

The Precarious Female Body: The Dialectics of Body Politics in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*

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Abstract

Throughout history, the diachronic and synchronic evaluation of the human body has traversed various perspectives and approaches. As a source of temptation and sin, a symbol of mortality and decay, a site of sensuality and pleasure, a source of creative energy and inspiration, and a site of ambiguity and uncertainty, the body has been the locus of contestation of intellectual, philosophical, and socio-pragmatic realities. Postmodern Feminism explicates the social construction of the body, with regard to gender and sexuality arguing that the body is not a static and natural reality, but instead a socially oriented and performative one, sculpted by cultural norms and expectations. Contextualizing the hindsight, *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood reiterates the way the body is employed as an instrument to be trained, constructed, and confined, and how ubiquitous male entitlement towards the female bodies is perceived as inherent. The present paper intends to explore the treatment of the feminine body as a desirable commodity such that her sex, surrogacy services, biological resources, and even babies are appropriated. Through the stream of Body Politics, Feminism, and Gender studies, the paper will thus scrutinize the appalling treatment of the female body which undermines the fundamental ties of femininity and maternity.

Keywords: Body Politics; Gender; Objectification; Sex; Sexuality.

Introduction

Throughout the millennia, the body has been a subject of cultural debate and has been labeled a biological entity, a center of cultural production, a material encumbrance, a clothing for the soul, and, a psychosexual con-

struct. Although it primarily serves as a vehicle for self-expression, it is also an object for dominance and control. Therefore, in the emerging world of neo-liberalism, the body doesn't simply persist as a brute reality of nature but is interwoven into the culture and is a site of meaning-making. Michel Foucault's speculation of the body in his magnum opus *History of Sexuality, Volume 1* (1979) has deepened our understanding of the body as the nucleus for power dynamics, 'anatomy politics of the body, foregrounding its socio-cultural interpretation, "the body is directly involved in the political field, power relations have an immediate hold upon it, they investigate it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs" (25).

Additionally, Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) redefined the understanding of the body asserting it as a powerful indicator of one's identity. Exposing the artificiality of gender, she proclaims that one's identity, masculine or feminine, is appropriated by the repetitions of 'performativity' of acts that are subsequently acquired through language and conduct hence, gender is nothing less than an imagined signification of sex. Thereby, the body coalesces under the name of sex and in this vein, gender is socially cultivated via language, symbolic interaction, and socialization through normative paradigms that adhere to strict gender narratives and social frameworks, culminating in an 'interpellated subject.' Parallel to this, Krystal Cleary in *Feminist Theories of the Body* (2016) contends that "Gender, then, is a verb – a series of acts and re-enactments of learned behaviors, dress, mannerisms, and so on that only in their ongoing repetition come to feel and appear to us as natural" (3). Hence, the gendered dichotomy, is purely political and it "suits the economic needs of heterosexuality and lends a naturalistic gloss to the institution of heterosexuality" (112). Consequently, looking at how the body is constituted in time and space, Elizabeth Grosz in *Volatile Bodies* (1994) uses the page as the metaphor for the body where one can actively paint and inscribe the signification of the subject:

The body has figured as a writing surface on which messages, a text, are inscribed ... the blank page on which engraving, graffiti, tattooing, or inscription can take place...This analogy between the body and the text remains a close one: the tools of body engraving- social, surgical, epistemic, disciplinary -all mark, indeed constitute, bodies in culturally specific ways. (117)

Further, Grosz (1994) mentions that the "analogy between the body and a text remains a close one: the tools of body engraving- social, surgical,

epistemic, disciplinary -all mark, indeed constitute, bodies in culturally specific ways" (117). Therefore, bodies serve as dynamic narratives inexorably entwined within historical and cultural contexts. Nonetheless, such narratives remain ever-changing as the topoi of the body is inherently intricate and uncertain, thus, leaving room for multiple discourses to be encoded and decoded.

Within the confines of a heterosexist culture, many feminists argue whether the body of a woman is an anatomical phenomenon, a corporeal surface, a rhetorical figure, an aesthetic effect, a cultural artifact, or something entirely different. From time immemorial, the female body has been the subject matter of artistic representation purportedly to honor the beauty of the female form, but also to fetishize, dismember, and imprison women within the shackles of the 'Ideological' as well as 'Repressive State Apparatuses.' Thereby, what it means to be a woman and what constitutes her body and consciousness have been a matter of great concern since the development of Greco-Roman metaphysics. Several feminists have emphasized how women are imprisoned in their bodies, and how sexist and gender ideologies often originate from this distinction between the sexes, perpetuated by dualistic paradigms of reality-language, material-discursive, and nature-culture. Although Foucault devoted a significant part of his work to examining the interplay between the body, power dynamics, and sexuality, however, he paid no heed to the gendered aspect of the body. This made Sandra Lee Bartky in "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power" (1988) question, "Where is the account of the disciplinary practices that engender the 'docile bodies' of women, bodies more docile than the bodies of men?" (63).

On this basis, he is criticized for "glossing over the gender configurations of power" (Diamond and Quinby xiv), "neglecting to examine the gendered character of many disciplinary techniques" (McNay 11), and "treating the body throughout as if it were one as if the bodily experiences of men and women did not differ and as if men and women bore the same relationships to the characteristic institutions of modern life" (Bartky 63). Critiquing this gender-neutral/androcentric theory of Foucault, Bartky (1988) claims, "Women, like men, are subject to many of the same disciplinary practices Foucault describes. But he is blind to those disciplines that produce a modality of embodiment that is peculiarly feminine" (63-4). Furthermore, in the essay "The Prisoner of Gender: Foucault and the Disciplining of the Female Body" (2004), Angela King argues that the female body is "a particular target of disciplinary power to argue that gender, specifically femininity, is a discipline that produces bodies and iden-

tities and operates as an effective form of social control" (30). Expressing a similar notion, Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982) explicates that the female body is viewed as the object, 'semiotic' as opposed to the 'symbolic'. She posits, "Unlike the male body, the female body is penetrable, changes shape, swells, contracts, lactates, bleeds and gives birth" (102). In addition, Andrea Dworkin in *Woman Hating: A Radical Look at Sexuality* (1974) expounds that "In our culture, not one part of women's body is left untouched, unaltered...From head to toe, every feature of a woman's face, every section of her body, is subject to modification" (113-114). Thus, a woman is only a fabrication, "the projection of (men's) fantasies." (Grosz 176)

Despite being extensively exploited in the neo-liberal realm of marketing practice, the body as the focal point of cultural materialism and social authority has received very scant attention in academic discourses. Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) has underscored the phenomenological, anatomical, and materialistic truths of women's bodies. The novel with its emphasis on the body is used as a medium to warn against the detrimental politics of prevailing societal and political patterns that mitigate the female bodies by only acknowledging their material or recreational utility. The research is, therefore, an infinitesimal attempt to demonstrate how the morphology of the body specifically the female body, has endured a significant epistemological shift from the pragmatic schema of the body to the postmodern and cultural materialist notions of the body and its portrayal. Furthermore, by analyzing the female body utilizing multiple physiological and sociological perspectives, this research additionally intends to discern how the female body is a political battlefield that is inscribed and constituted by different regimes of truth.

Women's association with their bodies and nature is fostered by biological essentialism and determinism that regard women based on their physiological abilities. While it is possible for a man to be able to transcend his inherent material reality, a woman is firmly rooted in her corporeality. They are always looked upon as the pious figure of 'mother' as motherhood becomes the important motif to configure the concept of body. In *The Second Sex* (1949), Simone de Beauvoir posits that "the whole organism of the female is adapted to and determined by the servitude of maternity, while the sexual initiative is the prerogative of the male" (56). She claims, "Woman? Very simple, say the fanciers of simple formulas: she is a womb. An ovary; she is female" (33). Adrienne Rich in *Of Born Woman: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1976) regards motherhood as "the institution which aims at ensuring that the potential - and all

women – shall remain under male control” (25). Andrea O’Reilly expands on this idea in her work *From Motherhood to Mothering: The Legacy of Adrienne Rich’s of Woman Born* (2004), exemplifying the two contrasting viewpoints on motherhood, “the negative discourse where motherhood is seen as patriarchal oppression and the positive discourse where mothering holds the potential to empowerment as long as the patriarchal elements are eliminated” (12). Similarly, *The Handmaid’s Tale*, entwines the idea of motherhood with conceptions of womanhood and nationhood, adding complexity to the female identity, thus exemplifying how motherhood is negatively embedded as an essential pre-cultural reality. The women’s capability to give birth is not largely a biological prerequisite crucial for sustaining life but has also acquired an alternate dimension in the wake of political agendas, the social reproduction of the laborer within the capitalist system. Reproduction thereby is no longer a matter of choice, but a law, as Offred, internalizing her imposed identification, remarks, “We are all for breeding purposes. We aren’t concubines, geisha girls, or courtesans, we are two-legged wombs, that’s all: sacred vessels, ambulatory chalices” (13). However, one is not considered a woman if their biological function is eliminated. Thereby, the infertile women in the regime, particularly the wives are looked upon as failures, as products of defeated femininity. However, regardless of his capacity for reproduction, a man is still a man, “There is no such thing as a sterile man anymore, not officially. There are only women who are fruitful and women who are barren, that is the law.” (70)

The novel also gives way to the buyout issue of forced surrogate motherhood or substitute wombs as the handmaids become what Gena Corea in *The Mother Machine* (1985) calls a ‘Breeder class’. Corea argues that within the context of surrogate motherhood, “the woman is again seen as the vessel for a man’s seed, just as she was under Aristotelian/Thomistic biology” (221). Additionally, Andrea Dworkin’s perspective in *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (1982) foresaw the emerging surrogacy trend with a grim vision, envisioning women enslaved in cages, some subjected to sexual slavery, and others persecuted into communal reproduction. Although Atwood’s handmaids cannot be compared to surrogates in a literal sense, certain unsettling analogies prevail between their lived experiences and the realities of surrogacy in modern-day society. In the “Historical Notes” section of the book, Professor Pieixoto draws a connection between surrogate motherhood and handmaids in the Pre-Gilead era when he claims that “the need for birth services were recognized... inadequately met by ‘artificial insemination’, ‘fertility clinics’, and the use of ‘surrogate mothers’ who were hired for the purpose” (317). Therefore,

in "The misogyny of patriarchal culture in *The Handmaid's Tale*" (2001), J. Brooks Bouson claims, "Because they are women with 'viable ovaries' in a world of mass sterility, they are forcibly enlisted in the regime's project of reversing the precipitous decline in the Caucasian birthrate" (44). The handmaids are the mechanized mothers, serving the purpose of delivering a product, the commodified child. We see how Offred anticipates that the commander and his wife perceive the ceremonial sex purely as a business transaction, underlining the tenets of the commercial nature of surrogacy. This ceremony of insemination of the handmaid, "is not recreation, even for the Commander. This is a serious business. The Commander too is doing his duty" while Serena Joy asserts that, "as far as [she is] concerned, this is like a business transaction" (25). Thus, we can see how Offred exists in irresolute dialogue with her materiality, positioned against the unified humanist self, encased in its fundamental body.

Historically, men's bodies have been seen as pure, legitimate, sealed, and self-sufficient, while women's bodies are seen as leaking with menstrual blood. As the subject does not exist a priori, the anatomical differences between the male and female bodies have defined the cultural component, aiding in the awakening of science's dormant metaphors describing the egg and sperm. Emily Martin in her article "The Egg and the Sperm: How Science has Constructed a Romance based on Stereotypical Male-Female Roles" (1991) describes how the conventional idea is colored by the cultural and biological constraints associated with male and female:

In the case of women, the monthly cycle is described as being designed to produce eggs and prepare a suitable place for them to be fertilized and grown to the end of making babies. But the enthusiasm ends there. By extolling the female cycle as a productive enterprise, menstruation must necessarily be viewed as a failure. Medical texts describe menstruation as the "debris" of the uterine lining, the result of necrosis, or death of tissue. The descriptions imply that a system has gone awry, making products of no use, not to specification, unsalable, wasted, and scrap. (180)

Body fluids are more associated with women, who are thought to be "seeping beings, unstable, in need of control and solidification", and, more importantly, these fluids "assert the priority of the body over subjectivity" (Grosz 194). Thus, by projecting themselves as solid, "men demarcate their own bodies as clean and proper ... men take on the right of the proprietors of women's bodies too insofar as women's bodies are conceived as the receptacles of men's body fluids and the nesting place

of their product – the fetus” (Grosz 202). Furthermore, in many cultures, the female body’s monthly shedding of the uterus lining is determinedly treated as a bodily limitation and thus regarded as a disease. Offred metaphorically compares her uterus to the vast expanse of the universe and longs for the moon, symbolizing the egg to develop into a fetus. However, every approaching month, menstruation brings a sense of despair, as it signifies a perceived failure in her desire to conceive. This preoccupation of Offred over menstruation reflects what Pamela Cooper terms “the gendered ambivalence of the flesh” in “A Body Story with A Vengeance’: Anatomy and Struggle in the Bell Jar and The Handmaid’s Tale” (1997) by giving insight into the dual significance of blood talked about in the novel.

The menstrual cycle of Offred “genders (her) by designating a bodily openness both to fertility and – in an especially intense, biologically specific way to injury. Menstrual blood marks the renewal of life through procreation and its potential destruction through sexualized violence of invasion and occupation” (93). The fetishization of Handmaids’ bodies, particularly in terms of their fertility and menstruation, encapsulate both aspects of their role. On one hand, it highlights the trauma of ‘ritual rape’ and state-sanctioned violence, and on the other, it underscores the significance of their menstruation and childbirth made possible by their fertility. Rightly as Luce Irigaray in *Sex Which is not One* (1985) articulates, women are simultaneously “utilitarian objects and bearers of value” (175). Their autonomy, morale, as well as agency are compromised as “women-as-commodities are subject to a schism that divides them into the categories of usefulness and exchange value; into matter-body and an envelope that is . . . not susceptible to appropriation by women themselves; into private use and social use.” (176)

Surveillance is an important tool of power for the regulation and monitoring of the body. Foucault (1975), while referring to the ‘biopolitics of population’ claims, “supervision was effected through an entire series of interventions and regulatory controls” (139). The perpetual penetrating gaze echoes the Foucauldian notion of ‘The Panopticon’, a comprehensive symbol for modern authority and discipline, that aims “to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (201). In the novel, the pervasive fear of surveillance, observation, and documentation establishes a rigid moral framework upheld by ceremonial rituals, the pervasive fret of the spies, known as ‘The Eyes’, along with the silent threat signified through the hooded and draped corpses displayed along the wall. Increasing the threat of punishment, Gilead delivers a clear message that female citizens

face execution and public hanging if they attempt to challenge the system. As a result, women often succumb to the dominance of the patriarchy, yielding to its legitimacy, shrinking inside themselves, and falling into silence. This strengthens the notion that the body and subjectivity serve as a 'spectacle' that underpins the power dynamics determined within the society, as asserted by Foucault:

There is no need for arms, physical violence, or material constraints. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which everyone under its weight will end by interiorizing to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against, himself. A superb formula: power exercised continuously and for what turns out to be at minimal cost just as surely as the inmate of the Panopticon, a self-policing subject, a self-committed to a relentless self-surveillance. (Foucault, 1980, 155)

With the same viewpoint, Laura Mulvey in her pioneering essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975) explains that Sigmund Freud "associated scopophilia with taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze" (270). Mulvey claims that "in the world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female" (348). Furthermore, she contends that under patriarchy, "the image of woman is (passive) raw material for the (active) gaze of man" (351). In *Gilead*, every person, especially the handmaids, is "caught up in a network of surveillance and counter surveillance" (45), "We can feel their eyes on us as we walk in our red dresses two by two across to the side opposite to them. We are being looked at, assessed, whispered about; we can feel it, like tiny ants running on our bare skins" (123). In addition to this, even the concluding phrase of the quasi-religious Ceremony in *Gilead*, recited by the Commander, asserts that, "the eyes of the Lord run to and from throughout the whole earth, to know himself strong on behalf of them whose heart is perfect towards him" (82). The power exerted by observation and documentation can be seen through another example where Handmaids are strictly monitored to be in the company of another Handmaid every time she steps out of the household:

We aren't allowed to go there except in twos. This is supposed to be for our protection, though the notion is absurd; we are well-protected already. The truth is that she is my spy, as I am hers. If either of us slips through the net because of something

that happens on our daily walks, the other will be accountable.
(10)

Surveillance also extends to what Cooper regards as “the gaze of the doctor,” a concept she explores in her article, “Sexual Surveillance and Medical Authority in Two Versions of *The Handmaid’s Tale*” (1975), wherein she addresses the role of physicians within Gilead. In the clinic, symbolic representations of authority, the eye, the snake, and the sword, serve as visual allegories. These symbols come together to form what scholar Cooper refers to as an ‘emblem of Hippocratic integrity’, which fosters the masculinization of medical jurisdiction, establishing an apparent connection between this authority and the phallic eye. Similar to her vulnerability under the scrutiny of the state, Offred is also in a vulnerable spot within the boundaries of the clinic even though “the doctor will never see (her) face. He deals with a torso only” (99). By insinuating that he could aid Offred in conceiving, the doctor takes off his surgical glove, starts caressing her legs, and goes as far as lifting the sheet that separates her torso from her visage, thus breaching professional ethics and consequently objectifying and sexualizing her existence. Emphasizing the power of this impregnating gaze makes the aunt claim, “To be seen – to be seen – is to be – her voice trembled –penetrated. What you must be, girls, is impenetrable” (92). Thus, we see how “Gilead’s system of indoctrination positions women as the objects of a deeply punitive, ultimately masterful but technological, depersonalized masculine order of surveillance.” (Atwood 50)

Surveillance chains oneself into the shackles of self-regulation which leads to an internalization of control. Gilead’s law mirrors what Kate Millet in her seminal work *Sexual Politics* (1969) calls “interior colonization” (25) of female bodies. Echoing the same idea, Catherine Mackinnon in her essay “Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State: An Agenda for Theory” (1992) claims that “women come to identify themselves as sexual beings, as beings that exist for men...and internalize a male image of their sexuality as their identity as women” (531). In the novel, the feeling that they are constantly being watched, or followed creates fear and vulnerability:

My nakedness is strange to me already. My body seems outdated...I avoid looking at my body, not so much because it’s shameful or immodest but because I don’t want to see it. I don’t want to look at something that determines me so completely. (72)

This is reflective of the way Offred has embraced the Republic’s perspective of her body as instrumental in deciphering her worth as a human

being. Offred's self-objectification and governmentality are theorized in *Senses of the Subject* (2015) by Butler where she asserts, "I am affected not just by this one other or set of others, but by a world in which humans, institutions and organic and inorganic processes all impress themselves upon this me, who is, at the onset, susceptible in ways that are radically involuntary" (6-7). On similar lines, Linda Myrsiades in "Law, Medicine, and the Slave in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*" (1999) reads the novel "through the prism of property law," observing that "the handmaid has some responsibility for maintaining her reproductive body before actual use or exercise, for the economic and social life of Gilead depends upon her ability to control (or perform) her reproductive function" (231). In this context, Offred not only shoulders the duty of maintaining her physical well-being but also, because her body is considered a property of the Gilead regime, she is compelled to act as a steward of the assets owned by the state. Instead of having individual autonomy, the body, in this context, carries a communal significance, rendering it an extended property of Gilead, serving as a constant reminder of her subservience to a regime that she is compelled to be a part of. Accordingly, 'an inspecting gaze' is internalized by the individual bodies, who become their own 'overseer' and exercise "surveillance over, and against [themselves]." (Foucault Power 155)

Religion acts as an apparatus to control and justify the oppression of female bodies. In Gilead, religion serves as an effective propaganda of seamlessly incorporating ideologies to "divert people's point of view into believing in and adhering to a religious creed that, in reality, actually reinforces the political creed of the dominant power group" (Banner 27). The Biblical resonance is carried over into a sexual transaction, a ritualized rape, that starts with the Commander, a fundamentalist, quoting a biblical verse from Genesis 30:1-3, "And when Rachel saw that she bare Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister; and said unto Jacob: give me children or else I die" (8). The Commanders who perceive themselves as modern-day Jacobs, use and abuse the handmaids similarly. Additionally, Gileadean theocracy, the state-in-religion or religion-in-state, views women as perpetually perpetuating Eve's vices, hence they are not entrusted with any authority or power. This forms the foundation of Gilead which misuses sexist strategies along with the biosocial theory of inherent polygamy, legitimizing its racist and sexist notions in the wake of biblical precedent. Theresa Sanders in *Approaching Eden: Adam and Eden in Popular Culture* (2010) states that "For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. Notwithstanding she shall be saved by childbearing ..."

(207). Consequently, the myth of the fallen Eve serves to validate men's domination over women offering the rationale for men to exert control over women, leading to the enactment of laws that infringe upon female bodies and identities. Eve, in this context, emerges as a symbolic representation of all women, portraying them as flawed or fallen. Therefore, becoming a mother is viewed as a sacred sacrifice bestowing upon women a sense of honor and prestige because it is akin to being "a flag on a hill-top" (Atwood 36). The Handmaids, through this accord, are coerced to hold the belief that childbearing is their sacred obligation and ultimate redemption. Thus, we can see how through the use of religious indoctrination and implementation of laws, the state sustains and institutionalizes this ideology, thereby ensuring the compliance of females to the sovereign authority.

The Handmaid's Tale outlines the mechanisms of the government levying societal authority through sexual repression, as demonstrated by strict sexual norms that regulate actions. In Gilead, where reproduction becomes industrialized, the sex/gender system is streamlined to solely serve the authorized function of reproduction. Thus, all other dispositifs of sexuality are ignored, suppressed, and prohibited. MacKinnon's bold formulations state, "Sexuality is to feminism what work is to Marxism: that which is most one's own, yet most taken away. Woman fucks woman; subject verb object" (12). The mechanisms of fallen man's libido domnandi can be seen starkly in the claim by Beauvoir (1949):

Domination is expressed in the very posture of copulation—in almost all animals the male is on the female, and certainly, the organ he uses is a material object, but it appears here in its animated state—it is a tool— whereas in this performance the female organ is mere in the nature of an inert receptacle. The male deposits his semen, and the female receives it. Thus, though the female plays a fundamentally active role in procreation, she submits to the coition, which invades her individuality and introduces an alien element through penetration and internal fertilization. (50)

Similarly, Offred's body, trained in self-abnegation, deference, and service is metaphorically constructed as a landscape, with the Commander's genital likened to a traveler embarking on a journey within it. She is thus feeble and in a perpetual state of passivity, literally a recipient of the male desire and incubator for their lineage, a being solely dictated by instinct and sentiments; enslaved by her reproductive organs and hormones, because of which the deeply misogynist apparatus envelopes "power, not choice;

coercion, not volition; fear not desire" upon her. (Malak 14). Thereby, sex with Handmaids is strictly for procreation, as Offred perceives, "There is supposed to be nothing entertaining about us, no room is to be permitted for the flowering of secret lusts; no special favors are to be wheedled, by them or us, there are to be no footholds for love" (Atwood 136). She also adds, "What he is fucking is the lower part of my body. I do not say making love, because this is not what he's doing. Copulating too would be inaccurate because it would imply two people and only one is involved" (Atwood 77). As a result, we can see how Gilead's institutions govern the desires of women or, at the very least, neutralize Offred's emotions into political or pro-Gilead forms. Offred characterizes a sexual experience where neither partner is actively committed, and her body functions as nothing more than vacant territory to be filled. The Commander is also isolated from the act, "Preoccupied, like a man humming to himself in the shower without knowing he's humming; like a man who has other things on his mind. It's as if he's somewhere else, waiting for himself to come, drumming his fingers on the table while he waits" (80). Devoid of any conventional signifiers, sex has "nothing to do with passion or love or romance or any of those other notions we used to titillate ourselves with" (Atwood 94) thereby, Offred hungers to, "commit to the act of touch" (Atwood 14). Hence, we observe how Offred is progressively losing her ability or agency, "I used to think of my body as an instrument, of pleasure, or a means of transportation, or an implement for the accomplishment of my will. . . Now. . . I'm a cloud, congealed around a central object, the shape of a pear, which is hard and more real than I am and glows red within its translucent wrapping". (Atwood 95)

Conclusion

All the aforementioned deliberations on multiple dimensions of women's bodies have made it explicitly clear that the body of a woman is not just a biological edifice but a cultural texture that has extricated relationships embedded within the psychological, economic, social as well and linguistic realities. The sexual politics and the ecological and political issues deliberated in the novel unveil the social satire on women's corporeal usage. The handmaids are looked upon as coded bodies that depict the exploitation, and defacement encountered because of their mutilated existence as sexed bodies. Therefore, we see how Atwood's portrayal of the fundamental dystopian struggle with its indigenous patriarchal ideology as well as neo-liberal consumerist culture, while seeming implausible, serves as a startling illustration of how intricately political, biological, social, and religious paradigms are inextricably linked to one's sexuality,

particularly that of a woman, and how these ideologies dictate women by compelling them to adhere to gendered preconceptions that persist in both reality and dystopian fiction.

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