Chapter Four

The Volatile Body: The Proclamation of Corporal Feminism

This chapter is inclined to many of the ways in which the female artists construct and theorise bodies. Alice Borchardt pays attention to the historical perception of the female body and the fundamental meanings accorded to it. She is always aware of the social roles prescribed for it, and the humiliations on body and soul, visiting, promptly upon them. Hence, one can surmise that Alice Borchardt’s fiction is also linked to the physicality of women. And for that, she has fixed her women in the essentialist paradigm constituted by eco-feminism. Eco feminism offers a remarkable cultural backdrop, which demonstrates the configurations of gender behaviour. These configurations, naturally, intercept with the masculine, constituted by aggression and domination.

The principal objective of this chapter is to explore the different perceptions of the feminine body as posited by Alice Borchardt. The chapter explores, in depth, the different discourses related to the perceptions of body. The focus of analysis will be on the women characters. Further, the chapter explores the politics of sexuality and the supplementary situated knowledge for a better understanding of the subject. The chapter, further, looks into the issue, besides providing a comprehensive understanding of the intricate intimacy between body and politics. It argues that a woman’s body is constituted by the then historical materialism, which had often abused the feminine. One might agree that women are the most disadvantaged
because of their sex. And, hence, the chapter is finally constituted by, as diagnosed by Alice Borchardt, some of those areas, which help re conceptualise gender.

Alice Borchardt does not wish to forge an exclusive female body, by integrating it into a man’s space. She, in fact, aims to make more meaning for the body. Her application of shape shifting in women is one of her strategic repositioning of the body. This categorisation could even he considered a deconstruction, related to post structuralism and postmodernism. The shape shifting is one starting point in which, the binary opposition can be transcended to form a new meaning.

At the outset, Alice Borchardt’s Devoted appears as a novel demonstrating the fundamental conflict of Good and Evil in the Christian perspective. The novel is typical of Borchardt’s perception of history, and is projective of more than a few melodramatic events supplemented by a single dimensional construct. Nevertheless, the unique appeal of Devoted arises out of its comprehensive demonstration of the struggles of the Bishop against the titanic warlords. Also Borchardt’s thematic demonstration of historical events eventuates a new paradigm shift in that the ecclesiastical symbol becomes a metaphor of the postmodernist hologram of cultural materialism, in which, a female body, is accorded the cheap materialistic commodity status.

Borchardt creates a 900 BC world attached to France in which one witnesses Bishop Owen emotionally poised against the tricksters of the Saxon tribe. Chapter One of the novel, introduces Bishop Owen as an “armed rider” attempting to rescue “probably one of the camp slaves” (Devoted 1). The girl comes to know of her name later “I was their slave. I was their whore” (5). She is a slave victim of the hostile
warlords, yet, she displays remarkable courage while fighting with the Bishop and consequently, she even saves him from the deadly attack of the enemies. Such is the potential of the body. As observed in Amazon’s review:

Bishop of Chantalon, risks his life to save Elin, a forest girl of sorceress like powers who has escaped the Viking camp where she was enslaved. Undying love develops between the two, instantly, with no setbacks and little tension, and is expressed often and graphically.

Viking raiders are terrorizing the region; their menace is exacerbated by Count Anton and his bastard son Gerlos, who collect tributes from the people for the Vikings but keep part of the confiscated riches for themselves. Betrayed by his friend Reynald, Owen is captured by the "North men" but quickly saved by his Saxon henchman Enar and a band of Elin's "forest people." Later, Elin's mystical powers curse Reynald to his death and bring on a storm to defeat the northern invaders. Borchardt effectively conjures life in a far-flung era, but more action and less romance might have made this tale of an odd alliance between early Christians and European pagans. (www.amazon.in)

The Vikings are historically known as the ferocious invaders who never give up so easily. This is what the Bishop makes of the Vikings: “Two kings. . .and both worse to no king at all. Odo, once the strong defender of Paris, buys off the Vikings now while Charles, descendant of Charlemagne son of Charles the Fat, our wealth, our lands ...” (Devoted 25). This is one ambience, which is fore grounded by Alice
Borchardt, to enunciate the position of feminine subjugation. Also, this turns out to be the hyper-real, which foreshadows the categories of subjugation. While speaking of the hyper-real, Jean Baudrillard’s observation warrants mention. He observes:

There is no longer any critical speculative distance between the real and the end of the social rational. There is no longer really and other essays projective of models but an in-the-field, here-and-now transfiguration of the real into the model. A fantastic short-circuit; the real is hyper realized neither realized nor idealized but hype realized. The hyper real is the abolition of the real not by violent distinction, but by its assumption, elevation to the strength of the model. (83)

This is one configuration of history, and Alice Borchardt foresees history as getting narrowed down to its hidden agenda, as that of segregation. As Baudrillard continues:

History has gradually narrowed down to the field of its probable causes and effects, and even more recently, to the field of current-events, its effects in real time. Events now have no more significance than their anticipated meaning, their programming and their broadcasting. Only this event strikes contributing a true historical phenomenon - this refusal to signify anything at all. This is the true end of history, the end of historical reason. (21)

An illustration, in this regard, can be had from Alice Borchardt’s Devoted. As she writes:
The marks on her body were truth. Raw patches of skin on her back, still unhealed, torn by the whip. Sores on her ankles and wrist burned into her flesh as she fought the ropes that tied her. Purple and yellow bruises where the hands of some men held her down so others could have their will of her. (Devoted 8)

Elin is projective of the historical reality, constituted by the commoditisation of women of which, she herself is a victim. She has to put up a stiff resistance as she contemplates:

She had known that if she were dragged away, loaded like a piece of merchandise into one of those ships, she would die, she could die. Willing herself into darkness to do so was one of the many strange skills of her people. A thing she had been taught but it hasn’t happened, none of the merchants thought her worth the price. She risked being tilled, treated as a thing of no value to be crushed and discarded. Yet she had taken that risk, embraced it gladly, rather than lose her people. (9)

Elin emerges as a metaphor of life, destined by the perennial struggles of life. This is one self contained reality which figuratively extended, is projective of the postmodern anarchy. Thus, Elin can be extracted from history, to figuratively represent postmodern women. Francis Fukuyama writes of the postmodern condition as follows:
The unfolding of modern natural science has had a uniform effect on all societies that have experienced it, for two reasons. In the first place, technology confers decisive military advantages on those countries that possess it. . . second, modern natural science establishes a uniform horizon of economic production possibilities. Technology makes possible the limitless accentuation of wealth and thus the satisfaction of an over expanding set of human desires. This process guarantees an increasing homogenization of all human societies, regardless of the origins or cultural inheritance. (10)

This “over expanding set of human desires” (Devoted 344), has taken possession of the feminine. Eventually, it ends up volatile. For instance, in the novel Sybilla has to engage herself, in a constant struggle against the cultural meanings accorded to her. She rises in rebellion against those destructive Romans who “carried swords everywhere they went and used them” (344).

At any rate the most striking of Borchardt’s depiction is what she forges as a fusion of the new energy. This is one fact of cultural consequence of the postmodern realism. Sybilla draws the immense emotional energy from Nature. This is one subliminal speculation of Alice Borchardt, which devices literariness out of historicity. She provides a way of looking into the situations which enrich the wisdom of paganism. The wisdom demonstrated by the pagan positions, recontextualises the body, in such a way that it gains supremacy as a liberating body. One of the reasons why, the novelist provides a clear picture of Sybilla’s world, backed by her heroic behaviour, creates independent ideas about a historic past. There
is always the hope that liberation is possible with the accommodation of the pagonist notions of humanity. While Hakon and his men are Christians, Sybilla is not. This is one overmastering ride exhibited by Elin when she gets on to endure and then redeem the Christian humanity. She has endured the Christians when they force themselves on her, one after the other. With the mention of the people of the forest, Alice Borchardt brings one to another postmodern cultural act, that is, the recreation of ecology in the postmodern age. In the journey over the vast health land Bishop Owen is exposed to the intruding cultural tide of the people of the forest like “the first waves of the returning tide” (425). The element that justifies Elin as being the saviour of her husband comes as a Christian paradox, as evidenced is Owen’s contemplation of his wife “your life for my people” (425). The sacrificial Nature of Elin makes one conscious of the beginnings of Christianity. Over the years, the history constituted by Christianity has designated men to fight and the women to keep home. Significantly, Elin is part of the first humanity which did not possess any religion. She progresses into an apostle of postmodern feminist ideology. While speaking of the cultural construct of the female body, Constance Penley observes:

but the female body. . . is the body of the woman as it has been constituted by culture: a body that is a legal, moral and religious background; a body seen as murderously, dangerous to the foetus it may house; a body held to painfully higher standards of beauty rather than the male body. (498)

One can begin by stating that Elin emerges as metaphor of the universal feminine. Elin can also be extended into a performative woman who is not afraid of
the dark, and the sacrifice she is going to make. The performativity principle is one component of the postmodern pastiche. To Elin, much to the shock and surprise of Godwin descends into spirituality too, “eyes unseeing, as though her feet knew the way” (Devoted 246). Godwin, a typical sample of masculinity, is afraid of the huge cavern. Elin is sure of the fact the spiritual alienation assures, a sure liberty and identity. One of the reasons why Elin subjects herself to suffering by fire and heat is that Elin is in the position to recover humanity, out from the first life to the beginning of a new life. No wonder, Elin subverts Godwin’s Christianity. This is a post modernist’s subversion, the novelist posits as the essence of truth. This is human agency at work which contests myth to uncover truth. As Roland Barthes observes:

this narrative style of history, which draws its ‘truth’ from the careful attention to narration the architecture of articulations and the abundance of expanded elements (known, in this context, as concrete details). So the circle of paradox is complete. Narrative structure, which was originally developed within the cauldron of fiction (in myths and the first epics) becomes at once the sign and the proof of reality (154)

The text seems to release the voice of the novelist as enunciating a new meaning. Elin’s venture how to save her husband is projective of not only a new meaning to humanity, but also the multidimensional phase on which humanity rests. Elin is one figural extension of Alice Borchardt herself, who can be regarded as a vanguard of feminist liberation. According to Helene Cixous:
She must write herself because, when the time comes for her liberation, it is the invention of a new insurgent writing that will allow her to put the breaks. . . To write-the act that will ‘realise’ the uncensored relationship of woman to her sexuality. . . Then the huge resources of the unconscious will burnt out. Finally, the inexhaustible feminine imaginary is going to be deployed. (94)

Bishop Owen reminds one of tormented spirituality burden by his Christianity. Owen, reaches the point of disaster when he is made the Bishop of Chantalon by his uncle against his wishes. So even in the beginning of the novel one witnesses Bishop Owen, as a helpless individual, who is cut off from the arduous individual quest. Primarily, Owen is granted the power to rule. When he marries Elin who is connected to the first world of Nature, he is all set to gain the vision of comprehending the world in its right perspective. Together, Owen and Elin experience the power of the first root of life.

Alice Borchardt projects an event in which one finds Owen recuperating after his encounter with Gerlos, the notorious Count. Elin takes care of Owen and all he feels, after a few seconds that he is “refreshed and alert” (Devoted 148). The scene offers the couple an opportunity to fuse Christianity and the most cherished ancient humanity. Naturally, paganism is one word which is misapprehended, ever since the word has been coined. Additionally, Elin becomes a symbol of femininity putting upside down the Christian concept of the masculine. The life strength of the Bishop Owen comes from his love of Nature, his relation to the ancient soil. The people of the forest, with whom he becomes friendly, are expressive of vitality. Hence,
Godwin, Gowen and Enar, the very personifications of the masculine are rejected by
Elin’s determinism. Godwin, Gown and Wolf the tall and Wolf the short end up the
relegated other. Thus, Elin is the feminist determinant. Likewise, Sybilla is the
feminine counterpart to Alshan. Yet, both belong to the forest. Alshan represents
masculine redemption, and Sybilla represents the feminine salvation. And together,
they represent humanism. This is an eco feminist exercise, Alice Borchardt indulges,
in order to proclaim a new humanity. Sybilla Promptly becomes a typical woman of
the forest as she works out a strategy for safety, in her own way, as evidenced in her
act of sailing, Bishop Owen comes back home safe. She simply subverts the ideology
of mankind centred on man as the source of meaning. As Catherine Belsey observes:

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\ldots \text{man is the origin and the source of the meaning of action, of}
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\[
\text{history (humanism). Our concepts and our knowledge are held to be}
\]

\[
\text{the product of experience (empiricism) and this experience is preceded}
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\[
\text{and interpreted by the mind, reason or thought, the property of a}
\]

\[
\text{transcendent human Nature whose essence is the attribute of each}
\]

\[
\text{individual (individualism). (7)}
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Similarly, Henry Thoreau perceives the wilderness pattern as part of the
ancient rhetoric of retreat or rather escapism. He writes:

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\text{It is difficult to conceive of a region uninhabited by man. We}
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\[
\text{habitually presume his presence and influence everywhere. And yet,}
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\[
\text{we have not seen pure Nature, unless we have seen her thus vast, and}
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\[
\text{drear, and in inhuman. . . Nature was here something savage and}
\]
awful, though beautiful! This was the Earth of which we have heard, made out of Chaos and Old Night. (71)

The novel subverts landscape further, as Alice Borchardt attempts to establish Elin as a multifaceted personality. As against the backdrop of the Viking threats, as evidenced in their presence on the river, Elin maintains poise and splendour. Elin, while preparing strategies to root out the eventual Viking incursions, stands sensitized to domesticity. One can witness Elin as a wonderful housekeeper. As her husband Owen leaves on a mission, she is much concerned about the stock of their larder so that she can feed the entire community, both soldiers and farmhands. Along with Elin there is Enar, to extend support to her. Judith is another female representative of the community who successfully transacts business and merchandise from even those who do not like Bishop Owen very much. This is an illustration of women taking hold of the community in the absence of men. Perhaps, Alice Borchardt wishes to drive home the point that women could operate well outside domesticity. Judith Butler’s understanding of gender as symbolizing a kind of public performativity, when repeated, clinches the subject, a unique identity. In this regard, she writes:

gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts. The effect of gender is produced through the stylisation of the body, and hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. (140)
In *Beguiled*, Hakon is strategically placed against Elin and Owen. He is puffed with pride by hundreds of boats built with oiled black oak. Hakon is a believer of the Augustinian faith, the same as Bishop Owen. Elin drags an opportunity to contest St. Augustine as she regards “a man’s mind is in his work” (*Beguiled* 142). Bishop Owen defends St. Augustine, stating that he is “so certain about the city of God” (143). However, Elin considers herself, more strategically positioned in Chantalon. She knows for certain that Chantalon is a rich place and many disciples of the Augustinian order “might be willing to throw for it” (144). A determined lady she is, Elin will not fail her people. Yet, she is also part of the people of the forest, who regard the land as the possession of the quests that they love very much. As Elin contemplates, “we give, not take, from those we love” (144) and that, “For now she was a ruler and a ruler must act like one” (144). She is happy that her husband, Bishop Owen is “running now in the freedom of the forest with her people by his side” (144). In the meantime, one encounters Raushing, one of Halcon’s men corrupting the innocent farmers who live on the frontier. He forges an illegitimate intimacy with Elfwine. He bribes her with gold and diamond jewellery. Raushing not only extracts information from Elfwine but also poisons the food, so that Hakon’s men will easily take over the city. Raushing is Hakon’s deputy who is supposed to “make mischief in the town” (152).

As the events unfold in *Beguiled* one finds Elspeth a sprightly individual who had garnered the hope of her community. She runs the family taking in the leadership. She attempts to pacify her own people when they bring complaints against Hakon. Corwin and Bettena is a young couple, who hold Hakon as responsible for having
burned the forest, “the very woodlands from which we derive part of our livelihood” (Beguiled 247). Elspeth confronts them with equal ease, as she says, “The forest will grow again. Richer than before” (247). The young couple acknowledges the fact that Elspeth has emerged as a victor in an all-male ambience. As Godwin says:

‘We know’, he said quietly, and “that you have much influence with this man, Hakon. Reynald slighted you, but Hakon does not. Several of the serving girls tried to make themselves more agreeable to him. His eyes slid away from them. When he comes here, he always seeks your room first, and Bettena takes away the children quickly’. (248)

Alice Borchardt in order to intensify Elspeth’s position as a cultural imperative, proceeds with the history of Elin. This time Elin is attended by the child ‘Ilo’. When Elin’s people are all set to punish Elfwine for having attempted to poison them, Ilo, the child seeks forgiveness. As the child’s voice speaks “none of those are poisonous”( 249). Hence the child Ilo, who comes from the people of forest, could be regarded a metaphor. The child Ilo is able to ignite the human in Elin who eventually, begins to approach Elfwine in a friendly manner. Alice Borchardt creates a picturesque situation in order to establish the point that Elin’s people have already been ordained by humanism. Now Elin and Elfwine are friends-- “their hatred exhausted, they were almost friends now” (253). Thus, they rise above their bodily conditions, to rescript a new meaning of life.

Godwin tells Elin about the people of the forest, “there was a time when I wondered if your people were human,” Godwin said, “now I see they are only too human. She is very much afraid of Hakon” (253). And finally Godwin’s
acknowledgement of the situation is one manifestation of the passionate surrender to humanism. As the novelist writes:

She found Ilo in the hall. The little girl was safely ensconced in Godwin’s lap. She was asleep, her leather cap askew on her dark curls.

“I’m beginning to understand how you know so much, Elin,” Godwin said as he handed the child up to her, “she’s been telling me all sorts of interesting things about Hakon”. (253)

Alice Borchardt flourishes with her textual materials to create more and more of the feminine types and every type, a body-category. This time Ceredea, the dancer, happens to accompany Owen, who is found in his usual adventure. Owen traverses many an unknown land and at this time he meets “Ceredea, the thumbler” (254) Owen knows that Ceredea has entertained his father’s guests many times. As Owen speculates:

He remembered the high-pitched cry of the flute, the rhythmic, throbbing tabor. Owen had clapped with the rest, in time to the dream, watching Ceredea as she leaped and cart wheeled in seemingly impossible feats of acrobatic grace, her smooth limbs glowing in the yellow light of the fire. (254)

Ceredea has been acquainted with the people of the forest as she falls in companionship with Nature. This is how one encounters Ceredea as against the backdrop of the dark vegetation:
Overhead, the trees forked into branches nearly as thick as the trunks themselves, festooned with dense tufts of foliage. Among them, the long pale wands of mistletoe stood out, chartreuse against the crisp, jade surfaces of the oak leaves, each long switch of the parasite encrusted with berries white as the fog itself. (*Beguiled* 255)

Owen is quite comfortable in the company of Ceredea. Like a picaresque hero he travels against the whiteness of the land and the blackness of the forest. He emerges, like the trees, enormous to capability and active in performance. He is always a part of the dark vegetation. As the novelist writes: “This is our forest,” (256) Ceredea said softly, “Alshan knows many songs about this forest, except that it is said that here the first tree grew. When it was an age to bear fruit, blessed by sunlight and watered by rain, all living things came to birth among its branches” (256).

Ceredea introduces the elements of the forest as proclaiming the beginning of life. She asserts the point that the first song began with the first tree. To the Christian Owen this is “a Pagan story and blasphemous” (255). According to Jean-Luc Nancy:

> There is no longer any world: no longer a *mundus*, a *cosmos*, a composed and complete order (from) within which are might find a place, a dwelling, and the elements of an orientation. . . There is no longer any spirit of the world, nor is there any history before whose tribunal one could stand. (4)
Ceredea perceives a primal Nature through a feminist focal point. She holds the perception that “God had seemed afraid – afraid of mankind” (*Beguiled* 256).

Ceredea establishes her eco-poise through her argument. As she says:

> If men knew nothing of good and evil how could they live? They would fall into fire thinking it safe, know nothing of what’s nourishing to eat, what’s a poison, How would they understand whom to love or hate? Who did well by them or harmed them? It sounds to me as though the woman was too clever for this God and he hated her. (256)

Ceredea clears up the forest and makes a clear path for Owen, which is a figural indication of humanism. The stallion, on which Owen is seated, is reminiscent of the Biblical horse, which offers the promise of hope and salvation. The horse drags Hakon all along. The horse is also indicative of the humanist aspirations which reach “so high that they would fly in the face of divinity itself in order to achieve them” (257). Owen also encounters a new community. In the forest, he meets the king Ilfor, his queen Aud and the Princess Gynneth. They all come to Idris, the city of Brittany and here, one sees Owen’s experiences balanced against Ceredea’s humanist’s vision. King Ilfor is part of history because Idris is “the greatest city in Brittany and the fairest” (267). This is how the novelist makes of Idris, as she writes:

> Idris drifted like a chimera in the light from the sea. The walls and rooftops were a warm rose in the rising sun. It seemed a place of light, cradled amid the jaws of black rocks, the brown of the wide fields stretching out around it, the emerald sea beyond. A big square Roman fortress crowned the rock and the houses spilled down the boulder-
strewn slope all around, ending at a wooden palisade like the one at
Chantalon. (*Beguiled* 267)

Presently, as they approach the fort, “it is a squalid neighbourhood, a ruin, at least half of it fallen down a steep cliff into the sea” (268). The city is the masculine pride. It positions women’s body, as the other. Hence, Alice Borchardt uses women to contest the body politics. Significantly, the novelist’s perception of the male construct is one of male crisis. According to Herbert Sussman:

maleness, potentially progressive, is also innately diseased. The very spring of male identity is also potentially the source of it destruction as dissolution. Repelled by the male body, by male sexuality, by what he sees as the miasmic swamp of the male psyche, Carlyle imagines the interior of the male as polluted, unclean. Masculine energy may power the energy of industrial society but it may also disrupt it in a power surge. (24)

With the creation of women characters as associated with radical and eco humanist positions, Alice Borchardt steers the text into a philosophical scepticism. The protagonists are indicative of a concern with meanings of body and hence, they indulge in an attempt to displace power. The novelist, through a memory paradigm, puts together the historical pieces. Postmodern feminism cannot escape from history. It can remake a primary history. Elin and Elspeth are constant reminders of the repressed cultural samples of history. Their attempt to displace the male hegemony enhances the quality of the text. Their exercises of feminism and eco feminism collectively steer the text into a new contextual history. The writing of history in
Beguiled is all a matter of constructing women’s story as one encounters the traditional male hegemony. Culturally exposed to male buyers and prejudice, the feminists demand for truth and authenticity. In simple words, Beguiled is a story of Elin and her women in contest with Hakon and his men. The forest one finds in the novel is the metaphorical primal earth and also the archetypal mother. Ceredea is the archetypal daughter.

Hakon is the archetype of sadomasochism constituted by war ethics. Hence, Elin and her women are paraded as the maternal life force to encounter the civilization of death and destruction, and finally salvage humanism. Hakon is part of the evolution of Roman history, masked by fascism. It not only invests the future civilization with violence and bloodshed but also deprives women of identity and the wholesomeness of being. Eventually, Alice Borchardt uses her women to register her cultural protest against this historical disfunction. Ideologically, Elin is representative of eco humanism which is centred on mankind’s redemption Elspeth enacts her rhetoric again on Hakon periodically, till she subverts the male order. Her concern for her son Eric is one forced moment of realization. This is a moral sense of which Elspeth is aware, and hence is much concerned about the safety of her son Eric.

Alice Borchardt addresses the concerns surrounding the body problematic. One could explore looking for cultural configurations that centre on women’s victimization. As one finds, the commercial structures like the taverns, the ecclesiastical constructs like the Abbotry are places fraught with conjunctive links with the historical proclamation of the singular conception of woman. These super
structures reject the notion of a subject. Instead, they individualize woman as a commodity. As Stephanie Genz and Benjamin A. Brabon observe:

The notion of the ‘subject’ has been accorded a vial importance in postmodern theories that cast doubt on the idea of the autonomous and free agent—often identified as an integral component of modernity—and articulate a self that is always within power structures and subjected to multiple discursive formations. As a conceptual category, the postmodern subject is fluid rather than stable, constructed rather than fixed, contested rather than secure, multiple rather than uniform, deconstructed rather than whole. (107)

Alice Borchardt has equipped her mainstay woman to dispel the notion of the subject, reinforced by masculine constructs. Her fiction is informed by the postmodern feminist contest of history. This directionality of the artist attempts to tilt the essential characteristics of the male oriented epistemology. Further, Alice Borchardt’s fiction sets aside the epistemological divisions of the male perceptions. Her text rejects the male perception of woman, as it simultaneously expresses distrust of the male constructs. Borchardt holds the male domain as deep-seated in essentialism and foundationalism. She is quite suspicious of this male ambience for, as Steven Best Douglas and Kellner stress, “the oppression of women has been sustained and legitimated through the philosophical underpinnings of modern theory and its essentialism, foundationalism and universalism” (206).

The duel of the women gladiators is a case in point. Julius Caesar, along with Calpurnia, comes to watch the women gladiators fight. Alice Borchardt capitalizes on
the Girl power phenomenon of the 90s, which centred on the male-dominated action adventure. Monarchy centre stage women as half naked fighting machines. In this way women move out of history, to become the postmodern feminist fighters, who have to fight the masculine ideology. Women carry an appeal for Julius Caesar, as objects of sexual desire, as the fight evokes sexual stimulation in Julius Caesar. Alice Borchardt strongly attaches the necessary rebellion with her women. She also wishes the readers to be exposed to a new venture. The world of the reader, as Henry Jenkins writes is:

characterized precisely by its refusal to respect cultural hierarchies (the boundary between high and low culture); its rejection of aesthetic distance (the boundary between text and reader): its blurring of distinctions between individual texts, genres, even media; its defiance of conventional conceptions of literary property (the boundary between reader and writer); and its attempt to integrate media context into its everyday social experiences (the boundary between fantasy and reality)…. (151)

In a way, Alice Borchardt’s women are action oriented as they carve a new definition of body. From the gadgets they carry to the warrior like dresses they wear, they embody an activated body, posing an inherent threat to masculinity. At the same time, through their redefined bodies, they create a new meaning. They regenerate and reenergize the bodies in such a way, that they reinforce a new consciousness. The new body equates itself into the postmodern allocation of the hyper feminine. Hence, as metaphors, Alice Borchardt’s women, not only slip out of history, but also reach the
postmodern scenario. Alice Borchardt’s fiction is the foreground, in which one finds a heavy debate of history. It negotiates between the destabilization of the historic feminine self and the historic drive of a sexually engaged woman. A tavern too slips out of history. As a metaphor, it is a domestic shell constituted by new traditionalism.

In *The Meaning of Wife* (2004), Anne Kingston also comments on the romanticisation of domesticity that lures late twentieth-century housewives into a ‘domestic nirvana’ and a dream of ‘mystique chic’. As Anne Kingston observes:

> Increasingly, housework – an endeavor reviled for decades as drudgery, as the source of women’s psychiatric problems, as the very root of female oppression – was presented as both fashionable and, even more perversely, a sure-fire route to female satisfaction. Call it mystique chic. Call it the ultimate backlash to *The Feminine Mystique.*

(65)

Hence, Alice Borchardt’s women are expressive of the notions of the New Woman. They revise the prevailing conditions of the feminine, so that a new woman power is achieved. The protagonists, especially, have now reached the moment of bodily realization and hence, they attempt to balance the disparity of power between men and women. Promptly, they overcome their very sense of being victimized. By eliminating the victim status, they garb on the new role of power status. The protagonists are designated by this power status which establishes them as free thinking and self assertive. This is a crucial postmodern feminist moment, with which, Alice Borchardt redefines the notion of the historical female body. Thus, one can surmise that Alice Borchardt is a dissenting feminist voice. She carries on this
strategic dissent only to redefine the notion of the subject and the cultural
configurations of the body. As Deborah Siegel observes:

Dissenting feminist voices participate in a much needed
intergenerational conversation. . . [but] these authors’ desires for
mastery overwrite any attempt to keep a dialogue moving. In their
incorporation of a rhetoric of repossession, in their masterful
articulation of ‘good’ feminism, and their righteous condemnation of a
monolithic ‘bad’ feminism, Wolf, Roiphe, and Denfeld make feminist
history the story of a product rather than that of a process. (72)

While the perception of Alice Borchardt’s text is a deconstructive strategy to
network body politic, it also supplements a demand for interpreting her text, as a
cultural redoing. By cultural redoing, one is aware of the feminine assertion of the
dynamic self-expression. Consequently, the protagonist is ignited by new cultural
dimensions, which transfer them into a liberated individual. One receives
identifications from the postmodern scenario. The entire bulk of fiction, poses a
number of issues which emphasize the modern second wave feminist fight for
women’s freedom, equality and liberation. As Patricia Waugh notes, “women can
only begin to problematize and to deconstruct the socially constructed subject
position’s available to them once, they have experienced themselves as subjects” (25)

Over time, men have gained more than a few opportunities to work in the
fields. At the same time, women have been separated in such a way that they are
dumped into tavern keeping. As Olive Schreiner observes:
So much is this the case, that, exactly as in the earlier conditions of society an excessive and almost crushing amount of the most important physical labour devolved upon the female, so under modern civilized conditions among the wealthier and fully civilized classes, an unduly excessive share of labour tends to devolve upon the male. That almost entirely modern, morbid condition, affecting the nervous system, and shortening the lives of thousands in modern civilized societies, which is vulgarly known as ‘overwork’ or ‘nervous breakdown’, is but one evidence of the even excessive share of mental toil devolving upon the modern male of the cultured classes, who, in addition to maintaining himself, has frequently dependent upon him a larger or smaller number of entirely parasitic females. (44)

Alice Borchardt’s fiction attempts to draw sustenance from Schreiner’s evolutionary precepts as observed in the following passage:

No man ever yet entered life farther than the length of one navel-cord from the body of the woman who bore him. It is the woman who is the final standard of the race, from which there can be no departure for any distance for any length of time, in any direction: as her brain weakens, weakens the man’s she bears; as her brain weakens, weakens the man’s she bears; as her muscle softens, softens his; as she decay, decays the people. (46)
Hence, Elin, Regeane and Guinevere have to organise a group respectively. They attempt to deliver the women from the clutches of the patriarchal oppression. As Juliet Mitchell observes:

Under patriarchal order women are oppressed in their very psychologies of feminity; once this order is retained only in a highly contradictory manner this oppression manifests itself. Women have to organize themselves as a group to effect a change in the basic ideology of human society. To be effective, this can be no righteous challenge to the simple domination of men (though this plays a tactical part), but a struggle based on a theory of the social non-necessity at this stage of development of the laws instituted by patriarchy. (94)

One could infer that Alice Borchardt is of the firm conviction that her protagonists have occupied the arena of the political debate, constituted by the crisis of subjectivity. Guinevere in *The Dragon Queen* helps one, as Rose observes, “to open the space between notions of political identity-between the idea of a political identity for feminism (what women require) and that of a feminine identity for women (what women are or should be)” (19)

This is one point as to how the feminine body is psychologically induced by the male anarchy. Hence, one could fix Alice Borchardt, as largely contesting the traditional patriarchal insensitivity to the body *politik*. The great monarchical order, supplemented by the Abbotry, regards a resisting body as quite detrimental to the collective male order. Here, one witnesses the intrusion of the male normative order, which holds women’s contesting bodies, as steeped in narrow individualism. The
male normative order refuses to accommodate the redefinition of the female body, in
the name of emancipation. According to Julia Kristeva:

Discrete quantities of energy move through the body of the subject
who is not yet constituted as such and, in the course of his
development, they are arranged according to the various constraints
imposed on this body-always already in the semiotic process-by family
and social structures. In this way the drives, which are ‘energy’
charges as well as ‘psychical’ marks, articulate what we call a *chora*: a
non-expressive totality formed by the drives and their stases in a
motility that is as full of movement as it is regulated. (98)

Essentially, Alice Borchardt’s fiction addresses the impact made by the male
superstructures. As Peta Bowden and Jane Mummery observe:

Possessing a woman’s body has meant, for instance, not possessing the
right or capacity to control everything that happens to or is expected of
that body. Women’s bodies are, after all, like their lives, affected on
all sides by various forms of explicit and implicit social, political,
legal, symbolic and discursive control. (45)

The redefinition of body is imperative in that, it constitutes the very credit
worthiness of the soul. In the words of Nancy Hartsock: “The female construction of
self in relation is others leaves. . . toward opposition to dualisms of any sort, [the]
valuation of concrete, everyday life, [and the] sense of a variety of connectedness and
continuities both with other persons and with the natural world” (298)
One of the reasons why Alice Borchardt constitutes a language which subverts the cultural considerations that constitutes meanings. As Luce Irigaray observes:

The question of language is closely allied to that of feminine sexuality. For I do not think that language is universal or neutral with regard to the difference between the sexes. In the face of a language, constructed and maintained by men only, I raise the question of the specificity of a feminine language: of a language that would be adequate for the body, sex, and the imaginary of the woman. A language which presents itself as universal and which is in fact produced by men only, is this not what maintains the alienation and exploitation of women in and by society? (58)

Women tend to be made invisible in the eyes of commerce and the other socio political discourses. According to Wendy Williams:

When a woman married [as of 1803], her legal identity merged into that of her husband; she was civilly dead. She couldn’t sue, be sued, enter into contracts, make wills, keep her own earnings, control her own property. She could not even protect her own physical integrity - her husband had the right to chastise her (although only with a switch no bigger than his thumb), restrain her freedom, and impose sexual intercourse upon her against her will. (63)

Accordingly, Alice Borchardt wishes to make the body quite visible. Hence, she attaches a concerted action, which not only changes the status, but also gains
significance, as an autonomous body capable of delivering the male body, as evidenced in Elin act of saving the Bishop Owen from the hands of the Viking raiders.

Thus eventually, it has been found out that much of Borchardt’s fictional materials, initiate the problematics of the body. Naturally, Alice Borchardt stresses the significance of the body as embodying the feminist perceptions of the body politic. It is also perceived that the longstanding cultural configurations of masculinity demonstrate the erasure of the feminine identity. Borchardt’s fiction well establishes the point as to how cultural practices have strategically worked socially, to devalue women’s bodies. The chapter has thus focussed on the cultural representations of the gender connecting motherhood and human relationship.

Thus the chapter finally reaches the considerations of Bowden and Jane Mummery observations, “some feminist revisionings of the body inspired by psychoanalytic and post structuralist ideas, along with a consideration of the way legal and socio cultural discourses have depicted the female body” (46)