

GENDER PERFORMANCES IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S *THE EDIBLE WOMAN*

ALIREZA FARAHBAKHSH¹ & BANAFSHEH ZOHARI²

¹Ph.D. in English Literature, University of Guilan, Iran

²M.A. Student in English Literature, University of Guilan, Iran

ABSTRACT

Power and its effects on the body is a recurrent theme in many of Margaret Atwood's novels. Atwood's female characters are mostly concerned with the issue of the body: wounded bodies, masquerade, pregnancy, fashion standards, beauty practices. Their habitual obsession with gender performances related to their bodies maintains their gender identity imposed by the male society. Atwood's *The Edible Woman* is in line with Butler's gender performance theory. The present paper attempts to observe to what extent Butlerian performance theory is discernible in Atwood's female characters' performances related to their bodies marking female gender in the society of *The Edible Woman*. The present paper's discussion is developed through Butlerian concept of gender performativity. Focusing on the subject of body, Atwood attempts to show the effects of the disciplinary power on the female characters, particularly, Marian. The paper shows that there are passages in *The Edible Woman* which portray how the disciplinary practices and regulatory norms imposed by the patriarchal society on the female body produce gender performances.

KEYWORDS: Atwood, Disciplinary Practices, Disciplined Body, Gender, Performance

INTRODUCTION

Gender studies, as a recent branch of feminism is concerned with the discussion of women, gender, sexuality and politics. In fact, the study of gender as a recent phenomenon in academic scope dates as early as the second wave feminism in the late 1960s. The subject matter of feminism and feminist theories in the second wave change from mere political- in the first wave feminism- to a combination of social and moral issues. The second wave feminism was specifically concerned with the issue of gender inequality in social and political areas. For the most part, this movement centered on patriarchal oppression, women's sexuality, empowerment, inequality, gender discrimination, differential rights, and family. Women protested, particularly, against gender discriminations at home, education, workplace and generally, inequality between men and women in society. It also took place at the time of the liberation movement in the late 1960s to the early 1970s. Among the feminist theorists of this movement who vastly influenced later feminists and gender theorists by their writings are Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan, Kate Millet, and Luce Irigaray.

Simone de Beauvoir is particularly famous for her influential book *The Second Sex* (1949). Her existential disposition in this book provided a rather new outlook for the readers of feminist issues and her stance became the subject of women's social construction throughout history of women's studies and the patriarchal oppression. Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) is also one of the books which influenced the second wave feminist advocates by portraying the false beliefs of the society about women. In this book, she argues that women know themselves as a property and feel responsible for tasks related to the house and child bearing. Her book became a bestseller and was followed by wide reception of readers. Friedan also brought her own experiences as a woman living in the patriarchal society and discussed

the oppressed women's condition whose subjectivity is forgot; they rely on their husbands and devote themselves to their children and husbands. Kate Millett is another influential feminist who strongly participated in the women's liberation movement. Her controversial work titled *Sexual Politics* (1970) had a crucial role in the second wave feminism. In this book, she discusses the relation between power, gender, and sexuality. She also criticized male domination over women's liberation, and included issues of male power and oppression against women. She also writes in favor of the homosexual writer, Jean Genet's gender politics. Luce Irigaray, the French feminist, was also among the many great advocates of the feminist movements. Second wave feminism diversified into multiple different groups. Irigaray is classified as a significant writer among French feminists, and also, identity feminists. This group was later represented to the United States in *New French Feminisms* (1981). Irigaray's stance in her popular books *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1974) and *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1977) is of significance to feminist criticism since she discovers how through philosophy and psychoanalysis, women were depicted as evil, monstrous, and without subjectivity. She also argues that the masculine have always suppressed the feminine subjectivity and portrayed the feminine according to their views and experiences. Categorized as an essentialist feminist, she argues that "women's physical differences alone (birthing, lactation, menstruation, etc) make them more connected with matter or with the physical world than men" (Rivkin and Ryan, 2004, 767).

Rivkin and Ryan discuss the emergence of two quite distinct critical feminist perspectives, the 'constructionist' and the 'essentialist' (ibid. 766). Feminists and gender theorists are categorized in either of these two groups. While constructionists believe that gender is constructed by culture, essentialists think that gender is a natural entity; and it is biological rather than cultural. These are totally different standpoints and it seems that there are no common points in either perspectives. Rivkin and Ryan continue that performativity, masquerade, and imitation are among the constructivist categories that generate gender identities which appear to be pre-existing natural entities (ibid.768). Judith Butler is an eminent gender theorist who is categorized as a constructionist feminist due to her controversial theory of performativity. Her works focus, to a great extent, on the issues of gender, identity, and power. Born on 24 February 1956 in Cleveland, Ohio, Butler received her first lessons in philosophy in her hometown, Cleveland. She also took some classes of Jewish ethics when she was a teenager. Studying philosophy at Yale University, Butler received her Ph.D. in 1984 and she is now Maxine Elliot Professor in the Departments of Rhetoric and Comparative Literature at the University of California, Berkeley. Her most famous work, namely, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) presented her widely recognized concept of gender performativity which was initially proposed in "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory" (1988). Butler also continued her discussions of performativity in her next book, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (1993) centering mainly on the materialization of the body. She is also the author of *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories of Subjection* (1997), *Excitable Speech: Politics of the Performance* (1997), and so many other critical books and essays. In her first book, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-century France* (1987), Butler deals with phenomenological debates over how some French twentieth-century philosophers describe the Hegelian subject, or can we put it, basically how the reception of Hegel is among them. What she offered in her first published book might be questionable compared with her next groundbreaking book, *Gender Trouble*, a turn from discussions of phenomenology to sex, gender and sexuality. This change of direction, unrelated it might seem, is justifiable once it emerges that some key phenomenological concepts contribute to Butler's debates on the constitution of gender identity of subjects. Butler's terminology contains a wide range of critical and theoretical subjects in an eclectic philosophical system not much like her other contemporaries. In fact, she

employs her terminology in a subtle way that convinces the readers of the terms' relation and applicability in the real world.

Butler's theory of gender performativity has broadly contributed to developments in feminist and gender studies. Butler draws the term 'performativity' from J. L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words* (Hall, 2000, 184). According to Austin, the ordinary language philosopher, all utterances are performative, even the constative ones which tend to describe precise conditions, because by uttering the words we do the acts, in better words; we perform them (ibid.). Judith Butler applies the term to gender performances in order to elaborate how we perform them "focusing primarily on the repetitive nature of gender" (ibid. 186). In *Bodies that Matter*, Butler notes that, "performativity is neither free play nor theatrical self-representation; nor can it be simply equated with performance" (1993, 95). Accordingly, Butler tries to clarify the misreading of the notions of 'performativity' and 'performance' discussing that what she means by 'performativity' is different from theatrical performance. Butler points out that, performance as an act cannot be replaced by performativity since performativity is "a reiteration of norms which precede, constrain, and exceed the performer and in that sense cannot be taken as the fabrication of the performer's 'will' or 'choice'" (1993, 234). She argues that "although theatrical performances can meet with political censorship and scathing criticism, gender performances in non-theatrical contexts are governed by more clearly and regulatory social conventions" (Butler, 1988, 527). Butler differentiates theatrical performances from real ones maintaining that in a theater, one can delimit the act to the theater as a mere performance, but once the act is done in reality, since there are no theatrical conventions, therefore there would be serious consequences. This is how Butler develops her theory of gender performativity by use of which she suggests that gender is like a performance acted by individuals. "As a strategy of survival, gender is a performance with clearly punitive consequences...those who fail to do their gender right are regularly punished" (ibid. 522).

In her account of gender performativity, Butler argues that "gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self" (Butler, 1988, 519). Further in *Gender Trouble*, Butler also theorizes that "there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results" (1990, 33). In fact, Butler suggests that these expressions of gender appear on individuals' bodies. The gestures, movements and enactments are the performances which result in the belief that gender is innate and natural. Gender performances are produced by the patriarchal society which trains the body to follow its ideal disciplinary practices and conform to these regulatory norms. Realizing the coercive effects of discipline over the bodies, Hass draws on Foucault's account of *Discipline and Punish* for how the disciplined body can work as "subjected, used, transformed and improved" (1996, 62). Maintaining that the disciplined bodies, per se, provide the proper conditions for producing bodily performances, Hass says: "A disciplined body is a trained body; a body trained, Foucault insists, not for renunciation (as in monastic practice) but rather production: the production of specific and efficient corporeal operations" (ibid.).

The following analyses attempt to explore the disciplinary practices through which the female characters of *The Edible Woman*, specifically the heroine, adjust their bodily acts, gestures, and, consequently, performances to the patriarchal ideal standards. The purpose of this paper is to see in which passages Atwood demonstrates these gender performances focusing on the manipulative practices on the female body. Before starting the study of bodily performances in the novel, there are a few points to be reviewed about Margaret Atwood.

Born in 1939, Atwood is a Canadian novelist, literary critic, environmentalist, and essayist having published over 30 books including short stories, novels and literary criticism. She has won many prizes for her writing, most importantly, the Booker Prize after being nominated for five times. Born on 18 November 1939 in the city of Ottawa, Margaret Atwood spent her early years in wintry Ottawa and northern Quebec. Afterwards in 1946, the family moved to Toronto. She began to write at the age of five and she says that she was not under pressure to get married or to read, though they expected her to use her intelligence and abilities (Oates, 1978, 15-43). Most of her works have been deeply influenced by her native country, Canada and this is why she is above all, Canadian. Atwood is famous for “the intricacies of her poetry, the power of her fiction, and the illumination of her literary criticism” (Howells, 2006, 12). She has contributed vastly to the feminist literature by her works, particularly, her novels. She prepared the draft of her first novel *The Edible Woman* in 1964-65 and later published it in 1969, which was about a female protagonist who is struggling with her fiancé, society and food. Then, her second published novel, *Surfacing* (1972), is a fiction circling around an unnamed woman who returns to her childhood house struggling to find clues about her father’s disappearance. Other novels include: *Cat’s Eye*, *The Robber Bride*, *Oryx and Crake*, *The Year of the Flood*, *Madd Addam*, *The Blind Assassin*, etc. Her most well-known and well-read novel, *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985) won many awards, among them, Governor-General’s Award for Fiction and Arthur C. Clarke Award. *Handmaid’s Tale* is a feminist science fiction centering on a dystopian society centering on women’s oppression.

The Edible woman is the story of a young woman, Marian McAlpin, who works for a marketing research company. She lives with Ainsley who is a temporary worker at a toothbrush office. They live on the top floor of an apartment whose landlady is a conservative woman worried about the innocence of her little daughter. Marian’s boyfriend, Peter, is a lawyer. Concerned about his last single friend’s marriage news, he proposes Marian to marry him. Ainsley confesses to Marian how she wishes to have a baby. For this purpose, she decides to get pregnant with a man who does not care about being a father, and Marian’s friend, Len Shank, seems a rather appropriate choice since he is a womanizer, and Ainsley prefers her child be raised with a single-parent. Peter Marian meets Duncan, an English graduate student. She starts having an affair with him. After Peter’s marriage proposal, Marian loses his appetite for food.

Peter throws a party and asks Marian to do her hair and wear something different, so she chooses to wear a red dress. She invites some of her friends over including Duncan and his roommates. Duncan leaves the party, so Marian goes to the Laundromat to find him. At the Laundromat, Marian and Duncan decide to a hotel and sleep with each other. The next day, Duncan leaves Marian so that she goes back to her normal life. Marian bakes a cake in the shape of a woman and asks Peter to have some, but he refuses and leaves. In the last part of the novel, Marian is cleaning up the apartment and Duncan calls to visit her. He devours the remaining of the cake and Marian tells him that she eats again, therefore, Duncan says that she is back to so-called reality, and that she is a consumer. Butler’s gender theories have greatly influenced lots of women and men writers. Amongst them, Margaret Atwood is one of the most eminent writers to have adopted and applied gender performance theories of Butler in her novels. The following discussions demonstrate how Atwood’s *The Edible Woman* is in line with Butler’s gender performance theory.

DISCUSSIONS

Atwood’s female characters’ constant obsession with gender performances related to their bodies maintains their gender identity imposed by the male society. Butlerian gender performance can be discernible in the image of the body of the women, their bodily practices like make-up, fashion and dressing, masquerade as well as their resistance against the pressure of male-centric society.

In the 1990 preface to *Gender Trouble* Butler questions the 'naturalness' of being a female. She asks whether "being a female is a 'natural fact' or a cultural performance, or is 'naturalness' constituted through discursively constrained performative acts that produce the body through and within the categories of sex" (1990, xxviii). As previously mentioned Butler builds much of her theories of gender, sex, and sexuality on Foucault's ideas. Feminists widely argue about Butler's use of Foucault's theory on modern power to deconstruct the notion of woman (Deveaux, 1994, 237). Arguing against the belief that there might be a truth of sex, Butler draws on Foucault's account of disciplinary practices maintaining that these regulatory practices create identities through gender norms (1990, 23). Butler tries to illustrate how the function of disciplinary practices on the body appearing as norms generates the illusion of real identities. She also draws on Beauvoir to discuss the question of the body in "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution":

When Beauvoir claims that woman is an 'historical situation,' she emphasizes that the body suffers a certain cultural construction, not only through conventions that sanction and proscribe how one acts one's body, the 'act' or performance that one's body is, but also in the tacit conventions that structure the way the body is culturally perceived. (1988, 523)

Drawing on Foucault's account of power and disciplinary practices, Sandra Lee Bartky also categorizes three types of disciplinary practices. In *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression*, Bartky discusses the three types of disciplinary practices by which power produces the illusion of a feminine body. The first category of these practices is "those that aim to produce a body of a certain size and general configuration." The second category consists of those the disciplinary practices "that bring forth from this body a specific repertoire of gestures, postures, and movements" and the third category is "directed toward the display of this body as an ornamented surface" (1990, 65).

Atwood's *The Edible Woman* is a great example of a contemporary fiction illuminating Butler's idea that gender is a performance. In the beginning of the novel, the heroine Marian McAlpin presents herself living a normal life, having a boyfriend, and working for a marketing research company. Toward the end of the first part of the novel, her boyfriend Peter asks her to marry him. Being confronted with Peter's marriage proposal, Marian's body starts to act strangely. So, she goes through a loss of appetite for food. Her anorexic behavior begins with the exclusion of meat (mutton, lamb, pork, and hamburger) and continues to exclude other types of food like cakes, carrot, and some other kinds of vegetables. She ends up taking vitamin pills toward the end and stops eating any food. Realizing Peter's proposal as a patriarchal imposition, the heroine illustrates this imposition as a body language. She fails to represent her refusal to accept the male domination; therefore, she starts to embody this rejection on her body. Her anorexic reaction is a way to resist the prevailing gender performances which she has been constantly doing against her will. This becomes more evident through the process of dropping different kinds of foods which gradually happens in different chapters of the book as she gets closer to her marriage.

The dwindling diet Marian takes might be a good example of the first category in Bartky's theory of the effects of disciplinary practices on the body previously mentioned. As this is the case with the regulatory gender norms of the society propagating certain size and shape for the female body as the standard body which women should follow. it might be inferred that the heroine is unconsciously adjusting her body- becoming skinnier day by day by resisting food- to the cultural standards of the society.

Marian's eating disorder can also be read as a kind of protest against the repressive consumer society. As Atwood contends in an interview:

It's a human activity that has all kinds of symbolic connotations depending on the society and the level of society. In other words, what you eat varies from place to place, how we feel about what we eat varies from place to place, how we feel about what we eat varies from individual as well as from place to place. If you think of food as coming in various categories: sacred food, ceremonial food, everyday food and things that are not to be eaten, forbidden food, dirty food, if you like- for the anorexic, all food is dirty food. (Lyons, 1992, 228)

Marian's strange bodily gestures and enactments extend to show unknown reactions in different occasions. As after watching Peter's change of tone and listening to his hunting stories, Marian unconsciously drops tears and is surprised to find herself crying as if she does not know the actual reason: "I couldn't understand what was happening, why I was doing this; I had never done anything like it before and it seemed to me absurd" (Atwood, 2009, 81).

As Marian goes on and the proposal issue gets more serious, Marian's reactions become stranger. After a meeting at the restaurant with Len and Peter, Marian desires to run and leave everything behind. As she runs along the street and describes the surroundings while passing lamp posts, she thinks that "it seemed an achievement, an accomplishment of some kind to put them one by one behind me" (ibid. 85).

Her sudden reaction of crying in the meeting, running suddenly and hiding from Peter under Len's bed is driven by her inner desire to escape the patriarchal power. Marian's sudden bodily performances in the course of *The Edible Woman* demonstrate the power and resistance binary. Rightly so, by portraying Marian's body resisting food, Atwood tries to show the heroine's body resisting the dominant male power. She cannot stand and fight because she thinks as a woman, she is weak. Therefore, she subconsciously chooses to run, hide and escape.

The dwindling diet Marian takes might be a good example of the first category in Bartky's theory of the effects of disciplinary practices on the body previously mentioned. As this is the case with the regulatory gender norms of the society propagating certain size and shape for the female body as the standard body which women should follow. It might be inferred that the heroine is subconsciously adjusting her body- becoming skinnier day by day by resisting food- to the cultural standards of the society.

In *The Edible Woman* women are expected to act nice, genteel according to the male society's standardized norms. What Peter considers good and normal is directly contrary to what Marian deeply desires to do. This is demonstrated as Marian is not comfortable with bringing a change in her appearance, but Peter wants her to make her body look different for the party for his interest, so she obeys:

Peter had suggested that she might have something done with her hair. He had also hinted that perhaps she should buy a dress that was, as he put it, 'not quite so mousy' as any she already owned, and she had duly bought one. It was short, red, and sequined. She didn't think it was really her, but the saleslady did. "It's you, dear," she had said, her voice positive. (Atwood, 2009, 261)

Peter even claims that what made him choose Marian was her sensibility and independence. In fact he is imposing his belief that a suitable girl is the one who acts based on how he believes she should. Another example is when Marian remembers that Peter has told her "it was my aura of independence and common sense he had liked: he saw me as the kind of girl who wouldn't try to take over his life" (ibid. 70). Later, in chapter ten, Peter reinforces his disciplinary manner to

control Marian's attitude: "There's one thing about you, Marian, I know I can always depend on you. Most women are pretty scatterbrained but you're such a sensible girl. You may not have known this but I've always thought that's the first thing to look for when it comes to choosing a wife" (ibid. 106). These practices exerted mostly by men involve women with specific kinds of movements, gestures, and in general performances which are conforming to what the male demand. As Marian repressed by Peter, believes that she has to "adjust to his moods, but that's true of any man" (ibid. 70). Peter also represses Marian's inner desire to run and hide at the night of meeting with Len by blaming her actions and saying "Ainsley behaved herself properly, why couldn't you...His approval of Ainsley was a vicious goad" (ibid. 95). Marian is disturbed by Peter's comparison of Ainsley with her despite the fact that Peter did not like Ainsley over some discussions, but this time he was taking Ainsley as a proper example to prove his point about a standard attitude.

As the result of Atwood's male-centric society's normalization of its patriarchal standards, one can see that the female characters believe and act according to the male society's expectations. One evident example is 'the lady down below'. She is a conventional type of woman who tries to manage her life and surrounding according to the traditional norms which the male society has been imposing upon women. She thinks Ainsley is not respectable because of the way she dresses and complains about Ainsley's drinking (ibid. 6). She also reacts severely when she is confronted with Ainsley's quarrel with Len Slank and asks her to leave her apartment. The lady down below portrayed as a conventional close minded landlady permanently monitoring Marian and Ainsley demonstrates the constituting process of normalization of the patriarchal society present in the novel. She makes them feel forbidden to do things as Marian claims (ibid. 8). She also emphasizes that "whatever happened the child's innocence must not be corrupted, and that two young ladies were surely more to be depended upon than two young men" (ibid. 7). Believing in the idea that women are capable of easily being controlled, she tries to rent her apartment to Marian and Ainsley so that her child can grow safely according to her standard points of morality directly under the influence of the general patriarchal norms.

Atwood is known for invoking fashion and masquerade in her novels. For example in *Lady Oracle* (1976), Atwood portrays costumes as having power. Joan transforms her identity by dying her hair and wearing scarves and sunglasses. She even tries to lose 100 pounds to receive her aunt's inheritance. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, as well, clothes are believed to be a means of recognizing the individuals' social status. As Karla M. Roland writes in "The Symbolic Power of Red in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*", "Indeed, the red of their ensemble means more than simple clothes or social status: the red defines who they are as people, where they can go, what they can say or do, and what they can eat. The red of their dresses and veils immediately signifies their identity as handmaids and their function within society to onlookers (2013, 3).

There are examples in *The Edible Woman* which illustrate how disciplinary practices function in women's decorating their bodies through make-up, dressing, and fashion. One of the first disciplinary norms illustrated in the novel is that the office in which Marian works at expects the female employees to wear high heels (2009, 5). These ornamenting processes make them more flexible toward performing gender roles assigned to them by the constituting gender norms. Marian decorating her body under Peter's demand is a great example of the patriarchal imposition of male society upon female identity concerning the body. Applying the ornaments like make-up, hair and night dresses to her body for the party are shown to be against her will since "She didn't enjoy feeling like a slab of flesh, an object" (ibid. 262). The decorations make her feel repressed by the outer world. While inside, she feels these are nonsense and make her feel like an object, a useless thing which should be decorated as men ask them to do so. When the hairdresser does her hair, she thinks about

them as “they treated your head like a cake: something to be carefully iced and ornamented” (ibid. 261). This is a symbol of the male society treating women as they like. Perhaps this could be the first hint for Marian to bake the human shaped cake at the end of the novel. Here, the idea of ‘womanliness’ is interchangeably used with ‘masquerade’ since a woman is known and demonstrated by her ornamented looks. As Joan Riviere suggests in her article “Womanliness as a Masquerade” that there is no line of difference between the two notions because actually they are the same thing (qtd in 1986, 30). Rivier also argues that “womanliness therefore could be assumed and worn as a mask, both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to possess it” (ibid. 36). By this Rivier is reminding the fact that women conceal their inner masculinity by means of womanliness for the fear that they might be repressed as this is also the case in *The Edible Woman*. The female characters involve themselves with their femininity in order to be immune of the outside repression for their inner masculinity since it is their bodies which label them as ‘women’ not men. As Beauvoir has contended,

Even if each woman dresses in conformity with her status, a game is still being played: artifice, like art, belongs to the realm of the imaginary. It is not only that girdle, brassiere hair-dye, make-up disguise body and face; but that the least sophisticate of women, once she is dressed, does not present *herself* to observation; she is, like the picture or the statue, or the actor on the stage, an agent through whom is suggested someone not there—that is, the character she represents, but is not. It is this identification with something unreal, fixed, perfect as the hero of a novel, as a portrait or a bust, that gratifies her ; she strives to identify herself with this figure and thus to seem to herself to be stabilized, justified in her splendor. (Beauvoir, 1989, 533)

It is significant to shed light on Beauvoir’s interpretation of illusory identification of the self with unreal decorations of the body. As the subject of ‘Masquerade’ is also evident in other female characters of the novel, for instance Ainsley chooses clothes which are a camouflage or a protective coloration (2009, 6). Lucy, one of the virgins of the office, wears expensive clothing so that she can attract businessmen’s attention at the restaurant: “Lucy was wearing a new dress, a stately dark-mauve laminated jersey with a chaste silver pin at the neckline...Lucy displayed her delicious dresses and confectionery eyes to the tubfulls of pudgy guppies who had no time for mauve” (ibid. 134-5). Marian symbolizes rich men at the restaurant as ‘pudgy guppies’ who just consume food and do not care about the existence of Lucy luxuriously dressed to attract them. Describing Lucy’s dresses as ‘delicious’ demonstrates how a woman’s effort to be fashionable and ornamented is merely employed for men’s consumption. This is linked with the most important theme of *The Edible Woman* portraying men as consumers and women as the ones being consumed by men.

Even men’s identity is known by their bodies and the way they choose their clothing. Peter’s choice of outfits attracts Marian and makes her feel proud (ibid. 179). But this does not take long until the night at Peter’s party when suddenly Marian realizes that she has been staring at Peter’s clothes’ cupboard. This is where Marian recognizes all the costumes Peter had been wearing. “She realized that she was regarding the clothes with an emotion close to something like resentment” (ibid. 288). For this moment, she comes to the realization that the clothes have been representing Peter’s identity all along, elegant, formal and authoritative. As in a theatrical performance where actors change costumes and play their roles and their clothes are crucial for their representation.

CONCLUSIONS

The paper discussed the effects of patriarchal power on the body and the processes through which gender norms

are repetitively maintained by gender performances in *The Edible Woman*. Moreover, it attempted to illustrate how gender and performance have been related throughout the novel. Through applying Butlerian concept of gender performance to Atwood's *The Edible Woman* it came to light how compulsory acts and enactments in Atwood's male society construct what is known as gender, thus inflicting in characters their gender identity. The reiteration of these ideal gender performances wrongly imply that gender identity is innate and that all subjects are innately gendered.

The disciplinary practices normalized by the male society with their direct effects on the bodies lead to the gendering of subjects. Atwood's *The Edible Woman* portrays the effects of these disciplinary practices in producing bodies and, consequently, distinct genders. She depicts a society in which men impose their power on female bodies to sustain the illusion of gendered selves through the individuals' repetition of gender performances. The disciplinary power controls the female body through fashion and beauty practices. Consequently, this process takes place as women try to follow the fashion and beauty standards which train and manipulate their bodies.

REFERENCES

1. Atwood, Margaret. (2009). *The Edible Woman*. London: Virago Press.
2. Bartky, S. L. (1990). *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression*. New York and London: Routledge. 45-83.
3. Butler, Judith. (1988). "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." *Theatre Journal* 40/4. 519-31.
4. ——— (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York and London: Routledge.
5. ——— (1993) *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*. New York/ London: Routledge.
6. De Beauvoir, Simone. (1989). *The Second Sex*. (trans.) and (ed.). H. M. Parshley. New York: Vintage Books.
7. Deveaux, Monique. (1994). "Feminism and Empowerment: A Critical Reading of Foucault." In: *Feminist Studies*. 20/2. Feminist Studies, Inc. 223-247.
8. Hall, Kira. (2000). "Performativity." In: *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*. 9/1-2. 184-187.
9. Hass, Lawrence. (1996). "Discipline and the Constituted Subject: Foucault's Social History." In: *Symplokē* 4/1-2. University of Nebraska Press. 61-72.
10. Howells, C. A. (2006). *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood*. Cambridge: University Press.
11. Jagger, Gill. (2008). *Judith Butler: Sexual politics, social change and the power of the performative*. London/New York: Routledge.
12. Lyons, Brooke. (1992). "Using People's Dreadful Childhoods," In: Ingersoll, E. G. (ed.): *Margaret Atwood Conversation*. London: Virago Press. 221-33.
13. Oates, J. C. (1978). "An Interview with Margaret Atwood." *New York Times Book Review*. 43-45.
14. Riviere, Joan. (1929). "Womanliness as a Masquerade," In: Burgin, V. (1986). (ed.): *Formations of Fantasy*. London. 35-44.

15. Rivkin, Julie and Michael Ryan. (eds.). (2004). *Literary Theory: An Anthology*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Blackwell.
16. Roland, Karla. M. (2013). "The Symbolic Power of Red in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*." Undergraduate Honors Thesis Series. Retrieved from: <http://dc.etsu.edu/honors/167>