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MY BODY, MY SELF, AND MY READING OF CORPOREALITY
IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S FICTION

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Esta dissertação foi julgada adequada para obtenção do título de MESTRE EM LETRAS e aprovada em sua forma final pelo Programa de Pós-Graduação em Inglês: Estudos Linguísticos e Literários da Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina.

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[...] it shines like a balloon, like a foggy noon, a watery moon, shimmering in its egg of light. Catch it. Put it in a pumpkin, in a high tower, in a compound, in a chamber, in a house, in a room. Quick, stick a leash on it, a lock, a chain, some pain, settle it down, so it can never get away from you again.

(Margaret Atwood, "The Female Body",
Michigan Review, Vol. XXIX, Issue 4,
1970, p. 493.)

ABSTRACT

Contemporary literature written by women demonstrates how the historical and socio-cultural context in which female characters are constructed affects the characters' perception of body and self. Novels like Margaret Atwood's explore corporeality, or rather, the material, social, and cultural experience of the female body, involving the bodily physical, emotional, and mental functions in their interconnection with the world. Within this framework, this thesis investigates gender-related concepts, the female body-related discomfort rooted in social relations, and the material experience of the body in Margaret Atwood's novels *Cat's Eye* (1989) and *Bodily Harm* (1981). The study focuses on the literary articulation of the problems of being female, the exploration of the relation between the biological body and the cultural concept of the body, the criticism of social representations of women, and the possibility of individual and social transformation. It offers a literary analysis along with a dialogue between the analyzed texts and the researcher's excerpts of creative writing, thus reflecting the poststructuralist view that includes the observer within the observed phenomena, and bridging between the analytical and the creative, the academic and the artistic, as well as between other historical dichotomies.

Key words: Female body. Corporeality. Contextuality. Margaret Atwood. Gender. Fiction. Creative Writing.

RESUMO

A literatura contemporânea escrita por mulheres demonstra como o contexto histórico e sociocultural em que as personagens femininas são construídas afeta a percepção das personagens quanto a seu corpo e seu self. Romances como os de Margaret Atwood exploram a corporalidade, ou, em outras palavras, a experiência material, social, cultural do corpo feminino, que inclui o corpo físico, emocional e o das funções mentais em suas interligações com o mundo. A tese investiga conceitos relacionados à questão do gênero: o desconforto do corpo feminino enraizado nas relações sociais e a experiência material do corpo nos romances escritos por Margaret Atwood, *O Olho do Gato* (1989) e *Dano Corporal* (1981). A pesquisa centra-se na articulação literária e nos temas principais acerca dos problemas de ser mulher, na análise da relação entre o corpo biológico e o conceito cultural do corpo, na crítica das representações sociais de mulheres e na possibilidade de transformação individual e social. A análise é tecida por meio da literatura, juntamente com um diálogo entre os textos pesquisados e trechos da escrita criativa escritos pela pesquisadora, refletindo a visão pós-estruturalista que inclui o observador dentro dos fenômenos observados, funcionando como uma ponte entre o analítico e o criativo, o acadêmico e o orgânico, bem como entre outras dicotomias históricas.

Palavras chave: Corpo Feminino. Corporalidade. Contextualidade. Margaret Atwood. Gênero. Ficção. Redação Criativa.

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INTRODUCTION

After centuries of muffled self-representation, the female body finally appeared undisguised and uncovered in literature in the 1960's due to the escalating feminist awareness of the need and the right to fill in this literary void. The historical identification of women with nature and hence with the body, as well as the identification of the body with physically, morally, and intellectually lower functions stand to dispute and investigation in literature written by women. This literature demonstrates the implications of contextuality, or rather, the historical and socio-cultural context in which the female characters are constructed, on the characters' perception of body and self. For instance, contingent constraints, such as ways of dressing or behaving imposed by education or habit, may have more impact on the development of a typically "feminine" body, with its soft gestures and docile habits, than the actual biological characteristics of femaleness. Thus representation, or the way the body is made to be seen, becomes a site of identity for women, whose immanence and connection to nature have been historically stressed.

With regard to the above, this thesis investigates the female body, as a site of identity, for the characters' relationships with and through their body, with an emphasis on the implications of its socio-cultural representations. The corpus of this work includes the novels *Cat's Eye* (1989) and *Bodily Harm* (1981) by Margaret Atwood. My own creative non-fiction work, while representing the concept of "corpus" as Shahar conceptualize it, including texts dealing directly with the body, and also while being different from academic analysis, is a part of the study. The analysis of the novels will be punctuated with short segments of my own work that are related to the topics in question.

Within the general context dealing with how the female body has been historically and philosophically constructed, the specific literary context includes an analytical investigation of gender-related concepts, a depiction of female body-related discomfort rooted in social relations, and a description of the material experience of the body. *Cat's Eye* and *Bodily Harm* handle these themes in an unflinching way. Similar themes are also present in the meeting points between these novels and my own creative non-fiction work.

In *Bodily Harm* Atwood writes about the body both as a fragile and sick physical entity, scarred due to a life-threatening sickness, and as a source of power, a tool of transformation. Clearly, the novel reveals the focus on the body in its title. It begins with the main character's

discovery that she suffers from breast cancer, thus furthering the emphasis on the female body issue. In *Cat's Eye*, a more intimate book, the relevance of body to the protagonist's restlessness is revealed in a subtle way. In this novel, a girl shuts down her body as a reaction to social suffering, consequently becoming emotionally detached. Later, as an aging woman, she studies herself through mirrors, pictures, and recollections, struggles with the signs of aging, and ultimately comes to terms with her body and with her self. The author explores the meanings of the body through different experiences and phases in the protagonist's life. Both novels question women's control over the body and its image, surveillance, victimization, and emotions related to the body as determiners of identity and destiny. My own creative process has similarly established how the body experience is related to feelings such as trust and guilt, as well as awareness of the gaze of others, and relationships.

The overall objective of this work, therefore, is to investigate corporeality in relation to identity in contemporary literary works written by women, through the analysis of the representation of the female body in two novels by Margaret Atwood, and to relate the literary analysis to my own writing about the female body. For the purpose of this analysis, the term "corporeality" is defined as the material, social, and cultural experience of the body, involving the bodily physical, emotional, and mental functions in their interconnection with the world. The work aims to examine the impact of the gendered representation of the female body on women's public and private interactions, and the possibility of drawing a line between the body and the concept of the body.

In order to develop these objectives, this research seeks to respond to the following questions:

-How does each of the selected works enable an articulation of the problems of being female, and what germane themes appear or reappear in them? The examination of the plot, historical context, and characters will determine the ways in which the novels tackle conflicts related to the female body and relate them to the characters' situation and the situation of women in general. It will verify the novels' exploration of the relation between the biological body and the cultural concept of the body, and determine whether the author draws a line between them.

- How do the literary works contribute to the criticism of social representations of women and point at a possible transformation as a response to trauma and shame? After studying the effect of discourses

related to the female body on the protagonists, the analysis will focus on the possibilities of change introduced in the novels, and will determine whether the protagonists have the tools that allow transformation. This will also be analyzed in the light of a general social transformation.

Atwood, a Canadian author, deals with the female body on an on-going basis. Her works correspond with the feminist call to turn the attention to the female body in order to expose its social construction and to construct meanings for the body. My interspersed own work will allow me to combine feminist literary criticism with another form of analysis. This corpus benefits the investigation of the related themes of identity and corporeality.

This project addresses important questions in the context of feminist literary criticism, relating the material experience of the body to the contemporary literary representation of the social and cultural situation of women. It offers an analysis through literature along with a dialogue between the analyzed texts and excerpts of creative writing. This approach reflects the poststructuralist view that includes the observer within the observed phenomena. By uniting the analysis of the fictional writing with the analyzer's creative non-fiction, the study questions the dichotomy between the analytical and the creative, the academic and the organic, all of these forms of investigation, suggesting to bridge between them as well as between other dichotomies such as mind and body, and nature and culture.

Its relevance is personal as well. In the past two years, I have written a personal creative non-fiction work about undergoing radical surgery to prevent breast and ovarian cancer. During the process of writing, I found how important it is to explore private and public relationships, feelings such as shame and guilt, and transformation in body image, and self-consciousness. This will complement the theoretical analysis of these themes in fiction.

The conceptual procedures selected for this research pertain to corporeality and contextuality, as defined above, and the application of these concepts to Atwood's fiction. My research methods consist of interpreting and comparing the novels *Cat's Eye* and *Bodily Harm* in their depiction of the female body experience. In order to do that, the research explores works of feminist literary criticism and theory by Judith Butler, Elizabeth Grosz, and Susan Bordo. Their conceptualization serves as a parameter to evaluate the influence of the social climate and historical context in which the books were written. The same analysis is applied to the characters. Dialoging with the

analysis through an implicit meta-criticism, excerpts of creative writing explore further the analyzed themes.

Some fragments of Aristotle's teachings, those describing a satisfactory explanation, have been extremely helpful in my process of structuring this work. They aid in the analysis of the female body's representation in women's writing, although it is a study of which Aristotle would have hardly approved, for he has taken the stand that "The female is a female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities" (xxii), generating a lot of discordance in future generations. Clearly, his view should be observed through the historical and cultural context of its formation. Regardless, the structure of his four-cause explanation inspires the framework of this study. According to the method he propounded, mostly applied to the study of physical phenomena of change, an explanation should include four causes:

(1) The material element of the subject, its physical characteristics. In the field of research of literary expressions of the female body, it includes the texts as a whole, and within them, the descriptions of the material experience of the body, the effect of the senses. Thus the text referring to the female body is examined, in order to study the way it expresses the characteristics of the body. The descriptions of the protagonists' sensory experiences are explored as well: pain, pleasure, withdrawal from the body through physical means such as fainting, sexual activity and body maintenance and nourishment.

(2) The form: the essence and reason of the subject's existence, its role, and the change it introduces. While the physical or the material element is the most basic dimension, the data, here an analytical study, is required. Here we examine the literary representation of the socially constructed female body, and study how the effect of discourse influences the characters' relationships in private and public spheres, if there is such a division, and to what measure is the characters' sense of self influenced by socio-cultural views of the body.

(3) The process the subject has gone through, it's historical development. The third reason is closely related to the second, as poststructuralist philosophers point out. An idea is produced and determined according to the cultural and historical context of its conception and of its analysis. Complementing the second cause, the interconnection between the process of implementation of cultural patterns related to the female body and the process of identity construction is examined. The question of power relations enters into play, as we study how the characters partake in the processes.

(4) The objective, or the future meaning of the subject. A prediction is made through comparing and contrasting past and present processes related to the subject, in the case of this work, the female body. With the investigation of the historical and social aspects of corporeality, and the characters' resistance or compliance to the identity-shaping processes, it is now necessary to examine the literary representation of the possibilities of transformation in the characters' prospect. This analysis explores the ideas for social transformation that transcends the characters' lives.

This Introduction is followed by three chapters and a conclusion. Chapter 1, "A Critical Review of Literature", will focus on the literature dealing with the body in Western thought and, more specifically, the conceptual development of the female body in Western culture according to philosophers and scholars, with an emphasis on feminist critical thought.

Chapter 2, *Learning the Body of Hurt*, deals with themes of the female body in Atwood's fiction: social surveillance and its influence in private and public spheres; detachment as a result of repression of physicality during the characters' childhood and as a reaction to sexual objectification later on; binary division as reflected in the protagonists' education and self-awareness, and lastly, an assessment of the effect of victim-victimizer relationships on the protagonists' body-image and related behavior. The analysis also verifies the singularity of the text related to the female body, or rather, the text focused on the body, comparing it to the rest of the text and examining how it explores the gendered body, the body of hurt, and the sensorial nature.

In Chapter 3, *Transformation and Healing*, the analysis focuses on the ways by which the text mirrors crisis and struggle, explains being female in such situations, and raises the issue of transformation for the characters. The theme of social surveillance is tackled further in relation to the ability of the characters to transform, come to term with their body and perceive it as a source of knowledge and positive experience, thus finding a response to trauma and shame.

In both chapters the texts of non-fiction authored by me are inserted in italics, in order to dialogue with the analysis.

CHAPTER 1: A CRITICAL REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1 The Body-Writing: The Corpus

The analysis of the female body in literature starts with the recognition that writing about the body involves the complex task of representing the body as a biological entity, a concrete existence, a naked reality, within a fictional or conceptual world. Galili Shahar, a scholar of history and literature, names the body-writing, or the texture of the body in literature: “corpus.” The corpus, according to him, is adjusted to the throb or movement of limbs and organs, their beat and pulse. According to him, the body’s literary representation is done by turning the issue of the body into the system of writing, or rather, by translating physical situations into a text. The sensual element, the echo of the animalistic, appears whenever the corpus deals with an authentic experience of the body. This physical manifestation constitutes its own poetics, and therefore the involvement of bodies in an event changes the flow of the narrative and causes a break in the text, a cut (Lecture 1). For that reason, bodies are often written as a fragment, a scene, an anecdote, as exemplified in the following section from “The Hunger Artist” by Franz Kafka:

And he looked up into the eyes of these women, apparently so friendly but in reality so cruel, and shook his excessively heavy head on his feeble neck. But then happened what always happened. The impresario came forward without a word [...] grabbed the hunger artist around his thin waist, in the process wanting with his exaggerated caution to make people believe that here he had to deal with something fragile, and handed him over—not without secretly shaking him a little, so that the hunger artist’s legs and upper body swung back and forth uncontrollably—to the women, who had in the meantime turned as pale as death. (Online)

Hence, a study of the corpus, the body-related text, observes the unique consciousness of reality it brings with it and creates hybrid bodies of writing. Its range of sensations leads to different corpora representing a body of pain, laughter, desire, mourning, messiah, denial, or shame among others (Lectures 7-8). Beyond that, Western corpus reflects the structure of power in Western culture. It transmits the body’s cultural place to the text.

Shahar's argumentation sustains that corpus dealing with the female body represents the body's historical and cultural construction, and its relation to women's situation. At the same time the corpus also expresses the essence and experience of a specific body. In the attempt to understand the corpus of the female body it is essential to study the way early Western culture has conceptualized the body, and how this conceptualization has influenced the notion of the female body, identity, and the situation of women.

1.2 Historical Developments

1.2.1 Dualism

Plato's conceptual split between body and mind, along with his other contributions to Greek Philosophy, are among the pillars of Western thought. The philosopher has organized knowledge in a systematic structure of questions in order to study the human being. The main four pillars are -- what is reality? (Ontology); what is the human being in terms of philosophy? (Anthropology); what is knowledge? (Epistemology); what is the best political system? (Political science). Based on these questions, it becomes clear that when Plato asks "What is human?" it is not a question of anatomy.

In Plato's work the dichotomy is clear: the body, or the physical urge, is necessary for reproduction and survival, but it has to be controlled by willpower and logic, or rather, by the mind. He explains: "In every one of us there are two ruling and directing principles, whose guidance we follow wherever they may lead; the one being an innate desire of pleasure; the other, an acquired judgment which aspires after excellence" (*Phaedrus* 30).

In order to avoid any bodily dominance, Plato instigates an awareness of the inherent defectiveness of the corporeal-physical dimension. The idea, or the soul, transcends the matter and does not depend on corporeality for its existence. According to him, it is necessary to repress the matter in order to attain through logic the idea of what it means to be human. Only in this way is it possible to find the objective of human lives.

This original distinction between body and mind has been further polarized in the seventeenth century by Descartes, a French philosopher, mathematician, and physician. Similarly to Plato, he has determined the existence of two exclusive substances, of which the consciousness, the thinking substance, or in another word, the mind, is placed outside the

natural world and superior to it. Only the extended substance, meaning the body, obeys the physical and biological laws of nature. The mind should escape the prison of the body to achieve knowledge.

In modern times, Virginia Woolf has referred to this distinction rather humorously, bridging over dichotomies: “The human frame being what it is, heart, body and brain all mixed together, and not contained in separate compartments as they will be no doubt in another million years, a good dinner is of great importance to good talk” (9). Woolf is one of the first theorists to speak about the related dichotomy of men/women, the social and cultural situation responsible for the situation of women in literature, and the scarcity of literature written by women. She introduces crucial questions in her book *A Room of One's Own*: “Why was one sex so prosperous and the other so poor? What effect has poverty on fiction?” (12). If William Shakespeare had a sister, Woolf says, she would have been mistreated because of her body and the gender roles attributed to it. She would have been laughed at or taken advantage of for being naïve and pretty. Woolf imagines the sister's end, because: “who shall measure the heat and violence of the poet's heart when caught and tangled in a woman's body? – [she] killed herself on winter's night and lies buried at some cross-roads” (23).

With the advance of modernism, feminist scholar Elizabeth Grosz's 1994 book *Volatile Bodies* observes the historical sources of the binary notion constructed by Plato and developed by Descartes, then analyzing and criticizing the division. According to the scholar, Descartes has set the basis for hierarchy and complete separation between the alleged opposites in Western thought, thus undermining the situation of women. His binary division of body and mind, nature and culture, divine and earthy, and women and men determines the masculine as a divine, productive power identified with the mind, and the feminine as a reproductive but unproductive earthy passive potential identified with the body (6-11).

After her comprehensive overview of philosophy, religious beliefs, and social ideologies in regard to the body, Grosz focuses her analysis on the female body and its place in the determination of the situation of women. She argues that feminist theories that lean on Western philosophy accept notions that avoid the fundamental question of oppression and its relation to the material body. This abstract debate favors the dichotomy between men and women, nature and culture, other and self, and creates a hierarchy between these alleged opposites. Grosz reminds the reader that the difference among bodies is not limited to the division between female and male, as Western culture has

determined, but also between people of different races, class, history, bone structure, and other factors. Each of these determines the experiences and the consequent identity of the individual.

With respect to binary division, history researcher Thomas Laqueur points out that the paradoxical coherence between the divine interpretation of the concept and the chronologically subsequent biological notion of it implies that, though introduced as universal truths, paradigms such as the hierarchy between men and women are determined according to political interests. According to his research, until the eighteenth century the dualism between men and women was not based on the sexually polarized biological model of the body. During this period it was sustained by a religious concept according to which the body is one entity with two versions. The masculine version was assumed to be warmer, thus allowing for the sexual organs to grow out and bringing the masculine version closer to divine perfection. Subsequently, however, anatomical post-mortem surgeries have proved wrong the unitary concept of the body. By then, in the eighteenth century, an epistemological and philosophical transformation from belief in cosmic order to rational and social thought had occurred. Notwithstanding, despite the change, the notion of female inferiority was not transformed, as Hobbs and Locke clarify in their socio-philosophical theories. Both philosophers agree that every person is a conscious, sexless being, and that the body has no political consequence. And yet, they determine that males should stay in positions of power, leaders in private and public spheres. Locke attributes male preponderance to the male's stronger, abler body. Hobbs, as Laqueur interprets him, rationalizes male's exclusive right for power with the vulnerability of women resulting from giving birth. It is a "social contract," and bodies are meaningful in the order of civil society (167-169).

Another paradoxical socio-cultural paradigm related to the Cartesian dualism is based on the contradiction between the idea of female passivity and the identification of women with a primordial power that represents danger and threat. Essentially, the feminine threat results from the idea that the mind, the masculine, is in struggle with the limitations and temptations that the body, the feminine, imposes on it. Feminist anthropologist Sherry Ortner has explained the reason women were identified with nature and body and not with culture and mind by relating it to the strong biological impression caused by child bearing and birth, breastfeeding, and the monthly shedding of blood (5-31). On a similar note, Susan Bordo has endorsed psychoanalytical gender theorist

Dinnerstein's view that the discriminatory view is a consequence of society's infantile experience of women as caretakers of our bodies. "The mucky, humbling limitations of the flesh" become the province of the female; on the other side stands "an innocent and dignified 'he' . . . to represent the part of the person that wants to stand clear of the flesh, to maintain perspective on it: 'T'ness wholly free of the chaotic, carnal atmosphere of infancy, uncontaminated humanness, is reserved for man" (5).

1.2.2. Counter Theories and Practices

The hypotheses regarding the cultural and political reasons of dualism and of discrimination have brought scholars such as the existentialist Simone de Beauvoir and the poststructuralists Judith Butler and Michel Foucault to elaborate on the necessity to perform a deconstruction of every historical pattern and concept introduced as universal truths, in order to reveal the power relations behind them. A deconstruction of patriarchal patterns and concepts, for instance, will reveal how they are used to create and recreate women's submissive nature. Such a deconstruction alludes to stepping out of a cave, as described in Plato's famous allegory. According to the allegory, everyone is born in a cave, into the existing set of principles, perceptions, conventions, and imposed boundaries, and is unaware of any alternative reality or truth. Society exercises emotional, intellectual and moral power upon its members, and makes the possibility of stepping out of the cave seem irrelevant or unattainable. Similarly, Western society has constituted a set of principles, a discourse, which preserves an existing order, creating and recreating women's inequality. Nevertheless, a strong enough motivation or a need to acquire knowledge drives selected individuals to go out of the cave, gather knowledge, and extend it to others by returning to the cave and beating any attempt to isolate, mark them as crazy, or eliminate them altogether. Mary Wollstonecraft, a thinker from the eighteenth century, who has criticized the system of education, treatment of women, and the poor exercise of physical and intellectual skills they were offered, is an example of such a process. She argues with the idea of natural polarity:

[...] Nor can it be expected that a woman will resolutely endeavor to strengthen her constitution and abstain from enervating indulgences, if artificial notions of beauty, and false descriptions of sensibility, have been early

entangled with her motives of action” (qtd in Bordo, 18).

A deconstruction of Western culture’s cave reveals how contradictory it is for Western society to promote democracy and freedom, while the cave bears a surprisingly close relation to Machiavelli’s code of morality. According to Machiavelli, a controlling authority such as a country or a society must do anything within its power in order to survive and build its supremacy. Just as Plato’s allegory implies, each society develops conventions and rules that help it hold onto its power. This type of morality, the moral of the group, prevails against any sense of justice, whether religious or human-oriented. Oppressing the other, an individual or a group, is justified because it’s a means for survival. In the same way, hegemonic conventions restricting the place of women and other marginalized groups have played an important role in preserving patriarchal society. The denial of this role is a structural component of the dominant group’s self-preservation.

As a result of this course, a change in social structure becomes plausible only when large parts of society start considering the existing conventions to be hypotheses and raise their voice against them. Interestingly, raising the silenced voice of the repressed group(s) of women in regard to the female body’s experience, among other issues, is interrelated with the mythological representation of women’s speech. The authentic feminine speech, as Greek mythology describes it, is identified with the throbbing of the womb, or *hysteria*, the Greek word for “womb.” Galili describes how the hysterical speech is built with thuds and is uneven, alternating between ecstasy and silence. It is dysfunctional as it avoids any unique significance, and it doesn’t reach any meaning, only expression through sound. In the most related mythological story, Odysseus ties himself to the mast of his ship so he’s not tempted by the sirens’ voice. By doing so, the body is forgotten, and anything spontaneous, organic, and natural is left behind in favor of discipline and order. In the process, the siren is destroyed (Lecture 7).

Unlike Shahar’s view of the sirens’ voice as the sound of freedom and flow, as a creative power, other scholars interpret it in a more literal reading of the *Odyssey* as a sound meant to seduce and destroy. Along this line, Susanna Braund, a literary researcher, associates the sirens with danger. In her interpretation of the intertextuality between Atwood’s 1974 ten-poem-collection *Songs of the Transformed* (in which the poem “Siren Song” appears) and Ovid’s epic poem *Metamorphoses*, she says, “According to him [Ovid], the Sirens were changed from

human form into bird-like creatures at their own request, during the abduction of Persephone.” The sirens, therefore, have a motivation to destroy men after having witnessed Persephone’s rape, and their voice is their tool of revenge (193-194). It should be noticed that by tying himself, Odysseus doesn’t hear the pain and rage in the sirens’ voice. He is too afraid of the consequences of listening to risk it, characteristic to a member of a sexist society.

After centuries of silencing, however, during the nineteenth century, political activists emerging from marginalized groups started raising a voice, and turning the public attention to the body as a site of discrimination. A speech given by the ex-slave Sojourner Truth at the Ohio Women’s convention shows an attempt to demand equal rights with the help of equalizing the capacity of feminine and masculine bodies: “I have as much muscle as any man, and can do as much work as any man. I have ploughed, and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And a'n't I a woman?” (1).

The growing political pressure exercised by marginalized groups brings to the open other previously repressed ideas and voices, and alters the face of contemporary literature. Notwithstanding, it is necessary to study to which extent literature written by a member of a discriminated group is able to reflect different values from the dominant one. As feminist Elizabeth Meese says, “[...] this writing always takes place within and by means of a circumscribing and repressive phallogocentric discourse to which its very existence stands as a challenge (119).

On the same note, Chris Weedon explains in the first chapter of her book *Feminism, theory, and the politics of difference* that the categorization of different groups as “the other,” the common ground among those discriminated due to sexual difference, race, class, location, economic situation, and cultural orientation can be defined as colonization in literal and figurative manner. The colonized may need a long process of liberation from fear and from dominant codes of behavior and thought in order to find a voice.

In her book *Survival* Margaret Atwood refers to the situation of the colonized, and their available means of self-representation, in terms of a female artist in a sexist society. According to her, a woman can:

1. Ignore her victimization, and sing songs like “I Enjoy Being A Girl.”
2. Think it’s the fault of biology, or something, [...]; write literature on How Awful It Is, which may be a very useful activity up to a point.

3. Recognize the source of oppression; express anger; suggest ways for change. What she *can't* do is write as a fully liberated individual-as-woman-in-society (145).

Although Atwood argues against self-victimization, she contends that it is necessary to recognize a monster in order to fight it. What is, then, the monster in a sexist society? It can be argued that the monster is the discourse in which the body is an opposite category to the category of the mind, and in which the female body is not only considered an inferior category within an inferior category but also a determiner of women's nature. But in this case, the monster is a marionette played by different masters along changing historical and cultural situations.

It can also be argued that the whole society in which the female body is chastened and silenced is the monster, since leaders act in the interest of the group as a whole. Clearly, there have been power relations and a play of interests. And yet, as Susan Bordo says in her 1993 book, there is no advantage in defining men as the enemy, since they too have been trapped within this social order. Nevertheless, she reminds the readers that there are still men in powerful positions who act upon their interest to block women's opportunities. As a result of hegemonic oppression, women are often barred from positions requiring a rational, intellectual, and responsible capacity. It is not a coincidence that Virginia Woolf finds such a restricted group of women writers in her research for *A Room of one's Own*, or that women's suffrage has been recognized by the United Nations as a right only in 1979 despite the recognition of human rights occurring since the French revolution.

Clearly, the aforementioned marginalization of women has resulted in the marginalization of women's writing and has served as an effective political instrument. Allowing any form of expression to the weaker parts of society could have threatened the existing social order. A significant aspect of the discriminatory treatment is the repression of any reference to the female body as shameful despite the female body's major role in women's lives. Following this tendency, canonical literature and other sources of knowledge have ignored the female body, introducing the masculine one as universal. Feminist theorists such as Grosz and Butler reject the view of the healthy white male body as a parameter for the human body, just as they object to any classification based on "human" or "universal" codes. Both notions simply reflect Western patriarchal values. As Woolf says, there is a lacuna wherever the female body disappears, creating a distortion in the representation of reality. She also argues that when women write they should include the

body, since books depend on the body of their writers. “Again, the nerves that feed the brain would seem to differ in men and women, and if you are going to make them work their best and hardest, you must find out what treatment suits them” (37). However, Woolf contends that men carry the experiences of men before them and women carry those of women, and therefore, the ideal state of mind is reached by a fusion of man and woman. Only in this mental condition, she says, nothing needs to be held back. She refers this fusion to Coleridge’s observation that a great mind is androgynous: “Some marriage of opposites has to be consummated” (49), she concludes. Woolf’s statement doesn’t break away from the philosophical view of biological difference that has led to women’s oppression. While revolutionary for the beginning of the twentieth century, her suggestion refers to polarized and complementary male and female identity, thus incorporating the Cartesian dualism with which later feminist thinkers struggle.

1.2.3. Early Feminist Discussions

Another seminal thinker from the first half of the twentieth century, Simone de Beauvoir, has acknowledged Woolf’s contribution to feminist issues. In her book *The Second Sex* she cites the most influential work regarding the relation between the body and the self, and studies sexual difference, relying on the phenomenological line of thought started by Edmund Husserl. She thus explains the phenomenological notion: “to be present in the world implies strictly that there exists a body which is at once a material thing in the world and a point of view towards the world” (39). She clarifies further: “If the body is not a *thing* [...], it is a situation: it is our grasp upon the world and the outline of our projects” (66). In other words, biology does not fix women’s identity, but it affects the ways by which a woman is treated, and thus it influences her interaction with the world. The lived body, the body in a situation, is a part of the constant process of identity construction.

This concept has influenced later feminist thinkers like Grosz and Toril Moi. Beauvoir’s lengthy descriptions of the negative significance of living in a female body, the discomfort and limitation caused by menstruation, pregnancy, and breastfeeding, led to a common belief that her work is essentialist. According to Diana Fuss, essentialism is “a belief in true essence—that which is most irreducible, unchangeable, and therefore constitutive of a given person or thing” (13). In fact, Beauvoir’s focus on the way the body weighs on women’s

conduct and emotional stability can be interpreted as a biology-based determining factor. Even her famous collocation that one isn't born a woman but becomes a woman has been understood by Butler in *Gender Trouble* as implying the existence of an essence of woman, or a gender, that exists beyond discourse. However, according to Beauvoir, sexual difference is the result of social conditioning. Based on that, feminist scholar Eva Gothlin argues that Beauvoir's theory studies the living body, sexuality, and sexual difference both in the natural-scientific aspect where the body is an object, and in the personalistic aspect, where the psyche is a part of the body. Beauvoir's ideas should be read in this existentialist phenomenological framework.

Most importantly, with her theory, Beauvoir has completely departed from Plato's distinction between matter and idea, linking differences to socio-cultural context, and showing the interconnection between sexuality and existing paradigms. According to her, activity affects sexuality, as it creates and recreates an existing set of values, and not the other way around. In her essay "The Ethics of Ambiguity", she comments: "What phenomenology shows is that all values are dependent on our activities -- no value or end is absolutely given" (qtd in Gothlin, 74). This idea is a bridge toward the concept of performativity started by Ervin Goffman's innovative performative theory of identity and developed by Judith Butler. The interactions of the body with others, and the relationships of a person with others create and recreate the existing set of values, thus affecting sexuality and sexual behavior.

The repression of the body, a part of this molding process, and its emotional, practical, and ideational impact surfaces in literature written by women with the rise of the feminist movement in the 1960's. For the first time, female authors do not hold back as they embody women's stories and emotions, motherhood and sexuality, treating a variety of situations and aspects of women's lives. Doris Lessing and *The Golden Notebook* is an example of this change in literature. Her character's liberation from former roles is closely related to the sexual liberation of her body.

The meaning of the female body, however, has remained in debate. The tension between essentialism and anti-essentialism in the exploration for the meaning of the female body becomes stronger with the 1980's rise of what was defined as French feminism along with the development of the contradicting philosophies of postmodernism. In this period, feminist scholars of the psychoanalytical wing such as Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, and Hélène Cixous offer new methods of

creating meanings for the female body in its relation to the psyche and to language. They base their theory on the assumptions that language has the power to define and name reality, and that the existing language has been developed in the pattern of patriarchal logic. Based on that, they call to seek feminine forms of writing, that illustrate what being woman means. According to Cixous, “if woman has always functioned ‘within’ the discourse of man [...] it is time for her to dislocate this ‘within,’ to explode it, turn it around, and seize it; to make it hers” (887).

Authentic woman’s language is assumed to be different due to the different kind of body producing it, and due to its historically subversive nature. Kristeva says that only an identity constituted by the specificities of the female body can lead to sexual equality. She explains:

Sexual difference--which is at once biological, physiological, and relative to reproduction--is translated by and translates a difference in the relationship of subjects to the symbolic contract which is the social contract: a difference, then, in the relationship to power, language, and meaning. (449)

Kristeva treats the maternal body as a condition that transcends the symbolic function of the language. She says that language constitutes itself at the cost of repressing the instincts and the relation to the mother. In this regard, Butler questions the meaning of treating the maternal body and instinct as prediscursive: “how do we know that the instinctual object of Kristeva’s discourse is not a construction of the discourse itself? And what grounds do we have for positing this object, this mutiplicitous field as prior to signification?” (Bodies 88). According to Butler the maternal body and the maternal instinct are constructed within culture, while Kristeva puts them prior to and outside of culture.

Beside Butler, other feminist scholars have rejected essentialist theories, since the idea of the expression of women through imagery and form based on a female-specific imagination and sensibility might strengthen the familiar patriarchal stereotypes. According to Weedon, essentialist theories are fixed and unable to deal with change. The debate around the idea of pre-formed identity related to motherhood and physical structure reflects a fragmentation of feminist thought and a search for new ways of expression. The concept of fragmentation has been a fundamental part of poststructuralist feminist theory. Most

importantly, in itself, the open debate has empowered women and helped them throw off patriarchal patterns of thinking and writing. The struggle for finding and raising an authentic voice brought progress in domestic and public spheres.

Beyond the debate and thanks to it, attempts to express women's experience creatively have resulted in a variety of themes and approaches in the arts. Feminists have called to turn the attention to the female body, construct positive meanings for it and celebrate it. Literary texts have revealed a large range of experiences of the female body as a crucial component in women's lives. Along with this, feminist literary criticism has developed the exploration of feminism-related issues. Corporeality in literature has become a subject of interest and research. Scholars have studied "the body of writing and the body in the writing", as feminist critic Elizabeth Meese has coined it (117).

1.2.4 Poststructuralism

With the growing influence of poststructuralist theory, Butler's *Gender Trouble* has become the most cited and influential text in gender studies since its publication in 1990. Butler introduces problems resulting from the identification of gender with the biological difference between men and women, analyses the power relations in the basis of the concept of gender, describes methods of control and suggests that deconstruction can lead to change.

According to Butler, gender-based classification is constructed by discourse with the objective of recreating hegemonic paradigms and perpetuating current power relations. Former feminists have noted the importance of exposing the interests behind conventions. Butler goes further: defining Women and Men as universal categories disguises the interest it serves. She writes, "Signification is not a founding act, but rather a regulated process of repetition that both conceals itself and enforces its rules precisely through the production of substantializing effects" (185). She states that analysis (or deconstruction) provides tools for the socially oppressed to fight against the existing social order. In the author's view, the category of Women from which the feminist struggle arises is different from the political, hierarchical myth based on biology. The assumption that there is a pre-discursive body with a pre-determined sexuality and gender sustains oppression against subjugated and marginalized subjects. Disconnected from the body, she suggests, gender can include more than two versions.

In the first chapter, titled “Subjects of Sex, Gender, Desire”, Butler introduces woman as a subject of feminism and distinguishes between sex and gender. In the second she discusses heterosexuality within psychoanalytical and structuralist theories. Lastly, “Subversive bodily acts” deals with the category of biological sex and ends with Butler’s theory of gender-related performance and performativity.

After receiving negative criticism regarding the distinction between body and gender, Butler replies to her critics in her 1993 book *Bodies that Matter*. She argues with the feminist thinkers who see the body as matter--a material body with a sexual specification. In her view, despite the body’s physical characteristics, it does not exist beyond the cultural construction, since we can only relate to it through the defining discourse. It serves as a site for the feminist theory independently of such a pre-discursive definition. In her introduction she explains:

For surely bodies live and die; eat and sleep; feel pain, pleasure; endure illness and violence; and these “facts,” one might skeptically proclaim, cannot be dismissed as mere construction. [...] But their irrefutability in no way implies what it might mean to affirm them and through what discursive means. Moreover, why is it that what is constructed is understood as an artificial and dispensable character? (xi)

The construction of bodies is a constitutive constraint, and bodies are understood through it. She states again that both body and gender are parts of discourse. The only way to reach the matter beyond discourse is through discourse itself. After all, it is discourse that defines the body as a matter existing beyond discourse.

Inspired by Foucault, she contends that discourse is based on power relations and manipulated by those who control the sources of knowledge. The definition of what is natural is manipulated as well. Hence, the materiality of the body is discursive. The material body, its boundaries and its sexuality, materialize through the repetition of policing norms. The norms attribute meaning to it. Even the body limits are the product of social codes according to which certain practices are allowed and others are not.

Butler strengthens here the concept of performativity, confirming that repeatedly performed acts normalize an attributed gender, as well as marks of race, class and sexuality. Discourse defines certain bodies as natural, thus marginalizing others. The accepted body

does not owe its acceptance to its biological characteristics but to cultural signs.

Based on Luce Irigaray's Lacanian analysis, Butler also investigates the political coherence for which certain bodies are not legitimized. Through her own and Irigaray's analysis of Plato's work *Timaeus*, she reaches the conclusion that the marginalized bodies are related to homosexuality. She concludes that deconstruction cannot be based on already constituted references. Only a truly open debate can bring change.

That year, 1993, poststructuralist Susan Bordo analyses Butler's and Foucault's theories in her book *Unbearable Weight*, and chooses to focus on body disorders such as anorexia and bulimia as examples of the body as a cultural text, and a direct center of power relations, instead of trying for a general theory like them. The disorders illustrate the extreme nature of the treatment of the body under social and historical pressures. In this way, she brings female body experiences into feminist discourse.

She says,

Many see the body both as a living cultural form and as a subject of scholar theorizing--as a significant register of the fact that we are living in fragmented times. Our cultural attitudes toward the body are full of dissonances, expressive of the contradictions of our society. On the one hand sex has become deadly; on the other hand it continues to be advertised as the preeminent source of ecstasy, power and self-fulfillment. (288)

In her view, Butler has naturalized gender and the natural body to cause "gender trouble" in the mind and show how it sustains the institution of reproductive heterosexuality. Both Butler and Goffman, she says, have been fundamental for our understanding that "we learn how to fabricate and manipulate language [...] through imitations and learning of cultural idioms" (289). However, according to her, a potential resistance to gendered definitions may lead to a preservation of the status-quo.

In a general manner, Bordo leans on Foucault's theory according to which politics, commitment, and the desire for change act on the body, the passive body, through organization of the subject's life. The body is tamed, designed, and influenced by multiple historical images of the self, femininity, and masculinity. It has become a subject of external

dominance, and of the consequent quest for transformation and improvement.

It should be noted that Butler returns to the debate on gender with her 2004 essay collection *Undoing Gender*. The philosopher reflects upon her former books in the light of subsequent philosophical analysis of gender and sexuality, testifying to being more open to criticism. Interestingly, however, she asks her critics in her last article “Can the Other of Philosophy Speak?” In other essays Butler discusses a wide range of ideas through the angle of feminist poststructuralism, using references of psychoanalysis, and involving literary and psychological analyses. She illustrates Antigone as a pattern breaker, for instance, and deals with incest, transgender, and social change. Beyond the philosophical discussion, she argues that the debate has to expand outside the academy so it can bring social transformation. In order to do that, she determines what social transformation means and how it can be accomplished.

Unlike Butler and Bordo, Grosz suggests dropping the terminology of gender altogether, since it takes the “matter” from the material. In her opinion, if gender is not related to the body, there is no substantial basis for the feminist struggle. Instead of the concept of gender and the view of the body as a socially constructed site, Grosz suggests concentrating on the lived body, or rather, the situation of the biological body within the social and historical context. The external experience or reality of the subject is experienced in the subject’s inner or psychological reality. This is a return to Beauvoir’s concept along with adaptations to the present times. Toril Moi does the same in “What is a Woman”, the first essay in her homonymous book. Moi investigates the distinction between gender and sex, a rather controversial topic among feminist scholars. She claims that the distinction has served as a political basis against biological determinism. However, she argues that the feminist poststructuralist attempt to deconstruct the distinction between body and gender, as Butler suggests, denies the body its materiality. According to her, we should take into account the body’s biological characteristics, while it should also be viewed as a “situation.” In her view, the poststructuralist discursive concept of the body leaves no place for a concrete historical understanding of what being a woman in a certain society means. Seeing the body as a situation, on the other hand, provides a material, historical understanding.

Despite the controversy over the issue, the conclusions regarding the concept of gender, whether it is discursive or real, stay in

the limited field of semantics. As long as the field of differences is taken in account where the female body is studied, it will not determine an identity in the historically narrow concept of binarism between mind and body or men and women. Moi shares with Butler the concern that sex is viewed out of social and historical context. In order to change this stance, she endorses Grosz's belief that the category of gender should be discarded. But this is explained by: "No amount of rethinking of the concepts of sex and gender will produce a good theory of the body or subjectivity" (5), she writes. She doesn't argue with the principle, but with its possible results. She contends that the concept of "lived body" helps feminist ideology because it discards biological determinism and, at the same time, offers a "historically and socially situated understanding of the concrete, material, living and dying body" (p.x.). Like Beauvoir, she says that biological facts are important but should not determine the destiny of women. According to the existentialist philosophy she is accepting, women are not a fixed reality. This is an abstraction that reminds of the abstraction of gender. She speaks about performativity and discourse, after all, when she says that the body is a situation, in the constant process of making individuals what they are. It is not fixed enough to define them. She adds, "A woman defines herself through the way she lives her embodied situation in the world, or in other words, through the way in which she makes something of what the world makes of her" (73).

Like Butler, Moi believes that "scientific methodology cannot yield a valid philosophy of human existence" (63). The body does not carry its meaning on its surface. The lived experience is an open-ended, ongoing interaction between the subject and world, and in this process, both of them construct one another.

The common ground of these philosophers is that identity is constructed through multiple discourses and interactions, and therefore, the definition of identity produces different meanings in different times and locations. Identity is closely connected to the body, as it is constructed through the experience of and through the body. The analysis which follows is based on the assumption that literature is a vehicle for such a construction and therefore an important locus of awareness and change.

CHAPTER 2: LEARNING THE BODY OF HURT

When interviewed by Margaret Meese, Atwood commented:

The body concept has always been a concern of mine. [...] I think that people very much experience themselves through their bodies and through concepts of the body which get applied to their own bodies, which they pick up from their culture and apply to their own. (104)

Concern with the physical and the conceptual body as well as attention to the connection between the body-concept and the social mechanism behind it have appeared in Atwood's *Surfacing*, *The Edible Woman*, and *Lady Oracle*, to mention a few, and they are present in *Cat's Eye* and *Bodily Harm*. As critic Madeleine Davies notes, "Atwood writes the female body in terms of the culture that determines it, simultaneously throwing light on that body and on that cultural process which is always and inescapably political" (60).

Accordingly, this chapter analyzes sources and significance of women's relationships to and through their bodies, based on conventions and practices regarding the female body within the frame of a patriarchal society, as portrayed through the experiences of the female protagonists in *Cat's Eye* and *Bodily Harm*. The analysis points out gender-related problems and their impact on the way the protagonists deal with the body. While doing so, it also focuses on the relation between body and writing, and how the female body appears in the text, or the "corpus" as Shahar names it, displaying the physical uniqueness of the body and its part in the unity of the self.

In both novels, the characters are driven by a moment of crisis to look back at their lives, turning their attention to their body experience and notions. For the purpose of this work, this analysis will be regarded as deconstruction. In other words, the concept of deconstruction is taken as the process of an individual's examination of history outside the patterns of essential or intrinsic meaning, in order to observe the factors that constitute it and construct new meanings. The themes the novels explore often intersect, as they deal with the body as a site on which political power is applied and abuse is exercised. The analysis of these themes includes "the gaze", or rather, the active application of social surveillance and its implications on body and identity, modes of negation such as detachment, the binary division between body and mind, and victimization.

Cat's Eye, largely set in the 1940's and 1950's, sheds light on the historical and social developments in women's situation in these years. However, both novels, written in the 1980's, dialogue to a greater extent with feminist poststructuralism. In this period, the influence of postmodern theories brings a certain shift from the feminist interest in the body toward the related issues of gender and identity. Feminist poststructuralist scholars explore the effect of language, cultural systems of signification, socio-cultural differences, and existing patterns of power relations on gender stereotypes and oppression. As the narratives develop, the effect of poststructuralism appears in the changing bodily notions of the protagonists and the fragmentary nature of their identity. Their journey into the past reveals how their identity has been formed across time and space and over multiple discourses. As literary scholar Eleonora Rao says, "Atwood's treatment of character and subjectivity presents the ego as inconsistent and in constant process" (xvii). Indeed, in their distinct processes of deconstruction, the protagonists discover the mechanism that stands behind gender stereotypes and the meanings attributed to female bodies. As Chapter 3 will illustrate, understanding their past from this perspective enables the protagonists to start a transformation and recover from past harms.

The female body-related themes appear as the novels parade the characters' whole life, seen through the characters' past and present points of view. Therefore, it is necessary to follow the workings of the narrative in order to observe the different layers of issues concerning the body. In *Bodily Harm*, Rennie Wilford, a young woman living in Toronto, Canada, and working as a lifestyle journalist, lives on the surface of things and avoids any emotional or ideological involvement as much as she can. Feminism is one of the matters she has previously considered important but now sees as irrelevant. She feels secure in her steady job and relationship and is certain that she, like all women, is now in control over her life. However, the discovery that she suffers from breast cancer shakes her certainty that her life has turned out the way she intended. Thus, her sickness-generated crisis provokes a reconsideration of past choices and overlooked conflicts.

The story spirals from the acknowledgement of a death-threat--breast cancer--to the surgery and to the life changes that follow. Principally, the introduction of a certain physiological aspect of this bodily harm, the illness, sets the ground for a further examination of what bodily harm means. The novel explores a range of bodily harms that interact with one another in interconnected stories, revealing an interplay between micro and macro power relations. The protagonist's

malignant tumor and the life-threatening nature of her illness form a connection to what she defines as a malignant behavior of people (289). Such connection is implied, for instance, when a dangerous intruder settles in her apartment the way the sickness has invaded her body. Both malignant subjects are expelled, but they lurk in the abyss and may return.

In the process of deconstruction, Rennie's rigid upbringing in Griswold, Ontario, a small town in Canada, her cold relationships with the women of her family, and her personal and professional interactions with men come into play. The readers find out how the social and historical context of her past interactions determines her reaction to the mutilation caused by the operation, and how this influence has caused her continued detachment from her body. The crisis propels the character not only toward self-reflection but also toward change and dislocation. She takes on a writing assignment for a journal's tourism section and travels to a Caribbean island on which she ends up imprisoned as a spy. Here, her own story becomes intertwined with other stories of bodily harm. Once in prison, she witnesses the lasting effect of oppression and brutality upon her cellmate Lora. Lora's story conveys pain, aggression, and resentment, and as their stories are told in alternated parts, they start reflecting each other, combining different illustrations of gender-based conflicts. Rennie's initial disbelief, sense of superiority, and cynicism toward Lora disappear as she notices Lora's integrity and passion. She also realizes that neither she nor Lora, or other women, are exempt from oppression. Both of them suffer violence from their jailers because they are easy targets. Now, the story of the unrelenting violent political struggle intersects with theirs. Toward the end of the novel, Rennie's intimacy with pain helps her recognize other forms of suffering and bestows her with a new capacity for compassion. She tries to help Lora survive a brutal attack, and, in a parallel process of regaining power, decides to speak up and take responsibility for the fate of the oppressed people on the islands.

In *Cat's Eye*, Elaine Risley, a renowned artist, is invited to Toronto, her hometown, for the first retrospective exhibition of her paintings. The location she hasn't visited in years and the reflective occasion bring back old memories that pain her now, in the period she considers to be the middle of her life, the middle of a bridge. As a result, she embarks on an intense recollection of the past, questioning the philosophical, physical, and emotional meaning of time and identity. While on this reflective journey, she finds that there are cracks in her memory, the outcome of repressed painful interactions from her

childhood. In this early period, a group of girls, led by a girl named Cordelia, abuses her for two years with the excuse of improving her personality and manners and making her a worthy person. Elaine has suffered in their hands as well as at school and at their homes from the application of conservative values of a patriarchal society. The girls may be using these values cynically, but they imitate and develop common molding processes, thus obeying and applying the current order. In the years that follow, Elaine believes that she has moved on from anyone and any place that have caused her pain. Only now, before the exhibition, does she realize that her paintings, the expression of her subconscious self, display people and events that have harmed her in ways she hasn't comprehended consciously. These are the sources that have formed her worldview and identity, and now she needs to study them.

The self-exploration that follows involves an examination of social pressures and discrimination suffered in different periods of her life. Pain and anger provoked by the girls, her repression by the rules of a school after years of living in the wilderness, and her experiences with men in her youth become disconnected from their chronological identification and spread over her mind--or "the field" as she calls it--as interconnected events. Clearly, a fundamental force in her past, the repression of body expression and physicality, still exists in her perception of her body and the way she introduces herself to the world.

There are many touching points between the two novels. The protagonists of both feel extreme discomfort that generates a crisis. They question their reality and their identity out of the necessity to heal the maladies that have affected their lives, and this process is their last resort to produce change. Initially, they reject the notion that their anxiety or their detachment from life and from the body is a representation of the situation of women in general. Elaine says, "I am not Woman, and I'm damned if I'll be shoved into it" (2). Her attitude as well as Rennie's defies calls like Cixous's in "*The Laugh of the Medusa*": "Women must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away so violently as from their bodies" (334). However, while they reject the sweeping idea of womanhood, they deal with the reality of women living within a certain socio-cultural context. According to Davies, "Their autobiographies seem to emerge in a gush as though the strain of repression has burst forth in a torrent of words reconnecting body and text" (63). Therefore, the bodies they write are "subversive carriers of [...] coded meanings" (60). Their confessional storytelling is

investigative. It explores and exposes the patterns behind their suffering and examines past and present possibilities of survival. Thus, survival reappears in different aspects and various levels, ranging from the physical body to gender-based groups and to nationalities. Here, too, the micro-macro interweaving comes into play. *Cat's Eye* connects the murder of Elaine's brother Stephen by terrorists to the gender-based torture of the nine-year-old Elaine. The girls are her own terrorists, abandoning her to die at one point and causing a death wish, or an attempted suicide, at another. Moreover, in both novels survival is related to the female body both as a physical site of oppression and a subject of an ideological definition. Hence, the author's writing about the body is closely related to power politics in the socio-cultural and political context of its time and place.

2.1. Dealing with an Imperfect Body

The protagonists of *Bodily Harm* and *Cat's Eye* write about themselves and their realities, expressing their anxiety in regard to the body. One of the principal factors in their sense of inadequacy is the imperfect body, that burden of a scarred, aging, or any body type existing out of the socially accepted standards. They try to prevent, disguise and control the body to no avail. According to Foucault, women have become the slaves of their body-maintenance due to social pressures that push them toward a constant process of self-improvement. In *Discipline and Punish* the philosopher describes the constant surveillance as the central technique of the disciplinary power. Directed toward disciplining the body, first, it then takes over the mind and induces a psychological state of "conscious and permanent visibility" (201). Bordo (1993) endorses his contention that the body is the primary site of power in modern society, using it as the basis for her analysis of the social control of women through their bodies and sexuality.

2.1.1 Health

Taking the sense of permanent visibility in account, it is conceivable to see Rennie's pre-surgery systematic caring for her body's fitness, weight, health, and beauty as a surrender to discourse. For a long time, she has taken care of her body maintenance and nourishment, believing in the importance of a perfect body for her well being, attractiveness, and social acceptance. Her behavior reflects Bordo's theory that women have developed complicity with patriarchal standards

of femininity. According to the scholar, the association between power through surveillance—and the internalized gaze—with a fatal bodily practice (such as anorexia) is an illustration of the link between the disciplinary power and the social control of women. Rennie wants to take control over her body, in order to perfect it, and by doing so she enslaves herself.

After the surgery, when the physical pain caused by the unilateral partial mastectomy is over, Rennie feels damaged because her body is damaged. In fact, she remains with a minor physical harm if compared to a tumor: a lacking part of her breast and the scar over it. However, she is afraid that it will repel men and diminish her chance of having or finding love, a highly desired objective for her. Already on the night before the surgery, knowing that she is sick and going to be mutilated, her thoughts betray her self-defying attitude: “She could understand his [her companion Jake’s] shock and disgust and the effort he was making in order not to reveal them, since she felt the same way” (21). Consequently, the corpus dealing with the night before the surgery reveals her distancing from body sensations, as if any sensation would be painful, intruding, obligatory and even belittling. It is a turning point:

She used to like it when he slid into her wet like that, but tonight she was only waiting for a certain amount of time to be over, as if she were at a dentist’s office, waiting for something to be done to her. A procedure. [...] Her body was nerveless, slack, as if she was already under the anaesthetic.[...] At last she faked it. That was another vow she’d made once: never to fake it. (21)

After the operation, she seeks Jake’s sincere acceptance but is certain that his sincerity will only reveal a rejection of her body, and based on it, of her. She is unaware or uncritical of her own feeling that the sickness has affected her whole self, damaging much more than her physical body. So far, she has not questioned the meaning of her self-defining as “damaged”. Consistently in line with her feelings, the corpus discloses her vulnerability by revealing the subtleties of her new body language: “Despite the heat Rennie lies with her arms folded, left hand on her breast, right hand on the ridge of skin that slants across the side of her breast up towards her armpit. This is how she always sleeps now” (48). This and other breaks in the text come to illustrate her sense of fear and of fragile hope. The ridge of the skin gains its independent power through the active tense. It is not slanted; it slants.

Rennie's new state of mind goes on to affect her relationships with her female friend Jocasta, as well, since Rennie expects sincerity without pity, and understanding without inquiry, and this turns out to be impossible. She finds that "Jocasta was a little too surprised to hear from her, a little too pleased" (163)". Afterwards, Rennie needs to make an effort to keep meeting her friend, since she sees her own damage, her wound, reflected at her from Jocasta's caution.

Metaphorically, the wound opens a window into Rennie's depths, offering her an opportunity to deal with her self beyond the surface and reconnect with her vulnerability and power. In fact, although she has been educated to respect superficial codes, she has never approved of them wholeheartedly. Despite her lifestyle writing, a shallow venue for her talents, in her view any shallow way of living represents her resented hometown, the conservative Griswold, where "Surfaces determined whether or not people took you seriously" (26). The following corpus conveys a possible new insight in a literal, physical way: "She runs the fingers of her left hand over the skin of her left breast, the good one, the one she hopes is good, as she does every night. From the surface you can feel nothing, but she no longer trusts surfaces" (48). However, while she is finally ready to take the emotional journey into her depths, she suspects that men may look at the surface alone and reject her. The scar, therefore, represents both seeing and being seen. The gaze involved is judgmental.

A Word

It's a blustery word. Say it and heads will crane forward. It's good for attraction. Breasts: a word that's becoming a concept, what with its innumerable synonyms floating from tits to mammary glandules and back to bazookas, through other twenty-something words. A range of embodied meanings are standing at your service. Choose a sexual, maternal, aesthetic, discriminative, scientific or artistic implication, and you'll find it built within a word. Invent one for this feminine part and it'll silence a room.

As a site of attention, breasts rival with vagina and, perhaps in some areas, with the butt. Ovaries, though feminine, don't send external signs of magnitude. Legs only raise an eyebrow. Breasts are bigger. When they are someone else's they are easy. When they are mine, I close the dictionary, or it slaps my fingers. Some of my definitions are nobody's business to observe. To myself I say: my breasts, my new breasts, my firm breasts, my scarred breasts, my silicon-filled breasts,

my restored breasts, the breasts that now represent only five percent chance of a life risk.

My breasts evolve into titles: discovered grown breasts on a girl's chest, the shadow of the overhung breasts, (quite good, isn't it?), the breasts that went under the knife, my pink and purple empty breasts, the breasts you won't see in a sauna. And finally: my comfortable breasts. Oh yes, they are comfortable to die for. You can run with them, jump with them, bang against a wall with them and feel an antsy tickle at most. There's an even bigger consolation prize to breast losers: your breasts will never be squeezed like orange slices between two glasses in the mammography room.

I need more, though. More words please, Waiter. Words to illustrate the embarrassment of waiting for my breasts to finally appear at fourteen. By then I believed that breasts, any breasts, even small elevations of the skin or two overgrown nipples would suffice to capture hearts. When they showed-up, I felt grateful and awkward as I took them out to school and play. They give a girl whose male friends seem altered a new sense of power. But also: they drive her to spend hours in front of the mirror-mirror. Is the breasts' shape fine, is their size good? Are they right? I'm not the most beautiful girl in the world, I'm afraid, but I can pass as pretty and the breasts help.

I look at Mother to see what awaits me. Well, she's too old, not old-old, but old enough to be irrelevant for tricks of fatal attraction, secrets of love. Mother is in her fifties, and toward the end of her life. Long before it happens, I look away from her to the girls wearing bikinis, passing tanning oil, their breasts rising in colorful bras from their hot oily bodies. Survival by imitation is common but impossible, so I keep trying to act naturally and let go. It's a slow-learning process. Adopt slight gestures, avoid focusing on breasts, learn to love with all your body.

Now, when I say "breasts" it holds more than jovial plentitude. After the power and beyond vulnerability, grows suspicion. Family, friends, and acquaintances speak about cancer, suffer from cancer, survive it or not. One case after another introduces itself as the years pass. This is when I become afraid. I was raised up on Salomon's The Song of Songs where breasts are compared to pomegranates for the beauty, the lush, and the sensuousness. Open a pomegranate and see red all over. But where will I be without them?

The word isn't lost when you lose your breasts; it's only changed for good.

2.1.2. Age

Just like Rennie's experience with her scarred breast, so does Elaine's contemplation of aging in *Cat's Eye* has to do with appearances and their social meanings. Neither the scar nor aging is in itself an illness or disability, but their occurrence implies certain "otherness" due to the body representation in Western media and art. The backwards journey described in *Cat's Eye* indicates that Elaine's current difficulty in accepting the change in her body is the result of an ongoing process of surveillance and identity formation. As literary critic Moly Hite contends in "Optics and Autobiography in Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye*," the separation between the looked at and tested and the looking and testing is at the heart of postwar definitions of masculinity and femininity in the novel. "'Look' is always a pun, as in 'How do I look?' -or as in 'I look like Haggis McBaggis' (76, 91), 'I look like the Witch of Endor' (36), or 'I'd look like an old biddy' (19)." The critic also notes: "Women look like, while in general men only look -- unless of course they are 'fruity clothes horses,' in Stephen's 'devastating appraisal of homosexuals (230)" (143). This judgmental gaze, as the previous section points out, has solidified standards—especially for women—limited to certain body types in a certain age and of a perfect health. Elaine's resulting struggle to control the way she looks imprisons her in a never-ending process of self-improvement.

Based on Lennard Davis's research about disability, old age, as much as the mutilated body, is denied, rejected, and marginalized in society since it is a reminder of the transitory nature of youth, power, health, and beauty. It disrupts the peace and the uniform visual field of people whose bodies are still considered normal. Clearly, the further the body is from the "adequate body" due to what is seen, wrongly, as disability, the more de-eroticized the person becomes.

Indeed, Elaine finds that fighting social conventions regarding age is hard. Even though she has learned from her brother Stephen that, "Time is not a line but a dimension, like the dimension of space. If you can bend space you can bend time also" (3), and in spite of her fascination with the concept, her difficulty in accepting the process of aging cannot be resolved through physics or philosophy. In fact, Elaine is not yet old, but she is aware of her aging signs. She says that her current age is borderline: "that buffer zone in which it can still be believed such tricks [as make-up and fashionable clothes] will work if you avoid bright sunlight" (6).

She has always been intrigued by the difference, the otherness, of old age, signaling out old people since her childhood. Accordingly, the novel frames her story with elder people, starting with her encounter with old women on a bus and ending it with her observations of “old ladies” into whom she runs during her trip. In fact, the relation between old age and sexual identity has been on her mind since she saw an old female teacher entering the girls’ bathroom despite her “sexless” body. School has instructed Elaine regarding the soft and docile way girls and women should look and act, or rather, it has involved her in seeing and being seen through a certain lens. And yet, she finds that a female member of school is included in the category of women despite her obvious otherness. However, this teacher represents the values of school, despite her appearance, and Elaine resents her.

Another subject of Elaine’s observation is Mrs. Smeath, a girlfriend’s mother who looks much older than Elaine’s. When Elaine considers Mrs. Smeath’s bad heart, she describes it in a rather sensual way: “hidden, underneath her woolen afghan and the billow of her apron bib, pumping in the thick fleshy darkness of the inside of her body: something taboo, intimate [...] a deformity. A horrible treasure” (62). Elaine comments on the fleshy body, and imagines Mr. Smeath glued to Mrs. Smeath’s backside as they have an insect-like sexual intercourse. Her repulsion with the mature female body, its expansive nature and hidden organs, finds its way to her paintings as well.

Later on, as a teenager, Elaine sympathizes with the extroverted old women who seem to have escaped from the jail of the gaze. She takes the bus with Cordelia, in the second phase of their friendship, and the two of them study old women dressed in non-traditional, colorful clothes; women who dye their hair in bright tones and wear a lot of make-up. These elder women refuse to be blurred with the background, defying the order that determines their position. She says, “They have a certain gaiety to them, a power of invention, they don’t care what people think. They have escaped, though what it is they’ve escaped from isn’t clear to us” (5).

Elaine becomes aware that the rejection of old women by the acquisitive gaze that analyzes “products” may become a source of either shame or liberation. She is fascinated by the choice of freedom, but when she is older, she is not able to adopt this attitude. She also questions the reasons for staying unaffected. As she perceives the weakening of the senses, she reconsiders the old ladies’ motives for being so flamboyant: “Now I think, what if they just couldn’t see what

they looked like? [...] I'm having that trouble myself now: too close to the mirror and I'm a blur, too far back and I can't see the details" (5).

With her internalized critical eye, and her assimilation of the gaze of a youth-admiring society, she activates the mechanism that attributes to her own aging body the power to make her a lesser person. She sees or foresees her body's gnarling, withering, loosening, and wrinkling, and she is ashamed. Interestingly, while she fights aging and hides its marks as much as possible, in her self-portrait she paints some hairs gray. Still, as she says, "This is cheating, as in reality I pull them out" (430).

At the same time, she wishes she could have let go. Dreaming about liberation from social disciplinary power, she hopes for "something that will never happen." for her and for Cordelia: "Two old women giggling over their tea" (445). It is merely a wishful thinking. She tends to feel inadequate, despite the possibility of liberation, possibly due to her childhood trauma. Back then, Cordelia and two other alleged friends had observed and commented on her way of walking, talking, and presenting herself, exercising surveillance and intensifying the accusing social gaze.

Secrets

My mother was fifty-seven the day I heard her tell the E.R. doctor that she had cancer a year earlier. I knew her age because she had revealed it, her great secret, at fifty-three. Until then, it had been kept from me as the biggest of all shames, a threat lying beyond the natural advance of the years and the simple nature of chronology. Finally, though, she came to trust me, her twelve-year-old daughter, to be mature enough to hear the truth and absorb the shock.

We were sitting on the large balcony of our apartment when she touched the subject. As usual, the shutters surrounding the balcony remained half-closed to avoid curious gazes, but human buzzing filled the air. The balconies of two other four-story buildings opened to ours from a short distance, and neighbors leaned over and looked down.

Although her age (fifty-three!) did not make me dizzy as she seemed to expect, it certainly hit me as a surprise.

I had never noticed the age difference between her and my classmates' mothers, although they were in their thirties or forties at most. She either looked young, or I hadn't been paying attention. I stared at her, recalling an occasion in Shuk HaCarmel, an open air market in Tel Aviv, in which the man who sold us peaches said she was

a beautiful grandmother. She kept on a fixed smile, as she pulled me away, squeezing my hand so tightly it hurt.

"I don't care," I said, though I felt she was old; definitely too old for comfort. As always, she didn't fit in, out of place on the coarse Israeli street, among the outgoing neighbors, or with people who did not appreciate erudite music and books.

A split orange lay between us on a stool, but she forgot to eat her half, and I couldn't eat mine.

She proceeded to tell me that those days, only old people over seventy with whom my grandfather used to sit on the green benches of The Independence Avenue, noticed her. Everything had been collapsing since she lost her father and her husband, my grandfather and my father, within that year.

Again at the E.R. - a few months after I'd turned sixteen - my mother was telling the doctor that she had her womb removed due to a malignant tumor. I held my breath as the information sunk in, then left my place behind the curtain, went to the corridor and told the neighbor who'd brought us there in his bouncing old car that he could go back home without us. It hadn't been a simple case of cysts like she'd told me. As was her habit, she had passed a layer of fresh paint over rotten walls.

I felt stupid for being misled so easily and guilty for not taking care of her. Fortunately, numbness and frustration settled in, keeping fear at a distance. It had been she and I alone, a family of two, for the past four years.

She had always told me lies, white lies of good intentions, and she kept secrets, sparing us from humiliation, sparing me from pain, and sparing herself from causing distress. Silence avoids pain - that was a common belief in the family.

Years earlier, I had only come to learn that my father suffered from cancer when he passed away. At the time, the term "cancer" was hushed all around, not only near children. There were taboos, things nobody talked about, and physicians hid the presence of cancer from patients. As for my mother, she postponed the revelation, or decided on hoping for a recovery, or was still deciding. Then, she repeated the same pattern when she got sick. Sickness was even worse than being over fifty.

When I heard her speak that day at the hospital, I recognized the wall and the paint that disguised the ruin. The shock came, and then subsequent aftershocks, the loss, the fury, and the fear that everybody might age or get sick or die without a warning.

From then on, I'd scratch everything, bleed, and go on until finding rotten wood or broken bricks, a truth that should be revealed even if I'd have to invent it.

2.2. The Gaze

Beauvoir has diagnosed the way women—such as the protagonists—live their bodies as objects for the gaze of others, a phenomenon that is not originated in anatomy but in “education and surroundings” (307). Rennie’s worry about being seen and “found out” acquires new meanings due to her sickness. It is affected by her current fear of a new diagnosis, or rather, a view of her depth that will announce an upcoming early death. She reiterates that she is in remission, and not recovered. The doctors, she says, tell her they will always need to keep an eye on her. They, too, will always look at her through her wound, reminding her of her fragility in the face of mortality, and emphasizing her weakness. This medical gaze takes a personal turn when Rennie falls in love with the surgeon who has operated on her, a married man. She rejects his gaze even if he is to become a lover: “She wanted to see him lying with his eyes closed, she wanted to see him and not be seen, she wanted to be trusted” (195). She craves his love but suspects that in his situation as a married man his love cannot transcend the circumstances. More than that, she is afraid that he will always see her as a woman in need, since he knows, without telling her, that she is dying. This dread, a self-imposed obstacle, impacts this relationship, as the image of herself as weak and needy, a classic view of women in a sexist society, is a characterization she tries to avoid.

Her insecurity makes her wonder if she has ever accepted her self beyond the body surface. As far as she can see, before the operation and as long as her body has been healthy and unmarked, she lived in peace. With the change in the body’s situation, however, her self-confidence collapses. Her self-esteem, it appears now, has been based on the response to the body’s message of fitness, sexuality, and aesthetics. Hence, her satisfaction has depended on the way others have perceived her through her body. It is likely that her present suffering is the result of her internalized social expectation of an “adequate body.” This phenomenon is articulated by Bordo:

And for women, associated with the body and largely confined to a life centered on the body (both the beautification of one’s own body and the

reproduction, care, and maintenance [...]), culture's grip on the body is a constant, intimate fact of everyday life (17).

Another expression of the gaze, mirrors, appears in both novels, reflecting much more than the protagonists' physical bodies. The protagonists gaze at the mirror reflection through the prism of the conceptual body, always finding their image lacking or unclear. In her shame of her mutilated breast and her fear of the meaning it may have for her life, Rennie prefers to steer clear from mirrors. Still, she finds herself observing her reflection once and again. John Berger, cited by Atwood in the epigraph of *Bodily harm*, points to the tradition of the mirror motif as a symbol of female vanity, and adds that "the real function of the mirror [...] was to make the woman connive in treating herself as, first and foremost, a sight" (51). He defines checking the mirror as a compulsion:

A woman must continually watch herself. She is almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself. Whilst she is walking across a room or whilst she is weeping at the death of her father, she can scarcely avoid envisioning herself walking or weeping. (46)

With the social emphasis on appearances, no wonder that mirrors have an important role in Elaine's self-evaluation just as they do in Rennie's. They are not only an image of the physical, but also an expression of her identity. Elaine is afraid of the sight and the signs of age, and also of unknown reflections of herself. After all, in her youth, when Josef dresses her up, the mirror reflects an image that is strange to her, and she "suddenly sees what Josef sees" (304). Currently, she is afraid to discover Cordelia in it, since they have exchanged places from a victimizer to a victim and the other way around, and Elaine is not comfortable with either place. However, like Rennie, she cannot avoid mirrors altogether. She looks at the mirror now and sees a transitory, blurred, and ever-changing reflection, an illustration of her sense of loss. She has to reconnect with her self in order to be able to see a clear image. On the convenient side, the unclear image relieves some of the loathing she feels toward the "criminalizing" signs of age. Unfortunately, while the lack of clarity diminishes her concern, she still confesses her propensity to buy whatever cosmetics that may make her look younger.

Obviously, social surveillance, a synonym for the concept of the repressing "gaze," or, taken a step further into the application of the

gaze, has marked the characters' past. Elaine remembers the close surveillance done by her childhood persecutors through her body. The text, the corpus, reverberates with a physical sensation and reaction to stress that closes the gap between periods of time, uniting memory with the present: "I can feel my throat tightening, a pain along the jawline. I've started to chew my fingers again. There's blood, a taste I remember. It tastes of orange popsicles, penny gumballs, red licorice gnawed hair, dirty ice" (8). The girls push her into a submissive, inferior state in the name of social conventions. Their demand from Elaine to improve replays the surveillance acted upon them at their homes and at school. As Hite points out:

[They] use her as a scapegoat in order to displace their own suffering as members of a patriarchy, here literalized in the authority of their own fathers. Carol's whip marks reinforce the message that fathers have 'real, unspeakable power' (176), power that Cordelia attempts to appropriate for herself by applying to Elaine her own father's expressions of contempt, 'Wipe that smirk off your face!' and 'What do you have to say for yourself?' (124, 271) (136).

The girls' surveillance may seem to go against their own interest, just like the affected way with which the protagonists judge their image in the mirror, but according to Foucault, it is unavoidable. He writes, "In the absence of the director [of a panoptic prison in which the prisoners are seen by an unseen authority], his family, his friends, his visitors, even his servants monitor, since the prisoners internalize the gaze and police themselves" (208-09). Following the same pattern, no matter what Elaine does, it cannot be enough and she will not be absolved. As she comments, "There will be no end to imperfection, or to doing things the wrong way" (148). Her response is revealed in excruciating details in the corpus that reveal the depth of her pain:

In the endless time when Cordelia had such power over me, I peeled the skin off my feet. I did it at night, when I was supposed to be sleeping. My feet would be cool and slightly damp, smooth like the skin of mushrooms. I would begin with the big toes. I would bend my foot up and bite a small opening in the thickest part of the skin, on the bottom, along the outside edge. (113)

The girl tries to diminish her emotional pain by concentrating her attention on the immediate ache of her torn skin. The suffering body,

the body of hurt, is the body of a little girl. Yet, the larger signification of the hurt is related to the wounding encounter with the traditional, patriarchal society and its representatives. Here too, the reaction is counter-effective because of the internalized gaze. Elaine acts against her own interest and comfort instead of acting against her oppressors. Clearly, the other girls sense that as long as she feels guilty and full of shame their control over her will last. They know the fear of looking bad or doing a shameful act. This fear is so fundamental, that all the girls at school avoid mentioning a girl who has been molested and murdered in the infamous ravine. Elaine remarks: "It's as if this girl has done something shameful, herself, by being murdered" (260).

Another aspect of the impact of surveillance on the protagonists is their surrender to their companions' design. Since the two women have become insecure individuals, both of them let their men design or redesign them, take over their bodies, and invent an identity. Josef, Elaine's drawing instructor, and lover, tells Elaine he'll see what he can make of her. He dresses her, thus creating a different person, just as Jake arranges and dresses Rennie. Elaine recalls,

Josef is rearranging me. 'You should wear your hair loose,' he says, unpinning it. [. . .] I stand still and let him do this. I let him do what he likes. [. . .] I move through the days like a zombie. [. . .] 'You should wear purple dresses,' says Josef. 'It would be an improvement' (319).

Similarly, Rennie remembers, "He liked buying her things like that. Bad Taste. Garters, merry widows, red bikini pants with gold spangles [...]. The real you, he'd say, with irony and hope" (20). Both women leave their bodies in the arms and control of their lovers and find ways to depart from this disturbing place. In the end, the surveillance mechanism and the self-surveillance become both the origin and the definition of their sense of self.

2.3. Gender Roles

More than Elaine, Rennie has obeyed gender-related expectations and taken on stereotyped gender roles in her personal and professional life. Upon her separation from Jake, Rennie traces the link between her living for and through her partner's gaze to her lifestyle journalism. Both her editor and Jake have expected a passive acceptance of roles that are gender-based stereotypes, since it has served their needs, and in her will to please them, she has collaborated. In her job, she has agreed

to write lightly about serious issues like porn, and seriously about light matters like celebrities. Her previous disapproval of this type of writing has worn thin, except in sporadic bursts of disgust. She recalls the editor's complaint that radical women's magazines miss the "element of playfulness" in pornography, and his instruction to capture the play. Customarily, Rennie obeys, but she feels sick in front of the dehumanizing exhibition items. When she sees a work showing rats coming out of a vagina, she leaves in such fright that it impacts the way she sees Jake. He hangs on the wall pictures of women with exposed bodies, and with heads like door knobs, and prefers sexual games of domination. His behavior reflects the same idea of lightheartedness when aggression is involved. Naturally, as she expresses her discomfort about the relation between what she saw and his imitations of rape, Jake belittles it. Nevertheless, such occasions of epiphany become the most significant turns in her perception. She realizes with certain regret that she has lived according to a less than demanding worldview, adopting light existence as a living philosophy. As the struggle against her breast cancer unfolds, her life stands to a test and her previous satisfaction in her situation vanishes. She is beginning to discover that her denial of depth has affected her identity and blocked her away from life.

Butler's analysis of power relations is a tool for understanding the causes of Rennie's subordination. Mostly, the explanation is not based on the traditional model of power since it is an oversimplified conception of power relations and victim-victimizer roles. Instead, drawing on Foucault, she says that women's experiences, self-perception, conduct, and abilities are constructed by localized forms at the political micro-level. Power is exercised rather than possessed, and it circulates through society by a general repetition of acts. In *Bodies that Matter* she says:

[...] this repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition for the subject. This iterability implies that "performance" is not a singular "act" or event, but a ritualized production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint. (95)

In accordance with this theory, Rennie hasn't been aware of the extent to which these pressures have molded her choices. Now she realizes that despite the apparent open-mindedness attributed to Toronto, the city to which she has escaped from her conservative hometown, most people still repeat the same models. Her compliance shows the strength of the construction.

2.4. The Lived Body

All the sections above point to the “lived body” experience, as the protagonists go through constant change, and alter their perception of their self, and their relationships. Drawing on scholars such as Beauvoir, Moi, and Grosz, the body is read through its physiological and psychic situation, and any change in its condition modifies the protagonists’ situation in the world, and shapes their identity. Rennie’s weak body and pronounced vulnerability scare Jake and transform his attitude from playful and somewhat vicious to serious and forced. The change also evokes care on the surgeon’s part, facilitating the doctor/patient type of affair, and finally terminating it. In another situation, Rennie believes that she can silence the police officers who hint that her sexual presence has drawn a stalker by showing them her mutilated breast. It is her (initial) belief that after the operation she cannot be seen as a sexual being.

In these episodes, her own reaction to the change in her body and to people’s response to the change mobilizes the situation. In her personal relationships, she cannot separate people’s reaction to her illness or scar and their affection for her as a person. Hence, she corresponds to the difference in people’s (alleged) views of her bodily situation and questions their sincerity and love. Simultaneously, she finds that dealing with her current fears and needs requires a readjustment of her world-view. She starts her adaptation to the new situation while still with Jake. The paralyzing impact of her body’s change on their relationships is a clue to the fragile fundamentals of their connection. Possibly, her own perception of the body’s role in their relationship makes her insecure in regard to his love. The communication between them is broken, and their sexual relations become null, as this exchange reveals:

You’re using me as a Teddy Bear,’ Jake said.
 Why don't you go back to sucking your thumb?
 [...] Sometimes I think you don’t like me very
 much, she said. Like, he said, Is that all you want
 to be? Liked? Wouldn’t you rather be passionately
 and voraciously desired? Yes, she said, but not
 every night. (101)

He makes an effort to stay despite his aversion to commitment, but according to him, she is relentless in putting her sickness in the center of their relationship. To this, she replies, “Why? [...] Because I

don't feel like it in the same way any more? Because I don't believe you do either?" (102). She considers his efforts an obligation and not his wish. In her opinion, Jake is mostly interested in the way she looks, acts, and plays into their sexual games and not in her thoughts and emotions. It becomes apparent that the growing distance is a result of a mutual discomfort, and not only his. They draw apart, and he ends up leaving.

Even before the end of their relationships, Rennie already goes on seeking approval from another man. She relates to Daniel, the surgeon, a man who has not only seen her harmed breasts, but has disfigured them in order to save her. He is not a man of surfaces, and he is connected to the body of hurt and its depth of emotion. However, she suspects that he is interested in her not because he is attracted to who she is, but because he is a caretaker. Again, she doesn't ponder the possibility that her sickness, this new bodily situation, may not be a fundamental element in his consideration of her as a lover.

As for Elaine, she currently revalues her situation in time, or rather, her aging and her difference from the child she used to be, in front of mirrors and windows, and she dreads the change, new revelations, and the future.

Gnarling has set in, the withering of the mouth; the outlines of dewlaps are beginning to be visible, down toward the chin, in the dark glass of subway windows. Nobody else notices these things yet, unless they look closely; but Cordelia and I are in the habit of looking closely (6).

Finding in her self a grotesque aspect, the aging body, she tells herself what Cordelia used to say in the past: "'Look at yourself! Just look!' Her [Cordelia's] voice is disgusted, fed up, as if my face, all by itself, has been up to something, has gone too far" (158). She is certain that the world will not be forgiving once it becomes aware of her age. Clearly, the dread takes her back to her childhood's rejected self.

2.5. Detachment and Binary Division

Since it has a role in all the protagonists' struggles, the repressing gaze also touches upon the theme of detachment and of binary division. The detachment of Rennie and Elaine from denied, repressed, or abandoned parts of their lives and identities is present in their distant relation to their bodies. All the elements, including the body, are inseparable from the self, and therefore the characters have become tortured and lost. Atwood has described a similar kind of detachment is

Surfacing, where the unnamed main character expresses the feeling that her head is separated from the rest of the body. The author's criticism of the division endorses the postmodern view of identity in the sense that a split creates a hierarchy between oppositions. The contemporary feminist theory mentioned in Chapter 1 has examined the concept of binarism, or dualist thinking, in the light of alleged oppositions such as body and mind, men and women, nature and culture, and evil and goodness. The detachment of the characters from their bodies displays their own binary notion of the world. They tend to a body/mind split in order to avoid suffering, but by doing so they disconnect themselves from being fully awake and alive. Only when the characters reject this split, embarking on a journey of self-discovery in which there are no fixed boundaries, do they come to terms with their unified, however fragmentary identity.

Before the journey starts, however, none of them is aware of the subjugated roles of sexuality responsible for their situation. Rennie and Elaine don't deny themselves physical satisfaction, but they cannot identify with the body's urges, so they separate their emotions from their physical pleasure. This negation of their physicality is an attempt to keep their identity within the patriarchal policing norms they have known since their childhood. As Kristeva says, "At the center of the Christian ideal of womanhood, the woman's body appears as a sealed vessel. The tightly sealed bodily borders place the body beyond the obscene" (71).

In the beginning of *Bodily Harm*, Rennie is already an observer of life, deliberately living at the level of "surfaces" and "appearances" (26). The split is rooted in her conservative education, in which any expression of physicality or impulsive behavior has led to punishment. Furthermore, the shapeless clothes of the women in her family and their controlled gestures have implied that the body with its desires and animalistic features is shameful. This kind of education alludes to Aristotle's separation of body and mind. In Rennie's family, the body is considered to be a deviating entity of which the mind has to be in control. Although theoretically she hasn't adopted the rejection of physicality, and has even left her hometown, looking for liberation, she still treats her body as if it were a subjugated object she occupies, uses, maintains, and enjoys. Stripped from other signification of the self, or what she considers to be the self, the body is defined as a mere physical entity, and thus, she objectifies it. As a result, she does not question its objectification by Jake, but considers his sexual games and his attempts to create an image for her harmless. Like him, she observes her body's

animalistic and aesthetic privileges with an amused and distant nod. Another sign of her detachment appears when she becomes sick and feels as if her body is a machine that broke down. She becomes angry with the body, as if it's a traitor and not a part of her:

The body, sinister twin, taking its revenge for whatever crimes the mind was supposed to have committed on it [...] She'd given her body swimming twice a week, forbidden it junk food and cigarette smoke, allowed it a normal amount of sexual release. She'd trusted it. Why then had it turned against her. (82)

The split returns in the pre-surgery scene, that acts in both the literal and metaphorical way, as she says, "she can see everything, clear and sharp, under glass, her body is down there on the table [...] she wants to rejoin her body but she can't get down" (172-73).

In a general manner, Elaine is more conscious of her widespread detachment than Rennie. As she goes back in time, signs and sources of detachment appear all over her history. Her interpretation of the mirror reflection implies that she tries but can't place herself in time both literally and metaphorically. Here, again, Atwood conveys confusion and loss through the body. The phrases are stilted, translating into the writing form the sense of a body going forward and backwards:

Maybe it was as simple as that: eye problems. I'm having that trouble myself now: too close to the mirror and I'm a blur, too far back and I can't see the details. Who knows what faces I'm making, what kind of modern art I'm drawing onto myself? Even when I get the distance adjusted, I vary. I'm transitional; some days I look like a worn-out thirty-five, others like a sprightly fifty. (5)

The difference between the protagonists' insights may be related to their starting points. Unlike Rennie, Elaine has lived in the wilderness, where there has not been any gender division, body/mind split or self-consciousness. When she suffers in the big city, she aches to go back and be free to live as her authentic self. Clearly, her liberal family and life in nature would have constructed a different identity from her current one. Since Elaine was left alone without gender-based pressures at that stage, she takes it to be her natural self. However, once she goes to school she is separated from her brother and the other boys, and her sense of her body changes. Her gestures and behavior are supposed to be delicate and contained. The school uniform, therefore,

limits her movements, suggesting that physicality is shameful. Gradually, her initial shock of discovery of gender identity turns into a struggle of adaptation and provokes an internalization of these notions.

Her perception of the body goes through several phases. In her examination of the difference of women, she looks at the bodies of the women around her. These women are fixed in their place by a process that renders them docile bodies, according to Foucault (137). She ignores her mother's body, but finds Mrs. Smeath's one big breast revolting and her body grotesque. She also observes Mrs. Smeath's daughters, her friend Grace's sisters, with horror: "Whatever has happened to them, bulging them, softening them, causing them to walk rather than run, as if there's some invisible leash around their necks, holding them in check -- whatever it is, it may happen to us too" (97). To her, it is not only a question of natural development but a proof that the softening mechanism of school leaves a permanent mark.

Her first conscious experience of detachment from her body is linked to power relations between girls. It reaches into the theme of patriarchal oppression since the girls represent the society of Toronto in the 1950's. She remembers: "Fainting is like stepping sideways, out of your own body, out of time or into another time. When you wake up it's later. Time has gone on without you" (189). Her will to be shut off is close to a death wish, since she negates her own existence. When she faints, she is encapsulated in a spot outside time and place, disconnected from her body and from the girls who exercise their power over her. When she gains consciousness, however, she is back on the field, in her body and mind.

This and other distinct parts of her life, experiences lived in different times, places and changing belief, educational, social and political systems are continuous and interconnected in her mind. Therefore, her childhood craving for detachment, her belief that shutting off her body will release her is still present. The radiation of this childhood experience and craving appears when Elaine is a young woman. She verbalizes the sexist tendencies of the time, occasionally analyzing them with a cynical tone that conveys her attempted detachment. She observes her male colleagues with a growing resentment, saying: "In any case they are boys, not men. Their pink cheeks and group sniggering, their good-girl and bad-girl categories, their avid, fumbling attempts to push back the frontiers of garter-belt and brassiere no longer hold my attention" (147).

When Josef dresses her, she looks at her Pre-Raphaelite image in the mirror in the non-personal way she sees his pictures. As Brooks

Bouson, a literary critic, notes, “For Elaine, as for other Atwoodian characters [...], the enactment of the feminine masquerade in which the woman participates in the man’s desire but at the cost of renouncing her own leads to a sense of self-alienation and inauthenticity” (177).

2.6. Partial Conclusions

To finalize this chapter, Elaine and Rennie’s detachment is a symptom of their insecurity and fear of suffering. It is another aspect of surrender to social surveillance, much like Rennie’s compliance with gender roles, and Elaine’s denial of her painful past. Their detachment involves distrust in their bodies, due to the meanings they may carry. The gaze of others has made them self-conscious. They constantly check themselves in the mirror or otherwise and try to adapt the way they look, move, dress, and act to external expectations. Clearly, they give up on the flow of life as they block it, and therefore, they live on the surface, like Rennie, or in a blur, like Elaine, unaware of their needs.

When the protagonists find that they no longer fit within Western culture’s image of a “normal” woman, whose body is adequate, they reach the dead-end of social acceptance as they understand it. The positive result of it, as Atwood illustrates, is the internal journey they start when they believe they have no other options. In their moments of crisis, they wish to connect with the flow of life but realize that it requires a complex study of their history. As they go back into their childhood, they identify certain sources of their identity. The education given by rigid institutions of a patriarchal order has been a principal factor in their constraint. The behavior of most of their family and friends at that time has been affected by these values, thus becoming an oppressive tool of the same order. The body of the girls is denied its impulses and natural activity, and they grow up, becoming estranged from it. When it subsequently becomes the focus of interest of men, and the basis of relationships in which men are controllers, the gap between the characters and their bodies deepens. Both Rennie and Elaine embark on intense sexual relationships, but these are not a sign of unity with their bodies. They separate themselves from it, and thus, they separate themselves from the relationships, and the emotional connection becomes lacking. Gradually, they understand their own complicity with the social order. The deconstruction aids them in revealing the reasons for their current dissatisfaction, distance from life, behavior, situation, and feeling of loss.

The next chapter will deal with the ways of transformation articulated by the author or implied from the characters' actions. It will also focus on the importance of these novels for the depiction and transformation of women's situation.

CHAPTER 3: TRANSFORMATION AND HEALING

With the end of the protagonists' deconstructive process and the resolution of *Bodily Harm* and *Cat's Eye* emerges the question of whether a transformation has taken place, and if so, what kind of transformation it is. Transformation, according to the Oxford Online Dictionary, is "a thorough or dramatic change in form or appearance." In accordance with this definition and that of the verb "transform," we ask whether the characters "make a thorough or dramatic change in the form, appearance, or character."

With these inclusive definitions it is plausible to assume that a transformation may occur along the arc of the plot in the characters' life conditions, their situation in relation to specific people, their situation in society, their acts, their self-image, general perception and awareness of the world and the self.

Moreover, a transformation may also take place in the readers' understanding of the world. In the spirit of the concept that "everything personal is political," the conclusion regarding each character's transformation applies to related elements in the world in general. Essentially, the readers observe the characters' reevaluation of their socio-cultural interrelations both in the characters' and in the readers' context of time and place. According to poststructuralists such as Foucault and Butler, a private condition cannot be read otherwise, as the personal (of characters and of readers in this case) is socially constructed and therefore contextual.

Another factor implied by poststructuralism determines that characters and readers cannot reconstruct their behavior, thought, and emotions in a void. They are only able to understand themselves and make changes within the limits of their experience, knowledge, and power relations. Their "lived body" is subjected to the influence of certain society, time, and place. Within the specific context, the changing situation constantly shapes the identity, modifies positions in relation to other people, and affects perception.

Notably, however, along with any such change of act and perception, the subjects, or the characters, go on reproducing and rehearsing social paradigms, as recognized by Butler's theory of

performativity. Their acts perpetuate social patterns. They may resist certain norms, but they are unable to act as if they had cut themselves loose from society. Since norms are an elementary measure that binds society together, people cannot break them altogether without any internal or external punishing reaction. As a result, any transformation will require a long and thorough process. Unlike other Atwood's characters, such as the protagonist of *Surfacing*, Rennie and Elaine don't try to drop out of society, and their acts of performativity continue.

However, Rennie's and Elaine's unease with the place they occupy in private and public spheres, along with their need to reconnect with themselves and with others on different terms may lead to change. Despite the limitation of their consciousness, their progressing act of deconstruction is bound to reveal some cracks in the construction of their identity. These cracks represent the unjustified causes of their troubled relationship with and through the body. In their self-study, as in an academic social analysis, they are, essentially, identifying the breaking points in the "the peculiar nexus of power and knowledge that gives rise to the field of intelligible things," as Butler says in her 2004 book *Undoing Gender*. Accordingly, as the characters analyze their past, they find unacceptable oppressing models built into their lives and self. Butler calls these breaking points "[the field's] discontinuities, and the sites where it fails to constitute the intelligibility it promises." When it comes to gender, according to Butler, the repressed subjects may stand for themselves and balance the existing power relations when they "trace the moments where the binary system of gender is disputed and challenged, where the coherence of the categories are put into question, and where the very social life of gender turns out to be malleable and transformable" (*Undoing* 215). Once the revelation alters the characters' reaction to social surveillance, it affects their situation, at least to a minimal extent. Thus, it generates a transformation and spreads toward changing the situation of women in general.

Notably, while a variety of transformative processes of this type propels both novels forward, the degree of change of external conditions is limited. The characters' restricted power over physiological developments such as sickness and aging or over violent repression exercised by political authorities imposes a boundary over their power to transform. However, in the face of unchangeable circumstance, the characters develop a growing determination to struggle against the status quo. The possibility of transformation emerges, therefore, in the characters' reaction to their circumstance, relationships, body and the unity of the self. It is indisputable that Rennie cannot heal her body from

a lurking illness or release herself from jail, and that Elaine cannot stop the process of aging or change past relationships. Yet, they become aware of the oppressing nature of social conventions that determine the “wrong” type of bodies, unacceptable behavior, “the other,” and gender-based roles. As they notice the implications of their own passive reception, they become better armed to raise their voice and contest discriminatory, harmful, or dehumanizing norms.

The transformation that takes place in Rennie’s and Elaine’s perception of their situation is aimed toward the recuperation of their life-force and self-acceptance. This kind of transformation is defined, for the use of this study, as “healing.” It involves a disconnection of self-esteem from the body’s biological, medical, or aesthetic condition, as well as from socially-constructed hierarchical patterns. It also involves a unification of the different parts of the self.

Ideally, Rennie and Elaine will construct the meaning of the body in their own terms. The conceivable change, however, involves the “lived body” in a constantly shifting situation. The characters may construct constant new meanings for the body as they stretch the fabric of their social awareness. This partial healing is a change made possible within a culture.

Basically, once Rennie and Elaine identify their weakness in relation to society and their alienation from their body as problems, a change has already occurred. In this sense, the course of deconstruction is in itself not only a transformative act but also a transformation. The progression from one state of consciousness to another involves a degree of healing. While this improvement may prove incomplete, Atwood obviously gives her female characters opportunities to reconstruct their lives.

In order for the narrative to show this transformation, *Bodily Harm* and *Cat's Eye* depict the development of women’s identity and behavior since their childhood, illustrating the formative power of socio-cultural pressures. Both novels open with grown-up protagonists, deliberately introduced in a moment of crisis. As discussed in Chapter 2, Rennie and Elaine are waking up after a lifelong of surrender to rules and inequalities. At this point in the narrative, their peak of pain stirs them away from the inertia of their actions and gives them an urge to question the sources of their discomfort. They start telling the stories of their past in order to understand the route they have taken, and obtain control. In the course of their analyses, issues of body-image, bodily harm, and the relation between the body and self-worth gradually take their due place on the front stage. In fact, as the protagonists first

appear, they are suffering because of issues related to socially marginalized bodies. Rennie feels damaged due to her scarred breast and the sickness' stigma and threat, and Elaine feels too unattractive for social encounters. While they explore their history, they deal anew with traumatic power relations that have occurred in diverse times, places, and situations. Much of their traumatic past experience, it appears, is related to gender relations and social surveillance, two elements that focus on the female body. They go on and question their childhood friendships, family and school education, choices of vocation, romantic relationships, and states of illness and aging. Rennie's story also includes extreme events involving abuse, violence, and incarceration.

From the moment Elaine and Rennie find these breaking points, they face the high task of releasing themselves from the pressures that have made them feel guilty and inadequate. Since their body perception has resulted from those emotions, it stands to question now. Once they are able to draw a parallel between their alienation from their bodies and their alienation from life in general, they are ready to grasp the chance of release from a numb existence. It becomes clear that a conscious integration of their split past and present, head and body, emotion, logic and physicality is essential for the sake of healing. Consequently, as the following sections will clear, the ends of both novels introduce a moment of transformation of this sort.

However, timely points of transformation appear earlier, when the characters take a leap toward liberation. Elaine's rejection of her childhood tormentors and her complete exchange of victim/victimizer sides with Cordelia is an example of such a leap. Yet, the healing of her emotional wound has not been complete, and she has to return to these events and face them. In the same manner, Rennie's departure from her reactionary family and hometown is a transformative moment that does not result in healing.

The map of these and other past and present relationships and occurrences, drawn from Rennie's and Elaine's points of view, changes as they define the problematic elements. The description of their ongoing process provides the readers with a study of fundamental issues in women's situation, gender-related psychological and political concerns, and the question of female victimization. Based on that, this chapter investigates whether the characters' new understanding gives them the power to transform and heal themselves, their behavior and situation, and if so, how it reflects on the situation of women in general.

3.1. Writing and the Body

The transformative act that relates and contains all others in *Cat's Eye* and *Bodily Harm* is the act of writing itself, or rather, the protagonists' storytelling. When they find their voice and begin their straightforward storytelling, it is, literally and figuratively, a bodily expression. The bursting stories change the protagonists' position in the world. As literary scholar Davies argues in *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood* while discussing Cixous's elaboration of female silence in *The Laugh of the Medusa*, "Atwood's female tellers of their own stories are emerging from a lifetime of enforced or self-imposed silence (the aural equivalent of void)" (12).

Presently, the concept of silence requires a contemporary and contextual adaptation. Clearly, in many parts of the world including Canada, the setting of both novels, women write nowadays with more freedom than they had in preceding centuries. Margaret Atwood's work serves as an adequate example of this. However, the characters have ignored or misjudged their own life views, and expressed themselves in a limited way. Elaine has expressed herself through paintings, without actually daring to read what they represent. Her artwork is a way of simultaneously showing and hiding a story she is not ready to acknowledge. Only she can connect this unconscious attempt at storytelling to her past and present difficulties. It leads to a breakthrough and a chance of reconstruction. In Rennie's case, her superficial writing in lifestyle magazines perpetuates the culture in which she is trapped. Therefore her choice of journalism cannot be considered a conscious writing. She doesn't dare to make her feelings known, refrains from describing anything from her own point of view, and thus, she shuts out her own voice. The distortion of her self-expression, like Elaine's denial of her past interactions, may not be the complete silence Cixous has spoken about, but it is a muffled voice. Rennie and Elaine feel banished from the sphere of words by individuals and authorities that reject their point of view. Their compromises reflect social and self-imposed censorship. They have practically raised "little voice" as Iris Marion Young calls it: "Just because images and expectations about women make us asymmetrically associated with sex, birth, age, and flesh, we have little voice to express our own point of view on this fleeting existence or on the social relations that position us" (3).

In line with their silence, the characters also evict themselves from their bodies. Their detachment is the outcome of their avoidance of any spontaneous presence. The self they have been educated to be

cannot co-exist with their physicality. Their troubled relation with their body expresses and helps the readers understand their psyches and their background. Their body is, as Davies writes,

The site of diseases of the breast [...] bad hearts and evil eyes; it is the site on which political power is exercised and the site on which abuse is practiced and in turn rehearsed. Atwood's female bodies are socio-cultural documents, [...], and always they are unmistakable signs of key energies at work within the novel to hand (56).

Hence, both acts, silencing the words and silencing the body, are forged by social rules. This kind of silence is metaphorically related to incarceration due to its prohibitive and limiting essence. Notably, in Rennie's case it is also a literal and physical situation, as she is imprisoned. Paradoxically, it is there that she breaks her silence, digging under the surface after years of succumbing to pressures. She confesses to her cellmate Lora her fear of emotional involvement, and goes on to tell her about the most trying moments in her life. Her confession is an act of liberation from her emotional imprisonment. The words form her own version of her history, finally building a bridge to everything she has shut out.

Beside incarceration, Atwood offers another body-related metaphor with respect to lack of words. It appears in Elaine's retrospective story, involving the discomfort of the body once more. As Grace calls Elaine to say, "We'll come and get you," Elaine's body absorbs the disguised threat and reacts to it: "My stomach feels dull and heavy, as if it's full of earth" (136). After coming out of her home and joining the menacing girls, she turns aside and throws up the alphabet soup she has just had for lunch onto the snow. She notices "the real thing, alphabet soup [...] amazingly red and orange against the white of the snow, with here and there a ruined letter" (137.) At that point she is afraid of the revealing power of her words, but she discovers colors. Later, she turns to art for a visual self-expression. She portrays women, including herself, in images that reveal body-related experiences, but she interprets them in a restricted manner. The breakthrough takes place right before the retrospective exhibit of her paintings. She realizes that the images carry stories she has forgotten, portray people that hurt her permanently, and express emotions she has eternalized without knowing it. The people are portrayed in a provocative way, challenging common conventions and expectations, but they are also a canvas of fear and resentment of such conventions and expectations. In her reevaluation

she finds, for the first time, that the portrayed women have been grounded in restraining spaces and possibilities. She stops reading different, lighter meanings into the paintings. Instead, she puts the stories into words, breaking the shell that isolated her. New emotions such as compassion and self-forgiveness rise and enable some recovery. Her healing process, just as Rennie's, starts with words but involves liberation across the whole self. The subsequent peace the characters make with the body is a sign of transformation.

2.1. From Ambiguity to Unity

Before the characters come to terms with the body, both of them adhere to the binary division of body and mind, and treat their bodies as an external being to their selves. The way they perceive their respective body and self reflects their specific life experience and their unique personality. Clearly, each of them has developed her own manner of coping with social construction and surveillance. For example, as a girl, Elaine lives in the woods, feeling as a unity, without determining where the body starts and ends in relation to her thoughts and emotions. The memory of this flowing sense of body and mind makes her long for those days of freedom when they are over. She sees them as the days in which she could be authentic. More than a question of an inherent identity, it is one of freedom to be and an unblocked joy of living. Her instinctive acceptance of herself changes later. During her school years, due to the rigid gender rules, school uniform, and changing perspective she learns to behave the ways girls are expected to, but she is not good at it. Her way of moving in space changes, and her body becomes a stranger. As she suffers abuse from other girls, she learns to distance herself from this separate unit, a body of pain, by shutting it off, as if it were a tool. She turns it on, later, upon learning to explore her senses for the pleasure of sex. In this phase, she still treats her body as a conduit that can be open or shut, as if it did not generate and share her emotions. Later, still, as a middle-aged woman, she finds the changes in her body to be disturbing. This latter turmoil takes place because she surrenders to the gaze that defines her through her body as a material thing that can deteriorate. Her body experience has two major influences. On one hand, her body exercises her own intentional, conscious, physical control. On the other, it is a tool of society to control her, and her movements are affected by the pressure of social surveillance. Therefore, her body, as the female body in general, is lived as Young says, an "ambiguous transcendence" that encompasses an "inhibited

intentionality” and a “discontinuous unity [of the body] with its surrounding” (147). Her alienation from her body, the distance she tries to create between the body and the self to avoid pain, is clearly spread in other areas in her life. Eventually, she finds that her detachment has rendered her lonely. It has never protected her, at least not for long. She recognizes the relations of domination woven into the fabric of her self. This recognition facilitates an emancipatory change.

Like Elaine, Rennie too, experiences social pressures that cause a disruption of her psyche, alienating her body. She lives in a society that treats the body as a wild dog that should be tamed, while also taking sexuality to stardom, nurturing a contradictory message. She rebels against her rigid background where physicality is determined as the negative aspect of life. It appears, however, that she does so because of her body urges, and not because she disagrees. When she liberates her body for sex, she cannot identify herself with that “wild dog”, and therefore, there is no unity whatsoever. She treats the spiritual mind as superior to the sexual body when she says that her body is not her self.

After the operation, her fear of death, and her shame in her mutilated body, or rather, her inadequate body, become the two poles around which her mind revolves, and the two forces behind the transformation of her life. These factors are inseparable as instruments of change and are united through Rennie’s perception. However, while awareness of one’s mortality does not raise questions of gender, primarily, the type of sickness and the impacting nature of the scarred feminine organ specify it as a matter of the female body and women’s situation. In the operation, Rennie faces a risk of life. She goes through a metaphorical process of rebirth, as she feels the reverberation of the life upon recovering. This new perception enables a mental process of inclusion of life, psyche, and body, but her full understanding of this unity takes place slowly. In the process, the body is equalized to life, since she needs to reunite with both. However, upon her arrival on the island, she still keeps distance from life. She remains a passive onlooker in a scene of systematic violence. Only when she feels the need to comment on the violence, after having told her story, there is a clear sign of transformation. In the course of getting there, she recaptures her sense of the body, of living. Finally, she recovers the values she used to judge important before surrendering to pressures. When she acknowledges her body as a part of her whole self and lets it merge with it, she enters into the flow of life.

The final liberation from the crystallized sense of separation between her emotions and her body, and between herself and her life, is also linked to Rennie's release from the hell of the islands. In fact, the chapter relating Rennie's release from jail--thanks to Canadian diplomatic efforts--is told in the future tense, leaving a doubt as to whether it would actually take place. However, it illustrates liberation from a factual and figurative jail and suggests hope and personal victory. The remaining doubt regarding her release is a reminder of the fragility of people standing against forces that conspire against them.

As the respective histories open for the protagonists' new interpretations, the body's biological sex, aesthetics, health, and physical vulnerability lose their determining, existential meaning. Rennie and Elaine learn that none of these socially determining parameters has ever been as significant as their surrender to "the gaze." This transformation illustrates the poststructuralist view that deconstruction makes change possible. The beginning of the healing process occurs here.

Moreover, Rennie and Elaine change their definition of what constitutes bodily harm, thus having a basis for resistance. Against their initial viewpoint, they recognize that mental and physical aggressions toward women are not a momentary slip but the reflection of a discriminatory worldview based on the biological body. The process is ongoing, as they articulate emotions and experiences felt in their skin, so to speak, and come to terms with their bodies. The different parts of their selves melt together, allowing a flow of life and a recovery of their power.

3.3. The Final Act of Transformation

The protagonists' changed perception is established by the act of storytelling and by the stories themselves. However, the question of to what degree their new point of view represents transformation does not get a full answer in the narrative. Undoubtedly, as the protagonists occupy a storyteller's position, they analyze themselves almost as characters in their stories, and perceive the objectification of their body along with the resulting guilt and shame. They are better aware that their body has been judged according to rigid standards, always standing in relation to other bodies. They also recall lovers, who held positions of authority, a teacher in Elaine's case and an employer in Rennie's, who diminished them to stereotypes based on gender. Until now, Rennie and Elaine have felt unaffected by social pressure, but they finally realize

how untrue this feeling is. Currently, they manage to connect the socio-cultural context of their upbringing and of their life as grown-ups to their suffering.

However, as already mentioned, Rennie's and Elaine's identity has been constructed in a patriarchal society. Therefore, despite the deconstruction, their coming to terms with their bodies is not unambiguous. The most obvious example is Rennie's two contradictory attitudes to her acute body-related discomfort. First, she transforms the parameters she uses for the examination of her history after realizing that her difficulty reflects the traditional values she has acquired. This reading should give her faith in her power to challenge social conditioning and existing power relations, but it is not enough. While processing it, she dislocates from one place to another and from one man to another, sliding into her old roles. She goes against her independence and turns to men for approval and transformation. When her partner, Jake, does not attend to her emotional necessities, she starts an affair with her surgeon, Daniel. She wants "the touch of the hand that could transform you, change everything, magic" (195). It becomes clear that she seeks a parallel mental route to the physical operation. After all, his healing hands have saved her and changed the route of her life. However, Daniel's limited availability angers and disappoints her, and she leaves him. Subsequently, she reaches out for the healing power of another, this time the enigmatic, possibly an arm dealer, Paul, and she is finally successful. In a transforming act of lovemaking, her body and her feelings gain force, united, and the surface becomes less important. The gaze takes its simple position as one of the five senses involved in their sexual attraction. Most importantly, the transformative act has the power to confirm to her that she can live wholly. In another turn, this dependent act of transformation leads to an autonomous one. Now that she feels stronger, she is ready to fight any social pressures to shut up. She may still depend on the male's gaze for her romantic and sexual involvement, but she is also able to combat surveillance aimed to bind her. She has an urge to act upon her beliefs before she is silenced again, this time by death.

When Rennie is separated from Paul by force, her encounter with Lora becomes the important catalyzer in the assertion of her transforming point of view. This is a different process. To begin with, she does not start their connection with hopes for healing. In this case, a full arc of spontaneous transformation occurs between her resentment in the beginning and her compassion in the end of their contact.

Symbolically, her body is the tool through which she gives Lora strength.

When the women first meet, Rennie passes a judgment on Lora, based on Lora's looks and unrestrained speech. Rennie acts as a judgmental onlooker, a journalist perhaps, defining Lora as a vulgar woman from a lower class. Soon after their first meeting, Lora asks Rennie to release an international delivery package on her behalf, saying there is medication in it. Although Rennie finds that the package contains firearms, she considers it a bother more than a cynical exploitation. Later, as the two of them are imprisoned in the same cell, she resists Lora's intimate stories. She says with certain disdain,

The Women's Movement would have loved Lora,
back in the old days, back in the early seventies. .
. . They'd have given her ten out of ten for
openness, a word that always made Rennie think
of a can of worms with the top 'off'. (93)

For a while, Lora's stories of abuse don't change Rennie's certainty that women are not oppressed any longer, and therefore don't need to fight for justice. She sees the feminist call for openness between women as forced intimacy, and for that reason, she toughens against Lora's revelations.

In fact, Rennie's initial reaction to Lora is an illustration of the marginal social status of lower-class women. She refuses to listen to Lora, exactly like all the people who have populated Lora's life. She even goes as far as planning a makeover for her, instead of paying attention. She also develops distaste for Lora's trading with sex in exchange for small favors. Gradually, however, Lora's substantial, tragic reality, along with her emotional flow break through Rennie's disinterest. Lora's stories of repeated sexual abuse and abandon seem more real and threatening the longer the women are in jail. They witness daily abuse of prisoners, and Rennie's grasp of victimization and marginalization is built up. The reality of violence and its relevance to her own body alert her to this danger. She peels the labels she has put on Lora's persona and looks in. Finally, she captures the depth of oppression from which Lora and other women suffer, and she needs to act upon it. She says, "She doesn't have much time left, for anything. But neither does anyone else. She's paying attention, that's all" (301).

The final stage of the transformation in her view occurs along with Lora's final suffering, during and after Lora's beating by the prison guard. It is described through a merciless corpus, as defined by Shahar, with excruciating details. In the face of such violence, Rennie has no

doubt something drastic needs to be done. However, while the guards beat Lora, she doesn't dare protest, because her fear is greater than her resentment. Atwood makes the conflict clear:

He [Morton] catches the raised leg, lifts, tips her backwards toward the boy, [...] Now nobody needs to hold her arms [...] They go for the breasts and the buttocks, the stomach, the crotch, the head, jumping. [...] he'll break her so that she'll never make another sound. (292)

Rennie aches for Lora. She says, "Lora twists on the floor of the corridor, surely she can't feel it any more, but she's still twisting." She "wants to tell them to stop. She wants to be strong enough to do that but she isn't, she can't make a sound, they'll see her" (293). However, she absorbs everything despite her characteristic urge to keep her distance: "She doesn't want to see, she has to see, why isn't someone covering her eyes?" (293). Right now, as critic Bouson claims, "Lora is the very emblem of the silenced, victimized woman and the fragmented body/self" (130). Rennie cannot ignore it whether she wants to or not.

At this stage, Rennie is aware that she holds a superior position to Lora, having had access to economic benefits, educational means, and public exposure. Consequently, she takes the responsibility to represent Lora and repeat what she heard from her. Rennie has become a stronger person, and, on a physical level, stronger than Lora. She feels that she has the power of bringing Lora back from the verge of death.

As in other turning points in the novel, the body and physical connectedness have a significant role here. Rennie holds and pulls Lora's hand to save Lora from the death that is pulling at her from the other side. The corpus brings to mind the image of giving birth. "She's gritting her teeth with the effort, she can hear herself, a moaning, it must be her own voice, this is a gift, this is the hardest thing she's ever done. [...] Surely, if she can only try hard enough, something will move and live again, something will get born" (299). Rennie is trying to pull Lora into life through a closing hole. At the same time, her own caring side is reborn as well. When she hears Lora say "Oh, God," she is simultaneously relieved and doubtful--she might have imagined it. However, the question of reality doesn't lessen this moment of transformation. Two major changes have occurred: the awakening of Rennie's compassion, and the upsurge of her resolution to speak up where her voice will be heard, trying to save people from violence.

As for Elaine, the transformation is more internal, less related to actions. She looks back at her life, questioning the nature of time and

trying to untie the emotional knot inside herself. She is reluctant to see the advance of time, of the years acting on her body. She is in the middle of her life, according to her, and she feels the burden of the past and of her age. However, she recalls that "Time is not a line but a dimension" (3), as she has learned from her brother Stephen in their childhood. There are no fixed boundaries in this flow, and therefore her self is not limited to what she sees in the mirror or experiences currently. As critic Tolan says, "Atwood draws a parallel between the psychologist's exploration of the mind and the physicist's exploration of the universe." The field of time is the field of Elaine's psyche. Everything in her past and present exists simultaneously in different dimensions and on the same field. She gradually accepts this in relation to herself, since this concept explains why her childhood trauma keeps pulling her downwards, causing her death wish. Her process of transformation must occur, unified, on all levels of time and existence. She studies her past suffering and resentment, and reads the actions of the people who have left a mark on her in the light of wider social influences. As she develops a better understanding of power struggles, victimization, and sources of behavior, she is not stuck anymore with unsolved traumas.

However, for this process to be successful, Elaine has to investigate every event and person she has avoided or forgotten over the years. The visual translation of gathering the pieces can be read as completing a puzzle. Clearly, Cordelia is a fundamental piece in this final construction of Elaine's identity. Elaine has blocked this part of her and its unresolved issues, thus inflicting pain upon herself. Now that she remembers Cordelia, she wishes suffering upon her, while at the same time she longs to have her as a friend. Most of all, she is afraid to find that she is Cordelia, or rather, that Cordelia is a part of her, since they have exchanged roles in their relationship. She knows she has demonstrated Cordelia's unforgiving temperament both in their late friendship and in her paintings. She has also internalized Cordelia's fascination with the body, along with the loathing of its unexpected, grotesque, and uncontrolled aspects. There is so much of Cordelia in her conscious and unconscious self, that Cordelia is no longer her childhood tormentor but everything in Elaine that Elaine has denied.

During this retrospective analysis, Elaine remembers Cordelia's miserable home life. She also notices Mrs. Smeath's fearful eyes in the portrait she has made of her. In fact, it appears that all the women and girls who have tormented Elaine have suffered from the same crippling effect of repression in their homes. She is less resentful now, because

she understands the constant influences that ran among all of them. With her growing, liberating ability for compassion, she is also forgiving herself for distancing herself from her life and emotions.

The next step involves Elaine's final reconstruction of her life. It occurs in the last part in the novel, titled, like Elaine's painting, "Unified Field Theory." In this painting, the "Virgin of Lost Things" appears by the ravine, holding the subject of the novel's title, the cat's eye. As Elaine rereads the painting, she combats her unconscious censorship of past events and emotions, seeing that everything is tied together. The cat's eye encompasses her current ability to see her entire life in the unified field of apparently split and contradicting units. She notices "Star upon star [...] galaxy upon galaxy: the universe in its incandescence and darkness." These are set under the bridge from which she almost descended into death. Along with the grand spectrum she also sees the endless movement of all things large and small, the "underside of the ground" (408), stones, beetles and small roots. The view implies a unification of the universal and the individual, the apparent and the hidden. Once she is able to see everything as unified, the conflict between alleged oppositions, the mental and the physical, is resolved. Elaine is able to see action and reaction, relationships creating and recreating other relationships, and misery as an echo of other misery. As a result, her difficulty in accepting her self is reaching its end. The grandiosity of unification applies to constant movement and change, therefore liberating her from shame or guilt in regard to her body. She can bend conventions, since their relative power is exposed. In the last chapter, called Bridge, she finds peace by bridging between all the influences, dimensions, and times that have torn her apart. Symbolically, she decides to go out as she is, without trying to adjust her appearance to expectations of others.

Body in Transformation

Now, in what was to be the end of the process but is only the midway, I can hardly come up with a single answer to the question whether anything has transformed from the time I learned about the potential genetic mutation, to the day I decided I needed to know the truth despite the nature of the best way of prevention, to the moment I was informed I had the BRCA 1 mutation which presented a real risk of ovarian and breast cancer, to the long days of the surgeries and to the present time in which I am writing about it all.

Physiologically speaking, my breasts have changed, as their inner tissue is gone, their skin is marked by two long scars like crescent moons underneath them and two fine pink crisscrosses on top, and the reconstruction has given them an artificial texture and a round form. In my belly button and on the sides of my stomach, three little scars remind me of the removal of my ovaries. I mostly inspect them when I add an extra layer of protection from sunrays before going to the beach. Also, without ovaries, I have definitely entered my menopause. Hormonal replacement therapy has solved the issue of hot waves, exercise keeps me in shape, but aging becomes obvious. I remind myself that I have removed the ovaries after having had children and shortly before I would have entered menopause anyway. The process of aging is unavoidable.

The way I see the physical changes borders with the nonphysical and involves dread. Has old age ever been welcomed by women? Has it been an issue of sorrow before these youth-crazed times? In any case, other sorts of change have occurred due to the passage of time. I have gone through a process of adjustment to the lack and to the addition, and eventually developed a sense of acceptance that probably means becoming mature. My constant relief, ever since the surgeries took place, has made the difficulties seem rather irrelevant. In a general manner, there has been less fear on my mind.

I had to learn to handle fear. As a ten-year-old girl, I alternated between running across the entrance to the dark building basement at full speed, and organizing children to act as detectives and search for dangerous people in all the hidden corners. With the detectives, as a group, I was not afraid of the lurking danger, and in the heat of action, I even stopped believing it existed. In the same way, I have dealt with the genetic mutation and the preemptive surgeries on my own, since I only had the support of people who have not gone through the same experience, but I am writing and reading about it, in order to join in the wider, protective circle of a group.

At seventeen, after my parents' early deaths, my fear from the unknown was abstract but intense, not very different from expecting something horrible to jump at you from a dark passage. As was my habit, I used two strategies: either breezing over possibilities of death and illness without looking at them closely, or investigating them in extensive but impersonal reading, as if it had little to do with me. Unfortunately, nothing worked out well enough for me to feel I was in control. From the general idea of danger, I pulled threads of internal and external, true and imaginary threats to my life and the lives of my

beloved ones. In the end, all turned into a consuming worry about things that hadn't yet happened but might. Above all, I looked suspiciously at my body, wondering if hidden random cells were already multiplying like rabbits in heat. I told myself these were irrational fears. When I was surrounded by people, I could forget about it.

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Eventually, I decided to take control over my life, or rather, over my health, by learning about the specific danger I faced and taking the measures to beat it. There are other risks in life, all kinds of them, but the fact I'd do something -- a lot-- to reduce the most fearful one made me feel secure. Afterwards, the tranquilizing effect of the preemptive surgeries appeared even in my aesthetic judgment of my body. When I look at my mirror reflection, I am far more concerned about weight and wrinkles than about my scars. Fat and lines stand as obstacles for my tiresome but solid expectation to look at the mirror and find that I am beautiful. Even so, since the pain of eliminating them is not backed up by health issues, I'd rather breeze over mirrors (that dark passage) than fight the effect of the years. The scars, on the other hand, are justified as side effects of getting rid of high risk and intense fear, and I don't mind them much. Their source overpowers their appearance. It is remarkable that despite my mother's admiration of beauty, and my confusion between being beautiful and being loved and admired, (well, actually, the latter is sustained everywhere,) the battle to stay healthy has won over the battle for beauty. I am behind this set of priorities even if I strive to win everywhere.

3.4. Social Acts of Resistance and Transformation

The narratives of *Cat's Eye* and *Bodily Harm* don't disclose how the change generated by the characters impacts others. In regard to their individual struggles, Elaine gathers her pieces, comes to terms with all the parts that constitute her identity, including her body, and finds peace in her ability to accept and forgive both others and herself. Rennie accepts her self as a unit that includes the body while existing beyond the physical body, rejects her past passivity, and finds the strength to speak up for change.

However, in order to study the extent of their impact in the broad spectrum, it is necessary to observe the nature of social transformation. According to Butler in *Undoing Gender*, social transformation involves collective action and shared experience. In these

terms, the range of the protagonists' social influence is fairly limited. Another view is taken by Beauvoir and Grosz, as they focus on the way individual acts work to maintain and reproduce oppressive systems, actually constituting them. Based on this assertion of the grandiosity of individual acts, it can be assumed that individual acts can also accumulate into resistance against oppressive systems and transformation. Conversely, Butler argues that this phenomenological view of constituting acts is a good indicator of oppression, but that such acts are not sufficient to constitute an oppressive regime. She explains that repetitive repressing social acts become possible only in certain socio-cultural conditions, so it is inconceivable to see oppression as the sole consequence of such acts. According to her, it is necessary to transform the hegemonic social conditions in which these acts are conceivable. Therefore, individual acts such as Elaine's and Rennie's have a limited power to transform their surroundings. However, Butler restricts the implication of her argument, as she recognizes that there are certain nuances and personal ways of action that are constituting acts in the same way social sanctions and prohibitions constitute society. Since there seems to be a common ground among the mentioned scholars, it seems fit to raise the question of whether and how the protagonists partake in or contribute to social transformation.

In the end of their inner journey, the protagonists recognize the harm caused by debilitating norms. Both of them learn the connection made between the female body and gender roles, resent its effect on themselves and on the people in their lives, and try to overcome the distressful impact it has left. In her process of deconstructing such norms and roles, Elaine understands the control mechanism used by Cordelia and Mrs. Smeath, and Rennie comprehends her grandmother's rigid education as the fruit of these women's upbringing. Similarly, Elaine and Rennie find that their lovers, teachers, and employers have operated from within the same patriarchal system. This analysis leads to a series of individual acts.

As mentioned before, Elaine's first transformation point occurs in her childhood when she gradually changes her patterns of behavior and preferences to "girly" ones. The second change, however, is an act of resistance that follows her banishment to the freezing ravine and her miraculous survival, as she recognizes a breaking point in the molding system. She realizes that everything said and done by her friends has been false. Her behavior will change once more:

I can hear this for what it is. It's an imitation, it's acting. It's an impersonation of someone much

older. It's a game. There was never anything about me that needed to be improved. It was always a game, and I have been fooled. I have been stupid. My anger is as much at myself as at them. (108)

As she identifies the forces and interests that stand behind morality, and links them with abusive power, she accepts her individuality and breaks free from the guilt of being socially inadequate. Naturally, as a child, she does not realize the grander scale related to the girls' futile grasp at power and control. However, she challenges her tormentors, whose power relations are changing as well, as a result, and solves her problem by dismissing the whole relationship.

Like her, Rennie arrives at the conclusion that she has been wrong to surrender to external pressures. She questions her previous transformation into an object of sexuality and beauty, or of no opinion, when she lets herself question the roles she has been given by Jake and by the editor. Once she acknowledges her resentment, she starts to accept her forgotten, original values and emotions. She is no longer willing to adhere to the type of acts, appearance, intellect, and emotion expected from girls and women. By doing so, she impacts the lives of the people around her.

Nevertheless, it remains for the readers to stretch the protagonists' respective influential social acts, and apply this finding to a general order. The protagonists don't go as far as considering if there is a need to define and delimit the mundane manner in which sex and gender are produced, reproduced and maintained within the field of bodies. This is where Atwood's creative writing, the books themselves, comes into action as tools for social change. Through the act of reaching the readers' consciousness, the transformative process of the characters becomes significant not only within the books, but also outside them. The author raises her voice, with a narrative that explores the need to raise it.

As Atwood explores the development of the girls' relationships in *Cat's Eye*, or the deterioration of Rennie's values as she surrenders to pressures in *Bodily Harm*, she clarifies that the oppressed, "the other" needs to detect the false assumptions of the dominant discourse and contest them. According to Bouson, *Bodily Harm* "sounds a warning about the backlash against feminism which emerged in the 1980s." These years, the new generation of young woman declares that "feminism is irrelevant and [...] imagine[s] themselves as 'past all that.'" (111). *Cat's Eye* handles the same issue of women's avoidance of feminism. Elaine relates the feminist movement to the generalization of

women as one group, and to pressures and intolerance within feminist groups. As the narrative advances in both books, however, it becomes clear to characters and readers that the situation of women has not become as comfortable as the protagonists have assumed until their existential crises.

Elaine and Rennie themselves are aware of the harm done by repression, although they are hardly aware of the philosophical and sociological aspects of their personal power relations. The poststructuralist view of sex and gender as conjoined with historical constructs reified as natural and universal in the service of reproductive and economic interests is not a part of their self-inquiry. However, their relationships constitute a skeleton of oppression that Atwood introduces for the sake of change. The novels make it clear that only a voice others can hear holds the power to change the existing equation.

3.5. Partial Conclusions

This chapter has questioned whether the characters have gone through transformation, its extent, and its impact on their lives and on the lives of others. The definitions of transformation and healing include a requirement for a drastic change. The change, however, can only be done within the dominant social patterns, by bending them in a limited measure. The characters find the breaking points in the social construction, and adapt their lives to their new perception. The change is possible in small acts in their immediate surroundings. They drop harmful relationships and resist pressures as much as they can. They also develop compassion toward individuals who have suffered from oppression, and in Rennie's case, she is determined to represent the oppressed in society. The relation between words, storytelling and the body comes to effect as the characters change their relationships with and through the body while they go through a parallel unification in every aspect in their lives, across time and place. Their storytelling galvanizes the process of transformation, becoming a transforming act in itself. Thanks to the wider perspective it provides the protagonists, they reconnect with everything repressed and denied, change their standing in their own lives, and create an affect of ripples that touch the lives of others.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the literary representation of the female body in Margaret Atwood's novels *Cat's Eye* and *Bodily Harm* has focused on the female body experience within the socio-cultural context of the investigator and of the investigated works and characters. Based on the poststructuralist recognition of the importance of context and constant change in the construction of textual meanings, the reading of the female body in literature has also included creative writing texts to illustrate where the researcher is situated in relation to the topic. The implicit but clear thematic interaction between the academic analysis and the artistically creative one has served as a bridge between over what may have been wrongly considered as a dichotomy between opposites.

In order to solidify the analysis, a four-element study, loosely based on Aristotle's theory of the four causes, has been conducted. The first element, the material one, has included the text dealing directly with the body, or, in Shahar's concept, the corpus. The sensory experience introduced through the corpus is read in terms of the culture that influences the characters and the writing. This element has served as a basis for the second element, the element of form, essence, and reason. This includes the social factors in the situation of the female body in the novels, and therefore has been studied through the analysis of the occurrences that surfaced in the protagonists' recollection: power relations, social roles, and perception of body and self. Furthermore, the reasons behind the characters' discomfort with the body have been investigated in regard to the body's social meaning in the individual history of the protagonists, and in the historical context of the novels' conception. Thus, issues of the female body have been introduced in dialogue with discourse and socio-cultural developments. Simultaneously, the third element, the element of process, has been utilized to explore how the individual body-related experiences have formed the characters' identity and relationships with and through their bodies since their childhood. The study has examined the extent to which senses, thought, emotions, and external influences are interrelated across time and space as they affect the protagonists' experience of the body. The characters' respective processes, beginning from compliance with identity-shaping patterns and ending on a point of resistance, however relative, has been related to a possible change in their consciousness of body and self. The study of the process has also set the ground for the fourth element, that of objective, or future meaning. This

element has been studied under the prism of possible transformation and healing. The protagonists have gone through previous, episodic processes of transformation across their lives, but these have not resulted in healing and liberation. Hence, the study has focused on finding whether the current act of deconstruction of their whole life has generated change in their behavior, emotional state, and sense of body and self, leading to a sense of healing and transformation. The study of this question has also been observed in its relation to a general social change. The excerpts of creative writing have echoed the same themes.

With the help of the four causes, the two questions that were placed in the heart of this thesis have been analyzed and answered.

1. Leading Question I

The first question is how each of the works enables an articulation of the problems of being female, and what germane themes appear and reappear in these works.

Fundamentally, the narratives, the historical contexts of the novels, and the characters are at the basis of the themes the author explores. Through these, Atwood, a socially conscious writer, articulates the effect of power relations and cultural systems of signification on the formation of women's notion and experience of the female body. The body experience is explored through the characters' points of view, during their respective processes of deconstruction, as the two women review the conflicts and anxieties they have experienced throughout their lives. In the beginning of the novels the protagonists halt the race of life in a moment of crisis, observe and reevaluate their history. They recover lost memories and observe their relationships, traumas, behavior, roles, and decisions. The overview offers an opportunity to explore processes that shape women's identity and provoke a body-related anxiety. With the help of this introduction, the author constructs familiarity with the fictional lives of Rennie and Elaine. Clearly, the novels differ in their plots, introducing a rather blatant storyline in *Bodily Harm*, and a subtler one in *Cat's Eye*, but problems of discrimination, abuse, and social molding are discussed in both.

Thanks to the readers' involvement with the text, the novels carry these relevant issues into a wider social debate. While the protagonists' lives are paraded, each novel focuses on testing moments and relationships that illustrate problems women face in society. The readers accompany the processes of deconstruction, enabled to bridge

between fiction and social realities, deconstruct and reconstruct their own reality and worldview.

Cat's Eye describes a childhood in the woods where liberty and joy stand in contradiction to the rest of this childhood in the city of Toronto in the 1940's and 1950's. Elaine has to adjust to the rigid patriarchal system of education and to the repressing acts of the products of this system, her girlfriends and their families. Through the girl's difficulty in doing so, the author illustrates the problems of growing up as a girl in a sexist society. Unlike Elaine, in *Bodily Harm* Rennie does not have the privilege of growing up in the wilderness. She is born in the end of the 1950's or the beginning of the 1960's into a small conservative town and is educated by the women of the family to be obedient, follow the rules, avoid being original or extraordinary, and hide and repress anything physical. As the author emphasizes, despite the changes occurring in the 1960's, the town hasn't modified its values and rules. The suffocating effect of the surveillance practiced upon girls comes through strongly. This is well illustrated through Rennie's view of her body as her possession rather than a part of her self. Like Elaine after leaving the wilderness, Rennie becomes self-conscious and dependent on the way others see her. Eventually, both protagonists realize that society has marginalized women whose behavior doesn't meet certain expectations, and whose bodies do not fit a certain standard. They are molded to display stereotyped feminine characteristics, are required to be attractive, and at the same time are educated to see physicality as shameful. Influenced by these conflicting messages, Atwood shows, Elaine and Rennie have become enslaved to the body aesthetics. Moreover, they can liberate themselves sexually only at the cost of detaching the self from the body.

The historical context, a theme in itself, is brought into play through stories that take place in several decades. This is a manner of giving the reader a perspective of the socio-cultural situation of the time. Elaine's trajectory goes on through the liberation of women in the 1960's, a moment in which she is sexually active, but otherwise feels trapped in bad relationships and in her life. These years, while at the university, she finds that the period of social transformation has skipped her male colleagues and professors. Her tendency is to distrust women and seek the company of men, but she is disillusioned as she realizes that the men around her judge women by their bodies and disdain their intellectual capabilities. She finds herself in various situations in which she and women she knows are discriminated or maltreated because of their gender. It becomes clear that if she joins the masculine crowd at

the university, and shares their view of women, she will act against her own interest. Through such experiences, the author indicates the continued relevance of women's struggle for liberation and equality. The readers are invited to reach their own conclusion, as Elaine reaches hers.

Later on, in the 1980's, the last period the books discuss, the protagonists' rejection of feminism brings to mind the backlash against feminism that took place these years. The protagonists consider themselves liberated and independent, although they are suffering from their objectification by others and by themselves. The negative results of their avoidance stand to testify against social blindness, warning that denial and compliance may perpetuate patriarchal patterns. In order to explore it in *Bodily Harm*, the author makes connections between physical maladies to interrelations between people, groups and states. The metaphor of the tumor represents an uncalled for, dangerous intrusion that settles in the body and needs to be eradicated.

Other metaphors, closely connected to the body, are used to convey ideas and help the readers construct meanings. Incarceration is a figurative way to convey the impact of social surveillance and political oppression exercised on women. It appears in the narrative in a literal way when Elaine is left in a hole in the ground, and when Rennie is incarcerated on the islands. Even in such situations, the author makes clear, they can liberate their spirit from internalized oppressing powers. Elaine can stop collaborating with the girls, and Rennie can opt to support another woman and to speak against the dictatorship upon her release from jail. Another metaphor appears in *Cat's Eye* when Elaine throws up letters, implying that she loses the language, the power of words, as she is afraid. Right when she could have protested against her friends' maliciousness, she throws up broken letters against the snow. However, the colors shine against her, and until she is strong enough to express herself with words, she will be able to do it through paintings. Finally, the wound serves as a strong metaphor for all kinds of bodily harms, as well as for the possibility to look through the crack and discover depths. It is an opening, an opportunity to go and explore what lies below the surface. In Rennie's story there is an actual physical wound beside the psychic one. In Elaine's, it is a figurative wound, and she is trying to heal it by facing her past. Through these metaphors, processes of deconstruction and reconstruction, and a historical socio-cultural perspective, *Bodily Harm* deals with themes like violence, political power, prison, and brutality as they apply to women's reality in private and public spheres. *Cat's Eye* examines the concept of

sisterhood, shifting victim-victimizer relations, and the power of harmful events across time and space. All the discussed issues are clearly linked to the body through gender-based oppression and discriminatory norms. Moreover, the protagonists' struggle to heal themselves from several maladies offers different interpretations of what constitutes bodily harm, and how it is possible to reverse the situation.

Consequently, the second part of the first question proposed for analysis deals with germane body-related themes that appear and reappear in both novels. As a basis for a reply, the study has inquired whether Atwood marks a line between the biological body and the cultural concept of it. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the author turns the readers' attention to the physiological body, to sensuous existence, pulsing and throbbing, instincts, and wordless sensations through the corpus. The passages dealing with health problems, aging, sexual situations, gestures, violence and other physical conditions convey the body's unique presence in the conceptual reality to a great effect. There is no shying away from the body of movement, pleasure, hurt, and pain, or from grotesque images. The utter ease with which Elaine as a child uses her body in her wild games and exploration of nature is an early reminder of the flow of life that passes through the body. The description of the cruel beating of Lora is strong enough to derive a physical reaction from the reader. Nevertheless, vivid body sensations are constantly interlaced with descriptions of the emotional and mental aspects of the same experience. The physical does not stand separately from or in opposition to the psychic, but rather, it is a fragment of the whole, as well as a reflection, and a physical realization of everything else. In fact, while the text makes it clear that the protagonists observe their bodies as separate units from themselves, it also clarifies that this split is their source of misery or, at least, a symptom of it. Elaine's experiences of shutting out the body and of causing it harm, in order to avoid emotional pain, prove ineffective. Rennie's treatment of her body as a machine that would serve her as long as she invests in its nutrition and exercise indicates another attempted separation, in which the body has its own space, like a car in a garage. As the characters detach themselves from the body, they succumb to discourse that portrays the body as external to the self and inferior to it. They, like Plato and Descartes, believe that the self, or their identity, transcends the body and doesn't depend on it.

On the verge of beginning the process of deconstruction, the protagonists don't only draw a dividing line between the body and the self, but also see their identity as an autonomous, socially and physically

unaffected unity. However, their displayed history proves that just as the body and the self don't have a definite line between them, so do the self and society. Rennie recalls the rigid discipline in her hometown, where any revelation of physicality was punished. Elaine remembers repression at school, limiting clothes, and sexist discrimination. Together with them, the reader learns that the physical and the conceptual body are tied together. In the related concept of "the lived body", the body is lived intensely on emotionally, rationally, and physically interlaced levels. After all, it is the site on which political, social, and physical power is applied, while it is also, simultaneously, a fragment of the self, and an instrument of action. Based on the connection between all the fragments of the self, Atwood observes how conventions and practices within patriarchal society impact the characters' relationships to and through their bodies. They are constantly self-conscious, always checking themselves against external standards. Moreover, they have repressed so much inside them, that they are unable to let life flow through them, or to flow with life. This simultaneous detachment from life and from the body is an indication that body and life should be equalized. Through these interrelations, the author points out the sources of women's perception of the body and conveys that just as the body and the self don't have a definite line between them, neither do the self and society.

Similarly to the above, the theme of feminism, briefly mentioned in the first part of the answer, is studied according to the characters' situation in life. Although Rennie has valued feminism earlier, currently she enjoys financial independence, leads liberal sexual relationships, and believes that women are equal to men and in control over their lives. Elaine was involved in activities of the feminist movement when she was first married, but disliked the calls for intimacy and sisterhood, and the general rejection of men. In her middle-age now, she has already detected certain cracks in her own worldview and become somewhat cynical in her view of men, but she still considers feminism unnecessary. Both protagonists reject the feminist movement as outdated, pointless, and overgeneralizing. Since influential poststructuralist views started a call to accept a fragmentary society, and embrace individual and social differences, it is plausible that the protagonists have been swayed to detach themselves from generalizing labels, groups, and movements. The characters refuse to see themselves as a part of a discriminated fragment of society or of feminism. Nevertheless, toward the end of each novel, while their view of the feminist movement as such remains unchanged, both protagonists

reconsider their belief that all is well for women. When in jail, Rennie realizes that neither she nor other women have been ever immune to oppression. Although she hasn't suffered the brutal abuse many others have, she has been dismissed, maltreated, and pushed into values and behavior she originally disdained. Elaine, too, becomes aware of the multidimensional effect of oppression. She realizes that the girls and women that oppressed her in her childhood suffered at their homes from the same abuse they applied to her. She also observes men-women relationships as she has experienced them, and finds recurrent cases of women's oppression

The call for a struggle against injustice and violence implied by the exploration of the social problems in the characters' lives runs like a thread throughout the novels. Atwood turns the readers' attention to the reasons that stand behind violence, maintaining an interrelation of micro and macro systems. The issue of physical violence practiced by men against women is explored mainly in *Bodily Harm*. Lora's past abuse by a stepfather and other men, Rennie's threat from the intruder, and the prisoners' vulnerability in jail are reminders that men in positions of power practice violence and abuse against easy targets. This gender-specific violence continues only partly in *Cat's Eye*. In fact, the one who suffers most is Elaine's brother, Stephen, who is killed by terrorists. The problem arises, the text implies, from radicalism and abuse of power. Victimizerers are not necessarily men. Elaine's childhood girlfriends bury her in a hole on one occasion, and on another leave her to freeze in the snowy ravine. Their motives may be rooted in patriarchal notions, but they are the direct victimizers. Hence, the novel connects the murder of Stephen to the torment of the nine-year-old Elaine through injustice, violence, and victim-victimizer relations. *Bodily Harm* makes a similar link between a corporal malady and social ones, tying together a tumor, threat, home invasion, and violence.

Clearly, an important theme related to sexist society in both novels is the bodily harm, a concept that serves as the title of one of them. The question of what constitutes it receives four main responses. First, the novels deal with natural causes. Rennie suffers from breast cancer, and then, as a consequence, she undergoes mutilation and scarring. The course of her suffering goes on to include external causes and violence, the second sort of bodily harm. She is imprisoned as a spy during a violent political coup, witnesses beatings, and learns how harmful the brutality Lora suffered has been. After going through so much harm, Rennie becomes rather intimate with pain. In addition, the protagonists' shame in the imperfect body extends the concept of bodily

harm as the reaction to illness, scaring or aging. The characters start believing that they are worth less since their body no longer represents the social definition of the “adequate” one. They expect rejection of their whole selves because of their imperfect body. Interestingly, this happens even though neither of them has run into a situation of an actual rejection. Finally, a self-inflicted, physical bodily harm, the fourth type, occurs when Elaine rips off her own skin in moments of despair, mostly in her childhood, but also later, when she is in Toronto. The physical pain is supposed to relieve the emotional one, but she suffers from both, continually. Each of these types of bodily harm, the natural, the external, the subjective, and the self-inflicted provokes emotional struggles. The characters’ perception of their body and self changes with the changing situation. As a consequence of the intense appearance of bodily harm throughout the narrative, the question of survival emerges, ranging from the survival of the body itself to the survival of the person’s well-being, and the political and physical survival of disadvantaged groups and people.

The need for emotional survival has a lot to do with the theme of surveillance or “the gaze”. The narratives reveal through the characters internal journey how society disciplines, generating anxiety and consequent obedience. The judgmental gaze determines what constitutes the “adequate body”, excluding all other body types. Those who lack it are marginalized. This act of disciplining also encourages consumerism through the feeling of inadequacy, or the fear of becoming inadequate. Clearly, the protagonists’ subsequent struggle to hide any marks of their body, change and adapt it imprisons them. After all, their body’s “shortcomings” are the fruit of delimiting social norms, leading purposely to high anxiety. In fact, long before the changes they detest take place, Rennie and Elaine have been estranged from their bodies. The symptoms of enslavement appear when Rennie disciplines her body, before the surgery, revealing what Foucault calls a psychological state of “conscious and permanent visibility” (201). In Elaine’s case, the association emerges as she confesses her compulsive purchase of anything that promises a reversal of the signs of age. They take care of their bodies, as if beauty empowers them, but the process is endless and enslaving. Apparently, the unity of the self implies that when a fragment is harmed, the whole self is affected. However, the great unease the protagonists feel when they suspect that their body is inadequate is not the fruit of unity, but the result of the social injunction that they are determined by the body. They mirror themselves in it, afraid that any physical mark will end in a deterioration of their social situation and

position in the world. The historical identification between women and the body is in the basis of the feeling of a general “otherness” and a sharp decrease in the protagonists’ self-esteem. As Bordo writes, the association between power through surveillance, assisted by women’s internalized gaze, is in the basis of social control over women.

As the narratives develop, it becomes clear that the significant part of the protagonists’ role in their own repression, an important theme, is the outcome of the internalization of this surveillance system. The characters police their behavior and body according to social norms, and in these acts of performativity, they repeat and perpetuate the existing social order. In this manner, Rennie’s compliance at work, where she takes on lifestyle assignments instead of her dream in-depth articles, and at home, where she surrenders to Jake’s objectifying view, prove how deeply-rooted is her auto-surveillance. Elaine’s own part in her discipline appears in her acceptance of her friends’ accusations and her consequent attempt to improve herself. It also rises as she surrenders to death thoughts, later on, refusing to analyze the reasons and the sources of her emotional state. Moreover, while exchanging roles with Cordelia, she has also absorbed Cordelia’s fascination with the body and her loathing of its grotesque aspects. Exercising both roles, personalities, and perceptions exemplifies the fragmentary, contradictory arabesque that forms the self. The protagonists become gradually aware of what moves them, why, and how their current anxiety has developed, and eventually they start a process of healing.

2. Leading Question II

The second question investigated in this thesis is how *Cat’s Eye* and *Bodily Harm* contribute to the criticism of social representations of women and point at a possible transformation as a response to trauma and shame.

The answer to the first part of the question starts with the process of deconstruction of each protagonist, since it sheds light on social pressures that act upon the characters as molding powers. The protagonists’ individual trajectory touches upon social representations of women in Western society between the 1940’s to the 1980’s, with an emphasis on problems generated by gender-based patriarchal patterns. Thanks to their literary outreach, the novels serve as an alarm against power abuse, social repression, and physical and mental violence practiced in the society of this time. This is an effective instrument for the author to create a debate. The effect of fiction as a social tool is

indisputable. As the narrative points out problems in women's situation, it contributes to criticism and may lead to change. Emotional, political, cultural and social struggles start with the protagonists, continue to their social and familiar circles, and reach out toward the readers and their circles. In its first layer, the text represents the protagonists, relating how they see themselves and other women, but in its deeper, parallel layer, it serves as a literary representation of women in general. Furthermore, it also functions as a self-representation of women, since the author is one. Readers learn about the difficulties women face due to gender issues, exercise of violence and political power against them, discrimination and maltreatment. The narrative stands as a mirror within a mirror in which the readers can also find themselves.

Beyond that, *Bodily Harm* and *Cat's Eye* don't only reveal the problems, but also clarify the need to confront overlooked gender-related conflicts in order to overcome emotional pain and accomplish peace of mind. The protagonists have become who they are because their identity has been shaped (at least to a great degree) by social pressures, whether they are acknowledged or not. The readers learn that the cumulative effect of ignored social forces disrupts the psyche and pushes toward an identity crisis. The characters have come to deny parts of themselves that contradict predetermined expectations, and the price of their succumbing to social norms is too high. They feel inadequate and diminished once a physical change such as illness or aging takes place. Their spontaneity and flow are blocked, and the body is constantly guarded. In the process, they detach themselves from the body, in the same way they detach themselves emotionally and deny what used to matter to them. The narrative further discloses that the internalization of discriminatory norms leads to unsatisfactory relationships in which women are objectified and redesigned by men. The question if and why women comply with social pressures that lead to anxiety emerges in all of its importance. From now on, the narrative implies, there is no place for overlooking and surrender.

To a certain extent, both novels reveal the suffering of women in several societies and classes. The physical abuse of women in lower classes appears in Lora's story of rape and violence, and the abuse of women in the middle class appears in the marks of beating of Elaine's friend, Carol. The situation of girls in the 1940's and 1950's in the education system is described through Elaine's story. It becomes clear that girls were treated differently from boys, in a debilitating, softening educational process. Discrimination of women at work appears in Rennie's story, as she is pressured to avoid substance and become a

lifestyle journalist. Other social representations of women emerge in Elaine's paintings, as they show middle-class women limited in space and opportunities, their eyes filled with fear and resentment. These representations are woven into the text as criticism of the situation of women.

The second part of the question, the inquiry whether transformation has taken place within the novels and outside them, has been observed in relation to the power of deconstruction to reveal, reformulate, and reconstruct. According to the definition of the word "transformation", the change should be dramatic. As determined by poststructuralist theory, however, the process of transformation can only take place within the contextual limits of time, place, and socio-cultural situation.

In order to provide an answer, the study has investigated whether the present process of change has generated a sense of healing unlike the characters' previous processes. In the past, Elaine released herself from Cordelia's grip of power, and later on, she exchanged the power roles in their relationship, turning from a victim to victimizer. Rennie's greatest changing act has been her move from her rigid hometown to Toronto. However, these processes have not led to self-forgiveness, compassion, and unification of the self, all necessary for healing. For that reason, in the beginning of the novels, the protagonists still need to recuperate their life force and self-acceptance.

As the novels illustrate, the possibility of change exists, although individuals perpetuate social norms by their acts of performativity. Change is possible because the growing discomfort in one's situation leads to a deconstruction that reveals the unintelligible and oppressing norms built into life and into the self. Both Rennie and Elaine have behaved according to social norms, and both of them find how hard it is to break away from the route their lives have taken. However, the cumulative power of their discomfort with the body, sense of existential unease, social repression, and violence displayed push the characters toward questioning social justice and discovering flaws in the social order. They are ready to observe the binary system of gender and reevaluate it despite their inability to attribute meanings to the body and self outside the delimitation of the society in which they live. Their situation shifts once they deconstruct the power relations that have weakened them, the ways social pressures have molded them, and their own role in harmful situations. Issues of body-image, bodily harm, social surveillance, and the unity of body and self emerge as an integral part of their self-analysis. The author shows the power of such

deconstruction to facilitate alterations in points of view. This sobering process may result in altered self-image, behavior, and relationships. Deconstruction, therefore, is not only transformative but already a transformation

Due to social conditioning, Rennie and Elaine have succumbed to the binary idea of body/mind split, detached the fragments of the self, and treated the body as a conduit, a tool, a home, and a source of sensory experiences. With Elaine's process of deconstruction, however, she has acknowledged that the unified field of time and place parallels the field of her mind. Her understanding of the ultra-dimensional, interrelated nature of life, diminishes her preoccupation with the physical body. Her current mirror reflection, she finds, is connected with all the reflections she has ever had and will have. In the same line, when Rennie feels the call of life within her body, right after the surgery, she finds that life itself is bigger than any worry about the particulars of the body.

However, the change from the ambiguous attitude toward the body, built along years of surveillance and discrimination, is gradual. Each protagonist goes through the process of unification in a different way. Rennie eventually reaches unification with her body and attains a sense of peace through an act of love making with her lover Paul. This dependent act results in her autonomous opening up and her willingness to listen to, absorb, and act upon injustice. Atwood reminds the readers of the body's participation in the process of opening up, as Rennie uses her body, thanks to her new capability of compassion, to try and pull her tortured cellmate Lora from the edge of death to life. In *Cat's Eye*, Elaine's transformation from a detached, judgmental set of mind toward a compassionate and self-forgiving one is expressed in her new reading of her interactions with people who have caused her pain. She recognizes parts of her past and of herself she has previously denied, and she accepts her body and her self to a better degree. There is a sense of the self as it gets unblocked, as she recalls the past, bridges toward forgotten areas, and accepts the sum of the parts. In the act of bridging, she relaxes into heading out to the street the way she is.

Yet, despite the transformation of both protagonists, the narratives leave the full extent of the transformation for the readers to decide. The extent of the protagonists' transformation, and its impact on their surrounding and society, does not appear within the novels. Either way, according to poststructuralist theory, social transformation impacts the individual in the same way that an individual process of transformation impacts society. The extent of the individual influence

over society has been examined in the light of Butler and in view of the phenomenological theory regarding individual acts and social transformation. Since small changes and acts, a difference in reaction, raising the voice, or rebelling against accepted truths are constituting acts, then the characters have caused social change. Obviously, the protagonists' most available instrument of transformation is changing the way they perceive the circumstances and themselves. Even if the power of individual acts in an existing oppressive order is limited, as Butler argues, they may open cracks and shake the construction. As the characters come to terms with their body, realize the causes that have brought them to the split, and observe the development of their crisis, they change their acts as well. This difference in their acts, small as it may be, touches their relationships with others and causes a greater change that spreads throughout society.

Admittedly, both characters seem to be still struggling as they tell their stories. However, their storytelling is a transformative act because Elaine and Rennie are using their own words to describe their lives, breaking a life-long silence. This contemporary type of silence is the distorted, disguised, and repressed story. The author implies that self-expression bent by social norms cannot give voice to the characters or to women in general. Currently, however, the characters' self-representation through writing or storytelling introduces a significant change in their perception. It is, in fact, an act of resistance, since they challenge existing norms by uncovering the hidden foundation, the underside part of their identity.

The power of words to tell a different story and provoke change has been analyzed in regard to social transformation as well. Due to the outreaching nature of literary works, the protagonists' journey ends by the end of the books, while the readers carry it on. Both protagonists have gone through a process of transformation, from deconstruction to reconstruction, to a certain degree. The fact that the readers cannot follow the particularities of their influence on society does not limit the effect of the novels' content on readers and society in general. In the act of writing, Atwood has raised her voice through the voice of her female characters, exposing women's vulnerabilities, surrenders and struggles, challenges, and changes of mind and circumstance. The author makes clear that provoking social change is impossible without sounding the voice of the oppressed. Once the characters define themselves as the weak part of society, and act in order to change existing power relations in individual or public fields, there is a possibility of reconstruction. Atwood illustrates powerfully how self-delusion and denial are

dangerous for the well-being of women and society. With *Cat's Eye* and *Bodily Harm* she has equipped the readers with thought-provoking narratives that echo in their lives, touch the life of others, and favor social change.

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