CHAPTER - IV
DEMYSTIFYING THE BODY
(BODILY HARM)

Politics originates in “senseless violence”-organized plundered, pillage and rape-male bonding to appropriate and devastate bodies and the fruits of bodily labor. It pauses to construe itself as the talus of human existence, and proceeds to develop as institution of domestic domination and foreign aggression.

- Wendy Brown

*Bodily Harm* (1981) is a legal term of art used in the definition of both statutory and common law offended in Canada, England, Wales and other common law jurisdictions. It is a synonym for injury or body injury and further similar expressions. In the criminal code of Canada, *Bodily Harm* is defined as ‘any harm that is more than merely transient’. It has its ordinary meaning, which includes any harm or injury calculated to interfere with the health or comfort of the prosecutor and such harm or injury need not to be permanent. The word ‘Bodily Harm’ covers a meaning of psychiatric illness, such as an anxiety or a depressive disorder, which affect the central nervous system of the body. But actual *Bodily*
Harm is capable of including psychiatric injury but it does not include mere emotion, such as fear, distress and panic. For example, to a woman, her hair is a vitally important part of her body, where a significant portion of a woman’s hair is cut without her consent, and this is a serious matter amounting to actual Bodily Harm.

Bodily Harm is known as Atwood’s best Post Feminist novel, which focuses about the violence perpetrated on the body of women in institutions such as jails and hospitals. The novel enhances the task of a women writer and the possible subjects for women’s writing. For, Atwood, the act of writing is not a mere frill it is a subversive weapon or a tool which projects the alternative reality. She is critical of the facile optimism of the post-feminist era concerning the state of women’s emancipation. In this novel, the female body becomes the metaphor for the weak and suppressed. She commits: as Margaret Atwood in her Introduction to The Edible Woman, The Second Words: Selected Critical Prose says:

It would be a mistake to assume that everything has changed… the goals of the feminist-movement have not been, changed, and those who claim we’re living in post-feminist era are either sadly mistaken or tired of thinking about the same subject”. (370)
With the opening words of Margaret Atwood’s novel *Bodily Harm*, ‘this is how I got here,’ is drawn into a labyrinthine plot that uses themes and images of earlier Atwood novels, poems, and criticism in order to make a radical statement about female sexuality, the political body and female text. It’s a novel of mystery that systematically confuses characterization, plot development, setting, and even genre. Throughout plot and subplot the repetition of both words and images create a ritualistic pattern that often suspends movement. Certainly the themes and images of the superficial stories of *Bodily Harm* allow a coherent literary critic and satisfy contemporary demands. The novel addresses itself to the nature of violence to victimization to women. The novel reflects on the past and it presents stories about Rennie the main character, her relationship with Jack, a man with whom she has been living but who has moved out of the apartment shortly before the novel begins, followed by her operation partial mastectomy. Daniel, the doctor who performed the operation, figures dominantly in her fantasy life including her early life in the small town of Griswold where she and her mother lived with her mother’s parents. Rennie gets influenced by the story of two other women, one told by Jocasta, a Toronto friend, another told by Lora a woman whom she meets on the island and who becomes her cellmate in the last section of the novel, “The true story lies among the other stories…the true story is vicious and multiple and untrue”. (11)
The name ‘Renata Wilford’ implies ‘born again’, a young woman who looks forward to a day of better and healthy relationships between men and women. She lives in the present with a meaningful message for the future; taking in her strole all the ugly and unpleasant encounters of her life. She pledges to devote her life in the service of the weak and as well as for women in particular. Her subversive and bold nature is a great example that, she narrates and publish her own experiences in the form of a travelogue called ‘Bodily Harm’ by rejecting her submissive role as a woman, as she is prepared to spread out the truth from her experience. So, the novel ‘Bodily Harm’ is what Rennie has reported to the world as her novel. She puts herself in to the text, as in to the world and in to history, by her own movement. The whole novel is structured as clue game and Atwood hints at the significance of the clue game as a metaphor for the plot’s development, mentioning it at regular intervals. This game is introduced by Rennie, at the beginning of the novel, when she discovers the intrusion into her room. There were three detective clues that had to be guessed, especially a rope in the bedroom of Rennie and a man with a knife. But Rennie’s forgetfulness in remembering the person whose name can be found indicates her reluctance. She feels to understand the significance of the game, focusing desperately on her own obsession with death.
Rennie, the protagonist in *Bodily Harm* is a journalist who has recently undergone surgery for breast cancer. With the removal of part of her physical body, her reality starts to disintegrate and the layers of her personality are exposed. Unable to cope with her disfigurement, the awful lover falls off. Rennie is left contemplating her future. She seeks escape and goes to a small island where she finds political unrest in spite of peace, in the midst of a coup.

In women, Breast cancer is one of the most common forms of disease, second only to skin cancer. When a cancer is found in women’s breast, it not only effects a woman physically but also mentally. The consequences of various breast cancer treatments also harm the body where radiation therapy, chemotherapy are harder in the body. Rennie Wilford “the camera narrator” of *Bodily Harm* is a Canadian female freelance journalist as well as a ‘life-tourist’ writer. As a journalist she always carries camera with her to take the ‘snapshots’ of the life around. Her travelogue includes all sorts of *Bodily Harm* perpetrated on women such as the pornography museum. She comes in contact with other women who helps her in conversing with the victims of Bodily harm. In course of time she meets Lora, a victim of rape by her vicious step father.
By demonstrating certain conditions of post-feminist North American society and its most political practices, Atwood suggests that the Canadian government in many ways is just inexperienced in dealing with the complex, social and economic problems of women in Canada. Representing the same issues the novel succeeds both as a powerful psychological and political novel. Rubenstein in Critical Essays on Margaret Atwood says, “Bodily Harm is Atwood’s most politically feminist novel, immediately concerned with such issues of body image, female sexuality, male-female relationships and male brutality in a patriarchal society”. (259)

To bring out the brutality if men, Rennie uses her pen as a ‘weapon’ to let the world know how the female body is sought to be abused, mutilated and destroyed in prison cells and hospital beds. In order to comprehend the progression of Rennie’s career as a writer, it is important to consider her early life in the small town of Griswold, Ontario. Rennie is the child of an irresponsible man who has abandoned his family for a mistress in Toronto. She is brought up in an unhealthy and narrow, joyless and repressive environment in the sterile, and hypocritical manner by her grand parents in Griswold.

For Rennie, her parents place is “a sub ground something that can’t be seen, but is never the loss there, full of gritty and rocks and buried
stumps worms and bones” (1981). Her impressionistic years of childhood is suppressed and spoiled by her grand mother’s traditional approach. She deters the servile existence in Griswold and leaves the place in order to lead a life of freedom in Toronto. Griswold forms the background to her career of free-lance journalism as well as her travelogue.

Rennie begins her adult life in Toronto as a versatile and gets commissioned to write articles for Pandora, a woman-oriented magazine and for Visor, a male-oriented journal which offered her enough scope to write about men and women. Rennie has traced out her internal torment and relationship with men, and a violent society at large. So, the novel is a vehicle for looking at society, an interface between language and what we choose to call reality. She talks about her early life, her memories of her grandmother flit in and out of her consciousness. The persons like Jocasta, Lora and other characters of the novel merge with those of the past, with segments of altering stories, the operation, grandmother of the island, the sexually violent men, the doctors, the brutal beating of Lora, all have resonance of recurrence rather than singularity.

In Bodily Harm Atwood states explicitly the moral action of writing, which does more than take what society deals out and makes it visible. Rennie considers herself as a product of the post-feminist era, thinks that she can stand up to any crisis, without any harm either to her body or
psyche. But, when Rennie comes in contact with Jack, in the course of writing a piece called “the young and the solvent” for visor, a clever designer for a packing company, exploits her. In spite of all her intelligence and caution, she allows herself to be trapped in the evil designs of Jack. He tries all his tricks to use and pack Rennie, just as he does other things.

For Jack, Love is not an emotional experience, but a crude game intended to hurt women as much as he owned. He disguises “sexual desire is love and he wields it as a weapon rather than bearing it as a gift” (117). Very soon she realizes that Jack’s interest in her is limited to the gratification of his carnal desires. His relationship with Rennie is superficial. So, her relationship with Jack remains as if it were a newly renovated house, without strong bonds. As a packager of images for advertising, he shares her taste for the superficial and her distaste for massive involvement. The character of Rennie, like the narrator of Surfacing, represents the country, which she lives through a theme of physical representation. Like Canada, Rennie is perceived by many different characters as naïve. Ironically the novel, attacks Canada’s simplicity by dramatizing the massive involvement of Rennie in the political affairs of a country. Like an old couple questions Rennie you are Canadian, aren’t you? We always find the Canadians so nice, they are
almost like members of the family. No crime rate to speak of, we always feel quite safe when we group these” (186), her naiveté is responsible for her ultimate victimization. Emma Parker comments in Twentieth Century Literature:

A method of male domination, since by stopping the life-giving flow between brain and body, it physically enforces the ideological dichotomy between mind and body which forms the basis of the hierarchical system of gender polarity which informs the whole of western meta-physics and culture. (363)

The themes of Bodily Harm, like victimization of women, nationalism and writing are related to the themes of her other works. Though Rennie’s story dominate the text, it becomes increasingly clear that her reading of events is erroneous, “what has she done, she’s not guilty, this is happening to her for no reason at all” (286). The novel is predominantly concerned with harm, the symbol of which, on the body, is the mark of castration. Therefore, can we discover the marks that will allow us to read her story? As Rennie reveals herself to be thoroughly manipulated writer, her body is too imagined as potential material for inscription is abundantly clear.

Rennie’s submissiveness takes a different shape that female body is representative of sexuality and women are largely treated as objects of sex.
In the woman’s objectification, the female is nothing but the body. So, Jack’s need is to recharge Rennie into the image of what is taken to be the eroticized female. Men like Jack have an exploitative and debased view of the female sex. He never considers women’s individuality and a life of her own but for him, she is only an object of sex. Jack hung two provocative posters in Rennie’s bedroom. First one shows a brown-skinned woman wound up in a piece of material that held her arms to her sides, but left breasts and thighs and buttocks exposed. While the other poster displays a woman lying feet first on the sofa and her head up at the other end of the sofa, was tiny, featureless and rounded like a doorknob. Thus Jack’s rapist fantasies are very close to the early 1980’s feminist anti-pornography position, which asserted strong links between pornography.

There is a strain of sadism to Jack’s cone. He imagines love with Rennie as a pretended rape. He enjoys over powering her sexuality with such prescription pretending as it just came through the window and remarks that women should be locked in cages. So Rennie understands that Jack would pack her up as he does his things when he no longer needs her. However, on her past, she wants to live with him keeping her options open. Rennie’s is aware, how her nervousness is attributed to her background. As Rubenstein in *Boundaries of the Self: Gender, Culture, Fiction* puts it:
“Jack, a man with Canine teeth and predatory desires—prefers sex that includes bondage and sadism”. (261)

The novel succeeds both as a powerful psychological and political novel and is in no way can be considered the immense failure. As a psychological novel, it traces Rennie’s movement from a superficial, alienated existence towards spiritual survival, which includes a deeper awareness of self and other. Rennie uses her pen as a ‘weapon’ and exposes the position of women in prison cells and hospital beds by coming out of the framed photograph and transcend camera vision, like the protagonists of Margaret Atwood’s other novels. According to Lorna Irvine, the novel illustrated “inscription of the female body and by connecting hospital room and jail cell, dramatically presents the injury of the female body that results from its confinement”. (Southern Illinois university press: 1988, 96). So Bodily Harm is a different kind of therapy to gender victimization where the process of self-discovery and re-humanization against the backdrop of cruelty is depicted. Gender politics are contextually nationalized within the frightening world of political intrigues. So the kind of open consciousness helps to the development of the feminist movement to identify and sexual politics often disguised as love and even in several forms of power politics. By Power Politics it does not mean who votes for whom but how power operates and who has power
over whom. Like women, Canada is emerging from a deadly brain, so washing has clearly interfered with both Canada’s history and her literature.

As a journalist and a university student she escapes to Toronto to live a free life. Rennie regards Griswold as a ‘back drop’ rather than her background. During her clinic operation time, she develops a crush on her surgeon. Dr. Daniel Luoma, who saves her once from her cancer. But she sees him as a substitute of Jack. But their sexual encounter doesn’t tear her out of darkness and insecurity rather she feels violated, victimized, raped as Daniel manages to take something from her. The kind of image that Jack forces upon Rennie can be seen in *The Hand Maid’s Tale*, where women and children are defined by their body, because the concept of detached body comes repeatedly as a subject of concern in *Bodily Harm*. The picture hung in the apartment of Jack presents the female in terms of a body, which can be a replaceable object. So Rennie learns that people are get trapped in things that are beyond their control. Jack is emotionally very insecure and love is a crude game underneath his assured play boy mask.

Like David in *Surfacing* and Peter in *The Edible Woman*, Jack intends to hurt women. He is depicted as a beast ready to pounce on his prey. Jack himself tells Rennie that he is an animal in the dark. The image of a woman is an object to masculine desire and violence and is contrasted
starkly to psychic and physical consequences that the actions have on the women. So to be an object of erotic desire is to suffer potential sexual abuse. Hence Rennie is a submissive victim of forced sex for Jack’s sexual encounters.

Predominantly, the novel is concerned with bodies, most notably with Rennie’s. It is also concerned with harm, the symbol of which, on the body, is the mark of carnation. As Rennie reveals herself to be a thoroughly manipulated writer, her body imagined as potential material for inscription is abundantly clear. After Daniel operates on her, he says, “think of your life as a clean page. You write what ever you like on it” (84). She complaints “I feel like a blank sheet of paper for you to doodle on” (105). When Rennie is diagnosed of breast cancer by Daniel Luoma, a male gynecologist, she gets trapped in things that are beyond her control. Rennie has to now choose between “sexual mutilation” by the surgeon or death by cancer in the hospital bed. She is afraid of death so, she does not want to die of cancer. Hence, she agrees to have an affair with the doctor to ‘save her life’ by allowing him to touch her “with his life giving hands” (187). Daniel, the surgeon takes advantage of his patient’s emotional state, indulges in sex and thus violates the professional ethics. So, she begins to look at ‘the man with the knife’ as the bringer of death.
Symbolically, her surgeon’s knife is both the sword of justice and a phallic symbol associated with molestation and sexual violence. Rennie experiences the trauma of mastectomy as she gets emotionally disturbed by the mark of a scar on her breast, as a mark of castration. She is almost obsessed with the scar, that destroyed Rennie’s trust in appearance. For her, the damaged breast is like a “diseased fruit” and a ‘cut open melon’, the malignancy uncured. Her affair with the doctor fails to confirm her fantasies of rescue from cancer. She was supposed to be the needy one, but it was the other way round, she felt like “a straw that had been clutched. She felt raped”. (238)

The partial mastectomy on the breast leaves Rennie half-dead. She has no hopes of becoming a mother and breast feeding her future child. Rennie’s anxieties about invasion and violation can be understood through the cultural attitudes towards both the female flesh and cancer. She becomes a double victim of both disease and male exploitation. She wonders and worries whether she will be able to bear a child. Rennie depicts the predicament of a woman, who has undergone Dr. Daniel’s surgery, and discovers that he is a victimizer, who directs technological assault on women in the guise of medicine and surgery. This reveals how a doctor happens to be an oppressor and a patient, the oppressed in a broad social and historical context.
Rennie identifies Dr. Daniel with her grandfather, a country physician of violent temperament, whose primitive life-saving methods-uncannily resemble torturous mutilation of the body. Though doctors like Daniel are regarded by society as ‘humane people’ they participate in the structure of power that presided over violence, manipulation of opinion and life itself Daniel embodies, the paradoxes of patriarchy, the opposing stances of healing and destruction as practiced in and politics.

Atwood confronts and demystifies masculine authority in the figure of the doctor, by creating the writer as both a woman and a patient in *Bodily Harm*. Rennie has nightmares and hallucination of someone in bed with her. But, she does not want to turn in to the sort of woman who is afraid of men. The coil of rope left on her bed is a sign, that she has been confine and fettered by her situation as a woman. She is aware of the fact, that she has been surgically as well as sexually opened or violated by Dr. Daniel and Jack. She regrets that she has allowed herself to be used, manipulated and debased by Jack and Daniel as a kind of raw-material Her encounter in love with Jack and Daniel end abruptly leaving her bruised and battered physically and emotionally. On the day of Jack’s departure and the dead end relationship with Daniel, there is an attempted crime in Rennie’s apartment. An unknown man leaves a coil of rope on her bed in Toronto as a reminder of his visit.
The thematic and metaphoric structure of the novel ingests a paradoxical rebirth or the things that death can symbolize. Essentially, the plot is about recovering from sexual pleasure. The novel follows a character trying to break freedom her past and grasp on to a brighter future. Later on, Rennie gets involved in love with Paul a tourist guide in the Caribbean Island, because of his impressive manners and ideals. Unlike Jack, Paul tries to make her over into something else. Daniel sees her as the answer to his emotional needs but Paul accepts Rennie for what she is. She feels that Paul is a good substitute to Jack, her first lover, who turns out to be an exploiter and seducer. She is of the view, that she might be able to strike a meaningful relationship with him and hopes that she might be able to live with him. While keeping her ‘options’ open, she is involved in bouts of sex with him for a brief spell.

Rennie get a new life with the experience from Paul and his touch enlivens her. Unlike Jack, Paul does not hate or abandon Rennie on the grounds of the scar, the mark of death on her body. He reaches out his hands to Rennie, that she is grateful to his touching, “she can be still be touched” (204). The age old maxim, that familiarity breeds contempt, seems to influence both Paul and Rennie. She tries to find out what Paul does for a living. In a significant scene where Paul and Rennie makes love,
she begins to repair her once several connections with humanity”: She notes:

She’s been opened, she’s being drown back down, she enters her body again and there’s a moment of pain, incarnation, this may be only the body’s desperation, a flare up, a last clutch at the world before the long slide in to the final illness and death, but meanwhile she’s solid after all, she’s still here on earth, she’s grateful she’s touching her, she can still be touched”.

(193)

The fact that she can still be touched, not just physically, but mentally is important. She is able to bridge the gap between the mind and the body. But finally she begins to realize her own ignorance in the confusing plot. Paul also realizes Rennie’s weakness and realizes that it is bound to get her in to trouble in the midst of different experiences. Her detached and unemotional behavior is referred by Paul as ‘alien reaction paranoia’. Within no time, Rennie realizes that he is an immature person interested in sporting and wielding a gun needlessly. She begins to detest him, because she is scared of the very sight of the gun. To him, she is a sort of house guest, who gradually disillusioned with him. Since Paul is not a person to give up himself totally in love. When Rennie is told not to expect too much from him, she totally shatters her hopes in him.
The meaningless relationships of Rennie with men like Jack, Dr. Daniel and Paul makes her understand that involvement in love affairs is like running barefoot along a street covered with broken bottles. She even says, that falling in romance with a mysterious stranger like Paul is the biggest cliché in the book of her life. She feels a sense of urgency to run away from her meaningless and loveless involvements with men. Rennie says, “I should take my body and run. I don’t need another man. I’m not supposed to expect anything.” (217)

Sometimes, it seems Rennie’s limitations are meant to be sympathetically female, moored in the flesh and trivial, feminized by the social niche. Atwood doesn’t condescend to Rennie so much to use her as a partially empty vessel that wants to be filled with sweet water of enlightenment, unsympathetic but less complex character. With strong didacticism which is both feminist and humanist, Rennie the protagonist is forced to step out of her socially conditioned self images. But what steps into is hostile environment and uncertain future. As a woman of disorientation, Rennie has to revise her image of herself as a middle-class Canadian exempt from the dangers that other people from other classes and other cultures have to face: “massive involvement”, said Rennie, “Its never seen been my thing”. (34)
*Bodily Harm* gives an understanding that how the world feels if one woman arbitrarily caught up in Power politics. Because she is caught up like any traditional gothic heroine in a female victim fantasy. The men she comes in contact with in her life are untrustworthy, threatening and sadistic. Her lover Jack with his rapist fantasies, her doctor Daniel who performed her mastectomy and Paul American with whom she has a brief affair in the Caribbean. But, when she is in prison, he disappears. “He’s disappeared which could mean anything” (293). Her first threat is not only parallelized but prefigured by threats inside the self. Her dreams about the rope, again and again; sometimes indicates as Jack, as Daniel, but it’s not either of them. It’s not Paul, as she says “The face keeps changing, eluding her, he might as well be invisible, she can’t see him, this is what is so terrifying he isn’t really there, his only a shadow, anonymous, familiar, with silver eyes that twin and repeat her own”. (287)

Rennie is often haunted by the images of female dread. They pervasive and radiate out from the coiled rope on her bed. As in Gothic writings, she is disturbed by absent faceless stranger who had put it, “in itself it was neutral, and useful too, you could use it for all kinds of things (41). She is afraid of men, because they are frightening. She has seen the man with rope. She attempts to escape the threat of the faceless stranger, to an unfamiliar place where, even she couldn’t discover what is at the end of
the rope, and she understands that there is not necessarily a place she will get out of it ever. She is not exempt, ‘nobody is exempt from anything’ (290). Rennie’s failed relationships make her an outsider. Her worst victimization is her lack of feeling towards others. She is not able to hold on perfect neutrality. Eventually the inherent need for human contact wins over a person’s desire to cut themselves off from humanity. The operation in which Daniel saves Rennie’s life could be described as Rennie’s rebirth. She is awakened to the fact that an invader has entered her body and will have to embark on the journey to recover her lost sense of self, as she unknowingly struggles on a journey to reconnect.

Like the other Atwood protagonists, Rennie understands that it is only through the use of her voice that she will be able to survive. To continue to be a journalist means that Rennie is not going to abdicate this power, instead she wishes to use it to her advantage. Rennie’s association with Jocasta, a feminist activist, raises her consciousness of herself and helps her understand better the villainous altitude and victimizing nature of the males. She is convinced, that women’s liberation continues to be a distant dream and a lot has to asses all her love relationships from a fresh perspective. Jocasta’s assessment of man-woman relationship illustrates Rennie’s thinking and serves as a ‘feminist therapy’. In view of Rennie Jocasta represents a complete and complex socio-gender system. Under the
influence of Jocasta, she publishes an article entitled, ‘Burned out on the
alleged death of the women’s movement’. Rennie reasons why and in
circumstances that women take to are odd, mean and degrading vocations
like ‘bitching’ and ‘trashing’ (93). It is important to note that, as a
journalist, Rennie has taken on a new outlook. She has recovered her lost
voice and recognizes ultimate power of language. So, she is going to
change her old ways and write about what is important. She knows that,
she must change and advocate and educate others by using her voice and
power of language.

From the perspective of woman’s own body, Rennie is like the
novelist and poet called Joan Foster in *Lady Oracle* or Antonia Fremont
the historic in the *Robber Bride* (1993). These novels explore the question
of the woman writer’s task and possible subjects for women’s writing.
Beginning with a very crude representation of the rope on the bed and
Jack’s rape fantasies are being very close to the early 1980’s feminist anti
pornography of novel’s structure of ideas which are clear and fluent in
outliving the main features.

Rennie has series of dreams in which her grandmother complains
that her hands are missing. What does a loss of one’s hands represent?
What does I mean for a writer in particular? It is the imagery of hands that
functions as an index of her developing attitude. Rennie must be subjected
to the potential sadism of the male in her relationship with men. So all her thoughts are full of symbols that show her fear of her diseased body. The notion of the oppressive male in ingrained in Rennie’s psyche, that her body is punished by the patriarchal society. For example Daniel is virtually identified with the hands that Rennie comes to realize, she herself has lost.

Through Lora the hand imagery is seen in Daniel. Rennie’s grandmother re-emerges in Lora’s own grabby, nibbled hands. Rennie refuses to touch them or have them touch her. Lora’s own mother in Bodily Harm acts an accomplice to her daughter’s victimization. When Lora finally confronts her step-father who sexually assaults her mother, turned on the daughter saying she had asked for it. These hands represent both as vehicles of human contact and as instrument of manipulation and domination. The existing sense of guilt, the obscure recognition of her own failure, displays itself in her dream that her dead grandmother is appearing to her, extending an impossibly remote promise of salvation.

Rennie’s involvement in a conflict situation in the local election, a political assassination includes Paul’s involvement in smuggled goods activities. His former mistress Lora exploits Rennie to smuggle weapons in to the country on Paul’s behalf. So, together with Lora, Rennie is arrested and confined to an underground cell in an old fort. She is forced to witness various scenes of brutality, culminating in the sadistic beating of Lora by
their prison guards. Rennie’s attitude to life is the direct legacy of her upbringing in a small town Ontario with the suggestive name of Griswold. She thinks of her name as ‘sub ground’ which means full of gritty old rocks and buried stumps, worms and bones.

Rennie calls that as a child ‘I learned three things well one is how to be quite, what not to say, and how to look at things without touching them. In her adult life she avoids thinking about Griswold because, it meant a surface, full of gritty old rocks and buried stumps, worms and bones. She is consciously detaching herself as completely as possible from her own roots. She has one of the ironic comments characteristically on her background and, those who would lately been clamoring for roots had never seen a root up close. This would seem to represent a purely personal reaction against a claustrophobic environment. Much of her attitude to life is furnished as a psychological explanation relating it to specific incidents in her personal past which are recalling through flash back.

The patriarchal culture of Griswold advocated for women to be in submissive role. Rennie admits that, she wanted to be a doctor, like her worshipped grandfather, but she quickly forgets about that idea. The fact is that in Griswold, ‘men were doctors, women were nurses, men were heroes and what were women? “women rolled the bandages and that were all anyone ever said about that” (48). As female writer, she is unconventional
in the eyes of her Griswold in counterparts. So, she is a victim because of
the profession she has chosen. She does not tell many things to her mother,
because she afraid of her mother’s reaction. She says in Griswold ‘every
one deserves the worst’ (10). There they believed that everything is out in
the end too much of good luck becomes unlucky. This distorted sense of
luck helps Rennie to explain her own thoughts on self and what people
deserve. As a child she conceal cuts and scrapes, since her mother seemed
to regard such things not as accidents but as acts. Her earliest recollections
are of grandmother in Griswold who prays that my hands finger by finger’
in punishment for some unremembered transgression. Her grandmother’s
attempt to eradicate any impulse in the girl in regaining the sense of touch
becomes futile. We learn Rennie’s actual response to her grandmother’s
delusion, towards the end of the novel. Her past life where she was brought
up by her lonely mother and grandmother affected her views on femininity.

In her association with Jocasta a feminist activist Rennie is
convinced with the truth that women’s liberation continues to be a distant
dream and a lot has to be done to realize the desired goals. By the
motivation given by Jocasta, she raises her consciousness of herself and
helps her understand better the villainous attitude and victimizing nature of
the males. When Rennie takes up writing as a serious and full-time
occupation from Angle for Visor. Her research leads Rennie to the studio
in meeting a male porn artist called Frank, who depicts pornography as an art form. She realizes how art is used to depict women as ugly creatures meant for violence when she sees there life sized mannequin tables and chairs featuring women muzzled and locked in demeaning positions. She understands about the social and moral functions of writing from Frank’s remarks like: what art does is, it takes what society deals out and makes it visible, right.

Rennie witnesses visual evidence of male sadist fantasies of power and violence against women. She is horrified by the sight of the nude film-lips meant for display and exhibition at the museum. The article on ‘pornography’ makes her to visit the Toronto policemen’s pornography museum along with Jocasta, her friend. Some of the films project women copulating with animals leading to the mutilation of their bodies. The museum films also include women’s nipples being chopped off and a ‘couple of sex-and-death pieces’ (210). The purpose of all these ugly and horrible films seems to display bodies of women as maps of violence. Looking at the films, Rennie thought that such things could not be real and it was all done with ketchup:

It’s indecent, it’s not done with Ketchup, nothing is inconceivable here, no rats in the vagina but only because
they haven’t thought of it yet, they’re still amateurs. She’s afraid of men and it’s simple, it’s rational, she’s afraid of men because men are frightening. She’s seen the man with the rope, now she knows what he looks like. She has been turned inside out, there’s no longer a here and a there. (256)

The most horrifying of all the film clips is a scene in which the head of a rat moves in and out of a woman’s vagina. Rennie is appalled by this sight and her detachment is completely shattered. This seems to have been deliberately contrived by a film-maker for sexual titillation, which indicates the utter depths of woman depravity and cruelty—and violation of human right. It paints out the abuse of women in the so-called civilized countries, which are primitive as far as brutalizing of a women’s individuality in a subtle and invisible manner with the help of cultural codes and realize that women are stripped of their identity, got reduced to raw materials where she too is part of the raw-material.

The political scene on the Caribbean island has no room for love, decency and humanity, where women are treated as non-entities. For six days, when she travels around the island, as she is commissioned to do a travel piece for Visor, she lives in the actual world. She finds her tragedy reflected in the tragedy of mute and innocent masses, all over the world. Rennie tries to probe beyond what is visible, while touring on the
Caribbean island. She discovers that all human principles and issues of
dignity and even love are used as pretexts to get rid of people disturbed.
Rennie finds out, that the voters list on the island contains names of the
dead, while the names of the many living are excluded from it. Floods are
like a boon to the rulers, because these fetch charity and aids are used for
purchasing votes. Rennie discovers different victims in the island like how
they are tortured and even sliced off in to the pieces. Her travel piece
expands and extends the implications of the term ‘woman’ to cover all the
exploited and abused people in the world. She understands that women are
not different from common people, because both of them are powerless
and hence they are abused. Rennie finds out, that women on the island are
still where they were a century ago. She realizes that, the much-spoken-
about freedom and identity of women are only delusions. Marsdon, the
campaign manager of elections for prince of peace, beats, and tortures and
keeps his woman tied to a free for several hours and yet he goes
unpunished.

As Jaidev says in “Woman as Metaphor: A Note on Atwood's
Feminism”, “woman becomes a metaphor for all those, who are damaged
and abused only because they are powerless” (111). The islanders look at
the cruelty on the women as mere silent spectators. She observes that the
Caribbean is essentially as bad as Canada, the representative of the
civilized world. When she visits the women prisoners in the Caribbean prison along with Dr. Minnow, one of the politicians on St. Antoine plays a significant part in guiding Rennie in touching things but soon she is accused of massive involvement in the island’s current revolution and in the political affairs. Accused of being an outraged tourist, due to the outbreak of violent disturbances on the island. For about two weeks, she suffers incarceration, where she comes in contact with Lora Lucas, a fellow prisoner with whom she shared cell together. But Minnow stands for justice and becomes a Christ like martyr whose influence lives on and inspires Rennie.

Rennie includes the tales in her travelogue, which Lora narrates in the prison. Lora narrates the story of her ‘non-violent’ rape by her vicious step-father with whom she used to live in a cellar. Lora’s tale of woe and brutality completely shatter Rennie’s over-confidence in women’s liberation. Even Lora’s mother is so helplessly independent on her husband, that she cannot go to the rescue of Lora, even when her husband used to threaten his step daughter with sexual assault. Ultimately, Rennie slaps him, as he tries to rape her and leaves the place for good. The vulnerability of the female is brought home by the Lora’s account of her childhood. Referring to the fellow worker’s attitude towards women, Lora says, they think if they are renting the boat, they’re renting everything on
it. Lora is hired to work on a boat after she escaped from home. Her experience at the place of work turns out to be worse still. She is shocked to know, that all the men around, either she has to comply with them or lose the job, they expect her to sleep with them. So, the very assumption that a woman is meant for rent, speaks of male arrogance. Thus, slavery which affects women, is forced prostitution, according to human rights perspective.

The pathetic tales of Lora’s experience in Canada and in the Caribbean shock Rennie’s feminist sensibility, because the tales of Lora convince Rennie that sexual exploitation is everywhere, be it ‘civilized’ Canada or the rustic ‘Caribbean’. The difference is in degree, not in kind. Rennie discovers that woman is at the mercy of a whole host of oppressors in any society. She witnesses, how Lora very reluctantly obliges the prison guards for sex in return for news about the prince of peace, her lover. Lora is sexually assaulted and beaten, and she is mutilated, killed by the very custodians of law and order namely police men. In Rennie’s case, the cancer of her body is a disease not only of the breast, but the chest, the heart and not only of her body, but of the social body. Her disease becomes a symbol of the condition that the world is in. The symptoms are universal violence, oppression and corruption and the more essential feature is the abuse of power on the part of men against women and weaker parties in
Looking back on her life, she finds all the men she has known are oppressors. Her grandfather had been a tyrant towards his daughter. Her boy friend Jake engages in sadistic sexual pranks with her, and Paul her lover in the Caribbean where she goes on a vacation, is inhumanely remote and uncommitted. Rennie has become a sadder, but wiser. Hence, Rennie proclaims that detachment of neutrality and non-involvement are no longer possible for her, to think in terms of some kind of positive action against atrocities on women. Rennie has solved the riddle of the faceless stranger, at the end of the rope. When she sees the brutality of the policemen in the prison yard, she realizes that the one who left the coiled rope on her bed was none other than the policemen themselves. The sight of the neglected and unearned dead body of Lora touches the very core of Rennie’s being. She feels a sense of empathy with her. Lora is no longer an individual, but she becomes a symbol of the weak and helpless mass of humanity. Rennie feels touches and finally licks the dead face of Lora as the animals do to their newly born offspring. Lora’s face is not “a face any more, it’s a bruise, blood is still oozing from the cuts, the mouth looks like a piece of fruit that’s been run over by a car, pulp, it’s the face of a stranger, someone without a name, the word Lora has come unhooked and is hovering in the air, apart from this ruin off with all the cloth in this room is filthy, skeptic, every face is someone’s it has a name” (298-99). It has been aimed, dismembered, altered and fragmented and stands as a testimonial to the
depravity and decadence of the society. Rennie, encompasses a reality of ‘Bodily Harm’ in her travel piece, that merges in past with present and future. She exposes what society deals out and makes it visible through her writing. She recognizes to figure out the ‘Bodily Harm’ that happened to Lora and other bodies in future. Rennie’s effort to tell the story is, like her effort to save Lora, an exercise of the moral imagination. As she is a reporter she determines to report, the contemporary life styles in two different countries. But now with an edge of moral engagement, she tries to imagine things differently and better than they are. She has begun to imagine a future, which will be different from the present.

There are no hard boundaries to ‘Bodily Harm’. The protagonist Rennie asserts that ‘Bodily Harm’ is everywhere, both inside and outside in every place and in personal lives. In figurative misuse, Cancer is analyzed only in the most limited sense like an historical event or a problem like an illness. Atwood’s doctor depicts that, Daniel, Rennie’s doctor, insists that cancer “is not a symbol, it is a disease”(78). For example, do cancer and pornography actually have in common? Or is cancer a political torture? To what extent does juxtaposing is carried through metaphor and substantively to the understanding of each? In the novel, the analogies operate not only between the basic disease metaphor and the public system but also suggest relationships among the public
systems themselves. How are the oppressions of women by advertising and drug racketeering similar? As writer she cannot deny anything in human. She never left the harm done to the weak and women. Rennie is prepared to speak out the truth, the disturbing truth, both about exploited people and women in particular. She becomes subversive and bold enough to narrate and publish her experiences and the form of a travelogue called *Bodily Harm*. Rennie is set free at the instances of a Canadian diplomat. However, she continues to be a living witness to the glued bodies beside the beaches and blue-green sea, are now perceived as serving, being served and serviced and associated with Lora’s *Bodily Harm*.

‘Bodily Harm’ is what Rennie projects to the world as her novel. Her visions are an organized society, where human beings are united and organized in a common course. As a free-lance journalist, she tries to discover her identity through her newly assumed subversive role. She takes a pledge to devote herself in the service of the weak and women. As Helene Cixous in *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism* says: “Rennie puts women, into the text, as into the world and into history, by her own movement of travelogue”. (825)

*Bodily Harm* drives home the message, which is embodied in Atwood’s address of the world meeting, ‘oppression involves a failure of the imagination, her failure to imagine the full humanity of other human
beings. If the imagination were a negligible thing and the act of writing a mere frill, as many in this society would like to believe, would not be at such pains to exterminate them’. In an address, Atwood delivers that ‘Rennie is reborn or she is struggling into a new awareness of herself as a morally responsible human being’. As the name ‘Renata Wilford’ implies ‘born again’, she is born a new and lives in the present with a meaningful message for the future. At last, Rennie ends up as an activist and she takes in her strides all her ugly and unpleasant encounters of her life. She also looks forward to a day of better and healthy relationships between men and women.

Writing as exposure of *Bodily Harm* conducts us through a journey of the imagination. The journey may contemplate both the fact of individual morality and the conditions under which the great mass of the world’s population have to live. Through the exercise of imagination we may lead to a more compassionate, more aware, more politically committed view of life. As always, the end of the text finds, Atwood’s heroine is poised for a new kind of life, a new independence and creativity.