

A Study of Childhood Trauma and Bullying in Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye*

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Introduction

Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye* (1998) narrates the story of a young girl, Elaine, growing up in the Canadian town of Toronto. Elaine becomes the victim of bullying. Her bullies are her so called friends, Carol, Grace and most and foremost Cordelia. The latter is the one who instigates the bullying in the little group of friends by being seemingly kind, yet at the same time continuously remarking on Elaine's flaws under the pretext of wanting to help her improve. It is difficult to ascertain why children bully each other. However, I claim that in a great many cases bullying is a way of coping with one's own shortcomings. The maltreatment of a peer may also function as an outlet for psychological strain due to a difficult home environment. This essay examines the reasons as to why Cordelia feels a need to bully Elaine. It has to do with her attachment pattern in early childhood as well as psychological defense mechanisms.

Numerous psychological studies investigate the concept of bullying, trying to explain its nature. These studies investigate the reasons as to why children bully each other, as well as what can be done to prevent bullying. One of these theories, the attachment theory, by the British psychoanalyst John Bowlby, is discussed in *Understanding Attachment* (2006), by Jean Mercer. This theory can be applied in order to discern the reasons for Cordelia's bullying of Elaine. It states that any child is in need of at least one loving and caring care-giver in order to become psychologically stable as an adult. The attachment pattern any given child has learnt during its upbringing is the very pattern it will reuse as an adult, when forming relationships. This is the reason as to why it is pivotal for any child to have acquired a reasonably well functioning attachment pattern (35).

I will also make use of theories dealing with ego-defenses in order to provide a thorough explanation why Cordelia becomes a bully. The purpose of ego-defenses is to avoid dangers and protect the self from painful feelings of anxiety and inadequacy. I will make use of two different kinds of ego-defenses. The first one is referred to as *projection*. Negative feelings within the self are projected onto another person so as to rid oneself of them. The second ego-defense is called *displacement*. It is used when you need to find a scapegoat. When the need to express anger arises you tend to make use of this ego defense against individuals who are less dangerous than the real object of the danger.

In this essay I will study the result of a disorganized attachment pattern that involves maltreatment of the child. My aim is to show that the character Cordelia suffers from such an attachment pattern and that this is one of the main reasons why she becomes a perpetrator and a bully. Furthermore, I will look into the role played by ego-defenses when it

comes to coping with feelings of anxiety and inadequacy. Firstly, I will highlight some of the scenes in which bullying takes place in the novel. Secondly, some key terms are given an explanation. An account of the psychological theories that are applied in this essay, is provided, for example the attachment theory by Bowlby as well as the theories on ego-defenses. Thirdly, the character, Cordelia and her family, will be analyzed, applying the aforementioned psychological theories. The protagonist, Elaine, is of great importance when it comes to understanding Cordelia; therefore she is also scrutinized in this chapter, her behavior mirroring Cordelia's actions.

The bullying

The bullying of Elaine takes place throughout her years in elementary school and affects her profoundly. Cordelia, the instigator of the maltreatment, very often conducts herself as if she were an adult, which is a part of her role as a bully. In the following quote the two girls meet for the first time:

She has a smile like a grown-up's, as if she's learned it and is doing it out of politeness. She holds out her hand. "Hi, I'm Cordelia. And you must be..." I stare at her. If she were an adult, I would take the hand, shake it, I would know what to say. But children do not shake hands like this. (CE, 76-77)

In this situation Elaine does not know what to make of her newfound friend, as the latter does not behave the way one would expect a child to behave. Cordelia is not consistent in how she relates to Elaine. In order to build confidence, she is warm, caring and talks in a soft and sweet voice:

There's dog poop on your shoe," Cordelia says. "Not the hard kind, the soft squooshy kind, like peanut butter." This time her voice is confiding, as if she's talking about something intimate that only she and I know about and agree on. She creates a circle of two, takes me in. (CE, 77)

Numerous accounts of Elaine being bullied are to be found in the novel. For instance, one rather horrid incident, takes place in the backyard of Cordelia's garden. Here Cordelia is digging a hole in the ground. It is a large, wide and square hole. The purpose for which the hole is dug remains unclear to Elaine. Under the pretext of playing Mary, Queen of Scots, Elaine, playing the role of the queen, is forced into the hole in order to be buried.

However, the bullying of Elaine is not always this dreadful and dramatic. Because she is not aware of the rules of conduct among young girls due to her having been moving around throughout many years of her childhood, she is often told how to behave. She is also told that she needs to be improved. She needs to acquire some social skills and the small group of friends is there to provide her with these. According to Cordelia, Grace and Carol, Elaine is only scrutinized and critiqued in order to be able to perceive her own flaws so as to be willing to correct them. This is how it goes on most of the time.. Every aspect of Elaine's behavior is criticized.

One dramatic and horrifying event, that merits a longer description, takes place when the four girls are on their way home from school one day in March. Cordelia throws Elaine's hat into the ravine under the bridge the girls are crossing. Then she tells her to go and get it. Elaine is left with no choice but to do as she is told. She descends into the ravine. Then she is forced to go out on the ice to get her hat. The ice, however, is not very solid and it cracks open under her. When in the water she perceives someone standing on the bridge, not small girls but rather a grown woman, dressed in a white cloak and with her heart outside her body. This apparition descends into the ravine and tells Elaine that she can go home and that she will be alright. The woman descending is the Virgin Mary. This is the end of the bullying of Elaine (CE, 204–209).

There are several effects provoked in Elaine by being a victim of bullying. In order to ease her mental sufferings, Elaine starts hurting herself physically in different ways. Yet another effect of the bullying or rather another way of temporarily escaping it, is fainting. One Saturday, while visiting an exhibition in the Zoology department, Elaine faints. After this incident, Elaine learns that fainting can take her out of situations she does not want to find herself in. (CE, 189) Fainting thus becomes a useful tool, to be used whenever she feels the need to temporarily leave. She uses this new-found skill in order to give her little group of friends a scare.

Elaine's mother does not seem to know what goes on in her daughter's life; yet, on one occasion, the former tells her daughter that she does not have to play with them (Cordelia, Carol and Grace), meaning Elaine could find some other friends to spend her time with. Thus, it seems as though Elaine's mother is aware of what is happening, but does not do a great deal about it. Elaine's father seems fairly unaware of what goes on in his daughter's life.

Bowlby's theories on attachment patterns

Children become bullies for various reasons. I will present some theories here. John Bowlby, (1907-1990), is known to be the founding father of the attachment theory. Mercer in his book, *Understanding Attachment* (2006), states that Bowlby believed that the attachment between caregiver and child results from human motivation, which means that it is a need in itself and not simply a way to gratify physical needs (38). When a child is born, it communicates with its caregiver by smiling and crying. This is an inherited behavior within the child and a way of socially interacting with the caregivers that enhances the child's possibility of surviving (38). Before the age of six months, the child directs its social interaction to virtually any adult. This is a wise way to secure the survival of the infant, should its mother die while giving birth to the child. After the age of six months the child has made an attachment with two or a few caregivers. The child will experience separation anxiety if one of the caregivers is to disappear. The mere fact of the child displaying separation anxiety shows the existence of attachment (38). In, *Bowlby and Attachment Theory* (1998), Jeremy Holmes talks about the caregiver functioning as a kind of secure base to the child. Securely attached children will investigate the world around them, departing from this secure base. Whenever they feel distressed or frightened, they simply return to the caregiver that constitutes the secure base (223). In addition, in Mercer, it is also stated that every human being is in possession of an *internal working model* that is comprised of "memories, emotions, and thoughts that determines a person's expectations and attitudes, and that consequently shapes behavior"(39). The internal working model is used by the child when he or she engages in relationships during the course of life.

Furthermore, Bowlby argued that every child will display one of three attachment patterns. The first one is called *the secure attachment pattern*. A securely attached child trusts his or her caregivers and is likely to be the recipient of good nurture and love. Because the child senses that he or she can trust the caregiver, an exploration of the close environment is likely to be undertaken by the child. This is commented on in *Security of Attachment and the Social Development of Cognition* (2003), by Elisabeth Meins. Here Meins claims that a secure attachment between a child and its caregiver, provides the former with important characteristics such as persistence and ego-strength. These two abilities enable the child to act in a resourceful manner when faced with difficult situations (28-29).

The insecure attachment pattern contains two subcategories, *the avoidant* and *the ambivalent attachment styles*. A child adhering to the *avoidant attachment style* is likely to have learnt that in order to receive the greatest amount of love and nurture from the

caregiver, it is best to appear not to want it at all. Thus, the child might ignore the presence of a caregiver and continue to play by itself despite the fact that the caregiver is present. A child adhering to *the ambivalent attachment style* has learnt that he or she will be the recipient of love and nurture occasionally. Yet, at times, when the child is expecting to be cared for, this might not happen. On the contrary, the child can be dismissed by its caregiver. This adult behavior creates an uncertainty within the child that renders the child anxious and ambivalent when relating to its caregiver. As a result, in order to be the recipient of the greatest amount of love, the child becomes clingy and needy when with its caregiver (26).

Disorganized attachment

To the aforementioned attachment patterns can be added a fourth; *the disorganized attachment style*. This category is comprised of children who cannot maintain a consistent attachment style. In the presence of their caregiver they display contradictory behavior, wanting to be close only to resort to avoidance. Furthermore, they might freeze and become dazed while interacting with their caregiver. Also, they are likely to exhibit sentiments of fear while being in the vicinity of their parents. This attachment style is discussed in Susan Goldberg's *Attachment and Development* (2000), where it is further mentioned that a child with a disorganized attachment pattern is likely to be subject to frightening caregivers, who display overt maltreatment such as looming over the child without showing that a game is in action (26). The caregiver might also be dazed and unresponsive which could be perceived as a more subtle maltreatment by the child.

Goldberg continues to discuss disorganized attachment and claims that an adult that provokes this kind of attachment pattern in a child is likely to be abusive and to suffer from unresolved traumas of his or her own (61). Moreover, this kind of caregiver is not able to ease the child's sensations of fear due to the fact that the caregiver is the source of fear. Not surprisingly, a child that is exposed to such a caregiver finds itself in a situation that is highly bewildering and confusing. As a result, the child suffers from maltreatment caused by frightening experiences of abuse that occur frequently and unpredictably (62). Even if the caregiver is not overtly abusive, more subtle ways of maltreatment such as unavailability can be perceived by the child as highly frightening. This behavior is rather frequent in depressed caregivers who tend to act unpredictably and thus confuse the child. Goldberg argues that the former is also likely to be perceived as emotionally unavailable and unresponsive by the child

(122). The effects of the disorganized attachment pattern are long-lasting, provoking life-long feelings of anxiety within the child (121).

The disorganized attachment pattern is thus likely to be developed in children who are being maltreated by their caregivers. Goldberg discusses the notion of maltreatment and suggests that it differentiates between abuse, which occurs when the child's need for care is met, yet in a harsh and hostile way accompanied by inappropriate anger, to neglect when the child's need for care is not met (119).

Goldberg argues that when the child experiences maltreatment and notably is the subject of extreme insensitivity, it may as a result develop a disorganized way of relating to its caregivers. Furthermore, a phenomenon referred to as *compulsive compliance* may come into being. The child can be said to be compulsively compliant when being "unusually accommodating and cooperative with their mothers" (120). The child has then simply learnt that it is a great deal safer to be vigilant and compliant when interacting with caregivers, than to be ambivalent or avoidant.

Maltreatment tends to have long-lasting effects on the child. If a child in infancy and toddlerhood has been the subject of maltreatment such as inadequate care, neglect or abuse, it is likely that the same attachment behavior is to be found in the child in for instance grade school years. Thus, the disorganized attachment pattern remains and becomes a part of the child's internal working model, by which it relates to people in its environment (121).

Ego-defenses

The purpose of ego-defenses is to protect the individual from mental sufferings. The level of anxiety felt by a person is to be reduced so as to enable him or her to cope with his/her life. In *Ego-defense- Theory and Measurement* (1995), Conte and Plutchick, describe various ego-defenses that serve this purpose. One of these is referred to as *displacement*. By this they mean that if your social need is to find a scapegoat so you do not have to blame the real object of your anger, you make use of displacement. Thus, you transfer your feelings of anger and hostility onto someone who is innocent yet much easier to blame (28).

A second ego-defense mentioned is *projection*. Projection is used when someone needs to rid themselves from feelings of shame, guilt or personal imperfections. Your social need is then to find flaws in other people. By projecting your own flaws and imperfections onto others, you rid yourself from the same feelings. Ego-defenses are said to

be important to human beings as a means of coping in difficult situations. However, they do not help in solving the underlying problem that gives rise to them (397).

Cordelia and her family

Cordelia is a victim of a disorganized attachment pattern and so are her two sisters Perdita and Miranda. All of the girls are named after characters in the works of Shakespeare. This is by no means a coincidence. The girls' names are given to them because they create an air of Englishness. Cordelia's family belongs to the upper class. Evidence of this is easily found in the novel. For instance, a cleaning lady referred to as "the woman" is mentioned by Cordelia several times. Furthermore, her house is decorated in ways unfamiliar to Elaine. On one occasion when in the company of her friends, Elaine understands that: "There are real flowers, several different kinds at once, in chunky, flowing vases of Swedish glass. It's Cordelia who tells us the glass is Swedish. Swedish glass is the best kind, she says" (CE, 77-78). Cordelia's house is larger than her friends' houses and the colors inside are light and welcoming, which is not the case for the other three girls. Also, Cordelia's mother buys flowers to put in the vases mentioned earlier; a habit that is perceived as strange to Elaine, given that her own mother would never dream of spending money on such a thing (CE, 78).

The society in which the characters in *Cat's Eye* live their lives is patriarchal and misogynist. Susan Strehle talks about this in *Fiction in the Quantum Universe* (1992). She states that certain roles were assigned to women in the Canadian society in the 1940s and 1950s. Women were not supposed to make efforts so as to achieve anything or have a career. They were expected to stay at home and engage in female activities such as cooking, arranging flowers in vases and embellishing their homes in order to please their breadwinning husbands (168-169). This is precisely what goes on in Cordelia's home environment.

Strehle goes on to state that Cordelia's father comes across as a very patriarchal man. Because of his contempt and his habit to scare his family, Cordelia's father turns the house into a divided one. When he is at home, and the family sits down at the dinner table to enjoy supper, everything has to be in perfect order. The napkins have to be folded, the candles have to be in their candlesticks, lit. The family members have to be neatly dressed and subdued for him to be able to endure a meal with them (171). It is implied that Cordelia's father is quite a menacing and harsh character. For instance, when Cordelia has proven to be a disappointment and if her actions are perceived as very disappointing, her mother tells her that her father shall have to sort things out. None of the three sisters dare to stand up to their father, for whatever reason (79). Also, like most of the male characters in the novel, he is an

absent breadwinner most of the time. He only comes home in the evening when it is already dark, a fact that seems to suggest his potentially dangerous disposition. Strehle reasons about this and claims that Cordelia's father hates women and is only able to show fury and resentment towards his daughters (170). Even when he is not at home his presence looms in the house (171).

Cordelia's mother is quite different from her husband. Strehle argues that she is perceived by her daughters as being rather fragile. There are certain things they tend to keep from her, as they do not think she will be able to handle them:

“She's tiny, fragile, absentminded: she wears glasses on a silver chain around her neck and takes painting classes. Some of her paintings hang in the upstairs hall, greenish paintings of flowers, of lawns, of bottles and vases. The girls have spun a web of conspiracy around Mummie. They agree not to tell her certain things. “Mummie isn't supposed to know that,” they remind one another. (CE, 79)

They even regard her as a child every now and then (CE, 79). Cordelia's mother is given the role of the subdued wife, who is not to question her husband's authority. This is all in concordance with the roles available to women in a patriarchal society such as the Canadian in the 1940s'. A woman was to know her place. These were values that were passed on to the daughters so as to teach them proper female conduct. However, Cordelia's mother's submission is not in entirety in concordance with the aforementioned roles, since she can be argued to be the subject of her husband's abuse. This entails having to live in a highly hostile environment and being the victim of domestic maltreatment. Strehle states that Cordelia's mother is assigned the role of a woman with a kind of girlish femininity. It seems to me that she is to be used as a decorative artifact to be displayed when the family is entertaining guests. She is an object not able to make use of her own intellect (171-172).

I would like to argue that the mere fact that she is perceived as fragile may connote that she either is suffering or have been suffering, from a psychical or mental disorder. As a matter of fact, it is possible to deduce that she suffers from depression. Her absentmindedness and fragile state seem to suggest that this is indeed the case. In, *Attachment and Development*, Goldberg reasons about this. She claims that maternal depression is one of the most common mental diseases that women suffer from. The mother's depressed state of mind gives the child reason to experience her as unavailable and unresponsive. Further, the developing child is likely to be subjected to long periods of time of hopelessness and helplessness (122). Thus, it is very likely that Cordelia's mother suffers from this particular

illness. Moreover, her daughters' willingness to withhold certain pieces of information from her, further stresses that she suffers from depression, as she is not expected to be able to handle the information that her daughters refrain from sharing with her. All the aforementioned facts taken together, make it possible to claim that Cordelia's mother, in one way or another, is affected emotionally in a harmful way.

Because Cordelia's mother suffers from some form of mental illness that is probably depression, her ability to relate to her children is impaired. Goldberg states that depressed caregivers are likely to create a disorganized attachment patterns with their children. This is due to them becoming neglecting towards their children, frequently. They may also be reluctant to engage in any sort of activity for want of willpower and strength. This behavior can, by the child, be perceived as frightening, and may cause the child to relate to its mother in a disorganized way. A child who finds him or herself in such a situation is likely to display what was before mentioned as compulsive compliance. This means that the child is likely to be overly accommodating towards its caregiver, and that he or she exhibits too great a will to obey the latter. The reasons as to why the child will behave in such a way, is that this behavioral pattern has proven to be the safest one for the child. As a result, the depressed caregiver also provokes a disorganized attachment pattern in the child. Therefore he/she cannot be regarded as a loving and nurturing caregiver (122).

When it comes to Cordelia's sisters, Perdita and Miranda, they stick together, not surprisingly, since they are approximately the same age. They go about their teenage business and attend to female things such as make up and clothes. In conducting themselves in this manner, they show that they have internalized the female role of conduct passed on to them by their parents, and indeed the surrounding society. Looks and appearances are things they are very concerned about according to Strehle who goes on to state that Perdita and Miranda are never going to be able to live up to the high standards set by a misogynist society. (172). Quite often they tend to look at themselves in the mirror and exclaim that they look awful. "I look like the wrath of God. Sometimes they say, "I look like Haggis McBaggis" (CE, 78). This is commented on in Katarina Gregersdotter's doctoral dissertation, *Watching Women, Falling Women* (2003), in which she reasons about the female characters in *Cat's Eye*, as being much preoccupied with their looks and the fact that they can always improve themselves in order to look even better (70). Gregersdotter argues that Perdita and Miranda are perceived, by Cordelia and her friends, as being somewhat driven into this obsession of appearances (70). They are secretive about their lives, and Cordelia is not

allowed to enter their room for any reason. Yet, she does like to tell her group of friends about her elder sisters. Grace, Carol and Elaine are intrigued by Perdita and Miranda's grown up lives. But there are things that they simply do not believe in for instance the curse:

They tell Cordelia there are some things she's too young to understand, and then they tell these things to her anyway. Cordelia, her voice lowered, her eyes big, passes on the truth: the curse is when blood comes out between your legs. We don't believe her. She produces evidence: a sanitary pad, filched from Perdie's wastebasket. On it is a brown crust, like dried gravy. "That's not blood," Grace says with disgust, and she is right, it's nothing like when you cut your finger. Cordelia is indignant. But she can prove nothing. (CE, 99)

Perdita and Miranda feel as though they are flawed especially while menstruating. They blame the curse for feeling flawed and unwomanly. Cordelia is often blamed for things that happen in her family. She is made to be the scapegoat which is hard for her to handle. Quite often it is her sisters who maltreat her. Yet, sometimes it becomes apparent that she repeats her father's words. An expression he often seems to use, and this is conveyed implicitly, is "Wipe that smirk of your face!" The reason as to why these words are perceived to be Cordelia's father's, is because she uses them herself when correcting Elaine, thus repeating the behavior of her father. Strehle comments on this by saying that the reason as to why Cordelia suffers from feelings of anxiety and inadequacy is that her father constantly makes her into an object, who is unable to express her emotions in the home environment. This is why Elaine becomes the perfect victim. Bullying her gives Cordelia an outlet for her aforementioned feelings (173).

Cordelia is less able to please her mother and father than her two elder sisters are. The pair of them manage quite well in adjusting their behavior, with regards to the fragility and absentmindedness of their mother. However, Cordelia is in want of this adjusting skill, and it seems that is the reason as to why she ends up being the scapegoat; she cannot stand up for herself within her own family (CE, 79).

When invited to dinner at Cordelia's house, Cordelia's lack of this pleasing ability becomes apparent to Elaine. During the dinner, she comes to understand that Cordelia is afraid of her father and therefore unable to say or do anything that pleases him or is good enough. She is always somehow the wrong person. Thus, Cordelia makes the ideal scapegoat of her family. Everything that is unpleasant can be put on her shoulders (CE, 274).

Cordelia inflicts bodily harm on herself as means of coping with her surroundings. At one occasion she confides in Elaine and tells her about a childhood situation

in which she, Cordelia, swallowed the mercury from a thermometer in order to feel sick. She tells Elaine that she did this so as to not have to go to school. But it seems as though the real reason for this action was to feel better psychologically by experiencing physical pain (CE, 276). Gregersdotter argues that when frequently exposed to critique of oneself, and when constantly reminded of one's flaws, one becomes very self-conscious and is likely to become self-loathing. This self-loathing may lead to self-mutilation as a means of escaping horrible psychological strain (71).

Cordelia often feels a need to escape in order to save herself. As mentioned earlier, she digs a hole in the ground in the backyard of her house. She justifies this by stating that she is in need of a place that is entirely her own, to which she can take refuge when she cannot stand her family. Although this is not an act of self-mutilation, I would like to argue that the mere act of digging a hole in the ground to be used as some sort of refuge, is an act of self-loathing. It bears witness of Cordelia's lack of self-worth. Even though it could be argued that the hole is a sort of refuge for Cordelia, the symbolism of a hole in the ground cannot be said to be that of a refuge or an oasis, but rather a place to which you withdraw when you feel ashamed or even inadequate. Shame and inadequacy are both sensations not unfamiliar to Cordelia.

In her doctoral dissertation *Appropriations of Shakespeare's King Lear in Three Modern American Novels* (2010), Anna Lindhé discusses this phenomenon in stating that Cordelia's role in the family is that of a scapegoat. In fact the entire family can be said to be victimized by the father (118). Examples of victimization abound throughout the novel, One of these, I would like to argue, is the mere fact that Cordelia and her sisters are forced to measure every word on a scale before uttering anything. Furthermore, they have to think in advance about the effect their words might have on their father before any utterance (119). I would like to argue that the willingness to please and comply to the father's wishes is to be perceived as a case of *compulsive compliance* that was mentioned above. When in toddlerhood, it is likely that Cordelia and her sisters, in order to be safe, have found it pivotal to remain vigilant and compliant in the presence of their father. Had they not done so, they might have found themselves the subject of paternal punishment. An example from the book serves to illustrate my point. This sequence takes place when Elaine comes to have dinner with Cordelia's family:

Today is one of the candle days. Cordelia's father sits at the head of the table, with his craggy eyebrows, his wolfish look, and bends upon me the full force of his ponderous, ironic, terrifying

charm. He can make you feel that what he thinks of you matters, because it will be accurate, but that what you think of him is of no importance. (CE, 263)

In this passage, Cordelia's father's authoritarian and patriarchal nature becomes apparent. Firstly, the mere fact that he sits at the head of the table seems to further stress his being the natural and only head of the family. Secondly, he is referred to as having a wolfish look, which highly connotes danger and the possibility to be devoured, as little Red Riding Hood. Thirdly, his charm is described as somewhat ponderous and even terrifying. This description provides the reader with ominous feelings to say the least. Finally, it is stated that what Cordelia's father thinks of you matters, whereas what you think of him is of no significance. This adds to him being perceived as a patriarchal and authoritarian, even an abusive parent.

Above, different attachment patterns were accounted for. Among them was the attachment pattern labeled disorganized attachment pattern. I would like to argue that Cordelia as well as her two sisters have developed such an attachment pattern during infancy and toddlerhood. This pattern is likely to have remained within them during the course of their upbringing. As was stated above, all of them have adopted ways of relating to their father that are highly characterized by the disorganized attachment pattern. One such feature is the aforementioned compulsive compliance. However, there are other pieces of evidence that seem to indicate that the attachment pattern of Cordelia and her sisters is a disorganized one. Firstly, the siblings have been and are exposed to abuse by their father. This is likely to have been the case during both infancy and toddlerhood. Being the daughters of an authoritarian and patriarchal father, the girls are likely to have been adequately attended to, that is to say, not neglected by their caregiver, yet it is highly credible that they have been subject to frightening parental behavior such as looming without making sure the child understands it is a game, harshness and excessively aggressive nurturing.

Secondly, they may have found that the behavior of their caregiver is not consistent and the caregiver not trustworthy. Instead, he is to be regarded as unpredictable and inconsistent. Finally, the girls have, due to this unpredictability, been forced to adhere to an attachment pattern that is disorganized. The maltreatment of the siblings has thus made them prone to vigilant behavior, manifested in their compulsive compliance. It has made them develop an internal working model of relationships, that tells them that adults are not to be relied upon, that they are potentially dangerous and that honesty and exhibiting true emotions in the presence of their father is virtually lethal. This is also commented on by Strehle who

claims that the reason as to why the sisters' are treated like this, is to make them compliant, nice and easily controllable (171).

Ramifications of disorganized attachment pattern and maltreatment for Cordelia

Cordelia is likely to have to play by the aforementioned rules, provided by an emotionally unavailable and unpredictable mother and an abusive father. Thus, in order to protect herself, she develops compulsive compliance, which was discussed in the previous paragraph. Further consequences of the maltreatment and the disorganized attachment pattern is Cordelia's way of coping with the hostile home situation and her role as the family scapegoat. In order to escape the highly unpleasant feelings that she harbors, Cordelia tries to harm herself psychically, by means of *self-harm*. In her book, *Hidden Self Harm* (2003), Maggie Turp, states that self-harm ranges "from the highly dramatic to the virtually invisible." (9). Turp claims that one of the reasons as to why an individual inflicts bodily harm on him or herself is the sense of psychological relief it allows the individual to feel. She further claims that it can be regarded as a survival strategy (20). Turp also provides a definition of the concept of self harm. She states that:

"Self-harm is the umbrella term for behavior:

1. that results, whether by commission or omission, in avoidable physical harm to self
2. that breaches the limits of acceptable behavior, as they apply at the place and time of enactment, and hence elicits a strong emotional response." (36).

The first criterion in the quote includes external as well as internal self harm as a result of both active and passive behavior. The second criterion has to do with the way the self harming behavior is perceived by people who witness it (37).

Cordelia inflicts bodily harm on herself repeatedly within the course of her life. At one occasion she even tries to commit suicide. An example from the novel will illustrate this. In the excerpt, Elaine is visiting Cordelia in a psychiatric facility. They leave the premises in order to have a cup of coffee in a nearby café:

How did you end up in that nuthatch anyway? You aren't any crazier than I am." Cordelia looks at me, blowing out smoke. "Things weren't working out very well," she says after a while. "So?" I say. "So I tried pills." "Oh, Cordelia," Something goes through me with a slice, like watching a child fall, mouth-down on rock. "Why?" "I don't know. It just came over me. I was tired," she says. There is no point in telling her she shouldn't have done such a thing. I do what I'd do in high-school: I ask for the details. "So did you conk out?" "Yes," she said. "I checked into a hotel, to do it.

But they figured it out - the manager or someone. I had to get my stomach pumped. That was revolting. Vomit-making, you could say. (390)

In this quote it becomes almost overly apparent that Cordelia hurts herself. Not only does she want to harm herself, she wants to cease to exist altogether. I would like to argue that this planned attempted suicide is a severe ramification of Cordelia's disorganized attachment pattern. In her childhood, during the grade school years, Cordelia dug a hole in the ground so as to create a refuge to escape to, from the hostile home environment. This fact adds to the impression that Cordelia has nurtured a will to commit suicide earlier in her life. It is so because digging a hole in the ground to use as an oasis, highly connotes to the digging of a grave, a place in which to finally find peace.

Cordelia in her peer group setting – Ramifications of her childhood maltreatment

In her small group of grade school friends, Cordelia is the leader. I would like to argue that this is partly due to her knowledge of the world of young women. Being the youngest of three sisters, Cordelia has intriguing stories to tell her friends about her elder sisters, Perdita and Miranda. In a previous chapter called the bullying, an account is given of the grotesqueries of the female body, that is regarded as totally compelling by the group of friends. Furthermore, Cordelia is also well acquainted with how to behave when in the company of girls. She knows the rules to play by, perhaps all too well, having grown up with two elder sisters. These social skills of hers, enable her to become the leader of the group of friends, as well as the instigator of the bullying of Elaine.

Elaine is rather susceptible to the bullying mainly because of her nomadic childhood life. Because of the constant traveling, Elaine is never able to make any friends. She therefore plays with her brother. This makes Elaine adept at boys' ways of playing. Yet, it also leaves her in want of the social skills required to relate to other girls. During these early years, Elaine longs for girlfriends.

I would like to argue that the reason as to why Cordelia instigates the bullying of Elaine, has to do with her disorganized attachment pattern, that was established in her infancy. In *Attachment and Development*, Goldberg claims that children with disorganized attachment patterns are more likely than securely attached children to show aggression (144). In Cordelia's case the aggression comes in the shape of bullying. Moreover, being the subject of ongoing maltreatment in her home, Cordelia is in dire need of an outlet of her inner feelings of inferiority and low self worth. Therefore, Elaine becomes the perfect victim.

As was established above, Cordelia's attachment pattern plays a significant role in explaining why she becomes a perpetrator and a bully. Because of her hostile home situation, Cordelia needs various ways to cope with her situation. As was shown in a previous chapter, she often resorts to inflicting self-harm on herself. Another way of coping with her difficult and horrifying feelings of anxiety which Cordelia makes use of, is to be found in the use of ego-defenses. In *Psychology-Science of Mind and Behaviour* (2001), Passer et al. define these as being: "unconscious mental operations that deny or distort reality" (457). Cordelia is likely to make use of the ego-defense called *projection*. Her own inner feelings of low self-worth are projected onto Elaine through the bullying. Elaine, then *internalizes* these feelings and makes them her own. She is likely to internalize them since she already senses that she is inferior to the other three girls, due to her want of social skills. This occurs at an unconscious level of the mind. Also, Cordelia makes use of the ego-defense called displacement in finding an outlet for her feelings of inadequacy in Elaine when her own father is the real object of anger. Cordelia, being a maltreated and maladjusted child is very likely to excessively make use of defense mechanisms, instead of dealing with unresolved trauma in a more realistic way (458).

Thus, it has been concluded that the reasons as to why Cordelia bullies Elaine are the former's disorganized attachment pattern, that has become solidified during her upbringing, provided by abusive and neglecting parents. Furthermore, due to Cordelia being a maltreated child she is more prone to exhibit aggressive behavior, in this case by bullying Elaine. As a result, Elaine becoming the scapegoat, solves Cordelia's inner trauma at least in the peer group setting. In *Children's Peer Relations, From Development to Intervention* (2004), Coie discusses the impact of being rejected by peers. If a child has once been rejected he or she is more likely to show poor social behavior (256). In Cordelia's case this entails her becoming a bully. Cordelia however, is not rejected by her peers, but by her entire family, which include her two sisters, who to some extent can be regarded as her peers.

Roles reversed – Cruelty further engenders cruelty

Throughout at least half of the novel, Elaine is the recipient of the bullying. Yet, after the ravine incident the bullying comes to a halt. After her religious experience of divine interference in the ravine, Elaine is no longer troubled by bullying simply because her need to adhere to her group of friends has disappeared. Strehle claims that the vision of the Virgin Mary has enabled Elaine to find an inner kernel of strength, symbolized by the cat's eye

marble, that she never knew she was in possession of. Therefore, “I am happy as a clam, hardshelled, firmly closed (CE, 221). Guided by the Virgin Mary, Elaine has come into touch with her own subjectivity. She now refuses to remain objectified by Cordelia and is able to find a voice of her own (177). Now the roles are reversed and Elaine becomes the strong one of the two. She develops a style of relating to her peers that can be said to be harsh. She becomes a mean-mouth, unwilling to help or forgive.

The years pass and Elaine and Cordelia become adolescents. The former is not prone to help her former bully in making contacts with boys, despite the fact that she is adept in this particular area. Cordelia is not very skilled in these situation because she is overly polite, too grown-up like in her way of relating to the boys. Boys then tend to find her intimidating.

Years later when Cordelia is in the psychiatric facility, she reaches out to Elaine again in order to be able to escape from the institution. Yet, Elaine refuses to help her. I would like to argue that this is an example of cruelty engendering cruelty. Not until much later in her life, when in her fifties, is Elaine able to really let go of Cordelia by forgiving her. This ability to forgive is the result of her coming back to her childhood town Toronto, for a retrospective exhibition of her art. Strehle argues that Elaine, through her retrospective exhibition, is enabled to revisit the landscape of her childhood trauma, yet this time she experiences it all through the eyes of an adult. She is able to understand and forgive people that she has been loathing for decades such as Mrs Smeath and Cordelia. She then clearly sees what was always the case; her own emotions of inferiority were always originally Cordelia’s. The two shared the same willingness to be loved and the same fear not to be (183). After having realized this, Elaine is able to let go of Cordelia once and for all. Her act of vengeance is forever over because, as she asserts, an eye for an eye only leads to more blindness.

Conclusion

This essay argues that Cordelia becomes a perpetrator and a bully as a result of her difficult childhood years. More specifically, it is in part due to her disorganized attachment pattern, developed during her infancy and toddlerhood, that she has become prone to exhibit an aggressive behavior towards her peers, especially those she perceives as wanting in social skills. Elaine is such a girl and therefore she becomes the victim of severe bullying instigated by Cordelia. Furthermore, Cordelia bullies Elaine as means of defending herself by making use of ego-defenses such as displacement and projection. Her ability to assign the role of scapegoat on Elaine, enables her to rid herself of feelings of inadequacy and anxiety.

Cordelia has a patriarchal, abusive and authoritarian father with whom she has established a disorganized attachment pattern. Further, Cordelia's mother, who could have provided her daughter with sufficient amounts of nurture and love failed to do so. This is due to her suffering from depression or perhaps some other mental illness during Cordelia's childhood. Because of her depression, Cordelia's mother is a neglectful and distant mother whose emotional unavailability and unpredictability frequently is perceived as frightening to her child. Thus, neither Cordelia's mother nor her father could provide her with the secure attachment pattern required in order for her to become secure in herself.

Cordelia's two elder sisters, Perdita and Miranda could have eased her sufferings by taking her side over the parents. However, this never happens, which leads to Cordelia finding herself being the scapegoat of the family. The reason why they do not try to help her is that they compete in pleasing their father by being compulsively compliant. The enormous pressure, provoking extensive feelings of inadequacy, low self-worth and self-loathing in Cordelia, drives her to find an outlet for these sensations. She thus engages in self-harm, performing actions such as swallowing mercury in order to be sick enough not to have to go to school and as an adult attempting to commit suicide. As a result of this, Cordelia is at the end of the book incarcerated in a psychiatric facility.

Cordelia's disorganized attachment pattern also has an effect in her peer group setting. Because of this pattern and the ongoing maltreatment that Cordelia is subject to, an outlet for oppressing feelings is needed. As a means of coping with these feelings, Cordelia makes use of ego-defenses such as displacement and projection. The real object of her anger is her father. Yet, for Cordelia it is impossible to direct her anger towards him. Thus, her own feelings of inadequacy and self loathing are projected onto Elaine who then internalizes them and makes them her own. As a result, Cordelia no longer has to suffer as much from these

feelings, at least not in her peer group setting. Elaine now plays the role of the scapegoat, which is also Cordelia's role in her family.

Thus, in the essay I have tried to show that Cordelia is the product of abusive and neglecting parents. In order to cope with this situation she has been driven to become an abusive predator and bully herself by means of ego-defenses. I find it pertinent to restate what is stated in previous chapters of the essay; cruelty further engenders cruelty.

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