As an example of this there is *One Wing*’s exhibition. Elaine claims that the painting has no meaning beyond the biographical, which would refer to the fact that her brother Stephen was taken hostage and killed during a hijacked flight by terrorists, who forced him to jump out of the plane. None of the people who have seen and analyzed the painter’s work know about this event, and the analysis published by Charna declares that the painting is “a statement about men, and the youthful nature of war” (Atwood, 2009, p. 459). Having this in mind, the novel’s description of *One Wing* is,

I painted it for my brother, after his death. It’s a triptych. There are two smaller, flanking side panels. In one is a World War Two airplane, in the style of a cigarette card; in the other is a large pale green luna moth. In the larger, central panel, a man is falling from the sky. That he is falling and not flying is clear from his position, which is almost upside-down, slantwise to the few clouds; nevertheless he appears calm. He is wearing a World War Two RCAF uniform. He has no parachute. In his hand is a child’s wooden sword. This is the kind of thing we do, to assuage pain (Atwood, 2009, p. 459).

Charna’s *One Wing* analysis is at least reasonable, considering the symbols chosen by the painter: the military ship, the cigarette card style of illustration⁴ — as Elaine describes in the narrative, the toy sword, even the free fall itself. This composition is not organized in a way that would only speak to Elaine’s own experience, as the painter appropriates herself of visual

⁴ Cigarette companies issued cigarette cards between the years of 1875 and 1940. These cards were designed to stiffen cigarette packaging and advertise cigarette brands. The companies often included collectible cards with their packages of cigarettes, with illustrations documenting popular culture from the turn of the century.

metaphors that can also speak to the public, as I will further comment. Of course, it is impossible to not consider Elaine's grieving as one of the main parts of this painting's significance, as mentioned by the character herself, something made to assuage the pain of her loss. Nonetheless, in my view, what the novel stresses here is the fact that not necessarily if the painting was made in honor of Stephen, it could not also be a statement on war. It is exactly the possibility of these different forms of apprehending a work of art that are in display in this context. Hite also highlights Elaine's choices, especially the use of the moth, which justifies Charna's approach,

Despite the criticism implied by the juxtaposition [of Charna's and Risley's view of the canvas], the two statements are not necessarily opposed. The World War II airplane and the luna moth of the flanking panels are both images of flight referring to situations in which Stephen was unable to see himself as endangered. The airplane recalls his childhood fascination with the war (...) The luna moth is part of a dense network of motifs connecting themes of flight, vulnerability, mutilation, and hope. (Hite, 1995, p. 152)

It is interesting to emphasize that both the biographical and the external interpretations are equally important and valid following this line of thought. In this regard, just as exemplified by Hite, Charna's analysis would not necessarily change if she knew the inspiration behind Elaine's painting, since one type of approach does not take away the meaning from the other. Moreover, the fact that the protagonist bases herself in an event from her own life also does not interfere in the fact that she is still able to build meaning in an intelligible way, as I previously mentioned. In short, the artist manages to translate her personal experience into the composition, which can be seen and interpreted by the public. Her choices are not based solely on Stephen's death, since she included symbols, as pointed out, that would not represent just literally what happened during this event, but also its cultural and metaphorical significance, something that goes along with one of the novel's main themes: "Perhaps more than any other Atwood novel, *Cat's Eye* is preoccupied with detail, with a proliferation of social and cultural observations about the postwar era (...)" (HITE, 1995, p. 138).

It is these specific tensions that create a complex and much interesting field when analyzing art works. Even though Elaine needs to critically review her own life to deal with her childhood traumas, which would imply, as exposed by York (2016), the need to remove her works from these "layers of critical explication", these same layers are also a representation of how Elaine's art has meaningfully affected the public. The fact that the protagonist frequently

resorts to a biographical understanding of her work is too a way of shedding light on this discussion, since the narrative does not ignore the private facet of artistic production.

Cooke (1992) also highlights the dynamics between Elaine and Charna,

For an Atwood heroine, though, Elaine Risley seems curiously resigned to the ways in which she and her art are classified. (...) What is happening, then, is that the heroine no longer has to battle against the hegemony of rigid classification precisely because the reader does it for her.. (...) for *Cat's Eye* is a book about the thoughts and images that make up Elaine's reflections — feminist, humanist, and personal. (Cooke, 1992, p. 167-168)

Cooke's observation on Elaine offers an insight into the dynamics of classification and the role of the reader in shaping the perception of the heroine and her art. Cooke contends that Elaine appears unusually accepting of the classifications imposed upon her and her artistic endeavors. The term "curiously resigned" suggests a departure from the typical Atwood heroine, known for her defiance and resistance against societal norms. Cooke posits that rather than engaging in direct confrontation with the hegemony of rigid categorization, the novel — and Elaine — leave for the reader this task.

Moreover, by categorizing Elaine's reflections as feminist, humanist, and personal, Cooke underscores the rich and diverse thematic elements embedded in Elaine's narrative. The term "feminist" implies a lens that scrutinizes gender dynamics, "humanist" suggests a broader exploration of universal human experiences, and "personal" a more intimate and individualized aspect of Elaine's reflections.

Following, Cooke's assertion that the reader assumes the role of classifying Elaine's thoughts and images introduces a dynamic dimension to the relationship between the text and its audience. It implies a participatory role for the reader in the construction of meaning within the narrative. This collaborative act of classification suggests a departure from conventional literary norms, where the author's intent may be considered absolute. Instead, *Cat's Eye* would invite a readerly engagement that actively contributes to the work's interpretation. In my understanding, this would also apply to how readers navigate autobiographical elements present in the narrative — specifically how readers, with their own biases, cultural contexts, and interpretative frameworks, would classify the novel.

In my next section, I will delve deeper into Cooke's contributions on this subject, specifically examining how this interactive nature not only challenges traditional notions of authorial control over interpretation. By shedding light on the reader's participatory role in

shaping the meaning of the work, she suggests how the relationship between author, text, and audience takes place in the context of autobiographical fiction.

Overall, and retaking some the main ideas exposed so far, the coexistence of these many forms of interpreting and presenting works of art point out that *Cat's Eye* puts in evidence the fact that any artwork has a private and public dimension, as well as the artist. Contrary to what happens with Elaine, most people do not have access to artists' private intentions and inspiration for their work. This can be considered as an interesting authorial movement by Atwood, who has herself dealt with these common associations between author and character, which tend to establish an equivalence between who a writer is personally and what they write about, or who they write about.

In this regard, I understand that the novel skillfully presents both sides of this dynamic, not ignoring the fact that art works have indeed a biographical dimension to them, whatever being the length and/or importance of that aspect to the artist. At the same time, *Cat's Eye* also succeeds in showing how artistic production can be enriched by the public's insights. In other words, none of the ways of seeing and interpreting works of art have an end in themselves — in fact, what seems to be suggested is that looking at art works solely through biographical lenses or solely through external lenses have, each on its own, their own features and shortcomings.

Moreover, it becomes even more evident how this dynamic can be associated to the fact that the novel also plays with autobiography and with widely known facts from the author's life, that is, with different expectations and assessments coming from the public regarding Atwood's own works, and especially on how biographical her work is. Drawing from Hite, the point that seems to be made here is that knowing about an artist's life is, at the same time, never knowing enough.

In conclusion, *Cat's Eye* offers an exploration of this relationship between creator and creation, creator and public. The novel's play with its autobiographical elements and its nuanced approach to the blending of fact and fiction resonate with Hite's contributions on the complexities surrounding an artist's life and its influence on their art — which are far from straightforward. In this sense, as above suggested, the point that seems to be made is that knowing the biographical details of an artist's life may be just the tip of the iceberg, and the true depths of meaning and interpretation are often hidden beneath this surface, or this arguable depth.

In her book *On Writers and Writing* (2015), Atwood also addresses the biographical elements in *Cat's Eye*:

Many years later, I put Brown Owl into a book. There she is, still blowing her whistle and supervising the knot tests, in my novel *Cat's Eye*, for the same reason that a lot of things and people are put into books. That was in the 1980s, and I was sure the original Brown Owl must have been long dead by then. Then a few years ago a friend said to me, 'Your Brown Owl is my aunt.' 'Is?' I said. 'She can't possibly be alive!' But she was, so off we went to visit her. She was well over ninety, but Brown Owl and I were very pleased to see each other. (...) That's my first answer: the writer writes for Brown Owl, or for whoever the equivalent of Brown Owl may be in his or her life at the time. A real person, then: singular, specific. (Atwood, 2015, p. 135-136).

Some significant points emphasized by Atwood are, for example, the practice among writers of drawing inspiration from their personal experiences and relationships. *On Writers and Writing* being a work on the different aspects of being and/or becoming a writer, I see that this quote explores how writers often create characters and stories as a way of paying homage to individuals who have left a mark on them, or even how specific, real individuals can inspire and give depth to such characters. In this sense, writing can be a way of communication with or paying tribute to these individuals.

Atwood's acknowledgment of drawing inspiration from her own life in *Cat's Eye*, in my view, underscores the idea that fiction often draws from real experiences and connections, something also commented on in *On Writers and Writing*, as above mentioned. I understand that becomes clear through this interplay of Atwood's autobiographical elements in *Cat's Eye* and her insights in *On Writers and Writing* is that the writer's craft is, in many ways, an extension of their life. While writers often begin with fragments from reality, the transformation that occurs during the writing process results in a wholly distinct literary creation. In this sense, acknowledging the presence of these elements would not mean that they must be seen as an absolute reference in the work of an artist.

As commented by York, "Another Canadian writer, Alice Munro, put the case memorably when she observed that writers often use a bit of starter dough from the real world, but the cake that rises from the pan is, of course, another confection altogether" (York, 2006, p. 28). According to Atwood herself, there is always some biographical element in any writing. The fact that *Cat's Eye* presents these biographical elements in a more straightforward way does not mean that the novel should or must be interpreted differently from other works, since "it is precisely the autobiographical aspect in and of *Cat's Eye* that makes us resist our temptation to master the text" (Cooke, 1992, p. 168).

In my view, in the case of *Cat's Eye*, these biographical elements may appear more overtly, yet they do not necessarily demand a unique interpretation of the novel. Quite the contrary, the autobiographical aspect in *Cat's Eye* challenges readers to resist the temptation to fully master the text, as also brought by Cooke. The blend of fact and fiction serves as a reminder that all writing is inherently connected to the author's life, even if to varying degrees, and this amalgamation contributes to the depth and complexity of such works.

In conclusion, considering the parallels between Elaine and Atwood is, in my view, also considering how the novel discusses and presents how artists have two distinct faces: the private and the public. Elaine's characters within the novel and Atwood's own public persona mirror this duality. Both operate within the artistic world, while simultaneously living their private lives. The novel does not focus on the life of an artist, solely, but also delves into the balance between an artist's public and personal identity.

In the narrative, Elaine feels intrigued when faced with different interpretations of her work. Her private intentions when making these paintings may seem to her as the main source of significance of these works, but the public perception is beyond her control. In this sense, I understand that the novel makes a point of displaying how the artist's private intention do not always align with the public's reception.

Contributions by Cooke, Atwood, and York underscore the necessity of avoiding the conflation of an author's public image with their private existence. The nuanced discussions presented by these scholars emphasize that artists are multi-dimensional individuals, and their creative expression is just one facet of their identity. Moreover, I see that these reflections serve as a reminder that an artist's public persona is a carefully crafted construct that may not necessarily align with their authentic self. While these parallels draw attention to the intricate relationship between an artist's life and their work, in my view it is imperative to approach such analyses with an acute awareness of their contextual factors. This awareness leads to the understanding that what is presented to the world is often a curated representation rather than an unfiltered truth.

3.2 Atwood and literary celebrity

Moving forward, it is worth noting the many facets through which the author has been seen throughout her life. Beyond her celebrated role as prolific writer, Atwood has also

cultivated a public persona that extends far beyond her literary creations. This public persona encompasses her roles as an author, a social commentator, an environmental activist, and a prominent figure in the feminist movement. Over the years, I see that Atwood has emerged as not just a writer of novels and poems but as a public intellectual whose perspectives resonate on a global scale. That being so, in this section I will delve into the author's different faces and how they relate to her work, especially *Cat's Eye*. From her views on a range of subjects to her position as an author, I believe that understanding Atwood's public personas add depth and context to her exploration of this theme in the novel.

I will associate these different ways of relating to the public to how *Cat's Eye* deals with Elaine's own response to fame, having in mind the previous discussion on the distinct ways of understanding artistic production. Cooke (2000) makes a differentiation among three main personas: the lion, the tiger, and the pussycat. Although these classifications might seem as a way of jokingly define Atwood, they show themselves as very useful when trying to understand the different angles from which the author has been seen. According to her, each of these animals also represent respectively different postures the author has had towards the public and the critics.

To begin with, the lion stands for Atwood as literary celebrity. Cooke comments that the author is *lionized* within Canada and abroad, "being one of the most prolific, best enjoyed and respected writers of our age, perceived to be extraordinary" (Cooke, 2000, p. 16). This is to be associated with the fact that, for instance, the author has a long list of publications and gained several awards, which corroborates this aura of exceptional talent which surrounds her. Cooke even brings the contribution of Phoebe Larmore, Atwood's own literary agent: according to her, representing Atwood is like representing a "dynasty of writers"; she thinks that Atwood is "larger than life", a "genius", and that the author is "magnificent" in what she creates and in the way she lives.

It is not hard to imagine that Atwood herself would not be satisfied with this type of approach towards her and her work, considering the "practical implications of such intensive media scrutiny", which "include an invasion of one's privacy and, perhaps even worse, a commitment on the part of the media to the creation of an icon" (Cooke, 2000, p. 17). In other words, ratifying the author's position as such a marvelous figure would not come without a price — without not only the media but also the public keeping check of these very own ideas of geniality, and, consequently, of Atwood's own life. In this sense, to continue to be lionized, as what happens with any other type of celebrity, is to subject oneself to constant evaluation as

to whether you are fit or not for a role that, in the first place, was most likely created without your consent. What Cooke highlights here, then, is that even in the case of media putting any kind of effort into creating an icon may be worse than the other implications in this process, or, on the contrary, an effort to demolish it.

Atwood's literary career and influence make her a subject of great interest for both the media and the public, I see. However, as Cooke points out, this intense media scrutiny not only invade an author's privacy but can also lead to the creation of an icon. As above suggested, I understand that Atwood herself may well view such an approach with skepticism, given the practical implications that come with it. The adoration and mythmaking associated with creating iconic figures like Atwood have a cost and can be a double-edged sword, potentially detracting from the authentic qualities one may have. In essence, the effort to construct an icon may undermine the very attributes that make someone iconic, which are often best when they naturally emerge. In my view, Cooke's insight serves as a reminder that there is a delicate balance between appreciating an artist's work and respecting their personal space, also, and this balance is crucial in understanding the complexities of public personas and their impact.

The second facet, the tiger, is associated by Cooke to the fact that Atwood has a fearsome reputation within the public eye, especially with critics who do biographical investigations on the author. She mentions the Australian filmmaker Michael Rubbo, who in 1984 filmed the documentary *Once in August*. According to her, Rubbo's plan was to discover and expose the autobiographical underpinnings of the novel *Surfacing*. This plan, nonetheless, was unsuccessful: he did not discover any kind of dysfunctional family or trauma to be connected to the novel. The underestimating of the filmmaker's project hits its peak when Atwood's family takes control of the camera and films the writer wearing a paper bag over her head, asking "Who is this woman?" while they gather around the table. This scene seems to perfectly encompass the author's and the family's posture towards what Rubbo intended to do with his film.

Moving forward, other aspects to be associated with this facet are the fact Atwood did not retreat from rebutting critics through her works, as what happened with Robert Fulford — who not only defined the writer as a "politician", but also classified some of her fiction as autobiographical and claimed that she enjoyed celebrity. The same happened to William Wible, a writer who included a character named Margaret Atwood in one of his books. In response, the author wrote Fulford into a story called "Uncles", and included a character named Fraser in *Lady Oracle* — Fraser is the same name as the editor of the journal in which Wible's story was

published. It goes without saying that both depictions were not positive. On top of that, Cooke also emphasizes that “Atwood does not suffer fools lightly” (Cooke, 2000, p. 20), something to be linked to her status as an outspoken defender of humanitarian values, for instance, which also leads to the fact that she is a writer perceptive enough to recognize the important social issues of her time.

All these factors paint a general picture of an author who not only has a lot of property on her area, but also that does not hold back when needed to stand her ground. Contrary to the lion facet, which shows itself as much more based on the bias around who Atwood is and what she does, the tiger facet seems to reflect actions and postures by the writer herself. How Atwood has been making a point of not ceding to numerous attempts of biographical approaches of her works is of special interest to this analysis, since it may also be interpreted as one of the factors that end up fomenting these interpretations even more, as I will further develop.

In essence, the tiger facet of Atwood’s public person unveils a more proactive and assertive side of the author, in my opinion, a facet that arises from her determination not to succumb to the expectations and interpretations of her work by others. This facet also seems to reflect her reputation particularly in the eyes of critics who embark on biographical investigations of her works — the documentary film incident with Rubbo aptly exemplifies the writer’s resistance to be pigeonholed or constrained by critic’s attempts to link her life to her literary works. Finally, the fact that “Atwood does not suffer fools lightly” also has a connection not only to her craft but also to her social consciousness, I see.

Bringing this context to *Cat’s Eye*, I see the way that Elaine reacts to her own notoriety as a nod to the limitations and challenges of being a public person. More specifically, if we consider the protagonist’s interview at the beginning of the book, we can see some potential associations with these struggles: Elaine feels like she is not wearing something adequate to the occasion — her “powder-blue jogging suit” is an “early-sixties holdover”. She also does not seem comfortable with the questions posed by Andrea — how she handles fame, when Elaine considers herself to be in a media pimple; what she thinks of her generation, when she really thinks she is from the 40s, not the 70s; and, finally, what she thinks of feminism, since she is called a “feminist painter”, when the classification is not so meaningful to her. Elaine is evasive and witty, characteristics like the Atwood picture painted above. Chiefly, the painter conveys the impression of someone not willing to label herself and to be contempt with being the character people expect from her — once again, the narrative does not distance itself from making an underlined comment on how handling this type of visibility can be troublesome.

Elaine's discomfort during her interview, her evasion of labels, and her witty responses not only mirror the dilemmas faced by notable artists such as Atwood but also underscore the broader challenges inherent in navigating public perception and expectation. Like Atwood, who has grappled with attempts to pigeonhole her work and identity, the protagonist reflects the tension between personal expression and public interpretation. The novel, through its portrayal of Elaine, invites readers to contemplate the complexities of artistic identity, the limitations of categorization, and the struggle for autonomy in the face of external expectations, topics already covered in my previous section.

The last facet is the pussycat. This choice of animal is justified by Cooke based on a poem sent by Atwood to the artist Charles Patcher, a friend of the author's. Entitled "Owl and Pussycat: Some Years Later", the poem brings the figure of an owl with bifocals, most likely representing Patcher, while Atwood would be the pussycat. In it, the speaker comments on how these two creatures achieved success — "prizes", "trophies", against their earlier ambitions — to "change the world". Cooke uses this character as an example of how the writer usually depicts herself, "as a short and soft-spoken, buried under a mass of curls, as one who, like everyone else in the contemporary world, often feels rather small, perhaps even bumbling" (COOKE, 2000, p. 22). Going further, when analyzing the author's visual work, such as her comic strips and her self-portraits, she is often overwhelmed by the situations she finds herself in and is drawn with an especial focus on how curly her hair is, respectively.

Figure — Atwood self-portrait



Source: <https://www.themarginalian.org/2013/11/08/whos-writing-this-notations-on-the-authorial-i-with-self-portraits/> Access on 23rd Oct 2022.

Drawing from Cooke, “these cartoon or stick figure self-portraits are self-deprecating and funny, proof that Atwood takes her work seriously, but does not take herself too seriously. Paradoxically, they also invite us to recognize that size has little to do with impact” (Cooke, 2000, p. 22). Interestingly, Andrea is also surprised by how small Elaine is — although she does not specify to which kind of smallness she is referring to. The interviewer says she thought the painter was bigger, to what Elaine answers that she *is* bigger. This scenario seems to illustrate well how the qualities of size and impact may relate, as exposed by Cooke: physical smallness does not correlate to a lack of accomplishments, at least in the case of both Elaine and Atwood.

Contrasting this last facet with the other ones, there is a considerable distinctness between the revealed and concealed side of the author, to retrieve Cooke’s own comment. This also recovers some of the views previously addressed in this piece, such as Atwood’s in *On Writers and Writing*: contrary to the popular belief, author and person should be confused as the same individual — they can be completely dissimilar, in fact. Known as an idolized, fearsome author, the writer may be a completely different individual personally, and, although there is no way of knowing exactly what the truth in this is, this would still be a valid reason to not push connections between author and person, person and characters, and so on.

With the aid of this overview of Atwood’s main public personas, I will draw from York (2006) some relevant considerations on how the writer has been dealing with these angles of celebrity. To begin with, it is important to clarify what the term “celebrity” means when referring to artists such as writers. As put by York, one may think that authors do not enjoy the privileges and notoriety of A-list celebrities, for instance. However, what is being defined here as celebrity is how Atwood attracts attention beyond “disciplinary boundaries”, as explained by her. This, and the fact that stardom is considered here as a product social exchange ratify the fact that the writer occupies an evident position of heightened visibility in her field of literary production. York even goes to the point of referencing terms such as “Margaret Atwood, Inc.” and “Atwood industry” — coined to Graham Huggan — to exemplify how the author has remarkable success.

It is also interesting to point out here that the York observes that there are several explanations for her popularity: hard work and productivity, an ability to function as a spokesperson on a wide range of topics, a variety of public roles (“writer”, “feminist”, “environmentalist”, “nationalist”), her “media-friendly” quality, among others. Some of these topics have been already covered with Cooke’s aid, nonetheless, it is pertinent to mention that

there is a multitude of perspectives that can be assumed in this context, and most certainly only three main “personalities” cannot cover them, although they serve as a simplified way to approach the subject.

This also leads to the first thing pointed out by York as one of the writer’s adaptive responses to fame: the fact that she restricts free access to her privacy. At the same time, as pointed out, this has “allowed her to preserve some time to herself, her writing, and her family, and it has also, ironically fed the publicity machines” (York, 2006, p. 32). One of the means through which the author has skillfully controlled her public image is through her website, in which there are both glimpses at the writer’s personal life — there is a section called “From Margaret Atwood’s desk”, which offers some comments by the author on what she is currently doing, reading, or thinking about — and important information on the author, especially on what she *cannot* do: “Ms. Atwood cannot write an introduction to your book (...) Ms. Atwood cannot read unpublished manuscripts (...) Ms. Atwood can no longer send ‘Sorry, can’t do it’ or ‘thank you for the book’”, and so on. This, as highlighted by York, is also a way of relieving a considerable amount of workload both from the writer and her assistants. Although it might seem that Atwood is “barricading herself” behind these statements, there is a suggestion that the balance between these instructions and more personal information are able to soften this impression.

However, although her privacy management is arguably one of the reasons why readers and critics are so eager to discover more from the author’s life, even if that means to continually make assumptions based on her works, the second point of interest brought up by York, which is exactly how Atwood’s fiction deals with these issues, is of particular importance to this thesis. York proposes that one of the writer’s common themes is the one of “fame as a deathly specter”. To begin with, York emphasizes that the fact that Atwood brings up these issues in her fiction does not necessarily mean that they are a simple reflection of her own experiences; however, it is worth noting that most likely the author playfully draws on her personal knowledge of the subject to build this “wry play” on literary celebrity.

The first novel mentioned is *Lady Oracle*, which more directly discusses these issues, since the protagonist, Joan, is a writer herself. According to York, fame becomes a condition far worse than death for the character, who is subjected to a media circus by her publishers, who aim to increase sales at whatever cost. Another novel mentioned is *Alias Grace*, which brings this topic on a more serious note. Although the novel does not deal with literary celebrity, it raises the topic of fabrications, multiple versions of truth, and lies, all of this in a close relation

to fame, according to the scholar. Moreover, *Alias Grace* also features “fame’s wicked twin”, notoriety (York, 2006). This is a very interesting idea, since it also plays with previously mentioned notions of identity in relation to the public and private sphere and suggests fame’s tendency to portray people in a derogatory way.

As to *Cat’s Eye*, the main aspect pointed out is that the novel is clearly more autumnal than the others mentioned, as it deals with a retrospective exhibition — as put by Elaine, “first the retrospective, then the morgue” (Atwood, 2009, p. 16). In this sense, the art gallery is considered as a morgue of sorts, which the painter can visit and bring her works back to life, “reviving their moments of creating and of their inspiration in her past” (York, 2016, p. 36). Although the protagonist offers some “funny wisecracks” about fame, as put by her, the novel’s tone is more serious than the one in *Lady Oracle*, for instance.

I believe that although *Cat’s Eye* tone is definitely autumnal, not only the protagonist’s comments offer a comical relief from more serious matters brought up by the novel, but also the character herself. As suggested by Banerjee, Elaine stands for a “middle-aged woman, critical of current fads and fashions, comic and sad in her remembrance of the body’s aging, anxious about reception by younger people, yet amused, and filled with a sense of loss” (Banerjee, 1990, p. 514). This protagonist, as also commented, is representative of a typical Atwood character, whose distaste for the culture they exist within and critical glance result in a “crotchiness”. Associating this to the discussion on fame, I see that the novel maintains a wry tone that extends to the way Elaine’s celebrity is portrayed, considering both the abovementioned aspects, which pay respect more to the way other people — especially representatives of the media and art critics — react to the painter’s work, and the way the painter feels and behaves towards her notoriety. In other words, the narrative presents an internal glance at fame as well, pointing out the feelings and thoughts, while maintaining this ironic tone, on the artist’s side.

In sum, there are many possible interfaces to be drawn between *Cat’s Eye* and Atwood’s own public personas and views on fame. Considering how the writer chooses to present herself and to deal with her privacy, there are two main features: how the novel also makes a statement on how artists are normally treated by the public and the critics, and how it presents Elaine’s feelings towards being a notorious painter and receiving a retrospective exhibition. Concerning the first aspect, I see that the novel does not fail in presenting the drawbacks of the treatment artists receive, especially the labeling that tends to happen in this context. However, this depiction does not happen unilaterally, as I exposed in the first section, since the novel also

presents how the public can potentially enrich works of art. Being these contributions “trendy explanations”, as put by York, or meaningful insights, it is in the reader’s (or seer’s) hands to decide. Having in mind how Atwood is also seen as someone who resists labeling and does not shy away from being a spokesperson on many subjects, although it would not necessarily mean that the novel is based entirely on her experience, as already disclaimed, it is evident that there is a reference to this type of situation in the novel.

Finally, the second aspect is especially interesting when considering how the writer has been avoiding biographical approaches to her novels and biographical works on her life. Very similarly to what Elaine states on the retrospective being a preliminary step to the morgue, Atwood has also replied that she was not dead yet when approached by an author who was willing to write her biography, for example (York, 2016). In this sense, I see that there is a playful nod to how patronizing these approaches can be, while at the same time the novel presents this wry portrayal of both the artist— who is critical, dislocated, comic, and sad — and the media and critical reception.

In conclusion, the exploration into Margaret Atwood's public personas and their intersection with the novel reveals how the author’s evolution into a public intellectual, encompassing roles as an author, social commentator, environmental activist, and feminist figure, underscores the resonance of her perspectives. Within this framework, the analysis of her personas — the lion, the tiger, and the pussycat — provides insights into the challenges and strategies Atwood employs in navigating fame, scrutiny, and public expectations.

The lion persona encapsulates Atwood as a literary celebrity, celebrated for her prolific output and esteemed across borders. However, as pointed out, this comes at the cost of intensified media scrutiny and the potential creation of an icon, raising questions about the delicate balance between appreciating an artist's work and respecting their privacy. The tiger facet reveals a more proactive and assertive Atwood, resistant to attempts at biographical investigation and unafraid to engage with critics. I understand that this facet mirrors the tension between personal expression and public interpretation, a theme echoed in *Cat's Eye* through Elaine's discomfort with fame and media attention.

The pussycat persona portrays Atwood as self-deprecating and funny, downplaying her size while emphasizing her impact. This facet, like the others, contributes to the complex image of the author, offering a nuanced understanding of how Atwood views herself in contrast to public perceptions. In my view, it is through these personas that Atwood navigates the intricate relationship between her public and private selves.

In examining how *Cat's Eye* intersects with these public personas, the novel emerges as a reflection on fame, especially as seen through the retrospective lens of Elaine's art exhibition. The wry tone in Elaine's comments on fame, her evasion of labels, and her critical perspective align with the writer's characteristic portrayal of her protagonists. The novel's autumnal tone delves into the challenges of being a public person, reflecting the recurrent theme of "fame as a deathly specter", a common theme in Atwood's fiction.

Moreover, *Cat's Eye* maintains a balance between depicting the drawbacks of how artists are treated by the public and critics and recognizing the potential enriching contributions from these perspectives. In my understanding, the novel, much like Atwood herself, resists simplistic labeling, offering a playful nod to the patronizing nature of biographical approaches. In the broader context, Atwood's adaptive responses to fame, such as managing privacy through her website, demonstrate a conscious effort to control her public image. These themes also find echo in Atwood's broader body of work, emphasizing the dynamics between personal experiences and her creations.

4 *CAT'S EYE*

In this section I will explore the reading of *Cat's Eye* as a fictive autobiography, as proposed by Cooke (1992) in her chapter “Reading Reflections: The Autobiographical Illusion in *Cat's Eye*”. To do so, I will review and provide commentary on some of the key scholarly works that examine the novel from this perspective, or a similar one. Additionally, I will present and analyse selected passages that illustrate concepts brought up by these works. The objective is to shed light on the intricate and intentional interplay between these elements within the novel, ultimately offering a more comprehensive view of how autobiography is appropriated by it. After analysing how the narrative relates to different approaches to autobiography and to Atwood's own public figure, I believe that understanding how the novel can be read as a fictive autobiography will help to gain a more profound understanding of the ways in which it embraces and challenges the conventions of autobiography.

4.1 Reading a fictive autobiography

The idea of a fictive autobiography may initially seem at odds with the established principles of the genre. As previously discussed, works like those of LeJeune outline the fundamental criteria that autobiographical narratives typically adhere to, and *Cat's Eye*, if evaluated within these confines, might not seem to align with all the necessary aspects. Nevertheless, Canadian scholar Nathalie Cooke frames the novel as a fictive autobiography. Cooke's interpretation challenges the traditional boundaries of autobiography and explores the blurring between fact and fiction present in the novel.

Cooke's approach to *Cat's Eye* introduces her perspective on how readers, including her own acquaintances, often perceive the novel as more autobiographical than other by Atwood. She recognizes that this perception is driven by the literary conventions — autobiography conventions — that are employed in the narrative. Cooke's central argument is that the narrative should be read with this dual perspective, as both fiction and nonfiction simultaneously. Some of the reasons for this to be necessary presented by the scholar are to challenge the reader, to challenge the narrative closure, and to challenge classification. I will comment on these ideas in this section.

Firstly, it challenges the reader's assumptions and expectations, compelling them re-evaluate the boundaries between fiction and autobiography. Cooke refers to this as "pulling-the-rug-out-from-under-us," suggesting that Atwood plays with the reader's inclination to assume a close connection between the author and her characters. According to Cooke, this challenge becomes particularly relevant because the writer is a woman, a factor that has led to unwarranted assumptions regarding the degree of autobiographical content in her work.

Moving forward,

[...] when we read *Cat's Eye* we are drawn by the prospect of the author within the text, of finding out about Atwood, or perhaps by having those stories we have heard about her confirmed, by her. It is not that this is any less fictional than her other works, but rather that the autobiographical elements in it suggest that it might be. (Cooke, 1992, p.165)

In this sense, Cooke's insights highlight the dynamic that readers may experience when reading the novel: the allure of the author's presence within the narrative. In other words, there is a palpable curiosity about Atwood herself, whether it is the prospect of gaining insights into her life or having preconceived notions confirmed by the author herself. In my view, one of the most important suggested ideas here is that this allure is not necessarily grounded in the novel's literal truth but rather in the autobiographical elements that create a possibility of connecting the fictional narrative to the author's real life. In sum, readers would seek a deeper understanding of the authors through the lens of her own narrative.

This quote also hints at the dual nature of the novel. I understand that it acknowledges that, despite being a work of fiction, there is a distinctive quality in *Cat's Eye* that suggests a more intimate connection to Atwood's own experiences. The autobiographical elements inserted into the narrative contribute to this suggestion, blurring the lines between fiction and reality.

On the other hand, Cooke ratifies how the adding of these elements does not make the novel any less fictional than other Atwood works. This acknowledgement is crucial in my opinion, as it underscores how the narrative incorporates personal elements while remaining a fictional creation. In this sense, readers would be invited to engage with the text in a nuanced way, appreciating the complexity of the storytelling rather than seeking a straightforward mirror of the author's life. In other words, I see that the prospect of uncovering aspects of Atwood's life adds an intriguing layer to the reading experience of the novel while not necessarily compromising the fictional essence of it.

Additionally, the approach of reading *Cat's Eye* as both fiction and nonfiction serves to challenge the conventional narrative closure, as suggested by Cooke. By weaving elements of autobiography into the novel, Atwood blurs the boundaries between the story's conclusion and the author's real-life experiences. In my view, this is one of the main elements that facilitates the narrative's resistance against a traditional conclusion.

Considering the contributions already made on Atwood's public persona and the relationship between her own life and her written works, it is evident that her choice to blur the boundaries between fiction and autobiography in *Cat's Eye* is not merely a literary experiment, in my opinion. It is also a statement on the nature of narrative closure and personal identity, as I will elaborate on now.

Atwood challenges the conventional narrative closure, as proposed by Cooke, by keeping the ending of *Cat's Eye* open to interpretation. Readers are presented with a sense of ambiguity regarding Elaine's future and her ongoing quest for self-discovery, especially the closure she would get if she encountered Cordelia. The idea of the "two old women giggling over their tea" teases a touching image that accentuates Elaine's loss in this process.

I have the window seat. In the two seats beside me are two old ladies, old women [...] They seem to me amazingly carefree. They have saved up for this trip and they are damn well going to enjoy it, despite the arthritis of one, the swollen legs of the other. [...]

This is what I miss, Cordelia: not something that's gone, but something that will never happen. Two old women giggling over their tea. (Atwood, 2009, p. 478).

This ambiguity resonates with real-life complexities of identity, which are not neatly resolved within a finite narrative frame. In doing so, Atwood defies the traditional storytelling conventions that propose clear resolutions and tied conclusions. Through this passage, I see the essence of nostalgia and longing — the absence of a particular experience. Choosing to end the narrative in this tone introduces how the yearning is not for a past that can be revisited but for a future that will never materialize, ideas previously teased in the novel. That being so, I understand that the passage then reflects this unresolved nature of relationships. In other words, by resisting a conclusive resolution, the novel offers an open-ended contemplation on the complexities of relationships, suggesting that the essence of yearning is not in having closure but in acknowledging how some opportunities — or even relationships — are suspended.

Moreover, this blurring of boundaries also relates to Atwood's own experiences as a writer. By weaving elements of her own life and her creative process into the narrative, Atwood invites readers to question the validity of distinguishing between the artist and her art. This

choice reflects somewhat of a fluidity of identity, especially for artists who often grapple with the intricate relationship between their creative personas and their personal lives — as it is the case of Atwood.

In summary, this fusion within the narrative not only challenges these conventions but also underscores the author's acknowledgement of the intricacies surrounding personal identity and creative expression. This approach fosters a more profound connection between the reader, the text, and the author, in my view, and invites reflection on the limits between these different elements, both within the novel's framework and in the context of Atwood's own life and literary career.

Furthermore, the duality of fiction and nonfiction in the novel challenges classification. I understand that the novel operates in the space between these categories, complicating attempts to neatly categorize it as purely autobiographical or purely fictional. By doing so, I believe that Atwood encourages readers and scholars to confront the limitations of rigid literary classifications, bringing the attention to the complexity of her narrative.

In sum, Cooke brings important contributions on the reading of the novel, where the focus shifts from searching for the author within the narrative to a reflection on our own assumptions regarding autobiographical fiction. Therefore, the novel would become a mirror reflection not just what we can see about Atwood but our own preconceived notions about the genre.

When we read *Cat's Eye*, we are forced to redirect our attention from Atwood's presence or absence in this seemingly autobiographical text to ourselves and, in particular, to our assumptions about autobiographical fiction itself. This is indeed a book about self-representation, and the reader's role is to reflect upon the various reflections of the self contained within in. (Cooke, 1992, p. 166)

By challenging readers to redirect their attention, Cooke suggests that the true essence of the book lies in its capacity to prompt self-reflection. *Cat's Eye*, in this sense, becomes a lens through which readers examine their beliefs about the boundaries between fact and fiction, and author and characters. In addition, I see that the reader would be cast into a participatory role, tasked by unraveling the different layers of self-representation embedded in the narrative. This shift in focus, in my view, transforms the act of reading into a dynamic, reflective process that extends beyond the boundaries of the novel itself.

On that note, I believe this process of self-reflection is intricately tied to the portrayal of Elaine's multifaceted character throughout the novel. Elaine's identity, in this case, is not fixed: rather, it evolves and adapts, revealing various dimension of her persona. As readers

traverse the narrative, they encounter different facets of Elaine — the child navigating complex friendships, the artist grappling with the intricacies of perception and reception, and the adult reconciling with her past. Each facet would bring a distinct form of reflection about the self.

The complexities of her relationships, especially with her childhood friends and her brother, offer a lens through which readers might reflect on the nature of these interpersonal dynamics, as well as their effect on the life of an individual. Her artistic endeavors, by their turn, could raise questions about perception, representation, and the complexities of expressing one's identity through art. Finally, Elaine's revisiting of her past reflects not only the character's internal struggle but also the themes of identity, memory, and the ever-evolving nature of the self.

Just as Cooke suggests that *Cat's Eye* leads readers to reflect on their assumptions about autobiographical fiction, I see that the various dimensions of Elaine's character also encourage this process of reflection. Her multifaceted identity ratifies how the narrative becomes a space for introspection. The complexities within Elaine's relationships, notably with childhood friends and her brother, provide a lens through which it is possible to contemplate the dynamics of interpersonal connections and their impact on an individual's life. Moreover, her artistic pursuits prompt questions about perception, representation, and the process of expressing one's identity through creativity. As Elaine revisits her past, the narrative delves into the themes of identity, memory, and the ever-evolving nature of the self. In essence, I see that the novel acts as a mirror reflecting not only readers' assumptions about autobiographical fiction but also inviting a reflection on human experiences and the nature of personal identity within the realm of memory and artistic expression.

Finally, Cooke also states how

To be sure, reviewers have already shown that they are uncomfortable putting any labels to *Cat's Eye*. Just as in the past they have been quick to categorize — and recategorize — Atwood's work, they are now hesitating. Even more surprising than this resistance to classification, however, are the grounds upon which that resistance is based: the sense that this is *more* than a feminist tract, *more* than a postmodern exploration of literary self-reflection, precisely, because it speaks from and about the autobiographical forms. (Cooke, 1992, p. 168)

The quote highlights a reluctance among reviewers when it comes to categorizing *Cat's Eye*. This hesitation is especially intriguing given the historical trend of categorizing and recategorizing Atwood's works, a practice noted by Cooke. What sets this resistance apart is the rationale behind it, as it comes from the belief that the novel exceeds the boundaries of a straightforward feminist tract or a postmodern exploration of literary self-reflection. According

to Cooke, this resistance emerges from the novel's intricate engagement with autobiographical forms, signaling a recognition that the work occupies a nuanced space, resisting easy classification within established literary frameworks.

Furthermore, the quote suggests how Atwood's deliberate inclusion of autobiographical elements challenges the conventional notion that biographical readings are inherently reductive. Instead, the incorporation of autobiographical aspects becomes a tool for expanding the novel's significance. By infusing the autobiographical, Atwood would encourage a reading resisting the temptation to master the text through a singular lens, encouraging a more comprehensive engagement with the narrative.

In my view, Cooke also implies that attributing a variety of labels to the novel becomes a way for readers to grapple with its complexity. The hesitancy to confine the novel to a singular genre or theme reflects a wish to conform it to a literary tradition, which often favors clear-cut categorizations. This negotiation between the novel's storytelling and readers' and reviewer's attempts to classify it displays the novel's complexity, in my understanding.

Following, Cooke also comments on the disruption of the comfort associated with perceiving biographical interpretations as inherently reductive. Atwood, according to Cooke, compels a reading where the autobiographical elements in the novel defy simplistic categorization:

In other words, Atwood is forcing us to rethink our position — again. Just as we had become comfortable with the idea that a biographical reading is a reductive one, Atwood shows us that is quite the opposite. It is precisely the autobiographical aspect in and of *Cat's Eye* that makes us resist our temptation to master the text. We want to say that *Cat's Eye* is all of fiction and autobiography, feminist tract and personal meditation, contemporary metafictional and classical narrative precisely because it is *more* than these. But to say that would be to admit that Atwood has restored our faith in story and in the magic of literary illusion; and we are surely much too experienced as readers to say that. COOKE, 1992, p. 168)

Cooke's analysis underscores questioning the assumption that a biographical reading simplifies interpretation, as previously mentioned; instead, she proposes that the use of autobiographical elements serves to expand rather than restrict understanding. This was also proposed in the previous section, where I discussed how the artist's intent and the public's reception are debated within the novel.

In aligning with Cooke's interpretation, the deliberate infusion of autobiographical elements into the narrative would create a resistance. This resistance, as suggested by Cooke, emerges from the intent to disrupt readers' attempts to master the text easily. Moreover, Cooke hints at the complexity of labeling *Cat's Eye* as an amalgamation of various genres and themes,

suggesting that this hesitation to neatly categorize the novel reflects readers grappling with the different dimensions of the novel. In my view, this deliberate resistance to easy classification serves a twofold purpose. Firstly, it challenges readers to move beyond conventional interpretive frameworks that might simplify the text into familiar categories, through this infusion of autobiographical elements and refusal to conform to easily recognizable genres.

Secondly, this intentional resistance brings a reconsideration of the nature of storytelling itself. By refusing to conform to predefined literary categories, the complexity introduced into the narrative by the amalgamation of genres and themes challenges readers, something also argued by Cooke. This negotiation between various elements in the novel reflects the potential negotiation that artists — including writers and painters — may undergo in their work.

In conclusion, Nathalie Cooke's framing of *Cat's Eye* as a fictive autobiography challenges established genre principles, introducing a perspective that blurs the boundaries between fact and fiction. Cooke's proposition considers the novel as both fiction and nonfiction simultaneously. This dual perspective serves a threefold purpose, according to the scholar: challenging reader assumptions and expectations, resisting conventional narrative closure, and challenging rigid literary classification. The allure of the author's presence within the narrative sparks a curiosity about Atwood herself, creating a nuanced reading experience that goes beyond a straightforward mirror of the author's life.

The novel's open-ended conclusion, emphasizing nostalgia and longing, reflects the unresolved nature of relationships and invites contemplation on the complexities inherent in human connections. Furthermore, the fusion of fiction and nonfiction in the narrative mirrors Atwood's acknowledgment of the fluidity of identity for artists, the distinction between the artist and her art. Lastly, the challenge to traditional classification invites reflection on the complexity of the narrative, turning the act of reading into a reflective process that extends beyond the novel itself. In essence, I argue that Cooke's contributions underscore that *Cat's Eye* serves as a mirror not just reflecting Atwood's work but also readers' assumptions about autobiographical fiction.

4.2 Other considerations on *Cat's Eye*

Besides Cooke's contributions on the reading of *Cat's Eye* as a fictive autobiography, other scholar proposes similar approaches to the narrative. Thereby, I will comment on some important contribution made by scholars who explored who autobiographical elements were

incorporated into the novel, or how it can be considered both fact and fiction. These works are from Ingersoll (1991), Hite (1995), De Jong (1998), and Banerjee (1990). Each one of them provide commentary on the usage of such elements in the narrative, even if this is not the main scope of their work. That being so, I considered important to complement my previous section with these diverse contributions.

To begin with, Ingersoll comments on the tendency of readers and critics to interpret Atwood's work of autobiographical. According to him, the writer has been quite vocal about her resistance to biographical readings of her fiction, a stance that has become more apparent in her interviews.

At the center of this postmodern text is Atwood's complex use of her own past. Few writers have spoken out so vehemently against readings of their work as autobiography. As her interviews indicate, she is very aware that her audience is bent upon biographical readings of her fiction. With obvious amusement she tells how in question-and-answer sessions following her public readings she has often just finished disclaiming autobiographical roots for her characters (...) For Atwood, there are clearly gender implications here since, as she has argued, women have traditionally been thought so imaginatively impoverished that all they could write about was themselves. (Ingersoll, 1991, p. 17-18)

Atwood's awareness that her audience often leans toward these biographical interpretations is very interesting. This highlights the challenges she has been facing as a writer who is frequently subject to such readings. Firstly, there is the creative autonomy of the author. Atwood's commitment to her creative vision is evident in her resistance to having her works reduced to autobiographical reflections. Secondly, there is the issue of reader expectations. The fact that her audience often expects her work to reflect her life experiences means that she must navigate the preconceived notions of her readers. This can be a double-edged sword: while familiarity with her life and experiences can make her work more relatable, it can also lead to misinterpretations and missed nuances within her stories. Interestingly, some of these topics have already been covered by Cooke.

Cooke also points out the gender implications of this issue. Atwood has argued that women writers are often perceived as having limited imaginative capacity, and as a result, their works were presumed to be self-focused. This gender bias can be seen as a backdrop to Atwood's firm stance against biographical readings, as she tries to distance herself from these stereotypes. In summary, Ingersoll's commentary sheds light on Atwood's deliberate separation of her life from her art, emphasizing her battle against the prevailing notion that women authors primarily draw from their own experiences.

In conclusion, Atwood's awareness of and response to biographical interpretations is a multi-faceted aspect of her career. I understand that it speaks to her commitment to her creative vision, the complexities of managing reader expectations, and her challenge to gender stereotypes. Moreover, it also highlights the complexities of managing readers expectations, as she navigates the blurred lines between her life and her work, a topic already discussed in this thesis and apparently one of the main ones when considering this discussion.

Going further, Hite also explores the idea of autobiographical fiction and its implications within the novel.

In what may be the most nearly autobiographical moment in Atwood's work, it points to the limits of Atwood's art and to what is lost because of these limits, although it also insists that the loss is necessary and that the limits are also what make the acknowledgment of loss possible. The oxymoron of "autobiographical fiction" in *Cat's Eye* finally authorizes not a transgressive glimpse into some pre-existing private realm of the "real," but a reminder that the "self" of self-representation is always seer as well as seen, and that both seer and seen are implicated in the social construction of how one looks. (Hite, 1995, p. 155)

Firstly, it suggests that there is a distinct autobiographical element in *Cat's Eye* that might represent a moment where Atwood's art aligns closely with her own experiences. This intersection of fiction and autobiography highlights the limits of artistic expression, emphasizing that not everything can be translated into fiction without loss. In other words, there would be aspects of one's life that are deeply personal and might be sacrificed or altered in the process of creating fiction. However, it also underlines that this loss is not a flaw but an essential part of the creative process. It's the compromise that writers make to make their narratives and, in the case of Atwood, to address issues.

Moreover, the concept of autobiographical fiction is not portrayed as a transgressive exploration of a pre-existing real world but as a reflection of how self-representation operates. It demonstrates that the self is not an isolated entity but is always observed and shaped by others, and this mutual influence is intricately linked to societal constructs of identity. In this sense, *Cat's Eye* serves as a reminder of the social nature of self-representation and identity formation. As well as with reader's expectation, this thesis also brought important contributions in this sense, especially considering how this dynamic is explored both inside and outside the novel.

In summary, the quote highlights the dynamic interplay between fiction and autobiography, suggesting that while the creation of autobiographical fiction has its limitations and losses, it is an important medium for exploring complex notions of self-representation and

identity. Atwood's work, through this lens, becomes a reflection on the nuanced relationship between personal narratives and the context that shapes them.

Following, De Jong brings some important insights on Elaine's artworks and their connection to this discussion. In the culmination of Elaine's artistic journey, the last five paintings in her retrospective stand as symbolic representations of diverse perspectives and dimensions of space-time. Notably, these artworks delve into the interplay between visions and vision, featuring the recurring motif of the cat's eye. In particular, the cat's eye takes on new significance, appearing as a globe held by Miss Stuart in *The Three Muses* and, more expressively, as a marble cradled by the Virgin Mary in *Unified Field Theory*. This deliberate choice of symbolism prompts an exploration of vision, both artistic and spiritual, within Elaine's creative works.

As mentioned earlier, the last five paintings of Elaine's retrospective all signify further perspectives and dimensions of space-time, depicting visions and vision simultaneously. The cat's eye itself returns as the globe held by Miss Stuart in *The Three Muses*. More expressive, though, is the cat's eye marble held by the Virgin Mary in *Unified Field Theory* at the level of her heart (408). (...) in my opinion, Elaine makes a straightforward statement about the importance of vision and visions for the development of her creative self by combining the object that constituted a vision (the Virgin Mary) with the object that signifies artistic vision (the cat's eye marble). (De Jong, 1998, p. 105)

Elaine's artistic expression in the final paintings of her retrospective, as analysed by De Jong, encapsulates a layering of symbolism and meaning. The recurrence of the cat's eye motif serves as a thematic thread, connecting disparate paintings and representing various dimensions of space-time. The juxtaposition of the cat's eye with the Virgin Mary in *Unified Field Theory* exposes the centrality of vision in Elaine's art. The merging of the object that embodies a spiritual vision, the Virgin Mary, with the cat's eye marble, representing artistic vision, creates a powerful visual metaphor in my view.

That being so, the protagonist's work also illustrates how different visions are necessary in art. This could be applied to the understanding of the novel itself, considering the debate on autobiography and fiction within it. In this sense, Elaine's artistic journey could be seen as a commentary on how different visions are not only inevitable but crucial to art. The diverse perspectives depicted in these paintings mirror the multiplicity of interpretations that can come from any artistic creation — including the novel itself. Moreover, I see that this principle could also be applied to artists themselves, considering the debate on how multifaceted they can be.

Following, the scholar also points out how

On a more general level, through Elaine's statement about herself, the novel as a whole makes a statement about present issues concerning female subjectivity, femininity and the formation of the female self. In current literary criticism the concepts of subject and subjectivity are under constant discussion. (...) Margaret Atwood's contribution to this discussion is in her fiction, which questions and problematizes notions of a unified self, a coherent subject (...) (De Jong, 1998, p. 98)

Therefore, De Jong's observation delves into how the protagonist's journey transcends an individual experience to become a commentary on contemporary issues surrounding female subjectivity and the construction of femininity. In this sense, Atwood's fiction would challenge conventional ideas of a unified and coherent self by problematizing these notions. In other words, the writer would contribute to a broader conversation about the nature of identity, particularly the female self, through characters such as Elaine, I understand.

However, and bringing these contributions to the discussion of this thesis, I see that it is evident how the challenging of the idea of a unified self, as highlighted by De Jong, also aligns with the idea of blurring the limits between the author's life and the fictional narrative. Just as Elaine has a public and concealed side, she is also seen as a side of Atwood, and the play with this proximity between character and author is an interesting part of the narrative.

Following, Banerjee proposes that

Similarly, in the question of time it is possible to distinguish between Elaine's time and Atwood's time. Whereas Elaine's narratives are linear the braided narrative Atwood constructs with the three modes of discourse articulates the subject as a network of signifier. This subject, emerging from the interrelationship of speech, memory, fantasy, dream, and art, cannot indeed be traced along a line; it exists within time as a dimension. [...] Paradoxically, then, these problematic aspects of the narrative become paradigmatic. Atwood's art is "Aesopian." It uses a vulgar surface as a popularly acceptable carriage for a serious concern with art. This may be Atwood's solution to the problem of artistic production in the marketplace: the production of works which have one face toward the popular market and a counter face visible to those with literary competence. It is an art in hiding, and in *Cat's Eye* it finds a narrative which narrationally foregrounds and psychologically grounds hiding. (Banerjee, 1990, p. 522)

Banerjee's analysis delves into the intricacies of time and narrative construction within *Cat's Eye*, highlighting the distinction between Elaine's linear time and Atwood's complex, braided temporal structure. The characterization of the subject as a network of signifiers emerging from various modes of discourse reflects the multifaceted nature of the narrative. Even though this is not the focus of this thesis, Banerjee's idea of the narrative braid within the novel is also an interesting reading of how the work deals with these different dimensions. This

approach challenges conventional storytelling, where a clear, linear progression often dominates.

The notion of Atwood's art being "Aesopian" is particularly intriguing, in my view. It suggests a dual nature — a surface that caters to popular acceptance while finding a more profound engagement with artistic concerns deep down. This duality, Banerjee argues, may serve as Atwood's strategic response to the challenges of artistic production in a commercialized literary market. While I not necessarily agree that the format of the novel would be so explicitly made for this purpose, or even that these two elements — popularity and artistic preoccupations — necessarily would be separated, I see that this reading of the novel reinforces how it, once again, deals with the double nature of art and the artist, being, in this case, popular appeal and literary competence.

In essence, Banerjee positions the seemingly problematic aspects of *Cat's Eye's* narrative structure as serious artistic concerns are embedded within a commercially viable exterior. In my understanding, this approach underscores the dual nature of art as both a marketable commodity and an artistic exploration of a series of subjects, as well as the relationship between art and its reception. These themes are also discussed by the narrative, even though not into those exact terms.

In conclusion, the contributions of scholars such as Ingersoll, Hite, De Jong, and Banerjee provide an understanding of the different complexities included in the narrative. To begin with, Ingersoll's exploration of Atwood's resistance to biographical readings sheds light on the author's commitment to creative autonomy and her navigation of reader expectations, particularly concerning gender stereotypes. Hite's discussion of autobiographical fiction, for its turn, delves into the inherent limitations and necessary losses in translating personal experiences into artistic works.

De Jong's analysis of Elaine's artworks illustrates the symbolic significance of the cat's eye motif and its connection to the broader themes of vision, both artistic and spiritual. This perspective reinforces the novel's exploration of different perspectives and the necessity of diverse visions in both art and life. Furthermore, De Jong's insights into the novel's engagement with contemporary issues of female subjectivity align with the overarching theme of challenging conventional notions of identity.

Finally, Banerjee's examination of narrative construction introduces the concept of a braided temporal structure, challenging traditional linear storytelling. The notion of Atwood's art being "Aesopian" also suggests a dual nature that caters to popular acceptance while

engaging with artistic concerns. This dualism, Banerjee argues, may be Atwood's strategic response to the challenges of artistic production in a commercialized literary market.

I understand that these scholars collectively contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of *Cat's Eye* by highlighting the dynamic between fiction and autobiography, the challenges faced by the author in managing reader expectations, the multifaceted nature of artistic expression, and the complex relationship between art and its reception. Each perspective adds depth to the exploration of the novel's themes, showing how the novel's themes extend beyond the conventional boundaries, also reconsidering assumptions about the author's relationship to her work.

5 FINAL REMARKS

As put by Banerjee, *Cat's Eye* has more than one face, and tells more than one story. Thereby, it is no surprise how intricately these portrayals of fame, reception, and different ways of understanding works of art are presented in the novel. Cooke suggests that one of *Cat's Eye's* main aspects is that it does not allow the reader to master the text, in the sense that its play with autobiography challenges well established notions on fiction and referentially, as I previously mentioned. However, I would go even further and suggest that the novel implies that it is not possible to master *any* kind of artwork, since all these dimensions to them are explored and contrasted constantly. In outline, I see that *Cat's Eye* delves into the complexities of biographical dimensions of works of art, not favoring any type of approach — biographical or not — instead of the other, but, on the contrary, portraying the potentialities of this scenario. Instead of naively suggesting that Elaine's canvasses do not have any biographical meaning, or, on the contrary, that Charna is completely wrong in her analysis, the novel explores this grey area, in which different ideas and perceptions are fomented and debated.

In my first chapter, I dove into the three waves of autobiographical studies and their takes on this type of writing and what characterizes it. In overview, I understand that, as previously mentioned, *Cat's Eye* only manages to play with the dynamic between autobiography and fiction by bringing elements that are characteristic from these narratives. This was confirmed by the notable parallels I was able to recognize between each of the waves presented and key elements in the novel. It is important to comment that one of my objectives with this thesis was to understand *how* autobiography is incorporated in the narrative, instead of *how*, as I brought in my introduction. That being so, studying more about these concepts enlightened the references embedded in the narrative to these writings and their perception in relation to other narratives.

In the first wave, Misch and Lukacs highlight the documental aspect and contextual references of autobiographical writings, as well as their emergence and relevance. The novel echoes these ideas by capturing not only Elaine's journey but also the cultural context of mid-20th-century Canada, reflecting Misch's documental aspects. Additionally, Lukacs's concept of the dialogical nature of the novel incorporating autobiographical elements finds resonance in *Cat's Eye*, functioning as a layered narrative connecting Elaine's personal reflections with the broader narrative of her life.

Concerning the second wave, Olney's exploration of the challenging definition of autobiographies and the idea that all writing is somewhat autobiographical aligns with *Cat's Eye*. The novel challenges traditional definitions of autobiography, blending personal experiences and storytelling, mirroring Olney's notion. The narrative encourages questioning the boundaries of autobiography, emphasizing the presence of autobiographical elements in various forms of writing.

Furthermore, the belief that the act of writing itself is inherently autobiographical parallels Elaine's artistic journey in the novel. Her paintings become autobiographical expressions, providing insights into her life experiences, reinforcing the exploration of this theme in the second and third chapters. Also, I see that the novel plays with this idea once it brings the prospect of learning more on Atwood's life as one of its main teasers with the public.

In the second wave of studies, Gusdorf's exploration of the tension between subjectivity and objectivity in autobiographical writings is also reflected in *Cat's Eye*. The novel portrays the nature of memory, where time and perspective alter the past, exemplifying the tension Gusdorf discusses. I see that Elaine's paintings further embody this duality as she merges her experiences with artistic expression, a theme explored in the third chapter.

LeJeune's autobiographical pact, framing the specificities of autobiographical forms, also resonates in *Cat's Eye*. The novel challenges conventional boundaries by interweaving autobiographical elements with fictional constructs, questioning the line between fact and fiction, as highlighted by Cooke (1992). In other words, LeJeune's autobiographical pact, emphasizing the negotiated nature of autobiographical works, finds resonance in the novel's narrative structure. By blending autobiography and fiction, the text prompts readers to reconsider the distinction between the two. In my view, this approach not only aligns with contemporary discussions on the malleability of autobiographical forms but also showcases the dynamics between reality and imagination within autobiographical storytelling.

Transitioning to the third wave, scholars like Olney, Eakin (1985), Eakin (2020), Smith and Watson (1998), and Smith and Watson (2001) offer insights into *Cat's Eye*. Olney's work challenges rigid definitions, aligning with the novel's blending of autobiographical and fictional elements. Eakin's insights into the tension between artistic freedom and historical accuracy find relevance in *Cat's Eye*, where the claim to autobiographical truth is a participatory process for readers. Eakin's distinction between biography and autobiography is crucial, challenging assumptions about objectivity in *Cat's Eye*, while his exploration of eyewitness accounts aligns with the novel's portrayal of memory and self-perception.

Following, the analysis of the two anthologies, *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader* (1998) and *Reading Autobiographies: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (2001), both by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, sheds light on the evolution of autobiographical studies. The first anthology, *Women, Autobiography, Theory*, explores the transformative trajectory of autobiography, particularly within the realms of academia and feminist discourse. The recognition of women's autobiographies as central in revising concepts related to different issues emphasizes the multi-dimensional contributions of women's autobiography. The mentioned themes also resonate with what is presented in *Cat's Eye*, where the protagonist's autobiographical narrative presents questions of identity and self-representation, as already mentioned.

The second anthology, *Reading Autobiographies*, delves into the complexities involved in interpreting autobiographical works. It distinguishes between life writing, life narrative, and autobiography. The scholars emphasize the challenges of classifying autobiographical writing and fiction, highlighting the blurred boundaries between these genres in contemporary literature. Once again, I see that this conceptualization aligns with *Cat's Eye*, where the blurring of the lines between autobiography and fiction challenge traditional notions of authenticity and truth.

Moreover, they propose a critical review of autobiographical studies, particularly focusing on women's contributions and exposing blind spots and exclusions. This resonates with ongoing debates about inclusivity, diversity, and intersectionality within autobiographical studies. Even though these themes are not the focus of this thesis, they reflect how autobiographical studies have evolved and what are their potential outcomes.

After comparing the concepts proposed by scholars from the three waves and *Cat's Eye* elements and narrative, I understand that the novel intricately inserts itself through the three waves of studies, offering valuable insights into the genre. The novel resonates with the historical roots discussed in the first wave, especially considering the importance of self-representation and the contextual references in these writings. It aligns with the nuanced perspectives of the second wave, questioning the boundaries of autobiography and how personal experiences intersect with artistic creations. It also engages with the themes presented in the third wave, particularly the role of collective memory and the interplay between an author's public and private personas. All in all, in my understanding these similarities confirm how intricate is the novel's work with these themes, and how it manages to tease the public by approaching the genre so closely.

Through these connections, I see that *Cat's Eye* expands on our understanding of autobiographical narratives. In my view, it demonstrates that the boundaries between the personal and the public, or even between memory and art, are porous, and that this does not apply solely to its own narrative but can also be considered in relation to any writing or even to traditional autobiographical narratives. In other words, I believe that the novel challenges us to rethink how we perceive and interpret autobiographical works, while it emphasizes the complexities between an author's life, their creations, and the broader context. This expanded perspective would lead to a more critical view of these narratives, recognizing that they are not static and self-contained reflections but rather part of a dynamic genre that continues to evolve.

The parallels drawn between Atwood and Elaine confirm the duality in the artist's identity. These connections reveal that artists often navigate a complex path between their public personas and their private lives, and Atwood's own self-awareness of this duality enriches the narrative. By presenting the character of Elaine as both an artist who mines her personal experiences for creative inspiration and as an individual who seeks to keep her personal life distinct from her public identity, the novel underscores the intricate relationship between an author's work and their existence outside of it. It highlights how autobiographical elements can serve as a source of artistic inspiration and as a means of challenging conventional narrative structures.

As suggested before, I see that Atwood as an author brings elements from Atwood as a person to the narrative. This intentional convergence, in my view, serves as a deliberate strategy, adding complexity to the novel. By infusing elements from her own life, I see that Atwood plays in a terrain where the boundaries between the creator and the created, reality and fiction, are deliberately obscured. As previously suggested, I understand this as an invitation of a more nuanced reading of the novel, considering the interplay between the actual and the invented within the text. This also invites contemplation on the nature of authorship, or even the malleability of truth, for instance.

As to the narrative's portrayal of fame and its connections to Atwood's position as a celebrated writer, I understand that there are several references to how the writer has been seen and treated by the public. This is not done without purpose, in my view: by playing with subjects so close to her own life, and with a character who resembles her so much, Atwood also highlights the limitations of biographical understandings of her novels. As put by Hite,

Cat's Eye plays with the implications of autobiography: advancing and withdrawing it as a mode of authorization; thematizing it as a strategy for simplistic interpretation

or, conversely, as the hidden, damaged heart of a work of art; insisting with the fervor of its adolescent girls telling each other scary stories that this is true, this really happened, while at the same time demanding on both aesthetic and metaphysical grounds, What do you mean, *true*? What do you mean, *real*? (Hite, 1995, p. 135) (original emphasis)

Hite addresses the way the novel navigates the concept of autobiography as a form of authorization. In the narrative, there are moments where autobiographical elements are advanced, as if to provide a sense of validity to the story, making it seem like an authentic reflection of the author's life. Yet, these autobiographical facets are also simultaneously withdrawn, creating ambiguity, and questioning the reliability of autobiography as a means of interpretation. This shifting approach to autobiography highlights the novel's manipulation of reader expectations and its rejection of a straightforward autobiographical reading.

The quote also points to the duality of autobiography in the novel. On one hand, it is thematized as a strategy for simplistic interpretation, suggesting that readers might attempt to impose a straightforward autobiographical lens on the narrative to simplify its meaning. On the other hand, the quote suggests that autobiography can be seen as the hidden, damaged core of the artistic work. This alludes to the idea that personal experiences and traumas can be the driving force behind creative works but are often veiled beneath other layers.

In view of this, it becomes clear how the novel tensions these associations, and, finally, also manages to provide an amusing — and potentially depressing — comment on how celebrity functions. As with the abovementioned aspects, the novel once again works with different and sometimes conflicting approaches to this topic, providing especially an internal picture of what it feels like to be scrutinized by the media and the public, for example.

As to Atwood public personas, her public image, whether perceived as an iconic figure or a fierce defender of humanitarian values, offers a window into the difficulties of being a public figure. Just as the blurring between fact and fiction, Atwood's own public personas reflect the complex dynamic between the personal and the public. In examining how Atwood's public personas have been perceived, I gained insight into the tensions that authors face when their lives become intertwined with their literary works.

Moving forward, the threefold division of Margaret Atwood — comprising the author, the person, and the public figure — unfolds new possibilities for analyzing the work. The authorial facet is the one who works within the confines of this fictional text. In contrast, the person Margaret Atwood exists outside the narrative, devoid of the constructed elements inherent to the authorial and public figure dimensions. The public figure, by its turn, is a

construct shaped by both spontaneous and purposeful movements. Notably, this study aimed to illuminate the intentional interplay between these facets, where Margaret Atwood, as both person and author, strategically brings elements of her personal life with the fictional protagonist. In my view, this accentuates the narrative's exploration of the boundaries between reality and fiction.

Finally, when considering the reading of the novel as fictive autobiography, Cooke's contributions explore how the novel challenges readers, classification, and closure. I understand that Cooke's insights showcase how disrupting traditional expectations of closure and defying attempts at neat classification are used as a deliberate narrative strategy that not only reflects the intricate interplay between fiction and autobiography but also underscore how Atwood pushes the boundaries of literary conventions. In essence, a fictive autobiography would challenge readers to grapple with the uncertainties and ambiguities inherent in both literature and life.

The three arguments brought by Cooke fit the narrative well, in my opinion. I agree that it challenges readers once it not only includes these autobiographical elements but also prompts readers to grapple with the intricacies of interpretation — they are fed the known similarities between Elaine and Atwood, the *apparent* similarity between the two as artists. The notion of challenging narrative closure is particularly resonant, as the boundaries between conclusion and ongoing experiences are blurred, creating a dynamic tension within the story. Additionally, questioning classification adds another layer to this complexity, inviting readers to contemplate the nature of genres and literary categorizations. Cooke's proposal of reading the novel with a dual vision, as both fiction and nonfiction, opens up for a richer engagement with the narrative, in my view.

In opting to examine *Cat's Eye* through the dual lenses of fictive autobiography and the interplay of autobiographical elements and fiction, my investigation is rooted in the novel's deliberate use of varied perspectives and readings. The narrative not only incorporates autobiographical elements from Atwood's life and autobiography as a genre but also intricately explores the nature of fiction and its intricate ties to the artist. I understand that interpreting *Cat's Eye* as a fictive autobiography, acknowledging the autobiographical elements while concurrently discerning its engagement with fiction and its connection to the artist, represents the most fitting approach. As commented earlier, Atwood integrates and indirectly discusses these elements, channeling the narrative debates on diverse interpretations toward the

protagonist's artistic creations. That being so, I see that these same debates could also be applied to the novel.

The contributions of Ingersoll, Hite, De Jong, and Banerjee also bring relevant insights into the novel. Ingersoll's exploration of Atwood's resistance to autobiographical interpretations adds a layer of complexity to the understanding of the author's intent. In my view, it sheds light on Atwood's deliberate efforts to navigate and challenge readers' expectations, showcasing her strategic engagement with these readings. Hite's investigation into the autobiographical elements within the novel also deepens our comprehension of how Atwood employs elements of her own life in crafting the narrative. This examination allows for a nuanced exploration of when and how the autobiographical goes into the fictional, contributing to the complexity of the novel.

Following, De Jong's insights into the influence of scientific concepts on Elaine's art offer a perspective on the convergence of different intellectual realms within the narrative. This aspect becomes a crucial thematic thread, illustrating how the novel transcends conventional artistic boundaries and integrates diverse influences to shape its protagonist's creative expression. Banerjee's examination of the novel's narrative structure as simultaneously commercial and artistically provides a lens through which it is possible to see the duality inherent in literary creation, mirroring the novel's exploration of how art exists both as a marketable commodity and as artistic expression.

In conclusion, *Cat's Eye* weaves together different themes, revealing a nuanced and interconnected narrative. The analysis of this work underscores the interrelated nature of the various subjects explored; nothing is presented in a simplistic or one-dimensional manner. Among these multifaceted themes, the novel's exploration of Atwood's personal life and her response to fame stands out as particularly intriguing. The narrative navigates these themes suggesting both the potential enrichment of the reading experience through connections to the author's life and the inherent limitations of such biographical readings. In essence, reading *Cat's Eye* becomes an invitation to reconsider and reflect upon one's own relationship with art and the artist. Simultaneously, the novel offers a unique and captivating glimpse into this intricate realm.

The work prompts contemplation on the dynamic interplay between an artist's life and their creations, offering a portrayal that encourages readers to engage critically with the boundaries of autobiographical interpretation. This dual perspective, enriched by potential connections to Atwood's experiences, contributes to the novel's allure while also cautioning

against overly simplistic readings. In essence, I see the novel as a compelling exploration of the complexities inherent in the intersection of life, art, and the act of interpretation.

Upon examining the different contributions on the novel, my main conclusion would be that *Cat's Eye* can indeed be interpreted as a fictive autobiography, and this intentional blurring of lines between fact and fiction serves as a distinctive and purposeful narrative strategy. This interpretation is rooted in the novel's initial denial of being an autobiography in the pretextual note, in my view a strategic move that sets the stage for the exploration of the nuanced spaces between classification and interpretation. The subtle hints interwoven throughout the narrative, indicating a connection between Elaine Risley and the author Margaret Atwood, further underscore the intentional ambiguity crafted within the text.

The novel negotiates the balance between biographical and fictional elements, creating a work that occupies a unique status in my understanding. By drawing upon and transforming references to the autobiographical genre as dictated by its narrative requirements, *Cat's Eye* emerges as a distinctive contribution to this type of discourse. I argue that the interplay of these elements is not arbitrary; rather, it serves a deliberate purpose in constructing a narrative that challenges traditional classifications and invites readers to actively engage in its interpretative process.

The ample references to autobiographical writings, both within the narrative and when considering the novel as a whole, substantiate the fictive autobiography label in my opinion. The exploration of memory, the complexities of reception, and the nuanced portrayal and discussion of Elaine's experiences collectively form a thematic foundation that centers around the act of narrating one's life — manifested in the case Elaine through the medium of painting. The novel, as De Jong points out, engages fundamentally in the art of representation.

In essence, *Cat's Eye*, when viewed through the lens of fictive autobiography, explores the complexities involved in representing the self. The intentional blurring of boundaries between fact and fiction, autobiography and invention, reflects an understanding of the act of storytelling itself, that could more directly be applied to autobiography, but also to other forms of writing. Once again, as De Jong's insights suggest, I see that the novel operates within the realm of representation, making the creation of a fictive autobiography a deliberate and integral part of its broader thematic concerns.

In the initial phase of this study, my primary inquiries concerning the novel revolved around its utilization of autobiography and the proposition to interpret it as a fictional autobiography. As highlighted earlier, my aim was not an exhaustive examination of all

parallels between the character and the author but rather an exploration of *how* autobiographical elements were integrated into the text. Having completed my research, it is apparent that this interweaving of elements from the author's life into a fictional narrative results in an interesting interplay between reality and fiction. First, I see that it offers commentary on the intricate relationship between an author's personal experiences and the artistic works they present. In my view, despite the noticeable similarities between author and character, the exhaustive exploration of these parallels would still be impractical. The novel, in my interpretation, suggests that understanding the extent to which the text is biographical is not relevant and does intentionally so. As previously posited, Atwood manipulates these elements from her life, enticing potential readers and critics who would perceive the novel as an autobiography while maintaining an ambiguity that prevents this definitive affirmation.

Given Atwood's status as a public figure and subject of numerous biographical readings, this intentional blurring of lines between autobiography and fiction serves a specific purpose. In my analysis, Atwood uses this intentionally to underscore the notion that the primary focus of a novel should not be on the extent of similarity between the character and the author. Considering Atwood's deliberate efforts to safeguard her privacy as a public figure, this intentional blending of autobiographical elements and fictional constructs takes more significance. It serves as a deliberate assertion of control over the narrative, delineating a clear boundary: if Atwood does not declare the work as an autobiography, readers should refrain from interpreting it as such, respecting the intended fictional nature of the novel.

Cooke's proposition that readers are prompted to scrutinize their own relationship to autobiography finds resonance here. These perspectives, in my estimation, profoundly influence how diverse readers interpret the novel, underscoring the richness and complexity inherent in this. The proposed reading of *Cat's Eye* as a fictive autobiography, while not exhaustive in its examination of similarities, provides valuable insights into this purposeful blurring of boundaries within the novel, highlighting the narrative's depth and complexity.

REFERENCES

- ATWOOD, Margaret. *Cat's Eye*. 1st ed. London: Virago Press, 2009.
- ATWOOD, Margaret. Me, She, and It. In HALPERN, Daniel. *Who's Writing This?: Notations on the Authorial I With Self Portraits*. New York: Ecco, 1994. p. 53-60.
- ATWOOD, Margaret. *Lady Oracle*. New York: Anchor Books, 1998.
- ATWOOD, Margaret. *Surfacing*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012.
- ATWOOD, Margaret. *The Handmaid's Tale*. New York: Ecco, 1996.
- ATWOOD, Margaret. *On Writers and Writing*. 1st ed. London: Little, Brown Book Group, 2015.
- ATWOOD, Margaret. *Second Words: Critical Essays*. Toronto: A List, 2018.
- AURELIUS, Marcus. *Meditations*. London: Penguin Classics, 2006.
- BANERJEE, Chinmoy. Atwood's Time: Hiding Art in *Cat's Eye*. *Modern Fiction Studies*, Baltimore. v. 36, n. 4, p. 513-522. 1990. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26283188>. Access on 29 jun. de 2021.
- BECKER, Susanne. Celebrity, or a Disneyland of the Soul: Margaret Atwood and the Media. In: NISCHIK, Reingard. *Margaret Atwood: Works and Impact*. 2000. Camden House, 2000. p. 28- 41.
- CICERO, Marcus Tullius. *The Letters to His Friends*. English Translation by W. Glynn Williams. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, Volume 1, 1958.
- COOKE, Nathalie. *Margaret Atwood: A Biography*. Toronto: ECW Press, 1998.
- COOKE, Nathalie. *Margaret Atwood: A Critical Companion*. Bloomsbury: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 2004.
- COOKE, Nathalie. Lions, Tigers, and Pussycats: Margaret Atwood (Auto-) Biographically. In NISCHIK, Reingard M. (ed.). *Margaret Atwood: Works and Impact*. New York: Camden House, 2000. p. 15-27.
- COOKE, Nathalie. Reading Reflections: The Autobiographical Illusion in *Cat's Eye*. In KADAR, Marlene. (ed.) *Essays on Life Writing: From Genre to Critical Practice*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992, p. 162-170.

DE JONG, Nicole. Mirror Images in Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye*. *Nora: Nordic Journal of Women's Studies*. v. 6, n.2, p. 97-107. 1998. DOI 0.1080/08038749850167806. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/08038749850167806>. Access on 29 jun. de 2021.

DVORÁK, Marta. Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye*: or the trembling canvas. *Études Anglaises*, v.54, n. 3, p. 299-309. 2001. DOI 10.3917/etan.543.0299. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3917/etan.543.0299>. Access on 29 jun. 2021.

EAKIN, John P. *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985.

EAKIN, John P. *Writing Life Writing: Narrative, History, Autobiography*. New York: Routledge, 2020.

FRIEDEL, Egon. *A Cultural History of the Modern Age*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1930.

FRIEDMAN, Susan S. Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice. In SMITH, Sidonie; WATSON, Julia. ed.) *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*. Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1998, p. 72-82.

GOLDBLATT, Patricia. Reconstructing Margaret Atwood's Protagonists. *World Literature Today*, v. 73, p. 275. 1999. DOI 10.2307/40154691. Available at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40154691>. Access on 25 dec. 2023.

GUSDORF, Georges. Conditions and Limits of Autobiography. In OLNEY, James. (ed.) *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980, p. 28-48.

HITE, Molly. Optics and Autobiography in Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye*. *Twentieth Century Literature*, Hempstead, v. 41, n. 2, p. 135-159. 1995. DOI 10.2307/441644. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2307/441644>. Access on 29 jun. 2021.

HOWELLS, Coral A. (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

INGERSOLL, Earl G. Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye*: Re-Viewing Women in a Postmodern World. *Ariel*, v. 22, n. 4. p. 17- 27. 1991. Available at: <https://journalhosting.ucalgary.ca/index.php/ariel/article/view/33363>. Access on 29 jun. 2021.

LEJEUNE, Philippe. Le Pacte Autobiographique. In LEJEUNE, Philippe. *Le Pacte Autobiographique*. Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 1975, p. 13-46.

LUKACS, György. *The Theory of the Novel*. Sheffield: Revelation Press, 2023.

MARGARET ATWOOD: A WORD AFTER A WORD AFTER A WORD IS POWER.

Directed by Nancy Lang, Peter Raymont. Canada: MVD Visual, 2019.

MARGARET ATWOOD: ONCE IN AUGUST. Directed by: Michael Rubbo. Produced by: Barrie Howells; Michael Rubbo. Canada: National Film Board of Canada, 1984.

MCWILLIAMS, Ellen. Keeping Secrets, Telling Lies: Fictions of the Artist and Author in the Novels of Margaret Atwood. *Atlantis*, v. 32, n.1. 2007. Available at: <https://journals.msvu.ca/index.php/atlantis/article/view/1147>. Access on 25 dec. 2023.

MISCH, George. *A History of Autobiography in Antiquity: Part one*. 1st ed. Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2014.

NORRIS, Mary. Margaret Atwood, *The Art of Fiction No. 121*. 1990. Available at: <https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/2262/the-art-of-fiction-no-121-margaret-atwood>. Access on 25 dec. 2023.

OATES, Joyce. *On Being a Poet: A Conversation With Margaret Atwood*. The New York Times. Available at: <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/97/09/21/reviews/oates-poet.html>. Access on 25 dec. 2023.

OLNEY, James. (ed.) *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980.

OLNEY, James. Some Versions of Memory/ Some Versions of *Bios*: The Ontology of Autobiography. In OLNEY, James. (ed.) *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980, p. 236-267.

SENECA. *Letters from a Stoic*. London: Penguin Classics, 2004.

SAGE, Lorna. Divided amongst Ourselves: Margaret Atwood. In: _____. *Women In the House of Fiction: Post-war Women Novelists*. New York: Routledge, 1992. p. 161- 168.

SCOTT, Joan W. Experience. In SMITH, Sidonie; WATSON, Julia. (ed.) *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*. Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1998, p. 57-71.

SINDING, Michael. From Fact to Fiction: The Question of Genre in Autobiography and Early First-Person Novels. *SubStance*, Baltimore, v. 39, n. 2, p. 107-130, 2010. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40801078>. Access on 2 Aug. 2021.

SIZEMORE, Christine W. Negotiating Between Ideologies: The Search for Identity in Tsitsi Dangarembga's "Nervous Conditions" and Margaret Atwood's "Cat's Eye". *Women's Studies Quarterly*, v. 25, n. 3/4, p. 68-82. 1997.

SMITH, Sidonie. Performativity, Autobiographical Practice, Resistance. In SMITH, Sidonie; WATSON, Julia. (ed.) *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*. Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1998, p. 108-115.

SMITH, Sidonie; WATSON, Julia. (ed.) *Reading Autobiographies: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001.

SMITH, Sidonie; WATSON, Julia. (ed.) *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*. Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1998.

THE Wall Street Journal. *Margaret Atwood's Wild Childhood*. 2016. Available at: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/margaret-atwoods-wild-childhood-1470758356/>. Access on 25 dec. 2023.

VICKROY, Laurie. Seeking Symbolic Immortality: Visualizing Trauma in "Cat's Eye". *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*. Vol. 38, No. 2 (June 2005), pp. 129-143.

YORK, Lorraine. Biography/Autobiography. In HOWELLS, Coral A. (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 28-42.

ZIDAN, Ashraf Ibrahim. Postcolonial Feminism in Margaret Atwood's Fiction. *International journal of Linguistics and Literature*, v. 2, issue 3, p. 11-28. 2013. Available at <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/358729091>. Access on 25 dec. 2023.