CHAPTER IV
Self-discovery in sexual gender power politics

Violence is conceptualized as an act that is embedded in the socio-cultural, economic, political and ideological context of power relations. In the social context, it is the illegal employment of methods of physical coercion for person or group. Atrocity is a conspicuous act of cruelty, associated with some political operation, for which a Government may be represented as directly, or indirectly responsible. It may be morbid or sadistic phenomena, or the outcome of a judicial process. Violence against women occurs with the intent of perpetuating and promoting hierarchal gender relations. It is deeply rooted in gender based power relations, sexuality, self-identity, and social institutions.

Gender violence embodies power imbalances inherent in patriarchal society. Structural inequality of power in relation between men and women provides the objective conditions for male abuse of power. The different processes of socialization strengthen the gendered identity and each adorns the stereotyped gender roles, males for domination and females for submission. Violence against women stems from the concept of male superiority and power. The problem of violence against women cuts across race, religion, income, class, caste, creed and culture. It is manifested in physical aggression, sexual abuse, psychological violence through insults, humiliation, coercion, blackmailing, economic or emotional threats and control over speech, and action against female dignity. These expressions of violence against women take place in male female relationship within the family in particular and society in general.
Feminist approach to violence sees the brutalization of an individual woman by an individual man, not as an individual or family problem, but as the manifestation of the system of male domination of women that has existed historically and cross-culturally. Karnika Panwar is of the opinion that “societal tolerance of domestic abuse of women is a reflection of patriarchal norms which support male dominance in family and society” (38).

Margaret Atwood, an active member of the Amnesty International is interested in gender/sexual power politics. By power politics, she does not mean who votes for whom but how power operates and who has power over whom. Sexual power politics is often disguised as ‘love’, one of the forms of power politics. In her Book of poems Power Politics, Margaret Atwood asserts that love is dominated by imperialistic intentions. Lovers wield love as a weapon rather than bearing it as a gift. Atwood’s novel Bodily Harm (1981) explores the imperialistic harm done to the women’s physical body, and the sufferings of women both physically and psychologically. As Howells says, “in Bodily Harm female bodies are all passive, distorted, dismembered or coerced witnesses to the sexual power politics of the Berger epigraph” (120).

In Bodily Harm, the protagonist Renata Wilford is a lifestyle journalist who just had a mastectomy. Besides her physical pain, Atwood traces her internal torment in her troubled childhood, her relationship with men and a violent society at large. Rennie tries to escape the traumatic experiences of her own past but unfortunately she escapes to an area that is politically abandoned by the British. During her visit, Rennie gets imprisoned by the corrupt politicians of the Caribbean Island and she writes her travelogue in prison cell. In her travelogue Rennie includes all sorts of bodily harm perpetrated on woman
such as the pornographic violation of women, as shown in the Toronto Policeman’s Pornography museum; Her lover Jake’s sadism and the situation of rape; the humiliations she suffers in the prison, the torture she witnesses of the people crusading for human rights and civil liberties in the Caribbean Island; her mutilation by cancer; and her fellow prisoner, Lora’s ‘non-violent’ rape by her vicious stepfather.

In *Bodily Harm*, gender politics is contextualized within the frightening world of attempted and real murders, rapes, political intrigues and torture, and the novel depicts the process of self-discovery and re-humanization against the backdrop of inhumanness, cruelty and violence. Atwood depicts the horrifying consequences of imperialistic power-structures that de-humanize, inferiorize the individuals and reduce them to being virtually dispensable commodities. Rennie is a double victim both of cancer and male chauvinism.

The focus of the novel is on Rennie’s struggle towards the goal of specialization through a life of tensions and conflicts. The novel gives us a peep as it were into the life of a tiny isle of St. Antoine with its politics, pathos, comedy and tragedy. But it centres round the interior landscape of Rennie’s consciousness. Rennie is brought up in the sterile, hypocritical, sexless Southern Ontario small town called Griswold. Her childhood is suppressed by her grandmother’s rules of do’s and don’ts. Rennie is never allowed to think and feel independently.

She spent her childhood in the narrow and repressive Griswold. The puritanical town sees everything that happens as the will of God and believes that people get what they deserve. In Griswold, everyone deserves the worst. Rennie regards Griswold as a ‘backdrop’ rather than as her background. If the light bulb goes out the people in
Griswold believe that it is will of God, and nobody is ready to change the bulb. Rennie grew up surrounded by old people: grandfather, grandmother, great-aunts, and great-uncles. Her grandmother told her many maxims:

- Laugh and the world laughs with you. (*BH* 54)
- Cry and you cry alone. (54)
- If you can’t say anything nice, don’t say anything at all. (66)
- If you can’t keep your word, don’t give it. (118)

As a child Rennie learned three things well: how to be quiet, what not to say, and how to look at things without touching them.

After her grandfather’s death, her grandmother began to deteriorate. Sometimes she wouldn’t remember who she was and who they were. In Griswold, women thought it was a sin to wear even lipstick. Rennie’s mother is as conservative as other Griswoldians. Being around the old people all the time, her mother seems to be old. She never leaves Griswold even after the death of Rennie’s grandmother. People in Griswold have a great fear of being left alone.

Rennie realizes that women relished sacrificing their lives, serving others, being subordinates. They are used in a negative way against their own selves. Her grandfather was a doctor. Seeing her grandfather hero-worshipped by town, Rennie says that as a young child, she too wanted to be a doctor like him. However after a few years at school, she gave up the idea, for, by then she had become aware that “men were doctors, women were nurses; men were heroes and what were women? Women rolled the bandages” (56). Rennie’s grandfather is both the mixture of the heroic and kind doctor as well as the violent and brutal man. Her father was an irresponsible man who leaves his family for a mistress. Her mother has sacrificed everything - husband, home and family - to look
after her aged parents. She is modest, and has the necessary courage and confidence to negate her own existence, and individuality. Rennie feels hurt as she is badly neglected by her mother. She hates the self-abnegation of her mother and chooses to break away from such an environment:

I didn’t want to be trapped, like my mother. Although I admired her – everyone was always telling me how admirable she was, she was practically a saint – I didn’t want to be like her in any way. (178)

In order to live a free life she escapes to Toronto as a University student. Rennie leaves Griswold in order to lead a life of freedom where there would be no fetters to bind to such an extent as to kill her own individuality and identity. Rennie begins her adult life as a versatile writer. After college she starts her career as a freelance journalist specializing in ‘Life Styles’. She writes articles for Pandora, a woman-oriented magazine and for Visor, a male-oriented magazine.

Rennie as a journalist prefers invisibility, and not being tied to anything. She couldn’t stand the idea of anyone doing her favour. She believes that the respect comes not from beauty but from decency, and the best way to keep the respect is to do nothing unusual. She wants neither to be considered crazy nor to be dead. Rennie was ambitious when she was in college in 1970. Honesty is her policy, and she decides to specialize in writing about abuses. She writes a piece for Varsity on blockbusting as practiced by city developers and another on the lack of good day-care centres for single mothers. She receives threatening letters as a tribute to her effectiveness. She is commented by one of the editors, “a southern Ontario Baptist at heart” (64). Instead of writing, she begins interviewing the people who are involved in them. The editors call her a Radical chic.
As a typical Griswold woman, she keeps professional liability as her honesty, but under control. She neither bothers about the comments made by anyone nor makes her honesty public. She views her honesty less as a virtue than a perversion. She dislikes being lumped in with a fictitious group labeled ‘people like you’, and believes in personal privacy. For her it is nice to know “who you are” (200).

Jocasta, a feminist activist, is Rennie’s friend in Toronto. She is a liberated woman. For Rennie, Jocasta represents a complete and complex socio-gender system. Jocasta believes that men are desperate to assert their superiority over women one way or another. Her theory is that, “they don’t want love, understanding, and meaningful relationships; they still want sex” (156). Rennie’s association with Jocasta raises her feminine consciousness. According to Jocasta women think that they are liberated but in reality it is like a distant dream. Nothing has really changed with women. Men still are interested in having full control over women. They consider women as rental objects for the pleasure of men.

Keith, the editor of *Visor* assigned Rennie to do a piece on pornography from women’s angle. Rennie visits the Toronto Policeman’s Pornography Museum along with Jocasta, and interviews the policemen. There she encounters with the evidence of male brutality and violence against women. She is shocked to see the film clips of nude women, and different postures of naked women. The policeman shows her some film clips of women with animals. Film clips of women copulating with animals make her physically ill. There Rennie sees all ugly and horrible films displaying bodies of women as maps of violence. She realizes the abuse of woman in so-called civilized society. She
feels that men destroy women’s individuality in a subtle and invisible manner with the help of cultural codes.

There are a couple of sex-and-death pieces, women being strangled or bludgeoned or having their nipples cut off by men dressed up as Nazis. Rennie is shocked to see the final pictures shown by the policemen:

The picture showed a woman’s pelvis and the tops of the thighs. The legs were slightly apart; the usual hair, the usual swollen pinkish purple showed between them; nothing was moving. Then something small and grey and wet appeared, poking out from between the legs. It was the head of a rat. (210)

Rennie interviews Frank, an artist who made furniture in the structure of women’s body. According to Frank, art is for contemplation. Rennie never turns on the artistic sense of Frank. As Howells says, Rennie’s action is very close to “the early 1980’s feminist anti pornography position which asserted strong links between pornography as misogynist power fantasy and male violence against women” (12). Rennie feels that a large gap appears in what she has been used to thinking of as reality. She decides that it is better not to know any more about some things. In many cases, surfaces are preferable to depths. Rennie refuses to do on pornography and sticks herself to lifestyles.

While writing an article “The Young and the Solven” for Visor, she comes in contact with Jake. Jake works as a designer for a packaging company. He is smart and keeps up with the latest trends in fashions. He lives according to the male images in the magazines he reads. Being a fine young man, and a good dancer he hardly ever bothers to dance. He is good at what he does. He is even good enough to start his own small company at the age of thirty. Before meeting Jake, Rennie used to think that being in
love is like running barefoot along a street covered with broken bottles. Now, her view on ‘love’ differs:

Love let people think they know something about the lovers that they don’t know about them; it gives them power over them; it makes them visible, soft, penetrable, and ludicrous. (BH 102)

According to Rennie, “Sex is a pleasant form of exercise, better than jogging, a pleasant form of communication, like gossip” (102). What matters is the relationship – with whom the sex has been. Rennie and Jake are supposed to have a good relationship, and there is no doubt of having sex with Jake.

Jake is more interested in Rennie’s body than her mind. They start living together. Rennie likes to have baby through Jake, but Jake advises her to postpone it. He tries all his tricks to use and pack her just as he does thing. It takes more time for Rennie to realize that she is one of the things Jake is packaging. Though Rennie considers her an intelligent and cautious she allows herself to be trapped in the evil doings of Jake. Jake is foxy, saturnine and a trickster. Underneath his self-assured, playboy mask, Jake is emotionally very insecure. He is an animal in the dark. For him love is a crude game intended to hurt women. As Rennie says:

Jake liked to pin her hands down, he liked to hold her so she couldn’t move. He liked that; he liked thin king of sex as something he could win at. Sometimes he really hurt her, once he put his arm across her throat and she really did stop breathing. (235)

Jake, an adept in the field of advertising, inhabits the plane of disembodied appearance alone, manipulating images, which bear no relation to the world of substance. He enjoys sex as a pretended rape: “Pretend I just came through the window. Pretend
you’re being raped” (236). Rubenstein comments, “Jake, a man with canine teeth and predatory desires, prefers sex that includes bondage and sadism” (261).

Jake is an exploiter of female sex and a woman is just an object of sex for him. In the woman’s objectification, the female is nothing but the body and the female body is representative of sexuality. From this stems Jake’s need to reshape Rennie into the image of what is taken to be the eroticized female. After killing her plants, remodeling her apartment and her look, he stages the ultimate erotic object – the perfect sexual poses as she parades in sensual lingerie. Everything seems to underline the power relation between male and female. He asks and she complies. He hangs posters in Rennie’s bedroom showing, “brown-skinned woman wound up in a piece of material that held her arms to her sides but left her breasts and thighs and buttocks exposed” (116). There is another poster in which “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. In the foreground there was bull” (116). This shows Jake’s rapist fantasies.

Rennie soon learns that people get trapped in things that are beyond their control. Rennie is shaken as she is diagnosed of cancer requiring a partial mastectomy. Though her operation is successful she continues to be haunted by the fear of recurrence. Before her operation, Rennie and Jake seem to be perfectly suited to each other but after operation Rennie realizes that Jake was all along packaging her according to his taste and pleasure till he realizes that packing was rotting from inside. She blames herself for allowing him to use her as a commodity and decides to leave him. Vevaina is of the opinion that Jake, who is tragically alienated from his inner self, is a “classic Waste
Lander figure and not at all the hero Rennie once thought him to be” (187). It would take a long time to scrape the true nature of Jake.

Rennie’s passive behaviour to Jake’s every whim eventually drives him away. After her mastectomy, things begin to go sour between them. Jake does not lose interest because of her mastectomy as she believes, but because of her remarkable acceptance of his oppressive and abusive nature. She reacts to her abandonment with predictable passivity and tries to embody the victimized woman, the innocent one in a perverse world of wrongdoers. She seems to manifest the victim psychology which Atwood announces as her subject in the epigraphs to the novel taken from John Berger’s *Way of Seeing*: “A man’s presence suggests what he is capable of doing to you or for you. By contrast, a woman’s presence…defines what can not be done to her” (Tandon *Margaret Atwood: A Jewel in Canadian Writing* 115).

After her mastectomy Jake feels uncomfortable with Rennie and sees the scar on her breast as the kiss of death on her. Now Rennie is emotionally disturbed by her operation and feels that she has her malignancy uncured. The mental anguish Rennie experiences on account of the rapture of her sexual self-image caused by the mastectomy is conveyed with great sensitivity and without the trace of melodrama. The malignant cancer cells within her body function as a metaphor for the malignant manifestations of power in the external world. Rennie regards the operation very little in terms of a salvation but more as evil and violation by man, her body and self cut away from each other are marked by male probers, the labelers and cutters. It is significant that the surgery and removal is that of the breast, an eroticized body part thus enforcing the idea
of man preying on the female as sexual object only. She has no more hopes of becoming a mother and breast-feeding her future child. As Rubenstein says:

> Men worship the breast, and woman internalize the male overvaluation of this aspect their anatomy. Because it is also associated with the actual and symbolic qualities of nurturance, the loss of part or all of a breast affects a women’s sense of her procreative capabilities. (262)

Rennie has done a piece on boredom for *Pandora*, and she observes that the powerful source of the boredom is male and the passive recipient is female. Being an expert on boredom, Rennie suggests women to alter their wardrobes, which will improve their appearances. Rennie closely observes the nature of men and women in the society. For instance, even Jake likes her refreshing body, not the interesting mind. The fault is not on the part of men alone, since “women prefer guys who treat them like shit” (*BH* 103).

Sexual demands of men and women differ from each other. Rennie firmly believes that as long as there is trust, a secure woman is not threatened by her partner’s fantasies. She wants to be the one the man (Jake) opens up for; Jake wants her to be the one who opens up. He treats her package, and doesn’t want to be stuck with the whole package: “She may be the icing on his cake” (154). After some days, there is neither desire nor need between Jake and Rennie and they part from each other. Rennie thereafter thinks of atomic radiation in the war, which accounts for New Chastity. Too many deadly rays zap the pineal gland. As per the wish of Jocasta, if every man is turned into woman and every woman is turned into man, all the women will become rapists.

Dr. Daniel Luoma, a male gynecologist, has performed a partial mastectomy on Rennie. Margaret Atwood presents horrific reality of mastectomy and the possible death
sentence of cancer through Rennie. The disease begins to restore in the most brutal way possible the severed contact between Rennie and her body in which she has up to then merely been a tenant. Rennie has been treating her body as a machine and for her, the damaged breast is like a diseased fruit. Daniel tells her that while the mind isn’t separate from the body, body and its ailments cannot be regarded merely as a function of the mind. He adds that cancer isn’t a symbol, it’s a disease. Rennie finds it increasingly difficult to live at the same level as before.

Rennie doesn’t want to turn into one of those people who use their physical disabilities for social blackmail. After her operation, as per the advice given by Daniel, Rennie constructs schedules and goals for her. She exercises; goes to movies to cheer herself up; begins to type; reworks her drain-chain jewellery piece; learns to brush her hair, and do up buttons again. Daniel applauds her and delivers an earnest lecture:

This is the second part of your life. It will be different from the first part, you will not longer be able to take things for granted, but perhaps this is a plus because you will see your life as a gift and appreciate it more. You must stop thinking of your life as over, because it is far from over. (83)

Dr. Daniel is not even handsome. He is too tall for his shoulders, his hair is too short, and his arms are too long. Though it is inappropriate to have fallen in love with Daniel, who had no distinguishing features, Rennie is in love with him. He brought her a pamphlet called *Mastectomy: Answers to Down-To-Earth Questions*. The pamphlet suggests her to ask the doctor. She never asks him the questions, since she loves him. After the operation done by Dr. Daniel, Rennie wants to be sick again so that Daniel will have to take care of her. Rennie asks whether she can have a baby. Daniel replies that it is a risk to have baby immediately after her operation, and she can have it after some
Daniel is a dutiful husband, a dutiful parent, a dutiful son. Rennie is not jealous of his wife, but of his other patients. As for Rennie,

Daniel is the only man in the world who knows the truth. He’s looked into each of his patients and seen death. He knows they have been resurrected, he knows they are not all that well glued together, any minute they will vaporize. The bodies are only provisional. (142)

He is not an afterglow from the past, but the wave of the future. He is a fantasy - a fantasy about the lack of fantasy, a fantasy of the normal for Rennie. It is soothing to think of Daniel. So Rennie calls Daniel, giving the impression of someone on the verge of suicide. Daniel comes there, and more than a desire, both of them need each other.

Rennie sees Daniel as a substitute of Jake. He possesses the healing touch that Rennie comes to obsess about in his hand. She wants and needs him to touch her. He saved her from the cancer and Rennie thinks that he now reconciles herself with her body. Daniel takes his job very seriously and is earned in his effort to help his patients recover both physically and psychologically. Rennie allows him to touch her with his life giving hands. But, Daniel violates the professional ethics by taking advantage of her in her emotional state. In her relationship with Daniel, Rennie wants something definite, the real truth, one way or the other. Then only she will know what she should do next. It’s this suspension, hanging in a void, this half-life she can’t bear. As Wainwright says, Rennie can’t bear not knowing, but Daniel is, “afraid of emotional commitment, and is unable to offer her anything but platitudes” (58). Ultimately, Rennie realizes that Dr. Daniel is a victimizer who exploits women in the guise of medicine and surgery. She says:
May be I’m not the only one…there’s a whole line up of them, dozens and dozens of women, each with a bite taken out of them, one breast or the other…he tells us all he loves us. Anyway he gets off on it, its like a harem. (BH 82)

Rennie compares Daniel with her grandfather, a physician of violent temperament. In the words of Rubenstein, the primitive life saving methods of Rennie’s grandfather “uncannily resemble torturous mutilation of the body”, and Daniel comprises, “the paradoxes of patriarchy: the opposing stances of healing and destruction as practiced in the characteristically male institutions of medicine and politics” (264).

The partial mastectomy on her breast reinforces the idea of Rennie’s incompleteness and her fractured identity. In Wilson’s words, Rennie feels, “raw material, violated and doctored by her surgeon Daniel” (140). Now she understands the feelings of a woman who has undergone Daniel’s surgery:

Holding the hand of a blonde woman whose breast he has recently cut off, who wants to cure, who wants to help, who wants everything to be fine. “you’re alive”, he says to her, with kindness and duplicity, compelling as a hypnotist. He says, “You’re very lucky”. Tears stream silently down her face. (BH 126)

Rennie searches for the ideal sexual relationship with Daniel. She wants to lie down beside him and touch him and be touched by him. She believes that the touch of the hand can transform, and change everything. There is a magic in the touch. She wants to be trusted; she wants to make love with him. She wants to open him up. But making love for an hour in a hotel room with Daniel will not work. There is a gap between what she expected and what she really is. Afterwards, she no longer expects Daniel to save her
life. She never expects anything. She wants to write a piece on the sexual expectations of women, and comments that, “One man I’m not allowed to touch and another I won’t allow to touch me” (198). Her fantasy is unfulfilled. Shortly afterwards, in one afternoon she returns to her apartment to discover that somebody has broken into her home in her absence.

The lust for power manifests itself in a myriad forms in the novel. The faceless stranger who breaks into Rennie’s apartment in Toronto and leaves off-white, medium-thick rope neatly coiled on her quilt, indicates his capacity and desire to do harm. Since Rennie does not even know the man, there is no question of personal vendetta. Though he does not succeed in harming Rennie physically, he succeeds in terrorizing her psychologically. She feels silly and neurotic, and throughout the novel, thinks and dreams of this personification of brute power.

With his lack of identity, the man with the rope takes different forms from the sadistic island police to the various men with whom Rennie is romantically involved. But every attempt that Rennie makes at actually identifying the man with the rope fails her. She tries to identify him as Jake, as Daniel, as Paul until, terrifyingly, she begins to realize that this facelessness is the possibility of any male in society. He is an agent of male oppression. He represents the potential in all men to brutalize women. This is not the individual brutality of a certain person inflicted upon another but the patriarchal structure. It is the need for male dominance and female subordination. This sinister incident prompts Rennie’s decision to leave Toronto.

At first Rennie liked to write pieces about trends that didn’t really exist, to see if she could make them exist by writing about them. The editors believe that what Rennie
said on subjects would eventually come true, even if it wasn’t true at the moment. She writes articles on drain-chain jewellery, cancer, and geese for *Owl Magazine*, and on Women of Achievement for *Pandora*. After the arrival of stranger into her room, she persuades Keith, the editor of *Visor* magazine to let her do a travel piece and ends up with an assignment on ‘Caribbean island’.

In her journey to Caribbean Island, Rennie is frightened by the world of political intrigues. Through Rennie, Atwood depicts the process of self-discovery and re-humanization against the backdrop of cruelty. In Wainwright’s words, “the novel succeeds both as a powerful psychological and political novel” (58). 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 others. And as a political novel, it shows the atrocity of Government in political operation.

Rennie visits Twin islands – St. Antoine and St. Agathe. There she notices the posters in the streets, and pictures in the Church. The posters are about the election. The pictures in the Church portray demons as female. The people are euphoric:

Caribbeans hold hands on the street, they make love in the afternoons, the wooden louvers of the old windows close against the sun, they get flea bites, there is nothing that doesn’t amuse them, they buy dubious cakes and strange fried objects from roadside stands, they eat them recklessly. (*BH* 71)

Rennie slowly realizes that more than religion, politics preoccupies the people, since it is the first election after British pulled out their island. The three parties are represented by Prince, Dr. Minnow, and Ellis, the Minister of Justice. Frequently there are speeches
given by these people in the streets. Rennie decides to write article on the culture of the twin islands, entitled *Fun in the Sun Spots*.

Rennie meets Dr. Minnow, a sixty years oldman on the plane from Barbados. He is known for his rebellion against the tyranny of the Government and one of the three candidates for the first local election since independence. Rennie expects to know the local attractions but Minnow shows her the island’s poverty and the corruption of the present regime. He reveals that he is the major opposition candidate in the upcoming election. He shows the victims of hurricane huddle who did not benefit in anyway from the money sent for their rehabilitation by the ‘Sweet Canadians’. By doing this he wants Rennie to write about them and feels that Rennie will be tempted to change things. Rennie reacts badly and says that politics is not her thing, and also the local politics of the island would not be of interest to Canadians.

Rennie knows much information about politics through Dr. Minnow. His revolutionary attitude opposes the imperialistic mindset of the British. According to him, the biggest mistake done by the British Government is putting the people in several islands together for the sake of selling their bananas. The British always hand out papers, forgetting the fact that only few can read. British are good at Botanic Gardens and Fort industry. Dr. Minnow explains the political condition at the Caribbean:

South of St. Antoine is St. Agathe, south of St. Agathe is Grenada, and south of Grenada is Venezuela with the oil, a third of U.S. imports. North of us there is Cuba. We are a gap in the chain. Whoever controls us controls the transport of oil to the United States. The boats go from Guyana to Cuba with rice, from Cuba to Grenada with guns. Nobody is playing. (135)
Dr. Minnow wants Rennie to write about the British parliamentary system which is not applicable to the Caribbean. He also hopes that that election will be the first and the last after the departure of the British, since their parliamentary system will no longer work there. But Rennie wants to do article on lifestyles, and not on politics. She takes many pictures of restaurants, the tourists, the natives for her article on the local culture.

Dr. Minnow makes Rennie conscious of her duty as a writer. He is like Christ in many ways. When he introduces himself to Rennie, he says, Dr. Minnow is “a small fish in a small puddle” (31). His name is a corruption of the French, Minot was the original. His members of the family were all pirates. His physical appearance resembles Christ. Being part Scottish and part native, he is brown-skinned, spare-faced and tall with a high bridged nose, and looks vaguely Arabian. Dr. Minnow believes in fair play, in democracy and does not mix politics with religion. He wants Rennie to publish the truth about the island. He says, “Look with your eyes open and you will see the truth of the matter. Since you are a reporter, it is your duty to report” (133). Thus he succeeds fulfilling his role as a spiritual guide.

Being a part Scottish, Dr. Minnow wishes to have remained in Canada. He referred Canadians, “The Sweet Canadians” (29). Dr. Minnow explained that when there was hurricane, the sweet Canadians donated a thousand tins of ham, Maple Leaf Premium for the refugees. They are almost like members of the family. Though Canada is a very small place, it is independent and safe as there is no high rate of crimes. In Canada, unlike the Caribbean everyone is not in politics. But it is odd to see the Canadian Government being thanked for anything.
Later Dr. Minnow wins the election and is shot by the CIA agent on the island. Then Rennie understands the reason behind his pleading. To Rennie, the coffin of Dr. Minnow seems to be a stage prop, an emblem out of some horrible little morality play. She imagines that “at any moment the lid will pop up and Dr. Minnow will be sitting there, smiling and nodding, as if he’s pulled off a beautiful joke” (250). Dr. Minnow’s wife cries beside his coffin. According to Griswold, open crying is a raw desolation, nakedness of a face, and is not decent.

Rennie’s experiences at St. Antoine and St. Agathe in Caribbean island constitute the unfolding plot, essentially about the recovery. She recovers her capacity for sexual pleasure. Among the people she encounters there, Paul, and Lora have the opportunity to move close with her. Paul, an American is involved in contraband activities and Lora, his former mistress exploits Rennie to smuggle weapons into the country on Paul’s behalf. St. Antoine is so far off the regular tourist path and because Rennie arrives during the first election since independence, her presence arouses suspicion. She is watched wherever she goes.

The morning after her arrival on the island Rennie wonders whether she, like other cancer victims, will resort to faith healing, “the laying on of hands by those who say they can see vibrations flowing out of their fingers in the form of a holy red light” (72). Shortly afterwards she finds herself being pursued by a deaf and dumb man whose inexplicable attentions strike her as being “too much like the kind of bad dream she wishes she could stop having” (72). Paul explains that the man simply wants to shake hands with her in the conviction that the gesture will bring her good luck. Then Rennie realizes that he has only been trying to give her something. At first she is afraid that the
scar left by her operation will repel him but these fears are dispelled when she perceives his actual reaction and understands that he’s seen people a lot deader than her.

After Jake’s departure and the dead-end relationship with Daniel, Rennie comes in contact with Paul. Psychologically he is better balanced. Paul is a tourist guide in the Caribbean island. He lives on the edge, he deals in drugs, and he rescues maidens in distress. He introduces himself that he was an agronomist with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. He visited many places like Vietnam, and Cambodia. But very soon Rennie realizes that he is an agent for politicians, and just a driver. He is doing ‘deal’ with women. At the same time he concerns for the danger. When anybody harasses the woman, Paul only unties the woman like Tarzan. Though he is a dope and gunrunner and a probable CIA agent, he cares for humanity. He helps Rennie to get rid of the political situation in the island and warns her against getting involved with Dr. Minnow. Paul provides Rennie with stayhouse, food, and comfort.

Though Rennie doesn’t fall in love with Paul, she is comfortable in his touch. Paul is “remote, but friendly, like a tour guide. He is part of a package” (223). She justifies her act that love is tangled, sex is straight. Paul is married, but his wife left her, since she didn’t like his uncertain lifestyle. After many frustrations, Paul never dreams for anything. Paul comments on Rennie, “You are too nice. You are too naïve. You are too easy. Anyway, you want it too much” (245).

Paul is a good substitute of Jake or Daniel as he shows extreme tenderness and is not repelled by the scar on Rennie’s breast. Dorothy Jones says, “Unlike Jake, who tries to make her over into something else, or Daniel who sees her as the answer to his emotional needs, Paul accepts Rennie for what she is” (93). Her relationship with Paul
gives Rennie a new meaning of life. The relationship between them emphasizes the healing power of love:

He reaches out his hands and Rennie can’t remember ever having been touched before…this much is enough. She’s open now, she’s been opened…She enters her body again and there’s a moment of pain, incarnation…she’s still here on the earth, she’s grateful he’s touching her, she can still be touched. (143)

But soon Rennie realizes that she is a sort of house guest. Paul is the one who’s supposed to know what to do next. Paul, Marsdon, and Prince together used Rennie and Lora, an object of negotiation for their revolution. The vocation romances are only bare excuses. Rennie feels like a hostage, strangely uninvolved in her own fate. In his attempt to save Rennie, his mission fails and she remains imprisoned.

Rennie’s relationship with Paul is also not satisfactory, she realizes that falling in love with Paul, a mysterious stranger is the biggest cliché in the book of her life. She does not enjoy being in love but she requires being with a man to satisfy her bodily needs. After Paul’s death, Rennie never imagines him to be dead. She reminds of only his blue eyes. She fails to establish a meaningful relationship with men and does not want another relationship, which is meaningless and loveless. She wants to take her body and escape. She is not supposed to expect anything. This shows her female passivity. Finally, Rennie realizes that all the men in her life are, in reality, one man, and that she herself has chosen him, created him in her own image his face, “…familiar, with silver eyes that twin and reflect her own” (283).

The other characters, Rennie encounters in Carribbean Island are Ellis, Marsdon, and Elva. Ellis is also the candidate for the first local election and does not believe in fair
play and democracy. Marsdon is the campaign manager in the elections for Prince of Peace. He is mean spirited. He is doing business with women. He forcefully ties the women in the tree, removing their clothes. He stays in the house, drinking rum and listening to their scream.

...he made her take off all her clothes, and then he covered her with cow-itch. That’s like a nettle, it’s what you do to people you really don’t like a whole lot. Then he tied her to a tree in the backyard, right near an ant hill, the stinging kind. He stayed in the house, drinking rum and listening to her scream. He left her there for five hours, till she was all swollen up like a balloon. A lot of people heard her but nobody tried to untie her...(215)

Rennie is shocked to know that in the Caribbean, robbery is a great crime than murdering a woman. If a man kills a woman it is linked with passion and that man is forgiven by the society: “If you get angry and chop up your woman, that is understandable, a crime of passion you might say. But stealing you plan before hand” (240). Elva is prince’s grandmother and the owner and the manager of Sunset Inn. She is a self righteous and ill-wishing English Woman. She is deliberately unkind to Rennie and does all she can, to make Rennie’s stay at her hotel uncomfortable. She does not like Rennie’s relationship with Dr. Minnow who, in her opinion stirs people up for nothing. When the policemen arrest Rennie in her hotel room, the vicious and cold hearted Elva has a look of pure enjoyment on her face. Elva seems very much like Rennie’s grandmother who often punished her for making a noise.

After the murder of Dr. Minnow, some of his followers attempt to overthrow the present Government. The Justice Minister declares a state of emergency, which make everything legal. Government doesn’t lay any charges because it doesn’t figure out what
charges to lay. All of a sudden the police with guns just bash into their houses and grabbed them. Some of the people have no idea why they were arrested. The police sweep of the island. They pick up anyone they find hiding or running or even walking on the road. They have the names of the main revolutionaries and they want everyone related to them. In the island everyone is related to everyone else around there. The police tie the men together in bundles of three or four and throw them on top of each other in the ship, down in the hold, like they were cargo. They tie the women’s hands together, behind their backs, two together, and let them stand up. In the street, they haul the bundles of men off the boat and the people are screaming, “Hang them! Kill them!”.

It is wrestling in the street. In the police station, they tie fifty or sixty men together in a long line, and beat them up with sticks and boots. Then they throw buckets of cold water over them and lock them up. The men are wet and cold, nowhere to piss, nothing to eat.

The St. Antoine policemen relish their power on victims whom they ruthlessly batter both physically and emotionally. A more subtle manifestation of power is in the form of the miniature five-piece steel band of real toads that have been killed, stuffed and varnished before being displayed for the benefit of tourists in one of the kiosk shops at the Barbados airport. By killing living beings at whim, the power is displayed over them. Atwood does not say that men always win and women always lose it. It is simply that the one with power wins. Besides Rennie, Lora, Elva and the young mother and child at Fort George, Dr. Minnow, the deaf and dumb man, Prince, Marsdon and probably even Paul, also suffer bodily harm. The policemen hit Elva on her head with a pistol butt. Elva is silently crying, and her face is streaked, mapped, caked, and dark red. They shot Marsdon, suspecting that he is an agent of the prince.
Despite herself, Rennie becomes embroiled in the conflict of a local election, a political assassination and is jailed as an outraged tourist. Rennie is arrested for about two weeks in a Central America prison. By depicting the pathetic conditions of the prisoners, Atwood emphasizes the need for mercy, pity and love in the power-mad world. Rennie’s painful and terrifying experiences make her realize that her cherished marginality has all along prevented her from living her life as a human being. While Rennie is provided with poor chicken, and salted tea in the prison, she is day dreaming of the tasty food, and her mouth is watering at the thought of it. She trusts that if only she believes to escape, it will happen.

Rennie is hopeless when she sees a number of prisoners are tortured by police guard in a courtyard. One prisoner, who turns out to be the deaf and dumb man she met earlier is treated with particular ferocity. He is a homeless, victimized beggar. Rennie first sees him lying on the steps of her hotel. She is frightened as he ran after her to shake her hands. The next time she sees him being beaten by the police in the street. Though he has a voice but no words, he manages to convey the truth to others. His physical condition and the expression in his eyes gain sympathy from Rennie. As Dorothy Jones says, he represents “the vast mast of people in the world crippled by poverty that ignorance and political tyranny have deprived of their capacity to proclaim the suffering and injustice of their plight” (96). Now, he is kept from hitting the pavement by the rope that links him to the other man. As Rennie witnesses this orgy of gratuitous cruelty, she is overwhelmed by a dark revelation of universal complicity in evil:

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. Rennie
understands for the first time that this is not necessarily a place she will
get out of, ever. She is not exempt. Nobody is exempt from
anything. (BH 290)

Rennie realizes her ‘self’, when she comes in contact with Lora Lucas in prison.
Rennie confines to a subterranean cell in an old fort with Lora who is accused of being
involved with Prince, the second opposition candidate. There Rennie is forced to
witness various scenes of brutality, culminating in the sadistic beating of Lora by their
prison guards. Lora is the child of poverty and abuse, and is deeply immersed in the life
of the island including its criminal aspects. Rennie and Lora pass the time by recounting
their personal experiences. Listening to her companion, Rennie discovers that Lora has
better ‘stories’ than herself. She experiences much social and sexual oppression. She
belongs to the lower class, loose, disheveled women who get what they deserve by
Griswold’s standard. She is shocked to know that all men around expect her to sleep
with them and the condition is either to comply or to lose the job.

In her childhood, Lora lived in the cellars of apartment buildings, which were
always dark even in summer, and they smelled like cat piss. Lora’s mother, who is full of
schemes, tries many businesses, arts and crafts. She believes in fate and says, “Where
there’s life there is hope” (114). After the death of Lora’s father, her mother marries
Bob. She is a helpless victim and she lives her life as the will of destiny. Her life with
her husband is much like an accident. She acknowledges the fact that she is a victim, but
accepts it as something inevitable, an act of fate. Lora is scared of Bob and doesn’t want
to live with him. But as a child, she couldn’t do anything. Later she realizes that even
her mother doesn’t want to live with him. Both of them don’t know what else to do, and
how to get out of him. Lora says, “He hit me because he could get away with it and nobody could stop him” (111).

At the age of sixteen, Lora married her boy friend Gary. She works in pizza centre and runs her life without the fear of Bob. But Bob never leaves her. He tortures Lora to be with him. When Lora informs her mother, her mother suspects and gets angry on Lora not on Bob. After some years, Lora and Gary split up, and Lora moves with Paul in Miami. For Lora, “Nice is better than rich” (213). Paul is both nice and rich. He owns a boat, and Lora begins to work in the boat. There is a practice in the island that one who rents the boat rents everything in it including the women there. Lora seems to be pretty cheap for men. Then Lora feels that Paul is not noble so far as she thinks.

Things become horrifying for Rennie when she comes to know the violence done to Lora. Lora’s tales further go to completely shatter her attitude towards thinking of feminism. Lora thinks that condition of women is not satisfactory in the society. When Lora begins to tell her tales, Rennie wishes she could not hear her. She fixates on Lora’s opening and closing mouth. At first, Rennie’s attitude is much like that of her society, which marginalizes women like Lora. By Lora’s tale, Rennie learns that in the society there are many who are eager to exploit a woman, if she is willing to be weak and give in.

Lora once met Prince in Beach bar, and falls in love at first sight. Prince, a Communist believes that he could save the world. He wants them to have a baby, and never wants Lora to be with Paul in the boat. She wants to stay with Prince, and because of the affair she gets arrested by the St. Antonie Police force. In the prison, Lora picks up certain tricks for survival in the course of her adventures and Rennie is disgusted to learn that she is prostituting herself for the supply of cigarettes, a comb, and a package to
chewing gum from the prison guards. For Rennie it isn’t decent. To the hardened Lora it is simply a survival tactic. Lora is savagely beaten by the prison guards. The guards have promised to arrange her meeting with Prince. As the days go by, Lora becomes impatient and finally knows that Prince was never imprisoned, having earlier been caught in the crossfire.

In a male-dominated society, Lora’s voice remains unheard. She is exploited by the prison guard for sex in return for news about her lover Prince of Peace. She is finally the silenced, victimized woman as she is beaten and killed by the policemen. Lora becomes a symbol of the weak and helpless mass of humanity. When Lora feels that she has been used, her grief explodes, provoking the two guards. Lora’s body endures their cruel beating and Rennie feels helpless, and pity for Lora. Her face is not:

A face any more, it’s 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. (298)

Now she realizes that it is the face of Lora after all, there is no such things as a faceless stranger, every face is someone’s and it has a name. Rennie really mourns for the death of Lora.

Lora’s death is symbolic of the death of the helpless and weak self of Rennie. The massive involvement has a different meaning, for Rennie it is a term with positive action. She makes the generous gesture of her life; she takes the injured Lora’s hand and holds it with all her strength, willing her back to life. If only she can try hard enough, something will move and live again, something will get born. Atwood addressed in a conference that “this shows Rennie’s feminist consciousness and she is struggling into a new
awareness of herself as a morally responsible human being” (Oct 1982). Rennie
redisCOVERs the hands she forfeited in the youth, “feeling the shape of a hand in hers…
there but not there… It Will always be there now” (299). The consequence of this crucial
act Would seem to be that something is indeed born if not Lora herself then the new
subversive reporter Rennie. This new Rennie is capable of seeing things not as society
pretends they are but as they are in reality. What she sees has not altered, only the way
she sees it. It’s all exactly the same.

After encountering all these characters, Rennie seems to be unique and feministic,
when she accomplishes her self identity. Rennie is different from Lora in every respect.
Lora is an illiterate, while Rennie is a University educated. Rennie doesn’t like her
father, and his words, “you look like your mother”. She wants to be completely sensitive
and sensible, whereas Lora becomes submissive to the wishes of her mother. As a typical
Atwood woman, Rennie seeks magic transformations and “wants to be cured
miraculously of everything, anything at all” (Salat 71).

At first Rennie represents all women who, through the influence of culture, have
become passive and allowed themselves to be taken advantage by men whom they are
anxious to please. She allows herself to fulfill the male desire, and gaze. She is in fact
observed and feels observed by the intruder who seems to know her and once again turns
her into an object of desire, an attempt to visually control her feminine sexuality. After
looking all the bodily harm to women, Rennie’s attitude towards men has been changed.
Once, Rennie was able to predict men. She used to think she knew what most men were
like, what most men wanted, and how most men would respond. She used to think there
was such a thing as ‘most men’, and now she doesn’t. She’s given up deciding what will happen next.

Rennie imagines that her mother and grandmother are with her in the prison, and she hears the voice of her grandmother, “I don’t want to die, I want to live forever” (BH 274). The present is both unpleasant and unreal. The thinking about future makes her afraid. She wants an end for this fear. She wants to remember someone she’s loved; she wants to remember loving someone. It’s hard to do. She remembers Jake, Paul and Daniel. She can hardly remember what Jake looks like. She doesn’t want to think of Paul as dead. She is the last person he touched; He is the last person who will ever touch her. She remembers the yoga class she once went to with Jocasta and feels the echo:

Feel the energy of the universe. Now relax. Start with the feet. Tell your feet, Feet, relax. Now send your mind into your ankles. Tell your ankles, Ankles, relax. (283)

Rennie thinks about Daniel, who wants to cure; who wants to help; who wants everything to be fine. With kindness he says to her, “You’re alive, you’re very lucky” (283). Daniel is a mirage, a necessary illusion, a talisman she fingers, over and over, to keep herself sane. Once she would have thought about her illness: her scar, her disability, her nibbled flesh, and the little teeth marks on her. Now this seems of minor interest to her. While comparing others,

Nothing has happened to her yet, nobody has done anything to her, and she is unharmed. She may be dying, but slowly. Other people are doing it faster. (284)
Lora’s death compels her to think in terms of some kind of positive action against cruelty on women. She emerges as a new human being, as her name ‘Renata Wilford’ means ‘born again’. She has begun to see things differently. As Howells says:

Rennie’s effort to tell the story is like her effort to save Lora, an exercise of the moral imagination, being both reportage and invention…As she is a reporter she determines to ‘report’, offering her interpretation of contemporary lifestyles in two different countries but now with an edge of moral engagement…she does more than report; she tries to imagine things differently and better than they are…(125)

The quest of Rennie comes to term with the central archetype which Jung calls ‘Self’ and sees the divinity which exists within her own psyche. She examines and rejects stereotypical notions and is more or less at peace with herself towards the end of the novel. Initially, Rennie sees herself inferior to some and superior to some others. Her divided psyche is healed at least partially, once she becomes aware of the paradoxical nature of her self-image, understands her personal shadow, grapples with her animus and sees the presence of the mother archetype within herself. She is more individuated for she imagines herself actively changing her own future and hopefully also that of others. The introverted Rennie understands that she must communicate verbally with those around her and live her life as fully as possible with all the emotional risks that it involves. As Vevaina says, “having accepted various aspects of her unconscious, she partially apprehends the peaceable kingdom within herself” (193).

Rennie’s inadvertent involvement in the political intrigues on the Caribbean islands of St. Antoine and St. Agathe shatter her complacency and she realizes for the first time in her life that anything can happen to anyone anywhere.
As Tandon pointed out,

> By reducing individual sufferers to statistics, the newspapers and media help create the feeling that we are safe and that all the terrible things that take place in the world happen, and can happen, only to others. Atwood feels that it is necessary to get rid of this illusion and recognize the fact that the ubiquity of evil can not be wished away. (120)

The world is a prison cell in which all are inescapably caught. Some of the prisoners terrorize the others by virtue of their brute strength. Those who like Rennie, are fortunate to suffer less, must do all she can for the worse off fellow beings and reach out towards them with love and genuine compassion. Indifference to their misery implies acquiescence in evil.

Rennie discovers that women are still where they were a century ago. Their freedom and identity are only delusions. People enjoy torturing others especially women. A man can be disloyal to his woman but a woman dare not. People look at the cruelty on the women as silent spectators but they do not like to interfere, explaining it away as a man woman thing and not anyone else’s business. She finally understands that she is not afraid of cancer or amputation. Her scar has no significance and it is a very minor accident. She comes to see men in the light of the power they wield, through violence as well as through language, “She is afraid of men and it’s simple. It’s rational, she is afraid of men because men are frightening” (BH 290). Now she becomes a sadder but wiser person.

At last Government finds that she is a journalist, and unofficially apologizes. The novel ends with Rennie’s release through the intervention of Canadian diplomatic authorities that she will not write about what happened to her. But, Rennie rejects her
submissive role as a woman and is ready to speak out the truth about the exploited women. She emerges as a warning against disabling female fantasies of innocence and victimization, which displace women’s recognition of the dangers of the real life. Rennie accomplishes herself a subversive journalist who is bold enough to narrate her experience in the form of travelogue called ‘Bodily Harm’. She uses pen as a weapon and ends up as an activist. She realizes her duty to write, to report the truth. She feels as if she’s returning after a space trip, a trip into the future. When she returns to Toronto, she says to herself, “You can fly” (301). She will never be rescued. She has already been rescued. She is not exempt. Instead she is lucky. She is overflowing with luck, and luck holds her. As Helene Cixous says, “Rennie puts women into the text as into the world, and into history by her own movement of travelogue” (875).

Throughout the novel, Atwood uses literal and metaphoric camera images. Camera images in Bodily Harm include actual cameras and photographs, commercial illustrations and products, pictures, or other non-commercial art, camera-like instruments or reflectors including telescopes, binoculars, sunglasses, mirrors and films. Rennie, the camera narrator carries an actual camera bag throughout her trip to the Caribbean. It symbolizes her tourist vision and identity. Rennie transcends camera vision, as well as other protective layers and distorting filters. She uses her pen as a ‘weapon’ and exposes the position of women in prison cells and hospital beds. In her travelogue, Rennie writes about the wickedness of man and his brutality towards women. The narrative is told almost in the third person. In Tandon’s words,
At the end there is total break between her story and what is actually going on and that is how the world feels to one woman arbitrarily caught up in power politics. (*Margaret Atwood: A Jewel in Canadian Writing* 123)

Camera and photographs have been instrumental in Rennie’s metamorphosis. She makes connection among past, present and future, between background and foreground. It is narrated with a deceptive double vision. The narration combines first person with third person that very smoothly moves between the past and the present, as well as bits of possible future. The novel is very effective in its exploration of Rennie’s own personal journey as a survivor of breast cancer. In this massive involvement situation, only through fantasy Rennie can distance herself from her intolerable position.

The picture of a cut-open melon in Rennie’s room at the Sunset Inn, is like most of the other pictures and products, apparent as an image Rennie and, in one sense, all women. When she waits at the airport to pick up a package of machine gun, she would like to use the photo machine. She images Jake as a packager. Having been surgically as well as sexually opened or violated by men she fears that the scar on her breast will, split open like a diseased fruit. Painful events are often disguised with comic book images. For example she pictures Daniel as Rox Mergan, M.D., Paul as Tarzan and herself as Paul’s con-do-book date. She cannot picture Daniel’s wife or Jake’s new lady. When Lora tells her life story, Rennie switches off the sound and concentrates only in the picture turning it into a magazine still. She arranges Lora into a makeover piece, before and after, with a series of shots in between showing the process. Lora’s tale is like a movie with the sound gone. Rennie imagines her grandmother and mother: “Her hands are cold, she lifts them up to look at them, but they elude her. Something missing” (*BH* 299).
Rennie’s cancer is a metaphor for a malignant world. The disease really to be feared, Rennie comes to realize, is the capacity to take pleasure from another’s pain. When the police arrests her, she recognizes on the hotel manager’s face a look of pure enjoyment and in prison she watches a guard with a bayonet menacing a group of bound prisoners. She thinks that he is doing it because he enjoys it malignantly. Atwood points that there is guilty of being human beings and that malignancy is quite a metaphor for the human conditions.

In Woodcock’s words, Rennie’s story emerges as a warning that “negative innocence…is the most appalling characteristic of evil when it appears in the actual world” (748). Atwood expresses her view on humaninity in Second Words:

Oppression involves a failure of the imagination: the 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, regimes all over the world would not be at such pains to exterminate them. (397)

As Bodily Harm is written in the aftermath of an over-conscious women’s liberation it forces one’s attention on the horrifying status of women. Rennie refuses to be a victim, and doesn’t accept the assumption that the role is inevitable. She exposes that in society bodily harm is everywhere - in prison, in civilized and uncivilized country, in political and personal life. There is no limitation of bodily harm. As Prabhakar says,

Rennie’s body which has been maimed, dismembered, altered and fragmented stands as a testimonial to the depravity and decadence of the society that is predominantly patriarchal. (79)
It is Rennie’s new optimism, which dictates the ending. The luck holds her up to fly away from the crisis. The feministic realization of her ‘self’ persuades her to use pen as a weapon and to throw light on the sufferings of the suppressed women.

As a writer under Pro-feminist stream, Atwood uses her novel *Bodily Harm* a critique of reducing male violence against women, children and other men. Atwood campaigns the elimination of various expressions of sexism such as rape, pornography and homophobia or hatred of homosexuals through the novel. Rennie raises her feministic consciousness and decides to accomplish her feminine identity as a dutiful writer. A journalist has a power to influence and initiate the public against any harm. It is proved in Rennie’s hope. Besides the power of writing, oral story telling gives the power to the protagonist of *The Handmaid’s Tale*. The power of language in reconstructing the meaningful life is discussed in *The Handmaid’s Tale*. 