

Eating, Starving and the Body: The Presentation of Self

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Abstract

This study examines the subtle and complex importance of food and eating in contemporary female fiction. It reveals how the chief concern with food, its consumption and the body are central to the work of writer like Margaret Atwood. Two novels in particular, *Cat's Eye* (1988) and *Alias Grace* (1996) will be considered as they feature female protagonists who experience intense conflicts concerning their bodies, conflicts that result in or are a response to violence. This violence takes the form of eating disorders. They highlight this form of bodily violence which supports their on-going critique of dualistic thinking. In their fictions, Atwood shows the artificial bifurcation of human existence into body and self which tends to result in self-alienation or the splitting of the subject. This writer draws on feminist and sociological theory to engage with a diverse range of issues, including eating disorders as a form of self-violence or mutilation, to demonstrate the direct relationship of food and eating or not-eating with gender and cultural politics to manifest the role of using food in assumed association of the womanly body which leads to splitting of the subject.

Keywords: food, starving, self, body, woman

1. Introduction

It is quite long time that the body depicts human's affections, sensations and speculations. It considers as a manifestation of a person's cultural sphere. In fact, the body was considered like a sign to fight against cultural, moral, and political burden. The people display their opinions and thought by their acts and appearance. It is through the time that the body changes its length, appearance, and context; however, it is still resigned for the same aim of declaration. Considering the fact that the act of the human body is dependent on food, it can be argued that food has worked the chief function in the history of the body (Rajewicz, 4). Eating is an important activity. It is in fact the basic source of happiness and depression and it is more or less the first action we perform a basic foundation of gladness and sadness, the grounding of our earliest education and enculturation. Food is our central activity, and it is essential for survival and is very closely connected with social function. What people eat, and what they feel about food and why, are important to an understanding of human society. However, the main significance of eating is not biological but symbolic. Based on psychoanalytic theory, influential feeding experiences are described in the psyche. In fact, food and eating are vital to self-identity and are helpful in the definition of family, class and ethnicity. These are not unclear associations, for eating practices are highly specific:

Encoded in appetite, taste, ritual and ingestive etiquettes are unwritten rules and meanings, through which people communicate and are categorised within particular cultural contexts. The essential and necessary qualities of eating invest its surrounding activities with value, whether psychological, moral or affective (Sceats, 1).

Sceats continues to add that the role and numerous levels of importance of food and eating lead to a link with epistemological and anthological issues. The occurrence of eating disorders in Western culture displays at least unsafe thinking about embodiment, the nature of being and the borders between the self and the world. Physical boundaries are clearly vital to food and eating activities as "substances pass into, and out of, the body. Uneaten food is 'other', part of the world outside, but its status changes as it is taken into the mouth, is chewed swallowed, digested" (1). Another point is that food is considered as a part of identity. Food creates a person or empowers what a person is. There is a close connection between gender, nationality, ethnic origin or identification, religion and class. In fact, a number of scholars have found that food and eating are necessary in

our ways of constructing our subjectivity and identity. Opposite to the opinion that food is empowering and enabling, food can also be weakened our identity and is stronger than one's self. According to Kristeva.

Food loathing is perhaps the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection. When the eyes see or the lips touch that skin on the surface of milk-harmless, thin as a sheet of cigarette paper, pitiful as a nail paring- I experience a gagging sensation and, still farther down, spasms in the stomach, the belly; and all the organs shrivel up the body, provoke tears and bile, increase heartbeat, cause forehead and hands to perspire but since the food is not an "other" fore "me," who am only in their desire, I expel myself, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which "I" claim to establish *myself* (MacAfee, 47)

Susan Bordo also highlights the point that in the late Victorian era, arguably for the first time in the West, those who could pay to eat well began to systematically to "deny themselves food in pursuit of an aesthetic ideal" (Bordo, 85). For aristocratic Greek, fasting is as "a road to self-mastery and the practice of moderation in all things" (Bordo, 185). She explains that there was a method in which people improve a great public self. It was in the middle Ages that Christians considered non-eating as a way for holy cleanness, which was assigned by the aristocracy and priests. She continues to discuss that customs of fasting were used to improve a perfect inside self and it makes closer to God. However, in the Baroque era, all the positive characteristics of man like beauty and good-looking or social position were connected with fatness. At this moment, being too much fat was the characteristic that separated the well-born from the vulgar (185). In fact, overeating and anorexia nervosa, which improved from fasting, were investigated and explained in the 19th era by researchers such as Ernest-Charles Lasçgue or William Withey Gull such disorders stopped being a secrecy for medics and they began to be better known to normal people, which led to a change in the common attitude toward these eating disorders. Therefore, overeating and anorexia nervosa were assigned by 20th culture and scientists to no longer be physical or mental illnesses, but as psychological issues resulting in external changes of the body. In other words, it was pronounced and proved that eating disorders were symptoms of the inner conflict with a person (Rajewicz, 4). Susie Orbach points out for example, that the right size for women has decreased every year since 1965, a claim substantiated in the figure of a supermodel 5ft 11in. tall weighing just 7st 7 lb (Sceats, 65). Susan Bordo makes a "direct link between the existence of the thin ideal and such disorders, arguing that eating disorders are not anomalous but entirely in keeping with ordinary experience in Western culture, resulting from hunger, desire, and fat being culturally saturated with negative associations" (57).

Sceats also argues that women write about food and eating. Women's bodies have the capability to make food for their infants which groups women as feeders, and in Western culture women have traditionally borne most of the responsibility of cooking for and nourishing others, with all that implies of power and service. The caring, providing roles and their maligned counterparts certainly contribute much mimetic content to women's writing, but women eat as well as cook, starve as well as serve and contemporary fiction is as much concerned with women's appetites as their nurturing capacities. Some psychoanalytic theories suggest that because of the long period of attachment of girls to the maternal figure, women have compelling boundary concerns as eaters. Cultural pressures in recent years have certainly made women particularly conscious of their body boundaries in relation to food and eating or not eating (2).

There are some writers like Angela Carter, Willa Cather, Toni Morrison, and, finally, Margaret Atwood began to write about food and woman writers give it second thoughts "Hunger, eating, and meals were used by feminist writers to speak of personal and social behaviors, psychological problems, art, sex, politics, poverty, nationalism, gender roles, power, and domesticity" (Rajewicz, 5). Moreover, since the progress of consumer culture, the essentiality to be a perfect manager of one's own life has appeared. Therefore, "the new culture produced a new type of personality which found its place between two extremes: obesity and self-starvation" (Rajewicz, 5). In the following section, this writer will discuss the selected author, Margaret Atwood because of her evident concern with contemporary history, society and politics, especially role and experience of women. This interest shows itself very differently in this writer, both officially and in terms of philosophical or political emphasis and how these are coded through food, appetite, eating and female bodies. The main focus of attention is on Atwood, whose writing of food and eating is closely linked to exploration of what means to be a woman in the latter part of the twentieth century.

2. Margaret Atwood: Food, Eating and the Body

Margaret Atwood examines the general and especial formation of victims such as the eaten, the over-eater and the self-consumers against the forceful strategy that it includes cultural limitations, political essentiality, marital and familiar pressures, the coercion of friends and self-created persecutions. She also sets the need for women to

resist the victim position. This resistance is effected through political engagement of the most basic and food-related cases (Sceats, 7). For Atwood, food and eating have many important functions in her writing. She considers food as an issue of politics. In a 1982 interview, she said: “politics for me, is everything that involves who gets to do what to whom politics really has to do with how people order their societies, to whom power is ascribed, who is considered to have power” (Sceats, 94). Clearly Atwood, like Angel Carter, considers herself to be an essentially political writer, and politics fills all activates for her. She frequently talks about it in several interviews. It is through her novels the possibility to put together a picture of how food, eating, and appetite in her fiction connect with how people order their societies, on the individual, interpersonal and cultural levels. Her presentation is not just in specific examples, but woven it into an overall political analysis or vision. Therefore, her works speak of a politics of appetite or a politics of eating. Atwood’s political analysis is arbitrated through a sophisticated, changing and complex feminism that while avoiding narrow and sexist censure displays the predatory but also criticizes passivity and assures women’s ability, even duty, to rise above the perception of self as innocent victim (Sceats, 94). Atwood’s publication in 1987 of *The CanLit Foodbook* testifies to her interest in food, both literal and literary, and her lively awareness of its history and presence in Canadian writing. The book was a fundraiser for imprisoned writers around the world. It contains recipes and food descriptions from Canadian literature and writers. Her knowledge of practices and values, the theory around food and eating is noteworthy (Lahikaine, 14). She has a shrewd view of its function as authors put various foods into their books because they reveal character, slimy as well as delectable, or provide metaphors or jumping-off points into the ineffable or the inferno. Food in her own writing has an important part in character revelation, and the ineffable variety of cultural and political issues through eating and female bodies and these combine to expose differences and dislocations between culturally constructed roles and experienced realities (Sceats, 95).

Atwood brings food and eating (or not-eating) into direct relationship with gender and cultural politics, using food and its activities to problematize assumed gender roles of the late 1950s and 1960s in urban Canada. She emphasises the predatory nature of appetite and perhaps more importantly, the protest signalled by its lack. In doing so her narrative invests the body with interpretive capacities in excess of its cultural definition, allowing physical recognition and a refusal of oppressive definitions. In other words, the body is given its own, subversive, voice (Sceats, 95).

Lahikaine argues that food is an important part of time to Atwood’s protagonists. It is linked with past and present joyness and sadness. The food themes are sometimes decorative; an illustration of time and place, but usually it is suggestive of something deeper in the lives of the protagonists. It is coloured by strong feelings, but it is also nostalgia for one’s youth, or symbolic hunger for love, companionship, freedom, or supporting community (15). The theme of food, eating and hunger is most explicit in *Edible women* and *Lady Oracle*. In other novels, it is more implicit, an undercurrent in *Alias Grace* and *Blind Assassin*. The characters’ physical hunger or lack of it, their eating or non -eating, cooking and the food that they consume are sometimes presented in detail. The symbolic hunger is present in the relationships between the characters and their vision of others. The heterosexual intimate relationships of the novels are narrated with “images of symbolic hunting and symbolic cannibalism. Characters ‘hunt’ each other in order to get something. For instance sex, marriage or pregnancy hunters can be depicted as meat-eating plants and their victims as carcasses of meat in the butcher’s shop” (Lahikaine, 15). All the protagonists explain the universal in relation to food and communicate their manner through life using food. Food works as a silent type of female self-manifestation but, more than that, it also turns into a medium of experience. Food imagery saturates the texts and becomes the dominant metaphor the female characters use to describe people, landscape, and emotion. According to Cline, “women appropriate food as a language because traditionally they have always been associated with food” (Parker, 358).

Atwood believes that “Eating is our earliest metaphor, preceding our consciousness of gender difference, race, nationality and language. We eat before we talk,” food and eating do not only have tangible representation, but as Atwood above states, a symbolic, metaphorical level. This symbolic aspect is of great importance: the images and metaphors of eating and food manifest much more of human life than one would think at first. Schofield discusses that, food “Articulate in concrete terms what is oftentimes vague, internal abstract food cooked, eaten, and thought about provides a metaphoric matrix, a language that allows us a way to get at the uncertainty, the ineffable qualities of life” (Lahikaine, 13).

Emmar Parker also discusses that in Atwood’s novels “eating is employed as a metaphor for power and is used as a means of examining the relationship between women and men. The powerful are characterized by eating the powerless by non-eating” (349). According to Sarah Sceats, food and consuming have complicated suggestions in Atwood’s fictions: “her extensive symbolic use of food and eating highlight themes such as the commodification of women, the duplicity of sexual predation or the negative power of the victim.” She

emphasizes on the point that Atwood's language of food stress the issue of women and responsibility (4). In fact, Atwood gives emphasis to the extremely symbolic and suggestive nature of food. She assigns it in a metaphorical meaning to display the source and role of overeating and anorexia nervosa among women in modern society. For Atwood, eating is inseparably linked with politics. It is eating disorders in Atwood's novels that mask "anger, frustration, sadness, and emptiness which derive from family problems, impairment in social relationships or a chaotic life story" (Rajewicz, 5). Emma Parker also discusses that in Atwood's fictions eating and non-eating display confrontation to the procedure of oppression. Atwood's characters are endlessly objectified by parents, partners, peers, or by society as a whole. They try to "protect their selfhoods by psychic distancing of their selves from their bodies and by physical loss or increase of weight" (11). Atwood presents a sensitive consciousness of how visions of female consuming have been oppressed and removed. She highlights, "I think I first connected literature with eating when I was twelve and reading *Ivanhoe*: there was Rebecca, shut up romantically in a tower, but what did she have to eat?" (Parker, 349). She examines the exclusion publicly the manifestation of woman eating and the social taboos which enclose females and food in related to the politics of eating. Atwood believes that eating is clearly political. She explains "politics" as "who is entitled to do what to whom with impunity; who profits by it; and who therefore eats what" (Atwood, 394). Femininity is rarely manifested eating in literature since, as Atwood's opinion comment refers, consumption embodies coded expressions of power (Parker, 349). The protagonists explain the universal in relation to food and communicate their way through life using food. Food works as a silent type of female self-manifestation but, more than that, it also becomes a medium of experience. Food imagery saturates the fictions and becomes the dominant metaphor the female characters use to explain people, landscape, and emotion. Atwood reveals the most delicate and subliminal ways in which power works by writing about femininity and food. It is such an expression of the ideologies and mythologies which oppresses femininity implicitly and offers how to overcome them. However, Atwood apparently suggests no option to the oppressive cultural organization she reveals, by displaying the harmful impact of such an organization; she brings into concentration the requirement and means to transcend it. According to Parker:

Since Atwood displays how consumption embodies coded expressions of power which have served to subordinate women; she delicately compels women to reclaim the right to eat and to proudly re-inhabit their own bodies. Women have been driven away from their bodies as violently as they have been driven away from food. Atwood shows them a road back to both. By displaying how consumption is related to power, Atwood delicately compels women to empower themselves by urging them to eat their way into the world (Parker, 367).

Atwood's writing challenges pressing issues of food and eating that are especially used in connection with individuality, freedom and responsibility. Atwood includes the extensive symbolic use of food and eating to show themes such as "the commodification of women, the duplicity of sexual predation or the negative power of the victim" (Sceats, 4). Atwood brings food and eating into direct association with gender roles. She stresses "the predatory nature of appetite and, perhaps more importantly, the protest signalled by its lack. The body is given its own, subversive, voice" (Sceats, 95). In the following section, this writer will continue the discussion by explaining some postulations of sociologists and feminists such as Susan Bordo to explore issues like eating disorders and to demonstrate the direct relationship of food and eating or not-eating to manifest the role of using food in assumed association of the womanly body which leads to splitting of the subject.

3. Susan Bordo: The Dilemma of Food

Dictionaries define the word "food" in similar ways. The Oxford English Dictionary defines food as "things that people or animals eat" (498). Although food seems just for eating, the issue is not as simple as it appears. The consumption of food is not a simple act of eating as defined, but an area of research. The weight-loss cult recruits women from an early age, and eating diseases are the bequest of the cult. "Anorexia and bulimia are female maladies: from 90 to 95 percent of anorexics and bulimia are women. America, which has the greatest number of women who have made it into the male sphere, also leads the world with female anorexia" (Wolf, 181). Furthermore, it is estimated in 1984 that as many as one "in every 200-250 women between the ages of thirteen and twenty-two suffer from anorexia, and that anywhere from 12 to 33 percent of college women control their weight through vomiting, diuretics, and laxatives" (qtd. in Bordo, 140). That is why this issue has drawn the attention of researchers in a variety of disciplines such as feminist theory, philosophy, psychology and cultural studies. Feminist critics gave attention in the early 1980s to the issue of food and its disordering. One of the studies that drew the attention of feminist research in this area is Susan Bordo's *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* which was first published in 1989 and contributed to feminist readings in cultural studies. Bordo was fascinated by the cultural obsession with keeping bodies slim, tight, and young:

When 500 people were asked what they feared most in the world, 190 replied, "Getting fat." In an age

when our children regularly have nightmares of nuclear holocaust, that as adults we should give *this* answer – that we most fear “getting fat” – is far more bizarre than the anorectic’s misperceptions of her body image or the bulimic’s compulsive vomiting (Bordo, 140-141)

She argues that it is women who are the most oppressed by what Kim Chernin calls “the tyranny of slenderness”, and this especial oppression is a post-1960s, post-feminist phenomenon. In her study Bordo discusses that the body is in the grip as Foucault puts it, of cultural practices. In fact, there is no natural body and it is just the cultural practices. As Foucault has emphasized, “on our bodies and their materiality, their forces, energies, sensations, and pleasure. Our bodies, no less than anything else that is human, are constituted by culture” (142). For Bordo, female bodies have historically been importantly more vulnerable than male bodies to extremes in both forms of cultural manipulation of the body. It highlights the fact that “women besides having bodies are associated with the body which has always been considered woman’s sphere in family life, in mythology, in scientific, philosophical, and religious ideology” (143). She continues her discussion to refer to the axis of continuity that starts with Plato and continues with the expressions of Augustine and finally becomes “metaphysically solidified and scientized by Descartes” (144). Bordo refers to the view that human existence is divided into two realms or substances which include the “bodily or material, on the other hand; the mental or spiritual” (144).

According to this, “the body is experienced as *alien*, as the not-self, the not-me. It is “fastened and glued” to me, “nailed”, and “riveted” to me, as Plato describes it in the *Phaedo* (144). In fact, for Descartes, the body is distinct from the inner self. In addition, the body is experienced as confinement and limitation as a prison or cage and also the body as the enemy which is described by Plato and Descartes as the “source of obscurity and confusion on our thinking”. According to Plato:

Liability also to diseases which overtake and impede us in the pursuit of truth; it fills us full of loves, lust, and fears. And fancies of all kinds, and endless foolery, and in very truth, as men say, takes away from us the power of thinking at all. Whence come wars, and fightings, and factions? Whence but from the body and the lusts of the body (Bordo, 144).

Finally Bordo refers to the body as an impediment to reason or as Augustine discusses it as the slimy desires of the flesh. It is the body as “the locus of all that threatens our attempts at control” this point of view is significant for dualists as Plato says, “nature orders the soul to rule and govern and the body to obey and serve” (Qtd. in Bordo, 144). Bordo refers to Plato, Augustine, and Descartes as the people that provide instructions, rules, or models of how to gain control over the body and believes that the anorectics are followers of Plato or Augustine, but that the anorectic’s metaphysics makes explicit various elements, “historically grounded in Plato and Augustine that run deep in our culture” (Bordo, 147).

As a matter of fact, Susan Bordo points out that women are as obsessed with hunger as they are with being slim. Thinness represents a triumph of the will over the body and a thin body is associated with “absolute purity, hyperintellectuality and transcendence of the flesh” (148), but on the other hand, fat is associated with taint of matter and flesh, “wantonness, mental stupor and mental decay” (148). Moreover, Susan Bordo explains that the emergence of an anorexic begins by diet in order to look thin. It also involves some constant physical activity in which anorectics engage such as jogging and marathon-running or long-distance swimming, cycling and body building. Bordo continues her discussion to highlight that self-criticism of the anorectic is usually focused on especially protuberant areas of the body such as the stomach rather than on the body as a whole. She considers it as a “metaphor for anxiety about internal processes out of control-uncontained desire, unrestrained hunger, and uncontrolled impulse” (189). Bordo also refers to the issue of fatness that until 1980s excess weight was the target of most ads for diet products and at the current time, it is more likely to find the enemy constructed as bulge, fat, or flab therefore a violent assault on the enemy is usually required as “bulges must be attacked and destroyed fat burned and stomachs must be busted and eliminated” (Bordo, 189). She argues that the “coexistence of anorexia and obesity shows the instability of the contemporary personality construction, the difficulty of finding homeostasis between the producer and the consumer sides of the self” (201). In Bordo’s point of view, “Bulimia embodies the unstable double bind of consumer capitalism, while anorexia and obesity embody an attempted resolution of that double bind. In fact, Anorexia could thus be seen as an extreme development of the capacity for self-denial and repression of desire” (201). On the other hand, obesity has an extreme capacity to capitulate to desire. Both are rooted in the same consumer-culture construction of desire as overwhelming and over-taking the self (201). Following Susan Bordo, the theorist of food and eating disorders, this present writer continues the discussion to examine the association of the anorectic with gender. As Susan Bordo argues, gender has “to do with fear and disdain for traditional female roles and social limitation, and [the anorectic] more profoundly with a deep fear of “the female”, with all its more nightmarish archetypal

associations of voracious hungers and sexual insatiability” (Bordo, 155). She believes that the anorectic is terrified and repelled not only by the traditional woman domestic role that women associate with mental lassitude and weakness – but by a certain archetypal vision of womanhood as “hunger, voracious, all-needing, and all-wanting” (Bordo, 160). Therefore, it is essential to examine the construction of femininity and how a womanly body is associated with the anorectic in mainstream of Western Culture “the female self” (Bordo, 155). This present writer focuses on Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity on order to demonstrate the direct relationship of food and eating or not-eating with gender and cultural politics to manifest the role of using food in assumed association of women with the body which leads to splitting of the subject.

4. Anorexia Nervosa: Hunger for Self

In Margaret Atwood’s *Cat’s Eye*, the protagonists also live within a phallogocentric society and are repeatedly confronted with culture that has associated woman with body which limits their existence to the corporeal. Elaine Riskey, the female character of the text, tended to interpret the world in relation to food. She manifests her way through life using this metaphor. She is a successful painter in her fifties, who returns to Toronto to have a retrospective show of her art after living several years in Vancouver. Toronto is the city of her childhood, youth and early adulthood, and the memories attached to it. The change between the bush and Toronto is visible in terms of food. The food of Elaine’s childhood in the bush is very simple, practical and easy to prepare. The family tries to live in unison with nature and eat “the lunch our mother makes, bread and sardines or bread and cheese, or bread and molasses or bread and jam if we can’t get anything else. Meat and cheese are scarce, they are rationed” (CA, 23).

Elaine’s early childhood is largely spent in the wilderness, accompanying her entomologist father on his fieldwork. As in Atwood’s second novel *Surfacing*, the wilderness is a site of innocence, and for Elaine, this period functions as a pastoral retreat from society. Elaine recalls, “Until we moved to Toronto I was happy. Before that we didn’t really live anywhere” (CA, 21). This “nowhere place” is characterised by innocence and freedom, particularly freedom from social divisions of mind/body. Her family operates within relatively unstructured gender roles, in which mother and father divide their labour along roughly traditional lines but with significant blurring of the physical difference, as Elaine describes:

We’re used to seeing our father in windbreakers, battered grey felt hats, flannel shirts with the cuffs tightly buttoned to keep the blackflies from crawling up his arms, heavy pants tucked into the tops of woollen work socks. Except for the felt hats, what our mother wore wasn’t all that different (CA, 34).

Similarly, Elaine, “wearing a blue striped jersey of my brother’s, a worn pair of corduroy pants” (CA, 63), busy “turning over logs and rocks to see what’s underneath”, and her brother Stephen who is a co-conspirator in a sibling relationship that is careless of gender distinction. In this period they are “like nomads” (25), “far from anything” (23), and their temporary absence from society is liberating. However, when they re-enter civilisation by moving to suburban Toronto, Elaine and her family must quickly learn or re-learn their socially acceptable roles.

Now, however, our father wears jackets and ties and white shirts, and a tweed overcoat and a scarf. He has galoshes that buckle on over his shoes instead of leather boots waterproofed with bacon grease. Our mother’s legs have appeared, sheathed in nylons with seams up the backs. She draws on a lipstick mouth when she goes out. She has a coat with a grey fur collar, and a hat with a feather in it that makes her nose look too long (CA, 37).

From this scenario, Atwood examines the construction and function of femininity in society, and so re-evaluates the essentialism debate begun at the start of the second wave. Elaine starts going to school where her body is constructed socially; and is forced to enter compulsory heterosexuality. She discovers that she has to wear skirts to school and enter the building through the “grandiose entranceways with carvings around them and ornate insets above the doors, inscribed in curvy, solemn lettering: GIRLS and BOYS” (CA, 51) which baffles her and leaves her wondering, “how is going in through a door different if you’re a boy?” (51). To Elaine, the so called heterosexuality is unquestioned and is a forced social contract, or in Butler’s terms, melancholic heterosexuality (164). Elaine is the typical Atwood protagonist, uncomfortable with womanhood:

I see that there’s a whole world of girls and their doings that has been unknown to me, and that I can be part of it without making any effort at all. All I have to do is sit on the floor and cut frying pans out of the Eaton’s Catalogue with embroidery scissors, and say I’ve done it badly” (CA, 59).

She enters the regime of compulsory heterosexuality in which as Butler argues the performance of gender is not voluntary, but a performance which is compelled due to the regulatory regime that expects and requires

heterosexuality. This regime constructs as culturally intelligent those genders which support the perceived ideal path of sex, gender, sexual practice and sexual desire. Genders which conform to this are those such as: female, femininity, heterosexuality, male, and as such are considered to be intelligible (qtd. in Carline, 218). As Elaine says:

So I am left to the girls, real girls at last, in the flesh. But I'm not used to girls, or familiar with their customs. I feel awkward around them, I don't know what to say. I know the unspoken rules of boys, but with girls I sense that I am always on the verge of some unforeseen, calamitous blunder (CA, 52).

She expresses a characteristic "fear of growing up to be mature, sexually developed and potentially reproductive women" (Bordo, 155). It highlights Judith Butler's point of view that gender identities are doing, not being:

Acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this on the surface of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are performative in the sense that essence or identity that purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality (136).

Although these descriptions are heavily influenced and shaded by heterosexual patriarchal views, it seems that these masculine representations, to some extent hold true. To quote from Susan Bordo the body is not only a text of culture. It is also, as anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu, and philosopher Michel Foucault have argued, "a practical, direct locus of social control. Banally, through table manners and toilet habits, through seemingly trivial routines, rules, and practices, culture is a 'made body'". As Bourdieu puts it – it is converted into automatic, habitual activity. As such it is put "beyond the grasp of consciousness untouchable by voluntary, deliberate transformations" (Bordo, 165). Foucault constantly reminds us of the primacy of practice over belief. "Not chiefly through ideology, but through the organization and regulation of the time, space, and movements of our daily lives, our bodies are trained, shaped, and impressed with the stamp of prevailing historical forms of selfhood, desire, masculinity, femininity" (Bordo, 166). In fact, Elaine became aware of the oppression of women and feels "trapped. I want to be back in the motel, back on the road, in my old rootless life of impermanence and safety" (CA, 35). As Cherry Boone O'Neill argues, Elaine speaks "explicitly of her fear of womanhood" (Qtd. in Bordo, 155). She cannot resist phallogocentric discourses that consider the disdain for traditional female roles and social limitation. She has a profound and deep fear of being female "I'm being wrenched away from my new life, the life of girls." (70). and have to adopt "nightmarish archetypal associations of voracious hungers and sexual insatiability" (Bordo, 155). She says: "On Saturdays I no longer go to the building. Instead I play with Carol and Grace. Playing with girls is different and at first I feel strange as I do it, self-conscious, as if I'm only doing an imitation of a girl. But I soon get more used to it" (57). While Elaine recognizes her gender differences, her body is presented as a "Locus of social control" (Sceats, 63) which is socially, culturally determined. The time, in which she notices that she is disciplined by society to get used to the function of being feminine, she notices the direct relationship of her womanhood with using food. The first presentation of Elaine's eating disorder is depicted at school which is a symbol of patriarchal discourse and consumer society that she recognizes womanly body roles as a female:

We eat our lunches in the chilly dimly lit cellar of the school-house, where we sit in supervised rows on long scarred wooden benches under a festoon of heating pipes. Most of the children go home for lunch; it's only the school-bus ones that have to stay. We're issued small bottles of milk which we drink through straws stuck in through a hole in the cardboard bottle tops. These are my first drinking straws, and they amaze me (CE, 51).

It is her the first step on her way to react to the culturally constructed ideal female body image "All I have to do is sit on the floor and cut frying pans out of the Eaton's Catalogue with embroidery scissors, and say I've done it badly" (CE, 59). While she notices the nature and the reasons of her eating disorder, she begins to figure out her own needs and feelings. Elaine's initial lack of appetite begins during her ninth birthday party with girl guests:

Shortly after this I became nine. I can remember my other birthdays, later and earlier ones, but not this one. There must have been a party, my first real one, because who would have come to the others? There must have been a cake, with candles and wishes and a quarter and a dime wrapped in wrapped in wax paper hidden between the layers for someone to chip a tooth on, and presents. These things must have occurred, but the only trace they've left on me has been a vague horror of birthday parties, not other people's, my own. I think of pastel icing, pink candles burning in the pale November

afternoon light, and there is a sense of shame and failure (CE, 116).

For Elaine the birthday and the cakes are connected with the feeling of vague horror, shame and failure. She loses the ability to eat which results to an eating disorder, much resemble to anorexia nervosa, which is her body's answer to society's attempt to impose its rules on her. As Susan Bordo highlights this point by stating:

The anorectic is terrified and repelled, not only by the traditional female domestic role-which she associates with mental lassitude and weakness – but by a certain archetypal image of the female: as hungering, voracious, all-needing, and all-wanting. It is this image that shapes and permeates her experience of her own hunger for food as insatiable and out of control, that makes her feel that if she takes just one bite, she will not be able to stop (160).

She spends each minute in an anxious pursuit of that ideal image and this nervousness causes a strong streak of self-punishment and injury, her appetite turns inward against her own body as violence toward her body:

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. I would pull the skin off in narrow strips. I would do the same to the other big toe, then to the ball of each foot, the heel of each. I would go down as far as the blood (CA, 124).

Elaine's anxiety is repeatedly attributed to her mouth, and body decisions. "I look into the mirror. It's just my face, with the dark blotches on the lips where I've bitten off the skin (CA, 175). She chews and tears at her fingers "my bitten fingers, the dark scabs on my lips where I'd pulled off patches of the skin" (CA, 166). Even her thought of putting her finger into the burning toaster is a similar counter to psychological distress and dissociation and self-violence:

The toaster is on a silver heat pad. It has two doors, with a knob at the bottom of each, and a grid up the centre that glows red-hot. When the toast is done on one side I turn the knobs and the doors open and the toast slides down and turns over, all by itself. I think about putting my finger in there, onto the red-hot grid" (CA, 130-131).

Elaine feels alien, to the point of having a distorted sense of herself in the other girls' world, while she buys candy with all the money she has earned as a baby sitter and gives them to the other girls. The edibles that might be the pleasure of her life, and the candy day that might mean fun and a break from the everyday are painful to her, a sense of powerlessness may manifest itself in her not eating. "I buy licorice whips, jelly beans, many-layered blackballs with the seed in the middle, packages of fizzy sherbet you suck up through a straw. I dole them out equally, these offerings, these atonements, into the waiting hands of my friends" (CE, 150). She was engaged in a "hunger strike" as Orban calls it, stressing that:

this is a political discourse, in which the action of food refusal and dramatic transformation of body size "expresses with the body what the anorectic is unable to tell us with words"- her indictment of a culture that disdains and suppresses female hunger, makes women ashamed of their appetites and needs, and demands that women constantly work on the transformation of their body (Qtd. in Bordo, 176).

Elaine denies eating birthday cake and begins to refuse candy and sherbet. She becomes an anorexic person, preoccupied with food but couldn't eat it. She even has difficulty with her breakfast:

I go out to the kitchen, where my mother is cooking breakfast. There's a pot with porridge in it, Red River cereal or oatmeal or Cream of Wheat, and a glass coffee percolator. I rest my arms on the edge of the white stove and watch the porridge, simmering and thickening, the flaccid bubbles coming up out of it one at a time and releasing their small puffs of steam. The porridge is like boiling mud. I know that when it comes time to eat the porridge I will have trouble: my stomach will contract, my hands will get cold, and it will be difficult to swallow. Something tight sits under my breastbone. But I will get the porridge down somehow, because it is required" (CE, 130).

The porridge appears to symbolise the torment. Her body rebels against the simmering porridge. Her appetite for life is abruptly stunted. It is difficult and painful and against her nature to stomach it. Elaine, as Susie Orbach highlights, was in a situation in which a constellation of social, economic, and psychological factors have combined to produce a generation of women who feel deeply flawed, ashamed of their needs, and not entitled to exist unless they transform themselves into worthy new slaves (Qtd. in Bordo, 47). Even, Elaine's mother represents passivity and fulfilment of her biological fate which is to be a mother. Elaine is a traditional woman.

Elaine had alphabet soup for Saturday lunch that her mother thinks is “a cheerful treat for children” (CE, 151) but Elaine used to enjoy picking up the letters, and playing with them, such that this action becomes associated with her feelings of entrapment. Elaine becomes a woman who remarked the system and who is at the same time deceived by it. Her instant contrast between charm and disgust concerning the consumption and food presents how hard an independent existence is in a capitalistic culture:

The alphabet soup has letters floating in it, white letters: capital A's and O's and S's and R's, the occasional X or Z. When I was younger I would fish the letters out and spell things with them on the edge of the plate, or eat my name, letter by letter. Now I just eat soup, taking no particular interest. The soup is orangey-red and has a flavour, but the letters themselves taste like nothing (CE 151).

At one time while playing with Grace, her stomach “feels dull and heavy, as if it's full of earth” (CA 152). Her dread provokes nausea:

I turn aside and throw up onto a snowbank. I didn't mean to do it and didn't know I was going to. I feel sick to my stomach every morning. I'm used to that, but this is the real thing, alphabet soup mixed with shards of chewed-up cheese, amazingly red and orange against the white of the snow, with here and there a ruined letter. I lie in bed with the scrub pail beside me, floating lightly on waves of fever. I throw up several times, until nothing but a little green juice comes out. I begin to be sick more often. (CA, 152-153).

Elaine was experiencing hunger as an “alien invader, marching to the tune of its own seemingly arbitrary whims, disconnected from ant normal self-regulating mechanisms” (Bordo, 146). While Elaine was sitting at the Christmas dinner she has “sense of horror at the array of food spread out before her, the mashed potatoes, the gravy, the lurid green and red Jell-O salad, the enormous turkey” (CA, 142). It is Christmas but Christmas turkey is not a pleasure to Elaine during that time either:

The turkey, which resembles a trussed, headless baby. It has thrown off its disguise as a meal and has revealed itself to me for what it is ...I'm eating a wing ...of a tame turkey, the stupidest bird in the world, so stupid it can't even fly anymore, I am eating lost flight (CE, 145).

Elaine's mother becomes anxious over Elaine's lack of appetite. She had a “terrible ambivalence about feeding and nurturing” (Qtd. in Wolf, 188). She was also conflicted for “choosing traditional values and being fulfilled by nurturing” (Qtd. in Bordo, 48). This scene takes place in the kitchen where the mother and daughter bake muffins together:

I'm in the kitchen, greasing muffin tins for my mother. I see the patterns the grease leaves on the metal; I see the moons of my nails, the raggedy flesh. My fingers go around and around. “You don't have to play with them,” my mother says. “There must be other little girls you can play with instead.” I look at her. Misery washes over me like a slow wind. What has she noticed, what has she guessed, what is she about to do? She might tell their mothers. This would be the worst thing she could do.” “You have to learn to stand up for yourself,” says my Mother “Don't let them push you around. Don't be spineless. You have to have more backbone.” I think of sardines and their backbones. You can eat their backbones. This must be what my own backbone is like: hardly there at all. What is happening to me is my own fault, for not having more backbone. My mother sets down the bowl and puts her arms around me. “I wish I knew what to do” she says. This is a confession. Now I know what I've been suspecting: as far as thin thing is concerned, she is powerless. I know that muffins have to be baked right away, right after they've been ladled out, or they'll be flat and ruined. I can't afford the distraction of comfort. If I give in to it, what little backbone I have left will crumble way to nothing. I pull away from her. “They need to go into the oven,” I say (CE, 173-174).

As matter of fact, Elaine is preoccupied with consumption in the novel. She has to participate in the capitalistic policy of eating, so she could not eat anymore. She was in an extreme and painful debilitating way, a psychological struggle to fulfil the cultural construction of femininity. To Elaine, this system propagates a “constellation of social, economic, and psychological factors that have combined to produce a generation of women like herself who feel deeply flawed, ashamed of their needs, and not entitled to exist unless they transform themselves into worthy new selves” (Qtd. in Bordo, 47). Elaine's mother was blaming her for the “look of sickness, the look of poverty, and the look of nervous exhaustion” (Qtd. in Bordo, 184). She is compared to unbaked muffins and sardines: Weak, small and soft edibles. Elaine's mother was upset that her daughter “fed less well, less attentively and less sensitively than [she] needs” (Qtd. in Bordo, 191) which leads to her being bullied and asking for more backbone. Even her communication with Ben as a symbol of patriarchy also manifests her requirement to “embody the masculine values of the public arena” (Bordo, 173):

I walk west from Simpsons, still looking for something to eat. Finally I buy a slice of take-out pizza and devour it en route, with my fingers, folding it in two and gnawing. When I'm with Ben I eat at regular times because he does, I eat regular things, but when I'm alone I indulge in junk food and scavenging, my old, singular ways. It's bad for me, but I need to remember what bad for me is like. I could begin to take Ben for granted, with his ties and haircuts and grapefruits for breakfast. It makes me appreciate him more (CA, 195).

At the very end of the book, when Elaine revisits the scene of her childhood torments, she achieves a visceral understanding in keeping with her original reactions: "There is the same shame, the sick feeling in my body, the same knowledge of my own wrongness, awkwardness, weakness; the same wish to be loved; the same loneliness; the same fear" (CA, 117).

5. Hidden Hunger: Suffer and Be Silent

Margaret Atwood's other novel, *Alias Grace* also permeated with food. According to Erin Knapp *Alias Grace* is an historical novel based on Atwood's own research into the real case of Grace Marks, a celebrated murderess of the nineteenth century, and Victorian society itself. In the life of Grace and the lives of the characters around her, the restrictive aspects of the Victorian myth, the popularity of the Spiritualist movement, and nineteenth century theories on mental illness work together to document the gender inequality of the time period (1). According to Atwood, "the novel has its roots in the mud and part of the mud is history; and part of the history we've had recently is the history of the women's movement, and the women's movement has influenced how people read, and what you can get away with, in art" (qtd. in Knap). In an address of historical fiction, Margaret Atwood declared that "We cannot help but be contemporary, and *Alias Grace*, although set in the mid-nineteenth century, is, of course, a very contemporary book" (qtd. in Harroch, 103). A methodically researched study of Upper Canadian social and cultural history, *Alias Grace* at the same time examines a range of late-twentieth-century concerns, including the politically fraught issue of traumatized women and their controversial claims about the past. As Atwood repeatedly highlights to interviewers at the time of publication of *Alias Grace*, "our own era shares many of the dichotomous notions about women, sexuality, and criminality deployed when Grace Marks was first accused of murdering her employer and his lover, and revisiting the historical circumstances of the crime permits a sophisticated critique of both the past and the present" (Harroch, 104). The story begins on 21st November 1843 when Grace Marks is found guilty of murdering her master Thomas Kinnear and his housekeeper Nancy Montgomery. Grace Marks must be locked up in the Kingston Penitentiary because of her foul sin and crime. In addition to her murder conviction, Grace is also convicted of madness and the trial sends her to the Asylum. It is 1851 and she has been imprisoned since the age of sixteen. The lawyers and the judges and the newspaper men have decided against her and her trial is long over. Society is done with her, and the situation will not change anymore. Grace has entered the world of social policy of gender regulation, authority and control, and her identity is unknown as Atwood writes that "the true character of the historical Grace Marks remains an enigma" (Stenley, 372). This is the expression that is attached the body of Grace Marks and she herself defines how she acts it:

It's 1851. I'll be twenty-four years old next birthday. I've been shut up in here since the age of sixteen. I am a model prisoner, and give no trouble. That's what the Governor's wife says, I have overheard her saying it. I'm skilled at overhearing. If I am good enough and quiet enough, perhaps after all they will let me go; but it's not easy being quiet and good, it's like hanging on to the edge of a bridge when you've already fallen over; you don't seem to be moving, just dangling there, and yet it is taking all your strength (AC, 6).

Grace reflects over the fact that she has been named a "murderess" (AG, 23) by society. Indeed, she is seen as a "celebrated murderess" (AG, 23). This is how the legal system defines her. Imprisonment formally deprives Grace of liberty and future and the penitentiary practices further restrict her behaviour. She has to follow the rules to gain her freedom. She is used to the repeated norms as the way in which "female bodies become docile bodies – bodies whose forces and energies are habituated to external regulation, subjection, transformation, "improvement" " (Bordo, 166). She knows how she should exhibit her natural body by being quiet and silent. Grace believes that her bodily social is not the truth and it is a fake. For the regulatory regime, it is just a cultural ploy to confirm her bodily script:

That is what really interests them – the gentlemen and ladies both. They don't care if I killed anyone, I could have cut dozens of throats, it's only what they admire in a soldier, they'd scarcely blink. No: was I really a paramour, is their chief concern, and they don't even know themselves whether they want the answer to be no or yes (AG, 27).

The motif of food in *Alias Grace* is manifested from Grace's childhood. Her childhood in Ireland is full of hunger and thus food is noted for its absence. Her mother is a sign of the suppressed in the heterosexual culture "a timid creature, hesitating and weak and delicate" who believes in traditional values (AG, 105). Grace's mother is closely connected with food, and her role as a "denial of self and the feeding of other is hopelessly enmeshed in her construction of the ideal mother" (Bordo, 118). Her weakness and inability to stand up for herself in front of her husband and her sister angers Grace, "I wanted her to be stronger, so I would not have to be so strong myself" (AG, 105). Grace's mother had at least twelve children and one miscarriage. Nine children survived, and Grace became the main caretaker of the children and the family's food provisions at the age of nine. The instant and unconscious act of Grace's body to the events occurring around and to her is the first reaction to self-realization about the cultural requirements about a woman's body. Her mother depicts oppression and a woman's fulfilment of her biological fate, which is being a mother, since "food is equated with maternal and wifely love throughout our culture" (Bordo, 122). It was the attacks of panic when she experienced touching her mother's pregnant belly which starts to signal her own inside negation of being an oppressor of the system of cultural discourses in which "construction of mothering as the one true destiny for women" (Bordo, 95). She sees pregnancy as threatening and the responsibility for nourishment seems to be bothering her.

I put my hand on my mother's belly which was all round and tight, and I said What is in there, another mouth to feed, and my mother smiled sadly and said Yes I fear so, and I had a picture of an enormous mouth, on a head like the flying angel heads on the gravestone, but with teeth and all, eating away at my mother from the inside, and I began to cry because I thought it would kill her (AG, 107).

In the eyes of Grace, pregnancy is an "unhappy condition" (AG, 107) since it is "the central cultural arena for the battle over reproductive control" (Bordo, 93). Grace's father jokingly proposes that they would eat the newborn baby to satisfy their hunger: "He said it made him hungry just to look at it, it would look very nice on a platter with roast potatoes all round and an apple in its mouth. And he said why were we all staring at him" (AG, 110). The father's words are based on a consumer culture in which man consumes and suppress others and is based on the system, "women would be callously and casually scraping foetuses out of their bodies like leftovers off a plate" (Bordo, 95). Canada is wealthy in comparison to Ireland and the portrayal of food and its easy availability is manifested. Food depicts power which is gained by those who eat:

Food was certainly easier to come by in the Canadas than on the other side of the ocean, and there was a greater variety of it; and even the servants ate meat every day, if only salt pork or bacon; and there was good bread, of wheat and also of Indian corn; and the house had its own three cows and kitchen garden, and fruit trees, and strawberries, currants, and grapes; and flower beds as well (AG, 150).

The motif of food is represented between the heterosexual patriarchal man, Dr. Jordan Simon and Grace. Regulation, restriction and impoverished diet are virtually permanent for Grace while she is serving a life sentence for murder. Dr. Simon Jordan offers a possibility of rescue. Simon is a privileged, educated, American man with a wealthy background who grows up in a consumer society. Grace sees Simon as a hungry and greedy hunter to reveal the truth of murder. Grace thinks that his desire is for superior knowledge of her; he has a powerful will to know Grace's secret "help is what they offer but gratitude is what they want he wishes to go home and say to himself, I stuck in my thumb and pulled out the plum, what a good boy am I. But I will not be anybody's plum" (AG, 41).

Simon is viewed by Grace as a predator and hunter. Simons feels superior to Grace and, he expects her to be submissive. But Grace refuses to be his edible, his fruit that will give him fame and fortune. Simon is using Grace to make himself a hero, more excellent than the others in the art of trying to open up Grace. Grace presents her disapproval of the versions of womanhood that Simon assumes. At the first meeting, "he smiles, and then he does a strange thing. He puts his left hand into his pocket and pulls out an apple. He walks over to me slowly, holding the apple out in front of him like someone holding out a bone to a dangerous dog, in order to win it over" (AG, 39). Grace's problem with eating an apple in the first meeting is then her body's expression of the inner refusal to present the image of dominated culture:

I am so thirsty the apple looks to me like a big round drop of water, cool and red. I could drink it down in one gulp. I hesitate; but then I think, there's nothing bad in an apple, and so I take it. I haven't had an apple of my own for a long time. This apple must be from last autumn, kept in a barrel in the cellar, but it seems fresh enough.

I am not a dog, I say to him.

Most people would ask me what I mean by saying that, but he laughs. His laugh is just one breath, Hah, as if he's found a thing he has lost; and he says, No, Grace, I can see you are not a dog. What is

he thinking? I stand holding the apple in both hands. It feels precious, like a heavy treasure. I lift it up and smell it. It has such an odour of outdoors on it I want to cry.

Aren't you going to eat it, he says.

No, not yet, I say.

Why not, he says

Because then it would be gone, I say (AG, 39).

Grace has to hide her hunger and the desire that it could be used against womanhood so that he has power over her, "The truth is I don't want him watching me while I eat. I don't want him to see my hunger. If you have a need and they find it out, they will use it against you. The best way is to stop from wanting anything" (AG, 39). Since in a patriarchal system, "the depiction of women eating, particularly in sensuous surrender to rich, exciting food is taboo" (Bordo, 110). The next time Dr. Jordan sits in front of Grace he puts on the table a "potato" (AG, 97). Grace knows that Dr. Jordan attempts to ruin her and she is feeling like a part of a victim/predator game:

He picks up the potato and looks at it. He says, is it not wonderful that such a thing grows under the ground, you might say it is growing in its sleep, out of sight in the darkness, hidden from view.

Well, I don't know where he expects a potato to grow, I have never seen them dangling about on the bushes. I say nothing, and he says, what else is underground, Grace?

There would be the beets, I say. And the carrots are the same way, Sir, I say. It is their nature. He seems disappointed in this answer, and does not write it down (AG, 99).

Simon sees Grace as "cool as cucumber" (AG, 133) and he tries "in vain to open her up like an oyster" (AG, 133). Grace is an edible, a cucumber and an oyster, which Simon wants to open up, eat and learn about thoroughly. He thinks that:

He'll pry it out of her yet. He's got the hook in her mouth, but can he pull her out? Up, out of the abyss, up to the light. Out of the deep blue sea. He means her well, he tells himself. He thinks of it as a rescue, surely he does. But does she? If she has anything to hide, she may want to stay in the water, in the dark, in her element. She may be afraid she won't be able to breathe (AG, 322).

The image of the hook in the mouth manifests Simon as playing the role of the compulsive eater who aims to make Grace takes part in the eating process. However, Grace consumes the norms that are offered to her through refusal of eating. As a matter of fact, Grace as a prisoner and accused of murder could not rebel against her womanhood and seeks liberation from her ideal femininity. She is an oppressor of the civilization, the "edible woman" whom Simon attempts to ruin. Nevertheless, Grace's anorexia nervosa shows her inner conflict, and refusal to confirm social expectations which leads to her split of subjectivity.

6. Conclusion

It is the importance and meaning of the function of feminine bodies in the works of Atwood *Cat's Eye* and *Alias Grace* that is of interest. Female bodies are used by author as an instrument of women's repression and reaction to cultural results and limitations. Atwood involves food and eating with gender and identity. The performance to public tension is manifested by her female characters through their reaction towards food and, hence, through the eating disorders from which they undergo. It is through the unease of the protagonists toward their own bodies, which are often anorexic or starving, Atwood talks about the political, social and cultural issues that women face during their lives. In addition, it has been manifested how individuals are put under the pressure of the society to play pre-designated gender roles and to adjust themselves to the values, beliefs and ideas that society owns. The selected novels of Margaret Atwood are focused mainly to especial and significant womanhood matters, like becoming a woman or being forced to present the predefined gender roles of the ideal femininity. These fictions reveal the basis and meaning of important eating disorder that is anorexia nervosa, which can be presented as the female characters types of self-violence and the manifestation of cultural force. The heroines' association with the body has been manifested which leads to be being behaved as inferiors instead of superiors in the dominated culture. Atwood presents the vision of a dominate culture towards women's bodies, which is powerfully effected by a culture that insists that people must adjust to its norms and stereotypes. Females who are under cultural burden to perform the gender functions that they are expected to play it. The novel brings up the subject of social expectations towards femininity, which are depicted as destructive to the female identity and self-confidence. The purpose of using such motifs in her writing is to present women's situation and presents the female split of subjectivity from cultural expectations and demands, which is inseparably linked with the female body.

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