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The Uncanny Gender: Gender and the Unrepresentability of Subject Formation in Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* and *Bodily Harm*

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Abstract

This article is an attempt to study subject formation in relation to gender in Margaret Atwood's (1939-) *Surfacing* (1979) and *Bodily Harm* (1983) within the frame of the uncanny. The issue of gender has been discussed in Atwood's novels from different perspectives but this article claims that what have been rarely discussed in Atwood's novels are the unrepresentable realities in relation to gender which can be foregrounded by dislodging the uncanny. The uncanny which was once a rather minor issue in Freudian oeuvre has been reconsidered in the contemporary era by prominent thinkers, such as Jean-François Lyotard and Julia Kristeva whose ideas are used in elaborating the unrepresentability of gender in this article. The idea of the female sublime is the most significant issue in the context of the uncanny in this article which challenges any representational system of gender formation and problematizes our preconceived hence familiar perceptions of gender formation and reevaluates them in an unfamiliar, dynamic and unrepresentable space.

Key Words: The Uncanny, the Female Sublime, the unrepresentable, gender, Margaret Atwood

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Introduction

This article aims at studying Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* and *Bodily Harm* through dislodging the uncanny. The attempt is to foreground the unrepresentabilities of gender/subject formation by the uncanny reading of Atwood's novels. According to the genealogy of the term, the uncanny at least goes back to Ernst Jentsch in his discussion of "intellectual uncertainty" in "On the Psychology of the Uncanny" (1906) where he attributed the uncanny to a state of hesitation when the mind cannot decipher the actualities of what it perceives. The more comprehensive investigation of the uncanny goes back to Sigmund Freud's 1919 essay of the same title "The Uncanny" where he tried to define the uncanny. Though he presented some of the examples and circumstances of the experience of the uncanny, he could not come up with a rigid definition of the term due to the paradoxical nature of it which will be explained later in the article.

The uncanny which was once a rather minor discussion in Freudian oeuvre gained prominence by recent reconsiderations of the term, especially by rereadings of Freud's essay in relation with gender. The importance of reconsidering the uncanny might be inherent in the very essence of the uncanny which conjures up concepts such as un/familiarity, ambivalence, fluidity and unrepresentability. Many contemporary writers have incorporated the idea of the uncanny into their writings in order to foreground the unrepresentable realities of modern anxieties and "experience of disorientations" (Collins and Jervis, 2008:1) since these concerns hardly surrender to a vivid graspable method in order to explain them.

The idea of gender is a significant issue which has been discussed by many contemporary writers, such as Margaret Atwood (1939-), the prominent Canadian writer. This article seeks to investigate a new way of studying subject formation in relation to gender in Margaret Atwood's two novels, *Surfacing* and *Bodily Harm*. Atwood's protagonists are exposed to the unrepresentable realities of subject/gender formation which can be foregrounded by the uncanny reading of Atwood's novels. In this article, the uncanny exceeds its classical definitions though it preserves the basic meaning which was proposed by Jentsch or Freud.

In what follows first the term, the uncanny is elaborated in order to emphasize the paradoxical nature of it and then the concepts of the sublime and the unrepresentable and their relationship with the uncanny in discussing gender issues are explained. This is significant because the uncanny as it long has been considered is not the negative term for the transcendental sublime. The sublime is related to the uncanny as far as it points to the beyond, to the unrepresentable and the unexplainable. In this article the sublime also is a linguistic phenomenon and unlike its classical considerations is not merely masculine implying stability but also feminine echoing fluidity and flexibility. In sum, the modern capacities of the uncanny provide a new way for reading Margaret Atwood's novels in terms of gender formation.

The Uncanny

"Uncanny" is a general word. *Das Unheimliche*, a word that Freud discussed in his 1919 essay of the same title, "The Uncanny", is translated as "unhomely" or "unhousedness". "Uncanny" is a translation

from the German word in Freud's essay. *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* defines "Uncanny" as "mischievous", "Untrustworthy" and "dangerous" which does not seem to include the implications of the German word *Das Unheimliche* since it posits the uncanny against canny. In other words, they are considered as two opposite words with the "Canny" meaning positive and safe but the "Uncanny" as dangerous and negative. Even if the word "canny" means "clever" it is as David Huddart mentions worthy of suspiciousness hence carries degrees of unfamiliarity and uneasiness. (Huddart, 2006: 55).

In Freud's definition of the word both positive and negative coincide in the same word "uncanny" and this definition should be considered along with Freud's lexicographic effort to define the word as he concludes: "thus *heimlich* is a word the meaning of which develops in the direction of ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich*. *Unheimlich* is in some way or other a sub-species of *heimlich*" (Freud and Strachey, 1976: 3679).

This is the very word "ambivalence" which is crucial in theorizing the uncanny because as Freud mentions this is not the emergence of something unknown and new which is frightening and consequently uncanny but the uncanny is "that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar (3676). In other words, the disturbance of the boundaries of the un/familiar arouses ambivalence in a way that this is the familiar which stimulates uneasiness in a certain way that one cannot realize that the situation is familiar or unfamiliar. This is the very hesitation which conjures up ambivalence. Ambivalence is at the core of the uncanny theory which shuns any graspable anchor point and this is the very ambivalence which turns the uncanny as a phenomenon which cannot be perceived and defined upon actual occurrence. One example is déjà vu.

As far as theorizing the uncanny is concerned, one might ask how does the uncanny function in a literary text? In the context of the uncanny, signification emerges elsewhere in half-told stories, in crossroad of imagination and reality where things are not vividly explainable and remain unrepresentable. The uncanny aims at foregrounding unrepresentabilities by manifesting belatedness hence problematizes any classified notion of referentiality, especially in the most significant issues and anxieties of the modern world such as gender issues. . In literature as McLeod observes the uncanny illustrates characters and conditions which are "unhomely" and "cannot be articulated through existing patterns of representation" (qtd. in Whiteman, 2004: 91). An example which will be elaborated later in the article is Atwood's unnamed protagonist in *Surfacing* whose uncanny experience of living the life of an animal in the body of a human being is significant to provide a space for that uncanny ambivalence which the writer of this article seeks to explain in the matters of representations of gender.

Therefore, in foregrounding what is unrepresentable, the uncanny challenges forms of representations in relation to subject formation. What constitutes the core of the uncanny theory is its collapsing of the boundaries and challenging the fixities. As Whiteman mentions "uncanny presences have the potentialities to disrupt the binary logic on which colonialist, nationalist and patriarchal narratives depend" (ibid). This can be read as the disruption of the orders which intend to dissolve the priorities which

lie in our dangerous preconceived notions of the issues of the world by disrupting the binary opposition first and keeping them in the threshold of being, averting any sign to take precedence over the other. Theorizing the uncanny continuously questions the authenticity of the signs by dislocating and disrupting the signs of representations and paves the way for our awareness of what is unrepresentable.

The Uncanny, the Unrepresentable and the Sublime

In order to discuss the female sublime in the next section, first it is crucial to discuss the relationship between the uncanny and the sublime. The relationship between the uncanny and the sublime has been oppositional in traditional conceptions of the two terms. The sublime has conventionally been considered as masculine which implied positivity, unity and transcendence. The sublime thus considered, was used to define the uncanny as a negative force. But in the recent reconsiderations of the uncanny by many contemporary thinkers, such as Lyotard, the sublime is attributed to the sense of nothingness which is in relation to the "unpresentable". In fact, the unrepresentability which is meant here is of a linguistic nature or as Lyotard mentions "isn't it essential to [the feeling of the sublime] that it alludes to something which can't be shown, or presented?" (Lyotard, 1989: 196).

The reevaluation of the sublime within the context of the uncanny seems to be in line with the postmodern condition and manifestations of realities in this era, especially in relation to the issue of gender and its representation as a contemporary anxiety. Since reality is not definable through one particular "self-contained material surfaces" (193), but in the "intersection of various complex levels of meaning" (ibid), it is quite imaginable that there are things which have gone unnoticed in the definition of the reality of gender which are "immaterial" and unrepresentable. The issue of gender thus considered within the uncanny female sublime as many critics, such as Barbara Freeman consider, provides the chance for problematizing the fixities of gender representations and paves the way for "the awareness of the infinite analyzability and transformation" (194). Therefore, gender fixities is problematized and reevaluated within the uncanny female sublimity, the example of which is Rennie's diseased body which the protagonist later understands as a site of transformation rather than a punishment for making a spectacle of one's self. Rennie challenges our being "situated through ideas of …gender" (Sawyer, 2014: 38).

Therefore, the sublime does not emerge out of owe inspiring images in the postmodern consideration of the term, especially in the framework of the uncanny; it is activated when our sense of perception finds itself totally incapable of deciphering the complex relations among different variables and elements which constitute the everyday reality of our perception of gender. Whenever the complexities of the relationships are at stake, there are abundant possibilities of misrepresentation of the reality. The sublime which is considered in the context of the uncanny perpetually reminds us of the possibility of the misrepresentations or at least unrepresentabilities of gender formation by rendering what has long been familiar into an unfamiliar realm simultaneously.

When we talk about unrepresentability embedded within the uncanny sublime, we

mean the discrepancy between what is demonstrated and the reality of that issue such as gender, to "the disunity of form and content, on the arbitrariness of signifier and signified" (81) which points to the indeterminate quality of the sublime and its immateriality from a linguistic point of view. In other words, there are unrepresentable realities about gender formation which cannot be explained hence it is needed to foreground them by an immaterial method which is the uncanny sublime.

The Female Sublime

It is not unimaginable to attribute the indeterminacy of the sublime to feminine quality. Unlike the classical perception of the sublime which associated it to unity, anti-fragmentary, stability and harmonizing of the opposing forces, the form of sublime proposed by contemporary thinkers, such as Barbara Freeman, on the other hand, does not stand for gathering the disparate; rather, it welcomes "self-shattering"; it does not shun fragmentations. While the masculine reading of excellence lies in unity, the feminine sublime seeks for excess in unlimitedness.

Therefore, there is a "sense" of conflict which helps to arouse the sense of the sublime. The sublime is neither dependent on unity nor on fragmentation; rather this is the continual dualism between the opposing sides which fuels any textual conflict; hence, the sublime. Thus, there is always this dualistic "co-implication" in a way that one force gives way to another or is transformed to another state of ecstasy. Atwood's protagonists in both novels exemplify the experience of death in life or un/life within their diseased body and madness as they go through the two apparently conflicting states of life/death without one force surrendering to the other which can imply a constant transformation or ecstasy.

Ecstasy is a significant feature of the female sublime. The idea of "transport" or "*ekstasis*" seems exactly related to the unrepresentable in relation to the sublime and the issue of gender due to its dualistic nature which makes the ekstasis or excess quite uncanny. The excess is an experience with the subject which confronts her or him with the *Other* because it perpetually exceeds what it is as the word itself suggests. Ekstasis is a chance to go beyond the self, to be an *Other* due to its transformational quality which helps us to experience a constant substitution of self and *Other*. Though the self does not totally disappear, the other would emerge as the spot where the self is both "disabled" and "empowered", "an encounter with the other in which the self, simultaneously disabled and empowered, testifies to what exceeds it" (Bloom,2010: 5). Therefore, what seems uncannily remarkable about the female sublime is that it is not all about representing the excess which breaks the unity and wholeness but "the desire for the excess itself" (ibid). Unlike the Longinian sublime, Freeman asserts that the female sublime has to do with "disturbance" of the boundaries, the practice of the unfamiliarity at the heart of what seems to be familiar. Ekstasis is a quality of the female sublime which unlike the traditional perceptions does not emphasize on otherworldliness. It is an emphasis on the linguistic quality of the sublime which stands for borderlessness, fluidity and the experience of unfamiliarity within familiarity. Ekstasis is that moment of unrepresentability which is not rigidly definable since it is neither here nor there, neither now nor then; it is the combination of different forces.

Surfacing: Logic as the site of the Masculine Sublime

The narrator of *Surfacing* is already born in a logic-stricken society. Many times she blames her father because of his rationalist view of the world: "he admired what he called the eighteenth century rationalists: He thought of them as men who….learnt the secret of the golden mean, the balanced life" (Atwood, 1979: 32). "A balanced life" as he called it is a specification of the masculine sublimity, an off spring of mere logic, a geometrical construction. Later the protagonist will discover through her husband that many of the rationalists suffered from "madness" or "manic-depression", "Cowper a madman, Doctor Johnson a manic-depressive and Goldsmith a pauper….after that I liked them better, they weren't paragons anymore" (ibid). Paradoxically, implying that for their literary and philosophical creativity and mastery a balanced life and mind was not sufficient.

The kind of logic the father advocated was at odds with spontaneity which used to keep him and the whole family in isolation as he believed that people were "irrational; animals, he said were more consistent, their behavior at least was predictable. To him that's what Hitler exemplifies: not the triumph of evil but the failure of reason" (53). The narrator would tell us that this was his very withdrawal that "split" them "between two anonymities, the city and the bush" (ibid). "In the city we lived in a succession of apartments and in the bush he picked the most remote lake he could find" (ibid). That is the reason the narrator experienced the potential separation and split of two modes of thinking, city as standing for the masculine sublime and the bush as female sublime. There was always this hidden rivalry and competence between these two forces as culture and nature as the main reason which fueled the narrator's lost selfhood which will be discussed later.

Unity and Wholeness

As the narrator is searching for her lost self among the old family photos and paintings she comes across her own paintings of her childhood. They picture the balanced life advocated by the rationalists and the logic. The traditional sublime as beautiful is well illustrated in her paintings as she tells us that every painting of her presented symmetry, safety, greenery and fertility, none of them is exotic and unusual:

> page after page of eggs and rabbits, grass and trees, normal and green, surrounding them flowers blooming, sun in the upper-right hand corner of each picture, moon symmetrically in the left. All the rabbits were smiling and some were laughing hilariously; several were eating ice-cream cones from the safety of their egg-tops. No monster, no wars, no explosions, no heroism. (85)

She is "disappointed" by her paintings and thinks that she was probably "a hedonistic child…quite stodgy also,…or perhaps it was a vision of Heaven" (ibid). Her childhood painting in fact was the reflection of the predominant version of the sublime, valorizing the discourse of the beautiful not the grotesque. As a grown-up, she would have a different perception of life as symmetrical and normal, especially with her experience of love and the married life.

Her gradual search in the old family photos and paintings provides no clue in

relation to her lost self or father. She wishes for fluidity as opposed to rigidity of logic, "I felt that would be the best way to live, in a floating house carrying everything you needed with you and some other people you liked; when you wanted to move somewhere else it would be easy" (34). The preconceived notion of the masculine sublime which seems to be associated with the narrator's living "civilized" life proposed the existence of either a loser or a winner,

> there were only things you could be, a winner or a loser; the mothers tried to rig it so everyone got a prize, but they couldn't figure out what to do about me since I wouldn't play. At first, I ran away, but after that my mother said I had to go, I had to learn to be polite; "civilized", she called it. (65)

Feminine sublimity, on the other, hand does not provoke the struggle of the opposing forces as the narrator tells us that "the trouble is all in the knob at the top of our bodies. I'm not against the body or the head either: only the neck, which creates the illusion that they are separate. The language is wrong, it shouldn't have different words for them" (70). In the masculine mode of the sublime the head stands for logic. The narrator comes to recognize that her search for the father and the self is but a failure through logical ordering and documents. As she is searching among her father's paintings she uncovers a page which is a "typed letter" addressed to her father. The letter had "a university crest"; after reading the letter she asserts that "the academic prose breathed reason" (97) as if reason is nothing but "an old man's delusion of usefulness" (97). "After the failure of logic" she assumes her father must have "discovered new places, new oracles, they were things he was seeing the way "she "had seen", she calls it "true vision"; "at the end, after the failure of logic" (139). This is exactly after the failure of logic when the uncanny experience of unhomely familiar happened most probably to the father as it is also experienced by the narrator, "when it happened the first time he must have been terrified, it would be like stepping through a usual door and finding yourself in a different galaxy, purple trees and red moons and a green sun" (139).

Madness as Ecstasy/ The State of the Uncanny Female Sublimity

As the narrator's search ends up with failure in finding a hint for her true self, she declares that "the power from my father's intercession wasn't enough to protect me, it gave only knowledge and there were more gods than his, his were the gods of the dead, antlers rooted in the brain" (Atwood, 1979: 147). Eventually, she falls into the state of madness which in feminine sublimity can imply the moment of ecstasy and infinity. Madness is in fact the unrepresentable moment of feminine ecstasy, "the lake was horrible, it was filled with death, it was touching me" (136). Madness is the uncanny moment of death in life which in female sublimity signifies multiplicity and ecstasy. As the narrator floats in the lake, she tells us that her "body also changes" (162) as if she multiplies. She merges with the nature, "on the bare flesh of my legs are the imprints of leaves and twigs"(163). In her extreme practice of madness, she eliminates "everything from history" (170) such as "paper things, glasses and plates and the chimney of the lamp" she "takes off" her "clothes, peeling them away from" her "flesh like wallpaper" (171). In her complete merging with nature, she sees

herself as part of it, "I dip my dead beneath the water, washing my eyes. Inshore a loon; it lowers its head, then lifts it again and calls. It sees me but it ignores me, accepts me as part of the land" (172). In the lake, she leaves her "false body". In her ecstatic experience of infinity as she is eating from the garden plants she withdraws any sign of rigidity and comes to term with variations: "red food, heart colour,…then yellow; then blue; green foods are mixed from blue and yellow". For the narrator that is the experience of multiplicity and multilingualism: "around me the space rustles; owl sound, across the lake or inside me, distance contracts. A light wind, the small waves talking against the shore, multilingual water" (ibid). In madness the body is no more a burden; the subject feels a total fluidity; now and again one agent merges without completely subjugating another; "I lean against a tree, I am a tree leaning…I am not an animal or a tree, I am the thing in which the trees and animals move and grow, I am a place" (175).

To Wawrzinek "the sublime has more often than not been employed for the specific purpose of installing and maintaining a hegemony that is not only masculinist, but also white, middle-class, Western, and heterosexual"(Wawrzinek, 2008: 53). Atwood's novels amplify and explicate that aspect of the sublime which has been ignored in many considerations and studies of the uncanny, that is, the feminine sublime. It seems that the recent reconsiderations of the sublime suggest the discounted aspects of the sublime long neglected. One of these very crucial aspects is "the grotesque" which is the heart of the study of the next section. The study of the grotesque in relation to the sublime seems to exclude the notion of hierarchy embedded in the classical consideration of the sublime which used to "exclude the abject body" as one of the significant notions in discussing gender issues. In the following section Atwood's *Bodily Harm* will explore the unrepresentable aspects of the uncanny gender in the form of the grotesque body (diseased body).

Bodily Harm: The Grotesque Body as the Female Sublimity

Defining the grotesque to many critics has become arduous since it is in direct relation with time, place and culture. Despite the difficulty in defining, the grotesque is generally acting against the preconceived perspective of perfection. Among the most significant ones is Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the grotesque in relation to his theory of the carnival implying democracy and the absence of struggle of the opposing forces; "the essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation" (Bakhtin, 1968: 19). In other words, the grotesque deals with the materialization of what is high and elevated. Like the female sublime it celebrates the "sphere of earth and body", therefore, unlike the classical masculine sublime, the female sublime allows what is a bodily attitude, a celebration of the abject as is "notably the life of the belly" like "copulation, gestation, ingestion, digestion, elimination" (Howells, 2006:115).

Mikhail Bakhtin's "grotesque body" about which critics are both happy and critical (because there is no implication of considering women as grotesque in his elaboration of the term) employs the notion of the carnival and attributes it to "the bodily aesthetic" which he calls "grotesque realism" (52); the kind of body which implies its openness to fluidity and becoming. Bakhtin, in fact, sets forth two types of bodies: the classical body which equates with a "finished

product" and the grotesque body or the "carnival body" which suggests fluidity. In Bakhtin's words, the classical body is "a strictly completed, finished product. . . . its protuberances and offshoots. . . removed, its convexities (signs of new sprouts and buds) smoothed out, its apertures closed" (Bakhtin, 1968: 29) while the grotesque body is "a body in the act of becoming . . . never finished, never completed . . . continually built, created, and build[ing] and creat[ing] another body" (317).

As was mentioned earlier the grotesque deals with degradation. It is worth recalling that the manifestation of the bodily images is intensely positive and that this positivity has to do with degradation. By degradation we mean a certain kind of process in which the preconceived higher gives in to the "downward". Therefore, we are dealing with two words: "upwards" and "downwards" in their "topographic" sensation with upwards dealing with head and downwards dealing with the lower part of the body, such as the belly. The grotesque used these connotations to refer to downward as dealing with the earth (or down to earth) and upwards as is related to heaven. In other words, downwards deal with the lower part of the body and the earth which signifies "an element that devours, swallows up (the grave, the womb) and at the same time an element of birth, of renascence (the maternal breasts)" (21). Degradation, therefore, suggests a sense of identification with the earth and its devouring and fertile potentiality at the same time.

Degradation as it is related to the grotesque body does not suggest elimination as it has the idea of downward in itself; rather, it kills to give birth. Since it connotes dealing with the "lower stratum of the body" it implies the belly and the genitals which set forth the idea of "defecation and copulation, conception, pregnancy, and birth" (21). In other words,

> to degrade an object does not imply merely hurling it into the void of nonexistence, into absolute destruction, but to hurl it down to the reproductive lower stratum, the zone in which conception and a new birth take place. Grotesque realism knows no other lower level; it is the fruitful earth and the womb. It is always conceiving. (21)

To many critics, Bakhtin would have better acknowledged that the grotesque body in its "conceptual" and "historical" implications has direst references to women. Mary Russo in her *The Female Grotesque: Risk, Excess and Modernity* mentions that Bakhtin fails to consider "the social relations of gender in his semiotic model of the body politic" (Russo, 1994: 63) and asserts that the issue of the female grotesque thus goes unnoticed and undeveloped in his theories. In Kathleen Rowe's words "[t]he grotesque body is above all the female body, the *maternal* body, which, through menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, and lactation, participates uniquely in the carnivalesque drama of 'becoming,' of inside-out and outside-in, death-in-life and life-in-death" (qtd in Shapira, 2010: 52). As Rowe asserts the grotesque body is above all the maternal body; the abject body as both are categorized in the zone of the uncanny. The uncanny undertones of the grotesque and the maternal-abject body rest upon a borderline of exclusion and inclusion as in childbirth which is "the height of bloodshed and life, scorching moment of hesitation (between

inside and outside, ego and other, life and death), horror and beauty,…at the doors of the feminine, at the doors of abjection" (qtd in Russo, 1994: 64). Kristeva writes: "something maternal" happens to bear upon the uncertainty that I call abjection" (Kristeva, 1982: 208) or the abject is "the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me toward the place _where meaning collapses…is on the edge of non-existence and hallucination" (2). The abject as Kristeva mentions, is the severe uncanniness since it is familiar yet is now "radically separate loathsome"; it is not "nothing" but it is "something" that she does not realize as a "thing". Therefore, Bakhtin's grotesque would be more illuminating in the realm of gender issue when it is fueled by Kristeva's abject body since Bakhtin's grotesque as reconsidered in relation to Kristeva's abject would aim at making a meaningful link between women's body as "unstable" and monstrous or "disgusting" and their potential implication for renewal disclosure to challenge the preconceived notions of female sublimity.

What Atwood is proposing in *Bodily Harm* is in fact demystifying the female grotesque body as a kind of negating result for female delinquency. In other words, in her novels the presence of the female grotesque body is not a deterrent story of a woman who is rebuked for her wrongdoing; the grotesque female body is not the sight of the presentation of the "ideologically motivated storytelling" (Shapira, 2010: 52) which used to recognized the presence of the grotesque as parallel to legitimized punishment for the "monstrous" or "transgressive" body. Besides, the female grotesque body poses questions in relation to issues related to female body's corporeality. Deconstructing the female sublimity, the female grotesque with all the corporeality inscribed in female body in Margaret Atwood's novels calls for a disclosure which promises renewal and "the act of becoming" rather than stability. The grotesque in Atwood's novel is a call for representing the unrepresentable realities about subject formation.

Atwood's novels are most vividly depicting the female body (the usual dark spot capable of provoking bafflement and insult) with all its mutability as "ever-dynamic locus" (53). Atwood's novel though like many of her traditional storytellers depict woman's body as one of the central issues but quite unlike her misogynous tale tellers challenges the view of presenting woman's fluid body as a sight of contamination as a natural outcome for those who make a "spectacle" out of themselves as Mary Russo mentions.

The grotesque body as Atwood mentions in her 1993 lecture is to "think the unthinkable and say the unsayable" (qtd in Shapira, 2010: 62). In reference to the traditional sublime, the unthinkable and the unsayable are no more suggestive of transcendence which would appear as the "sensible and material world" (Wawrzinek, 2008: 42) fade away. Conversely, the emergence of the "monster" implies "the disruptive return of the sensible, physical and abject"(ibid). When the physical and the worldly appear the role of the grotesque as "as the often forgotten third term that accompanies the sublime and the beautiful" (ibid) would be highlighted. For Atwood the grotesque in its larger scale is a motif in order to announce "leveling of the hierarchies" (Howells, 2006: 115) including gender issues.

"In myth woman's boundaries are pliant, porous, mutable. . . . she swells, she shrinks, she leaks, …., she suffers metamorphoses,

writes Anne Carson of the female body's portrayal in classical antiquity" (qtd in Shapira,2010: 52). There are many references to such embodiment of woman's body in texts of literature; Atwood's mutable female grotesque body challenges the legacy of the female grotesque body and reconsiders it in its social and cultural circumstance.

Rennie of *Bodily Harm* experiences an uncanny condition as she is diagnosed by breast cancer. She feels a constant oscillation between death and life since the boundaries of her body are shattered and "loosened" by her disease. A diseased body which according to Kristeva stands for the "ego threatened by the non-ego…life by death" (Kristeva, 1982: 71). This condition for Rennie is quite uncanny as she finds the once familiar body of hers to stand against her. After the operation she considers herself as dismembered as she lost one quarter of her breast and has difficulty pretending her situation as "normal" as she is trying to catch up with Jake her lover.

The historical conception of the female body as is inscribed on the consciousness of Rennie, considers her as the grotesque, the one who according to Mary Russo has probably made a "spectacle" out of herself some times and that she was probably punished for being excessive or transgressive which was seemed to be a "feminine danger". Rennie a day before operation (and long after that) is obsessed with normalizing her body and condition:

> she wanted to make it easy for him, she wanted to help him along with the illusion that nothing bad had happened to her or was going to happen. Her body was in the mirror, looking the same as ever. She couldn't believe that in a week, a day, some of it might have vanished. She thought about what they did with the parts. (Atwood, 1983: 15).

Atwood's narrative in *Bodily Harm* retrieves the predominant "narrative formula that joins the "grotesque" female body to a story of women's misconduct to produce a cautionary tale about the dangers of female transgression" (Shapira, 2010: 52) and then challenges it. We are told that Rennie is from Griswold, Ontario. The classic and rather gloomy picture of Griswold from Rennie's point of view against which she identifies herself is a confirmation of the manifestation of the female grotesque body as a site of contamination:

> Rennie is from Griswold, Ontario. Griswold is what they call her background. Though it's less like a background, a backdrop- picturesque red Victorian houses and autumn trees on a hillside in the distance- than a subground, something that can't be seen but is nevertheless there, full of gritty old rocks and buried stumps, worms and bones; nothing you'd want to go in. Those who'd lately been clamouring for roots had never seen a root up close, Rennie used to say. She had, and she'd rather be some other part of the plant. (*Awood, 1983:* 14-15)

Her joking references to Griswold as she shared them with her friends implicitly point to Griswold's tradition of "crime and punishment" mostly directed to women's

body and their misconduct, "in an earlier phase Rennie used to tell jokes about Griswold to amuse her friends. Such as:...how many people from Griswold does it take to change a lightbulb? None. If the light goes out it's the will of God, and who are you to complain?" (14)

But the idea of making a spectacle out of oneself and get the punishment accordingly haunts Rennie from the very beginning of the novel when she reaches home and finds that a man had already entered her house when she was out and left a piece of rope on her bed; implying that she certainly did something wrong; for Rennie Griswold is always there: "though it's not always so easy to get rid of Griswold. For instance: When Rennie saw the piece of the rope on her bed, she knew what Griswold would have had to say about it. This is what happens to women like you. What can you expect, you deserve it" (14). As a grotesque female body, Rennie might probably stand somewhere outside the realm of the beautiful and the sublime, somewhere "outside the structures of legitimacy inhabited by the sublime and the beautiful" (Wawrzinek, 2008: 44). She even did not tell anything to her mother about the operation since as a child she learnt that the "cuts and scrapes" are something that Rennie does to "complicate her mother's life". Her mother used to say "what did you *that* for?" and that "next time watch where you're going" (Awood, 1983: 55). Rennie would see that the operation would be her "fault"; cancer would be even worse since it "wasn't in the same class as a broken leg or a heart attack or even a death. It was apart, obscene almost, like a scandal; it was something you brought upon yourself" (ibid).

In Rennie's world which was surrounded by the "vertical" sublimity which according to Patricia Yaeger is masculine and is also identified with Griswold in the novel, the "masculine self" is differentiated and separated "from the chaos of the (feminine) generative body (qtd in Wawrzenik, 2008: 52). The masculine body is thus preferably definite, clear, and stable and the feminine body is excluded as abject and ambiguous. Rennie in her regular tests after the operation asks the doctor to tell her "either" she "is living or…dying" (Atwood, 1983: 40). Haunted by the uncanny state of blurred boundaries she feels that this situation is not good for her, "she wants something definite, the real truth, one way or the other. Then she will know what she should do next. It's this suspension, hanging in a void, this half-life she can't bear. She can't bear not knowing" (ibid).

The fear of the abject generative female body is severely embedded within Rennie's body when it turns out to "legitimate the experience of those…who are normally excluded from structures of representation" (Wawrzinek, 2008: 53). As Rennie's fear of her being not normal sustains throughout the novel, she specifically quits what she used to do with centrality of her body like swimming, she "hasn't been swimming since the operation, she hasn't found a bathing suit that will do…her real fear…is that the scar will come undone in the water, split open like a faulty zipper, and she will turn inside out" (Atwood, 1983:54).

Yaeger believes that the "maternal sublime" is the source of "transformation" which signifies change and instability and here is exactly the point, where the grotesque and the sublime can coincide; this very coincidence paves the way for hearing "those who are normally excluded from structures of representation" (Wawrzinek, 2008: 53). As for Rennie, she feels a constant transformation in her body throughout the

novel. Her female grotesque body becomes a site for the act of becoming as

> she lies down on the bed again, hearing the blood running through her body, which is still alive. She thinks of the cells, whispering, dividing in darkness replacing each other one at a time; and of the other cells, which may or may not be there, working away in her with furious energy, like yeast. They would show up hot orange under one kind of light, hot blue under another, like the negative print of the sun when you close your eyes. Beautiful colures. (Atwood, 1983:67)

The vertical or traditional form of the sublime is challenged through the presence of the female grotesque body in the form of the suffering or diseased body to shatter the safe guard of the stable and unified body and demystify its grandeur. The grotesque body celebrates "the body of plurality and difference"(Wawrzinek, 2008: 68). Rennie's diseased body acts as a metaphor for what Patricia Yaeger announces as "the maternal sublime" or "horizontal sublime" foregrounding transformation and its emphasis on "subjectivity as fluid and changing" (Yaeger, 131). At times Rennie falls into the state of undecidability between reality and abnormality. This situation of not knowing though is not desirable to Rennie, especially in relation to her bodily condition, accelerates the fluidity of what constitutes her subjectivity; the unrepresentable moments in her subject formation.

Her state of undecidability will even heighten when she takes the journey to St. Antoine, a Caribbean island to give herself a space in order to feel "exempt" from what had happened to her recently regarding her bodily harm and the external attack which was the mysterious presence of a seemingly faceless stranger who left a coil of white rope on her bed and then left. There in the island, she will be involved in a series of political issues, though she is trying to keep herself as detached to the problems of the region; she ends up being imprisoned with Lora because of "suspicion". Rennie finds herself quite unable to distinguish the validity of what she witnesses and hears. Though she spends a few days in Paul's house, she has difficulty realizing his true character in a way that his temporal absence in order to find eggs for breakfast makes her unsettled about Paul's probable constant absence.

Her sense of duality accentuates at the time of election in St. Antoine when she repeatedly asks Paul, the drug dealer about what is happening and is bewildered about the political events and figures of the island who are attending the election campaign. Rennie finds herself quite unable to locate the who's who game which even led to the murder of one candidate, Dr. Minnow. She is not even sure about Paul and Lora's conduct as she finds out that they were keeping an eye on her for being suspicious as one of the CIA's and her final entrapment. All that to Rennie seem like a "*Massive involvement*", a medical term her doctor used to describe the amount of malignancy for removing the harmed member of the body as Rennie tells the doctor that "I should be relieved,…that you didn't hack off the whole thing. We don't do that anymore unless there's massive involvement, said Daniel. Massive involvement, said Rennie. It's never been by thing" (Atwood, 1983: 25). Conversely, as the novel progresses Rennie realizes that all her

life is amidst a massive involvement. In other words, she is massively involved in the unrepresentable realities of the experiences which hover around her subjectivity not based on "action and visibility" but on silence, ambiguity and hideousness.

The novel ends in future tense as Rennie is taking the flight back. Though textually speaking this might imply that the flight image might take place in Rennie's imagination as she is still in prison thinking about her release, for Rennie everything becomes forever in the act of becoming. Everything for Rennie is associated with "instances of recurrence". Her trip back home would not necessarily be a release from the prison and the chaotic Caribbean island but a trip into the unknown, "she'll walk up the stairs and through her own front door, into the unknown. She doesn't know who will be waiting for her, who will be there, in any sense of the word that means anything" (250).

Rennie seems to extend the condition of her uncanny abject body appearing in the form of a diseased body to all aspects of her being. She sees everything has the potentiality of recurrence; either her disease or the reappearance of the unknown man with a rope. She is no more living on the surfaces as she used to think "that there were things it was better not to know any more about than you had to. Surfaces, in many cases, were preferable to depth. She did a piece on the return of the angora sweater, and another one on the hand-knit-look industry…" (140). Now that she has been exposed to the inaccessible and unrepresentable experiences which haunt all her life, she is full to the brim with things that are her "things".

> what she sees has not altered; only the way she sees it. It's all exactly the same. Nothing is the same. She feels as if she's returning after a space trip, a trip into the future; it's her that's been changed but it seems as if everyone else has, there's been a warp. They've been living in a different time. (198)

Conclusion

Atwood's novels are demonstrations of the uncanny gender. They foreground the unrepresentability of subject formation in relation to gender. This article attempted at dislodging the uncanny to bring about a way to study Atwood's depiction of in-between-ness, contradictions, paradoxes embedded within the very word uncanny illustrated in her heroine's narrations of the process of their subject formation.

In dislodging the uncanny, the issue of the sublime is a significant one in discussing gender since it embodies the unrepresentable realities of subject formation. The female sublime in Atwood's novels maintains the unspeakable and unrepresentable aspects of the experiences hovered around subject formation. In other words, the female sublime challenges the boundaries of the beautiful and what seemed to be "natural" (Royle, 2003: 1) and stands somewhere outside the structure of stability and visibility associated with the masculine or vertical sublime.

The female sublime in Atwood's novels is a demonstration of the gendered aspect of the sublime which has been neglected in many of the theories of the prominent thinkers of the sublime. The female sublime in Atwood is a consideration of excess and infinity which is a realm of the unrepresentable. In the domain of the unrepresentable, identity is not formed at the expense of overcoming the

opposing forces and yearning for the wholeness and unity; rather, the subject is inclined to a horizontal model of the sublime which shifts "the focus from a stable transcendental self 'discovered' in an experience of the sublime to a self in process, and from a fixed transcendental order to one that is contingent" (Wawrzinek, 2008:51).

Atwood's novels pay significant attention to body. A significant revision of the sublime with its focus on the female sublime brought the idea of the female grotesque body into attention. The grotesque in her novels speak for the unrepresentable realities of the experiences of the subject formation. A reading of the postmodern sublime and specially the female or gendered sublime paves the way for the presence of the "embodied others, and therefore to the carnivalesque and the grotesque. If we admit that the grotesque body is a carnivalesque body, we cannot deny that the grotesque body is significantly a maternal body, a body which is associated with flux and transformation. It is the body which is continually experiencing "the act of becoming" as it is alternating between the ego and the non-ego, the self and the other, life and death which are embedded in the birth-giving scene. Through the uncanny the preconceived notions of gender issues is problematized. In other words, the preconceived familiarity of gender formation becomes uncannily unfamiliar, hence provides the chance for reevaluation and reconsiderations of what we previously assumed as given and natural.

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ویژه‌نامهٔ آموزش زبان انگلیسی

جنسیت و امر نامأنوس: نمودناپذیری شکل‌گیری فاعلیت در رمان‌های تسطیح و آسیب جسمانی مارگارت اتوود

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چکیده

این مقاله به مطالعه چگونگی شکل‌گیری فاعلیت در ارتباط با مسئلهٔ جنسیت در دو رمان تسطیح (1979) و آسیب جسمانی (1983) اثر مارگارت اتوود در چهارچوب چارچوب امر نامأنوس می‌پردازد. امر نامأنوس (das unheimliche) که دست‌کم به طور مفصل در مقاله‌ای از زیگموند فروید و با همین عنوان در سال ۱۹۱۹ مطرح گردید در ابتدا مربوط به حوزهٔ زیبایی‌شناسی و یا روان‌شناختی بوده است. اما متفکران معاصر با توجه به تشویش‌های عصر مدرن همچون مسئلهٔ جنسیت به بازخوانی مقاله «امر نامأنوس» فروید پرداخته‌اند. این مقاله بر آن است تا با تکیه بر خوانش جدید از امر نامأنوس و با استفاده از نظرات متفکرانی همچون ژان–فرانسوا لیوتار، میخاییل باختین و جولیا کریستوا روشی جدید از بازخوانی مسئله جنسیت در دو رمان اتوود ارائه دهد. مسئلهٔ امر متعالی مهم‌ترین محور این مقاله است که در رمان‌های اتوود با تکیه بر بازخوانی امر نامأنوس، چگونگی شکل گیری فاعلیت را در ارتباط با مسأله ی جنسیت به امری نمود ناپذیر بدل می کند. با توجه به مفهوم پایه‌ای امر نامأنوس، امر متعالی روش‌های آشنا، مسلم و تغییرناپذیر ذهنی ما را نسبت به مسئلهٔ جنسیت به ناگاه در فضایی ناآشنا، مبهم و نامعین و معلق قرار داده و درنهایت به امری نمودناپذیر بدل می‌کند.

واژه‌های کلیدی: امر متعالی، امر نامأنوس، جنسیت، مارگارت اتوود، نمود ناپذیری

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