



**The Anorexic Body: Discipline, Power, and Resistance in Selected
Contemporary Novels**

الجسد المصاب بفقدان الشهية العصابي: الانضباط والسلطة والمقاومة في روايات معاصرة مختارة

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Abstract

*The paper aims at understanding eating disorders in general and anorexia nervosa in particular by examining three novels, two Western novels, namely the Canadian novel, *Skinny* (2004) by Ibi Kaslik, the American novel, *Wintergirls* (2009) by Laurie Halse Anderson and the South Korean novel, *The Vegetarian* (2007) trans. (2015) by Han Kang from a Foucauldian feminist perspective. It focuses on discussing the strategies or the literary devices used by the authors to convey their embodied messages/ subjects. Symbols, images, metaphors, dramatic irony, mythical allusions and other elements, intensifying and signifying physicality are woven into the fabric of the narratives that speak of the psychology of the female characters. The paper analyzes the novels in terms of the narrative merits that help achieve a unique correspondence between form and content. It seeks to subvert the discourses that valorize the hierarchal representations of femininity. Adopting Michel Foucault's theoretical framework, it attempts to prove that the female body, besides being the site of cultural inscription through disciplinary and normalizing practices, is also the locus of power.*

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المخلص

تهدف هذه الورقة البحثية إلى فهم اضطرابات الأكل عمومًا، وفقدان الشهية العصابي خصوصًا، من خلال دراسة ثلاث روايات: روايتان غريبتان، هما الرواية الكندية "النحيفة" (2004) لإيبي كاسليك، والرواية الأمريكية "فتيات الشتاء" (2009) للوري هالس أندرسون، والرواية الكورية الجنوبية "النباتية" (2007) المترجمة عام 2015 لهان كانغ، وذلك من المنظور النسوي المتبني لمفاهيم ميشيل فوكو. تركز الورقة على مناقشة الاستراتيجيات أو الأساليب الأدبية التي استخدمتها المؤلفات لنقل رسائلهن المُجسدة في رواياتهن. وتؤكد الورقة البحثية على الجانب الجسدي من خلال التركيز على الرموز والصور والاستعارات والمفارقة الدرامية والإشارات الأسطورية وغيرها من العناصر في البنية السردية التي تتناول نفسية الشخصيات النسائية. وتحلل الورقة الروايات من حيث مزاياها السردية التي تُسهم في تحقيق توافق فريد بين الشكل والمضمون، وتسعى إلى تقويض الخطابات التي ترفع من شأن التمثيلات الهرمية للأنثوية. يحاول البحث، باتباع الإطار النظري لميشيل فوكو، إثبات أن الجسد الأنثوي، إلى جانب كونه موقعًا للنقش الثقافي من خلال الممارسات التأديبية والتطبيعية، هو موضعًا للسلطة أيضًا.

1. Introduction

Anorexia Nervosa, as one of the compulsive eating disorders has come to be recognized as a sociologically invested physical illness that can be marked as a product and critique of patriarchy. Statistical measurements show that over 90 percent of sufferers are girls and women, most often, as the feminist critic Susan Bordo (1947-) explains in *Unbearable Weight* (1993), middle class white women. Practically and politically speaking, issues around female representation, productivity, oppression against women, rape, sexuality, gender norms and differences, women's body image, and beauty ideals; all highlight the significance of the body. Accordingly, the female body has become the locus of political struggle.

Though the core of this study is devoted to discuss anorexia nervosa, it is important to refer to its relation to another eating problem, i.e., Bulimia nervosa. These two eating problems overlap physically. As far as the terminology of anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa are concerned, there is great confusion and debate over their classification and diagnostic criteria (Lelwica 15). Anorexia nervosa is a misnomer or a misleading term, literally meaning from Latin, a "loss of appetite (hunger)" since the anorexics, in their rejection to eat, feel actually hungry for food (Oldis 84). As anorexia nervosa, bulimia takes its origin as a word from the joining of the prefix "bul" standing for cow and "limos", meaning hunger (Lintott 73). The bulimic's excessive (voracious) appetite that comes before the bulimic's binge-eating, as Lintott expresses it, "commonly owes its intensity to restrictive dieting"(73). Therefore, it is satisfactory to say that eating disorders often start with a common effort to follow a "normal" diet so as to desperately lose weight. However, the bulimic activity (behavior) is often secretive since it usually goes along with feelings of shame and disgust.

Beside family dynamics, what is at work, as will be clear in the next sub-section, against women's appetites is the political and economic relations that represent the core of their struggle. Coined simultaneously by the French doctor, Ernest Charles Laségue (1816-1883) and the English physician William Withey Gull (1816-1890) in 1870s, anorexia nervosa is introduced to "the medical literature as a specifically (or at least predominantly) female condition"(Hepworth 28) given that this condition is interpreted in relation to the profoundly ideological "knowledge about femininity and women"(28). This 'knowledge' that constructs women as emotional, deviant, mad or an inherently irrational, however is of help to Gull to explain anorexia (28). Like Gull, Laségue also emphasizes the gender-specific nature of anorexia nervosa: "The cases which have served me as a basis for this memoir are eight in number, all women, the youngest being 18, and the eldest 32"("On hysterical anorexia (a). 1873."497). Failing to identify an organic cause of anorexia nervosa, Gull shifts, in his search of an explanation for anorexia nervosa, to the psychological domain taking into consideration that this explanation "firmly [continues to exist] within the medical scientific discourse"(Hepworth 33).

Anorexia rather than being seen as a "reflection of the nature of women's social position", it comes to be the result of young middle class women's failure to move smoothly "into their preordained marital or domestic roles"(33). To explain women's food refusal, anorexia has strongly been associated with hysteria as a dominant mechanism. This link is functional; it is intended to maintain a psycho-medical system (37). As indicated by Foucault, hysteria as a discourse has played a pivotal role in women's pathologization from the mid-nineteenth century. Hysteria, in connection with "nervousness", is employed by the medical and psychiatric discourses to explain the female's abnormal behavior.

Anorexia is continually referred to by Gull as a female condition despite the reference to "the incidence of anorexia in males" that he has given "marginal importance"(Hepworth, 28). The reason for constituting anorexia as a feminine disorder is based on the idea that 'the nervous woman' to use Showalter's words, "was a significant cultural figure" at the end of the nineteenth century (67).

The paper aims to subvert the discourses that valorize the hierarchal representations of femininity in the novels under study. It is important to acknowledge that women's representations are understood as cultural and ideological products. The cause of Yeong-hye's illness in *The Vegetarian*, as Giselle's in *Skinny* and Lia's *Wintergirls*, is attributed to "aspects of cultural oppression,... and power play ... within the family structure"(Choudhury, 1) and gender hierarchy through the control of Kim Yeong-hye's body and food choices. Accordingly, ecofeminism, as a "critical theory and as a politics"(Molyneux and Steinberg 86) is addressed when it comes to analyzing Yeong-hye's abstinence to eat meat in the homogenizing South Korean world.

In addition to their focus on anorexia, the novels are selected for they share notable features. Though focusing on the idea of food refusal, they all have to do with and are thematically linked in emphasizing the notion of bodily autonomy, centering on familial trauma and the rejection of societal or cultural expectations. In the three novels, the protagonist's body has become the locus where she could assert her agency. Giselle's "physical wasting" is seen as a call for pristine emotional autonomy and a rejection of "patriarchal capitalism". Exerting control over a world that feels chaotic after the loss of her best friend, Lia Overbrook attempts to disappear in a (no)body. Yeong-hye's rejection of meat is considered as a rebellion against violence and women's submission in a carnivorous Korean society. Accordingly, all protagonists suffer from fragmentation or dissociation of the self, feeling

alienated from their human identities. Frequently referring to herself as a "wintergirl", Lia exists in a frozen state between life and death. Yeong-hye, in the same vein, eventually thinks she is a plant, trying to live on sunlight instead of food. Disappearing into a (no)body, from Foucauldian point of view, can symbolically be read, on the part of the subject, as a form of resistance to the cultural and social imposition of power. However, to avert those gendered norms into becoming an empty body can literally be interpreted as self-consuming (annihilating). Self-annihilation is elucidated through death or dying. After awakening from a terrible dream, Yeong-hye in *The Vegetarian*, like Gregor Samsa in Franz Kafka's novella, *The Metamorphosis* (1915), suddenly finds herself unable to eat meat, feeling estranged from those who surround her and from her own body. Literally, Yeong-hye's self-destruction initially takes the form of a passive resistance of the authoritarian rule and Korean conventions and then develops, through her continued dwindling diet, into sharpening edges of her body- hence, reproducing and turning the violence that she sees in her dreams against herself. Likewise, Giselle in *Skinny* is grotesquely depicted at the end of the novel as "a giant worm in a wet blanket on the edge of the roof"(Kaslik 238), "haul[ing] [her] sorry rag of a body up onto all fours"(236). One more point that Giselle, Lia and even Yeong-hye share is that their emotional and even physical needs have not been satisfied or fulfilled. Giselle's confused relationship with her father, Lia's failure to make healthy friendships or have a stable family, and Yeong-hye's uneasy relationship with her husband and father and; all contribute to the development of anorexia nervosa. Pressed by familial expectations, Giselle develops an anorexic behavior in an attempt to gain power and control over her life. Her father's inappropriate expectations cause her suffering. She feels bad because she is incapable of fulfilling these expectations on the one hand and because they indicate a lack of communication and understanding of his daughter's needs on the other hand.

While exploring the themes of self-starvation, extreme control, and fragmented identities, they diverge in their thematic focus, the cultural context of the characters, and the narrative goals. *Skinny* highlights the idea of family (sibling) dynamics and the medical reality of anorexia. *Wintergirls* focuses on the psychology of grief and the competitive nature of eating disorders in adolescence. In other words, it shows impact of a friend's death, self-harm, and the "ghost" of a shared eating disorder. Diverging entirely from the YA/literary fiction that focus on mental health disorders, *The Vegetarian* uses food refusal as a metaphor, positioning it as a political, philosophical, and existential act of resistance against patriarchal violence. Yeony-hye's act metaphorically represents a desire to escape human violence and the patriarchal constraints of South Korean society. Its focus is not on losing weight but on purging the world from human violence. Given that Neo-Confucian philosophical thoughts persistently influence the representation of contemporary Korean women, it is important to ground it as crucial in discussing *The Vegetarian*. Neo-Confucianism as a gendered discourse, among other "mythologizing practices", highly informs the Korean understanding of womanhood or femininity (Elfvine-Hwang 14). To challenge this biased view, it is a necessity to recognize the phantasmal nature of the very signs 'woman' and 'femininity' in different socio-cultural contexts (whether they are Western or South Korean) and create new forms of women's representations that could potentially as Luce Irigaray (1930-) and Judith Butler (1956-) think, open a space for women's new possibilities in the 'real' world(4). Irigaray is of the view that women in patriarchal symbolic order are never represented unless according to male genealogies given that patriarchal cultures (here manifested in Western and Korean contexts) are monosubjective, not recognizing female subjectivity/ sexuality on its own terms. Irigaray states: "[P]atriarchal cultures have reduced the value of the feminine

to such a degree that their reality and their description of the world are incorrect. Thus, instead of remaining a different gender, the feminine has become, in our languages, the non-masculine, that is to say an abstract nonexistent reality" (*Je,tu,nous: Towards a Culture of Difference* 20).

2. 1. Theoretical Background

In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1977), Michel Foucault (1926-1984) argues that the body is the text on which the physical manifestations of patriarchal ideologies are inscribed. In her appropriation of Foucault's work, Bordo uses the term body politics to indicate the direct grip of culture on women's bodies through everyday bodily practices. The female body, then becomes an important site for feminist analyses since it is culturally/socially connected to whatever that was regarded as degrading in the Western and non-Western traditions and is the means for women to articulate their experiences.

Central to Foucault's account of the punitive system, the prison, "that concentrated and austere figure of all the disciplines" (*Discipline* 255) and its development is what he refers to "the panopticon", an ideal architectural design for prison proposed by the English philosopher and social reformer, Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832). This model prison, as Bartky in "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal power" says "captures for Foucault the essence of the disciplinary society" (64) The body, as the primary focus of what Foucault labels as "the anatomo-politics of the human body" (*History of Sexuality* Vol. 1, 139), is inscribed through the internalization of such norms (the normalizing gaze). In her appropriation of Foucault's idea of disciplinary power, Bartky indicates how women and their bodies are informed by the patriarchal norms of femininity through various governing regimes and institutions like dieting and exercise disciplines, cosmetics and fashion industry. She points how femininity is a social construction, a disciplinary project emblematic of the "modernization of patriarchal domination" (66).

Foucault, in *The History of Sexuality*, briefly outlines how women and their bodies have been molded according to the patriarchal model of the female hysteric (104). As anti-essentialist, he, though indirectly, has hinted at the Western culture's pressure towards uniformity and how its effects on the individual's life choices, and possibilities or even the sense of self can be disempowering. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar discuss how hysteria has been defined by Freud as the "female disease" not only because its origin goes back to the Greek word hyster meaning the womb (the organ which was thought in the nineteenth century is the cause of women's "emotional disturbance") but because it is this disease, like other mental disorders, has spread among upper-middle class women in the nineteenth century. The etiology of this disease, in other words, was thought to be "the female reproductive system as if to elaborate upon Aristotle's notion that femaleness was in and of itself a deformity" (*The Madwoman in the Attic* 53).

2.2. Feminism and Body Politics

Feminist theorists attempt to problematize certain issues pertinent to the body, and more especially the female body that has been marginalized, denigrated or denied so as to approach cultural change in understanding and representing the female body. Therefore, the aim of the feminist project is to re/understand women's bodies, to re/evaluate and "celebrate [their] difference and to liberate ourselves from patriarchal understanding of womanhood" (Alsop et al. P. 70). To begin with deconstruction, simply defined by Jacques Derrida as "to write against the grain", feminist theorists deconstruct the essentializing category of a woman, introducing the terms "body politics" and what is called L'écriture feminine, a term coined by Hélène Cixous, in *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1976), meaning

literally “feminine writing.” The origin of the concept, L’écriture feminine, goes back to the 1970s and is linked to what is generally known as French Feminism. L’écriture feminine is defined, to use Janet Wolff’s words, as “writing grounded in women’s experience of the body and sexuality, an experience which is not mediated by men and by patriarchy”(“Reinstating Corporeality: Feminism and Body Politics” 132). As a theory, it stresses the connection between feminine writing and the body.

Following Foucault’s view that the body can be both an inscriptive surface and a site of resistance, feminist theorists, with the purpose of circumventing the dominant regimes of representation that produce women solely as objects for masculine gaze and desires, employ this idea of body politics. Nevertheless, some feminists may argue against “using the female body for feminist ends”(121) for the problems it can cause as Wolff shows that the body’s “pre-existing meanings, as sex object, as object of the male gaze, can always prevail and reappropriate [it], despite the intentions of the woman herself”(121). However, she defends the possibility of embracing “a feminist cultural politics of the body”(122), proposing that the body can be the “privileged site of political intervention, precisely because it is the site of repression and possession”(122). As a practice concerning the body, body politics “must speak about the body, stressing its materiality and its social and discursive construction, at the same time as disturbing and subverting existing regimes of representation”(138).

Feminist writings have been greatly influenced by women’s bodies and their experiences. Their roles cannot be dismissed in establishing a new language that will disavow the phallogocentric and hegemonic premises. The target of using such language is to depict women’s bodily experience and to dismantle “the masculinist symbolic cultural arrangement” (Frydrysiak 8)

The human body, being central to the discussion of the novels in question, comes to move and write itself into space. This paper discusses the strategies or the literary devices used by the authors in the making of their narrative so as to convey their embodied messages/ subjects. Symbols, images, metaphors, dramatic irony, mythical allusions and other elements, intensifying and signifying physicality are woven into the fabric of the narratives that speak of the psychology of the female characters. In other words, this paper attempts to explore the relationship between the writers’ techniques and their treatment of themes in the novels. It aims at analyzing the novels in terms of the narrative merits that help achieve a unique correspondence between form and content. The writers’ emphasis on eating disorders is intended to both “incarnate and parody disciplinary technologies”(Thompson 93). These texts attest to the fact that it is “through eating, sexuality and the care of the body... [that] we acquire our bodies, genders and identities” (93).

As far as perspective is concerned, *Skinny* is characterized by narrative juxtaposition. It is told from the first-person viewpoints of the Vasco sisters. Though these alternating points of view depict the strong and intense bond between Giselle and Holly, they set Holly’s contrasted view of Giselle as dreadfully invalid personality, a vulnerable woman unable to suppress the need for adult self-dependency against Giselle’s account of her struggle for autonomy. The juxtaposed standpoints of Giselle and Holly, however, invite, as Fabre puts it, “a necessary and useful critical engagement with the ways in which gender socialization, capitalist individualism, and authority- patriarchal and medical- intersect differently with practices of self-formation”(59). As Giselle, Holly too attempts to control her feelings and body even though exercising can bring her harm. However, the athletic Holly pursues a particular bodily practice of self-formation that can enhance her pride and excellence: “There was still a lot of work to do on my body... and I would continue to do it, despite the constant

ache in my knees and back"(Kaslik 62). Narrative juxtaposition is thus employed by Kaslik to bring forth the similarities and differences between the Vasco sisters' respective bodily practices of self-fashioning within the same contingent socio-economic framework. Giselle's act of self-regulation, in comparison with that of her sister, results in her pathologization given that her attempts to control her body through solid or firm eating regimen to come up to societal demands enkindle "disciplinary responses"(Fabre 138-139) whereas Holly's bodily practices, taking into consideration the "social values they produce"(138) do not delimit her ability to excel at sports. However, the technologies of the self-developed by both Giselle and Holly are self-annihilating.

Kaslik's epigraphic note to her novel, *Skinny* is borrowed from Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996). It reads as follows: "History, like trauma, is never simply one's own. History is precisely the way we are implicated in each other's trauma"(24). In *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (1987/1997), the French structural narratologist, Gerard Genette (1930-2018) defines the epigraph as "a quotation placed *en exergue* [in the exergue], generally at the head of a work or section of a work; literally, *en exergue* means *off* the work, which is going a little too far"(144). The epigraph's most direct function, Genette thinks, is that of "commenting", i.e. to "elucidate" and thereby "justify" the *title* of the text that is "meant figuratively"(156), or "commenting on the *text*, whose meaning it directly specifies or emphasizes"(157).

Caruth, through her trauma model that is informed by Freud's theories and flourished in the 1990s to analyze "the concept of trauma and its role in literature and society"(Balaev 363), emphasizes the link between individual traumatic experience and that of cultural group, "or between the personal and political worlds"(363). According to this model that is prominently figured in her *Unclaimed Experience*(1996), the effects of trauma on the individual psyche and consciousness are made use of to examine "the individual experience of a collective traumatic event in a text"(363), thereby establishing a connection between individual and collective traumatic experiences. From Caruth's perspective, trauma is characterized by its "transhistorical or intergenerational quality" that evokes, through its transmission across time, a shared response (364-365). This link between individual and collective experiences of trauma brings forth the idea of "trauma's universal effects upon identity and memory" that look as fragmented or dissociative (365). Accordingly, the traumatic experience of a cultural group in the historical past cannot be separated from "the psychic landscape of the contemporary individual who belongs to the same cultural group"(Balaev 365).

Digging deeper into her personal trauma, Giselle, through the element of flashback, or what Genette calls analepses, journeys into her father's family legacy displaying "the larger framework within which"(Kumari 3) they, as European (Hungarian) immigrants, suffer. For Genette, analepsis, means to place "an account of previous events in the reporting of subsequent ones"(Fludernik 150). Analepses are crucial when it comes to remembered events or when new characters are introduced, "characters, whose history and experiences before this point have to be told"(150). The postmodern novelists employ this technique "to disrupt the chronological and teleological structure of the narrative"(150). Giselle starts her journey into the past long before her parents' marriage to unravel the hidden mystery that connects her and her father: "I am convinced that there are clues that connect us, me and Dad. Convinced there's something concrete that held him back from me. A man doesn't just wake up one morning and stop loving his daughter, just like that, his flesh and blood"(Kaslik 130).

Skinny details Giselle's family history- its devastating effects upon the Vasco sisters' current lives- that gives rise to or constitutes her "technologies of the self".

Going through the past, Giselle remembers how she had "forgotten" to read a little essay about her family, informing her group of girls when her "turn came" that "[her] dad died a long time ago"(160-161). Giselle acknowledges "all the girls" are as suffocated, and deeply wounded in the heart as Sylvia Plath (1932-1963), the American poetess and novelist, who terminates her life to put an end to her suffering caused by her deceased father and unfaithful husband, the English poet, Ted Hughes. The first intertextual reference to Plath reads as follows:

Before that, all the girls had been complaining about their dads. Things were going 'the Sylvia Plath way,' as Susan used to say. Walking out into the summer night, I heard Susan's high-pitched Scottish voice in my head and laughed out loud: "My father had such high expectations of me, my father wanted me to be the perfect little girl, blah, blah, fucking blah. If every woman adores a fascist, it's her own fault. (Kaslik 161)

Skinny references to Plath's poem "Daddy"(1962) that embodies her personal tragedy. Addressing the negative familial conditions in which she lives, Plath opens the poem with a bleak metaphor, comparing herself to a "foot" that has been living inside a "black shoe"... for thirty years:

You do not do, you do not do
Any more, black shoe
In which I have lived like a foot
For thirty years, poor and white
Barely daring to breathe or Achoo (1-5).

The poem suggests that Plath, having been weighed down by the repressive shadow of her father's memory for thirty years, is struggling to liberate herself from his oppressive influence. She rejects the life that her father, Otto Plath, has made for her and the role as a submissive daughter, asserting her will to take revenge: "Daddy, I have had to kill you"(6).

In *Skinny*, Susan, Giselle's friend, pokes fun of the patriarchal/ societal expectations to which all the girls must conform. Girls are expected to be submissive, obedient and to have an 'ideal' or perfect body. Therefore, if a woman glorifies a man as God as Plath herself did, admiring his power "Marble-heavy, a bag full of God, / Ghastly statue with one grey toe"(8-9), then it is her own fault. As indicated in the lines quoted above, Plath has mixed feelings towards her father, feelings of love and hatred which brings about her sickness or inner turmoil that she overcomes by turning into a "vampire" and killing those who have oppressed her (Kaslik 161). This image is further intensified in the next reference that reads: "She claimed Sylvia Plath was the patron saint of anorexics and Electra- complexed women everywhere, but I've always sort of liked her poetry. It's not often that you read someone's words, and their pain, which has been dead for decades, lives on to give you a headache. I think there's something to be said for that"(Kaslik 161).

As suggested in the first reference, Plath's poem manifests her "ambivalent resistance to and dependence on the discourse of her father"(Bloom 54), through its elegiac form (exaggerating her father's evil and dominance and breaking down his massive image). However, Plath's bleak note suggests that what has caused her suffering is the early death of her father "whom she loved" and whose loss has "dragged her after him into death"(45). "Daddy", in a script set for BBC radio, is linked to the "Electra complex". Plath's reading of this poem is intentionally evasive:

The poem is spoken by a girl with an Electra complex. Her father died while she thought he was God. Her case is complicated by the fact that her father was also a Nazi and her mother very possibly part Jewish. In the daughter the two strains marry and paralyze each other—she has to act out the awful little allegory once over before she is free of it. (293)

Plath's implicit wish "to be desired by her father" has made her comply or yield to her father's commands, playing "along the terms of his game"(Narbeshuber 191). To break free from this complicated web where she finds herself entangled, she turns the male aggression against herself and those who surround her. In "Daddy", Plath has transformed "the conventional female body of the 1950s", giving her female persona the voice to speak to a public realm governed by men, therefore; prefiguring the contemporary movements in feminist criticism that considers the female body as a surface, a culturally/historically inscribed text (Narbeshuber 185), a site of contestation later exemplified in Bordo's discussion of agoraphobia (claustrophobia) in the 1950s and anorexia in the 1980s as "rebellious performances"(185).

Bringing her private self into the public or symbolic realm, blurring the borders between them, Plath's narrator has become a "rebellious performer" just like Bordo's bulimic, anorexic, hysteric and agoraphobic (Narbeshuber 186). She, just like the protagonists of the novels under study, as Narbeshuber expresses it, "should not be read as pathological case studies; rather it is culture, written on their bodies, which is exposed as pathological"(186). Plath depicts her persona as both "the agent and the spectacle of punishment"(187).

Kaslik employs parody, a postmodern technique by which she "paradoxically both incorporates and challenges that which [she] parodies"(Hutcheon 11). In a parodic narrative, Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth notes, "there is anecdote, and its antidote"(226). Such narrative, then, is characterized by its "doubling power". To reconstruct the world, postmodern writers find in parody a suitable means to deny "priority to any single narrative"(227). It is a tool wherein "the possibilities, the play, of systems" can be pluralized. In other words, this narrative technique, along with others, namely irony, stream of consciousness, symbolism, is used to invalidate patriarchal /master narratives or repressive institutions and justify new forms of representation. To change the oppressive social representations of women, Kaslik resorts to parody to subvert the traditions of the fairy tales genre: "Almost too easy, I think as a cab pulls up in front of the side doors of the hospital to sweep me away like some crusty Cinderella reject. I climb in and request a ride to the east end from the nice man in the turban driving my pumpkin-chariot"(Kaslik 223). The referent here is Cinderella, the title character of the fairy tale *Cinderella*. In *Skinny*, Giselle thinks that escaping the hospital and requesting a ride to the east end is so easy for a girl like her but not for Cinderella, the stereotypical submissive, passive and infantile young girl, who is swept away by the magical pumpkin chariot made for her by the fairy Godmother after attending the Royal ball at the King's palace.

Irony is clear in *Skinny*. In *Parody: Ancient, Modern, and Post-modern* (1993), Margaret A. Rose argues that a writer uses irony to duplicate messages wherein his/her "intended meaning" is concealed "from immediate interpretation"(87). Von Heide Ziegler, in his article "Irony, Postmodernism, and the 'Modern' "(1991), takes irony "as a mode of consciousness", i.e., "an expression of the mind reflecting upon itself and the conditions of human consciousness as such"(emphasis in the original 283). Kaslik successfully opens each chapter told from Giselle's perspective with epigrams sourced in medical textbooks, as keys to Giselle's story, to demonstrate that though Giselle is a well-informed med-student and is

supposed to have knowledge of the human body and of the ways she can secure it, she starves herself to death. Realizing that she is destroying her body is no guarantee that she won't go on doing it. Giselle confesses "Ah yes, I learned it all, immediate attention to cuts, needles, breaks, the general wear and tear of the human body, only to promptly wind up in a hospital unit myself"(Kaslik 4). Learning how to take care of patients at the hospital does not prevent her from ending up in a hospital "unit" herself. She is aware of the strangeness of the situation: "I think about how strange it is that I am on the inside, the sane side, of the hospital doors. I've spent my short adult life now on both sides, as med student and patient; a safety to others but a danger to myself"(148).

Kaslik resorts to ghost imagery as a technique to show how women's/girl's bodies are entrapped / imprisoned in the patriarchal world and are discursively constituted. Because of her severe starvation, Giselle suffers a relapse. With endometriosis, she is admitted to the hospital "to have an emergency operation"(Kaslik 202). She is aware of what the dynamics of power of repression has brought her to:

There were days when I ran on nothing but a small crouching pain in my gut that ate me up from the inside out, and now it's finally won. I guess I'm paying for all those missed dinners and periods, for all my thoughts of immortality. I'm a med student, I know the rules of the body, energywise: put nothing in and nothing comes out. So, why, after so long of putting nothing inside I have all this stuff pouring out? Where does it come from? (215)

The quote above shows the severity of pain that has conquered Giselle's body. Pain is personified and given a life-like quality. Metaphorically speaking, it is eating Giselle from inside. After engaging herself in a conversation with her alter-ego, Giselle expresses her wish to die: "I ... know that I will never be rid of her now, that I will eternally finish her thoughts. *And I don't know anything except that- I am not in love with anyone anymore*"(241-242).

As for *Wintergirls*, it is told from the first-person standpoint of the eighteen-year-old Lia Overbrook. Using Genette's terminology, *Wintergirls* is an autodiegetic (homodiegetic) narrative, "a narrative whose first-person narrator is the main protagonist"(Fludernik 150). Besides its "being written in the first person, a common point of view in YA novels"(Koss and Wilson 48), *Wintergirls*, as an emotional survival novel employs the stream of consciousness technique to give "an immediate, ongoing timeframe"(48), and a viewpoint which enable the reader, having had "a unique look" into the character's mind, to understand how she feels and thinks. Stream of consciousness is a narrative technique commonly used in modern fiction or novels to "convey all the contents of a character's mind- memory, sense perceptions, feelings, intuitions, thoughts- in relation to the stream of experience as it passes by, often at random"(Gray 197). Though some critics use the stream of consciousness interchangeably with interior monologue to represent the character's conscious mind, they agree that the former is an inclusive term that denotes "all the diverse means employed by authors to communicate the total state and process of consciousness in a character"(Abrams and Harpham 379). However, the interior monologue cannot be classified as stream of consciousness lest it "makes an extensive use of association"(Fludernik 155), simulating the character's mind to work. Accordingly, readers hear Lia's conscious (uncrossed out) and unconscious (crossed out) thoughts "as she experiences the events"(Koss and Wilson 49). Through the first person writing style, Anderson makes clear how Lia has come across and dealt with "a combination of negative emotional issues including self-mutilation, eating disorders... and overall self-destructive behaviors"(49). Going back and forth in her

perspective, readers and more especially the adolescent ones share Lia's fight for survival as they create meaning from the text (48).

In *Wintergirls*, Anderson includes the following quote from "Homeric Hymn to Demeter" as an epigraph to her novel, to suggest the connection between the novel's protagonist, Lia Overbrook and the mythological character of Persephone, the goddess of spring in "Hymn to Demeter": "[Persephone] was filled with sense of wonder, and she reached out with both hands to take hold of the pretty plaything. And the earth, full of roads leading every which way, opened up under her.... She cried with a piercing voice.... But not one of the immortal ones, or of the human mortals heard her" (Homeric Hymn to Demeter, translated by Gregory Nagy).

Lia's downward spiral and her "descent into the darkness of anorexia"(Oatman 65) is much akin to "the archetype of a young woman (usually at the dawning of sexuality) who becomes spell-bound or enchanted"(65). According to the mythological version of this archetype, Persephone was collecting flowers in a meadow with young friends as a rift in the earth was opened by Hades who emerged to carry Persephone off into the Underworld (Al-Maini 93) where she was captivated. With the loss of Persephone, the whole world turned into winter. According to the mythological tradition, the coming of winter is commensurate with Persephone's absence from earth. Deep down in the Underground, Persephone's cries of distress and pain cannot be heard by anyone. Natural imagery, then, is used to reflect upon the harsh reality or the state of despair, torture and gloominess that control Persephone and her mother Demeter over her loss.

The second relevant intertextual reference used as an epigraph to *Wintergirls* is borrowed from *The Sleeping Beauty*, a fairytale by the French author, Charles Perrault (1628-1703). It reads as follows: "The King gave orders that they should let her sleep quietly till the time came for her to awake"(The Sleeping Beauty in the Woods, by Charles Perrault, 1696, translated by Charles Welsh). In Perrault's tale, the main character, Princess Aurora is destined to fall into deep slumber when she approaches adolescence. She is surrounded by priers and brambles that no one can find a passage through them to reach her: "Deep in the wood, far from all mortal eye/ The Beauty sleeps. The hedge, the leafy and high/ Around her bower spreads its twining arms/ And from the world hides all her youthful charm"(Perrault 22). Therefore, her father, the king gives orders that no one awakens her until time permits. As in *The Sleeping Beauty*, Anderson employs rose imagery to suggest that "Lia's journey is like that of a rose dying only to return to life"(Oatman 65). The hedge of vines "[a]round her bower" that seems to spread its twisted arms creates a metaphor of the princess being "held in captivity with the hope of rescue"(65). Likewise, Anderson's words, in *Wintergirls*, read as follows:

Thorn-covered vines creep across the floor, crack-ling like a bonfire. Black roses bloom in the moonlight, born dead and brittle. The web on my face holds my eyes open, forcing me to watch as Cassie steps out of the shadows, briars twining up her legs and around her body, reaching up through her hair. (43)

Here, Lia, while trying to sleep, is haunted by the shadow of Cassie who wants her to come with her, giving the reader the impression that her life is "a kind of limbo between life and death"(Oatman 65). Lia feels that she is now imprisoned with no opportunity to be saved, nearly entangled by the web that the spiders have woven "together until they wrap me up in a coy shroud"(Anderson 43), the very web that makes her keep her eyes open as she watches Cassie, stepping "out of the shadows" who is about to be completely circumscribed or covered by briars. Lia is awakened from this nightmare in which the spiders, flying "back

and forth" to knit Cassie and Lia together and lock them with their web "into place", by Emma who turns the light on: "Wake up, Lia!"(44). Lia's state resembles that of princess Aurora in Perrault's *The Sleeping Beauty* who is spell bound to sleep for "one hundred years"(Perrault 9) wherein the whole world falls into the spell of cold weather: "Hypothermia and blood loss is like going to sleep, like pricking my fingers on a thorn or a spindle"(Anderson 265). Lia takes the decision that she wants to live and that if she wants to die, she would simply kill or stab herself "in a vein"(265) or pierce her hand or finger with a spindle, the curse by which Aurora falls" into deep slumber"(Perrault 9). Lia, therefore, claims "[t]here is a chance I might want to live, after I get some sleep"(Anderson 267). Confronted by Cassie who wants to surrender Lia to death, Lia says:

[Cassie] leans forward and exhales a wreath of mist that falls over me like bonfire smoke. My heart flops once. I try to breathe. My lungs don't expand. For a moment, one glass-coffin moment, I want to give in. Freeze. Bleed out. Surrender would be easy to swallow. I could sleep forever after. My stupid heart flops again in the mud, not ready to hibernate yet. One more time, and then a third beat, faster. It kindles a tiny fire in my blood. (270)

Lia's relationship to food and hunger is paradoxical. This ambivalent relationship to food, that characterizes Lia's and Giselle's narration, speaks of what Bordo calls the "crystallization of culture" - i.e., the disavowal of food, on the part of the protagonists, is emblematic of what is wrong with the Western culture that glamorizes women's thinness(*Unbearable Weight* 139). Images of food (fruit and muffins), feasts and fasts, hungering, binging and purging are prevalent in *Wintergirls*. Food refusal, eating disorders, and body hurt are part of the signs inscribed on the female body, telling a lot about the contradictory and intolerable demands women have to obey all over the world. Lia's obsession with the "society's bodily dimensions" (Rodgers 32), and calories are intensified. As its title suggests, *Wintergirls* focuses on the vicious cycle of starving and bingeing. Among the symptoms that Lia and Cassie suffer from is their sensitivity to cold weather (winter) due to food deprivation. Other images that emphasize the weakness, the pain and the loss of energy are also stressed. The novel opens with the prologue, under the title, "The Pact", that expounds the characters' struggle to come up to the Western idealized standard of beauty that Younger contends has become "the norm"(48). Approaching puberty, Lia and Cassie swear that they will be the skinniest girls in the schools, "be skinniest together"(Anderson iii). The prologue is an embodiment of what, Bartky describes, is done to meet "the requirements of femininity"(66-67). It supports the novel's title *Wintergirls*, that identifies the character's disordered eating/bodily habits. Suggesting an agreement between the two girls, it attests to the brutality of the disciplinary project. The opening line of the prologue exemplifies how bodily investment is necessary to achieve this agreement. Lia and Cassie publicly engage in acts of self-harm by "literally" cutting their hands with a knife. This act, in the words of Johnston, "signals a mutual acknowledgement that their respective bodies are means to ideological end"(314).

Going through Lia's stream of consciousness narrative, Lia's dichotomous messages about food and hunger become clear through typography. In *A Dictionary of Literary Terms* (1984), Martin Gray defines typography as "the organization of words on the printed page"(214). Obviously, the difference between prose and verse, for example, is typographical. Anderson employs the typographical technique of crossing words out to illustrate "Lia's disciplinary practices" and her attempt at self-control, i.e. Lia's renunciation of her body's need for food or hunger is translated through this act of crossing her appetite to

eat as it arises "actively producing and resisting the ideological tenets of her social conditioning"(Johnston J.321). Besides struck-through sentences and repetitions, blank pages are also included to emphasize and make explicit Lia's inner conflict (Glenn 108). Lia's early response to her stepmother, Jenifer, who wonders if Lia will eat a muffin at breakfast, reads as follows "~~Because I can't let myself want them~~ because I don't need a muffin (410), I don't want an orange (75) or toast (87), and waffles (180) make me gag."(Anderson 5).

Aware of her eating habits, Lia subverts and resists her initial thoughts, typographically represented by the crossing of words out, changing her language, using "I don't want" instead of "I can't let myself", taking control her social conditioning"(Johnston J. 321) that informs such disciplinary practices. In the same vein, Lia tells her stepmother "~~I could eat the entire box~~-I probably won't even fill the bowl"(5). In this contradictory line, Lia's desire that she would be able to digest the whole box of cereal is soon denied, claiming that she will not even be able to "fill the bowl". These struck-through sentences and ellipses, effectively used by Anderson in the extracts discussed above, obviously show or embody Lia's ambivalence and self-division- where "her anorexic thoughts 'correct' what was originally said"(Glenn 108). In a similar occasion, namely at "the Park Street Elementary School Winter Holiday concert"(Anderson 197), where Lia prepares herself "to work the bake sale"(198), Lia becomes involved in a contradictory form of self-control. To the mothers' question or suggestion "want some fudge?"... "Try the seven-layer bars. They're to die for"(200), Lia reflects: "I would love a seven-layer bar. I would love to pick up a piece of fudge, gossip about the latest episode of what- ever, bite the fudge, laugh, chew it because it tastes good and it feels good in my mouth, and swallow and have my tummy glow with fudginess"(200). Lia longs to taste sweets, cakes and other pastries but her longings last only briefly. Her appetite for food is expressed in a circumlocutory or superfluously redundant language. Suppressing her hunger or desire for food, she can't help looking at the mothers around her, who "slap their thighs, wiggle their butts, pinch their bellies"(Anderson 200). In spite of the fact that she derisively look at those moms while they "are shoving cookies into their mouths and letting the crumbs collect on their sweaters"(200), she can hardly control the food temptation: "~~My traitor fingers want that fudge. No, they don't. They want a seven-layer bar and some weird muffins and those pretzels. No, they do not. They want to squish the marshmallows and stuff them into my mouth. They will not~~" (202).

Lia's feelings, thoughts and reactions are split up into two divergent and conflicting parts, one wishing to yield to food eating; the other resists this temptation. The sentence structure "no, they do not" is used repeatedly for two times while the third sentence structure intensely varies. Using the present tense, Lia does not negate her desire to eat. With the third sentence where Lia decisively turns to the future tense, she denies herself the fulfillment of this desire (Riestra-Camacho paragraph 20).

Lia, in her visit to her mother's house, displays the same distorted logic when her biological mother, Dr. Murrigan is seen baking some muffins: "~~I'm hungry I need to eat. I hate eating. I need to eat. I hate eating. I need to eat. I love not-eating~~"(Anderson 145). As at the Elementary School Winter Holiday concert, Lia's uncrossed out thoughts are arranged in triad, with the third one overriding the earlier ones. Lia's willingness not to eat is uniquely embodied in the narrative's complex structure wherein her words "Must. Not. Eat" entirely fill the pages from 185 to 187. Like Holly in *Skinny*, Lia, too, in her effort to pursue a particular bodily practice of self-formation and control her body through exercising even though it may cause her injury, takes her decision to "head down to the basement to burn my leg muscles until the sun comes up to exercise moderately for twenty minutes so I'll sleep

better"(Anderson 99). Lia's crossed-out and hyperbolic thoughts cited above are indicative of her awareness of the unhealthy life-style by which, she, like other disorderly eaters, takes control of her body. It is quite paradoxical that this thought is stricken-out since what is not true about Lia is not crossed-out. Lia's words imply that she perhaps needs more than twenty minutes to sustain what she aims at, i.e. burning calories and having an emaciated body. In fact, *Wintergirls* addresses this issue- problem of body dysmorphia, the problem that becomes prevalent "in economically developed nations"(Piatti-Farnell and Brien 91). This problem is manifested in Anderson's novel through the use of mirror imagery. Mirrors are "Lia's worst enemy in her battle with distorted body image"(Oatman 65). While in church after the death of Cassie, Lia comments:

I want to take off her dress and see if they unzipped her belly. I want to look inside. She would, too, because that's all we ever talked about, the hidden creatures with itchy wings and antennae that poked us and sent us stumbling to the bathroom, Cassie to the toilet so she could get rid of it all, me to the mirror so the girl on the other side would keep me strong and steel-ribbed. (Anderson 87)

In the above quoted lines, Lia speaks of the creatures or the ghosts (by which she and Cassie are haunted) whose "itchy wings and antennae" have made them find their resort in poking and "stumbling to the bathroom"—"Cassie to the toilet" to purge her body of all that she ate and Lia "to the mirror" to see her image that makes her feel that she is strong.

Looking into her mirror, Lia can't help see "the fearful image of herself that has been mysteriously inscribed on"(Gilbert and Gubar 76) its surface. The mirror is too a symbol of Lia's fragmentation, self-division, or uneasiness. Like Giselle, Lia is unable to unify herself (body/flesh and mind/self) and to come to terms with her own fragmentation (76). Looking into a mirror "invested" by the male dominated society, Lia acknowledges that she is "the monster [the bad girl] that she fears she really is rather than the angel"(Gilbert and Gubar 77) or the good girl that she has been in the past. Besides being "locked into a mirror", Lia is haunted by the ghost of her friend, Cassie as Holly and Giselle, in *Skinny*, are haunted by the ghost of their father. These two images signify how young middle class girls have been "prisoners of their own gender"(85). However, the protagonists' effort to escape their social confinement, especially the case of Giselle and Yeong-hye, end "into nothingness, through the suicidal self-starvation of anorexia"(85).

It is already noted that the body/flesh within the Cartesian dichotomous discourse is constructed as alien, bad, and evil to the self/mind. In this sense, starving, as shown in *Skinny* and *Wintergirls*, denotes "the achievement of power"(Malson 135). This idea is clearly manifested though Giselle's lion imagery and that of being haunted/trapped by flies or ghosts- the symbols of her own confinement that she escapes by starving herself to death. Likewise, Lia's "alienated/familiar image in the mirror"(Gilbert and Gubar 285) is fostered by the illusory or deceptive sense of power that the anorexic woman attains through starvation, which, as feminist psychologists think, is linked to "a struggle for control, for a sense of identity, competence, and effectiveness"(285).

Cassie's mother tries to know from Lia why Cassie "threw it all away"(161). Lia, again through mirror imagery, reflects upon their pain: "Look in a mirror and find a ghost. Hear every heart- beat scream that every single thing is wrong with you"(161). Whenever Lia and Cassie turn to their mirrors, they are confronted by their ghosts which highlight what is wrong with them. To ask why "is the wrong question"(161). Their hearts speak of their cries of distress that find their only expression in bodily terms. As such, Lia expresses her wish to see her body disappear "past zero" when she looks into the mirror inside her bedroom: "The

music from my bedroom shrieks so loud against the mirror it's making my ears ring. I stare at the ghost- girl on the other side, her corset bones waiting to be laced even tighter so she can fold in on herself over and over until she disappears past zero"(223). However, these mirrors are shattered by the screams of Emma, Lia's "little sister"(226). The cracking of the mirror towards the end of *Wintergirls* signals Lia's metaphorical and literal liberation from the patriarchal prison that she has inhabited for so long. Back in hospital, Lia knows that, to survive both physically and emotionally, she has to "spin and weave and knit [her] words and visions until a life starts to take shape"(Anderson 277). *Lelwica* implies that story telling is important to accomplish self-recovery, and contemplates girls and women "opening their mouths not to gorge or vomit but to contest and transform the erasure of their longings and struggles in history"(146).

Storytelling, as a technique through which the voice of denigrated social groups can be heard, is developed in Anderson's *Wintergirls*. It affects Lia's cure. As a literary account about eating disorders, *Wintergirls* has a therapeutic function. The uses of symbolic language as well as this narrative form of story-telling have become a popular way for treating disordered eating behaviors as it is suggested by Anita A. Johnston's book, *Eating in the Light of the Moon: How Women Can Let Go of Compulsive Eating through Metaphor and Story-telling* (1996). Stressing the hidden meanings found in women's bodies and even their relationship with food, the novelists show how their characters become able to transform their life experiences. Lia, in one of the novel's concluding lines, states "[Cassie] got too tired and went to sleep. Somehow, I dragged myself out of the dark and asked for help"(277). She gets secured by her will to live, dragging herself "out of the darkness" of the dangerland she has been dwelling in. Therefore, *Wintergirls* ends with a hopeful note, with Anderson's employment of a mirror that no longer matters and melting ice: "There is no magic cure, no making it all go away for- ever. There are only small steps upward; an easier day, an unexpected laugh, a mirror that doesn't matter any-more. I am thawing"(278). Lia, now, feels that she is "thawing" to indicate that she feels warm given that she is saved mentally, emotionally and physically by her parents' intervention. Lia comes back to life and wakes up as *Persephone* and *Sleeping Beauty* do respectively.

Simile is also clear in *Wintergirls*. Leaving the hospital, Lia attempts to take forward steps towards recovery: "I am supposed to commit to recovery like a nun pledging body and soul in a convent"(52). It is used to indicate how Lia is supposed to be committed to her recovery, as serious as the nun who devotes herself (her body and soul) to the service of the church. Later in the novel, in her journey towards self-discovery, Lia reflects upon her internal battle and the tightness of a hold her illness has on her body. Tentative to take "her steps back toward wholeness"(Stevenson 177), Lia at the hospital for the second time, comments:

Part of my brain—the hydrated, glycogen-fed part—knows that I am looking at me. But the bigger part doubts it. This brain was on one drug and this body on another; this hand shoved food in my mouth too fast to count the bites. They tied me back *together*, but they didn't use double knots. My insides are draining out of the fault lines in my skin, I can feel it, but every time I check the bandages, they're dry. (Anderson, my emphasis 228)

The Vegetarian consists of three main sections, 'The Vegetarian', 'The Mongolian Mark', and the 'Flaming Trees', narrated respectively by three different characters, Mr. Cheong, the brother-in-law and In-hye. With its complex narrative style and dialogic plot, *The Vegetarian* offers the reader the opportunity to follow the internal lives of those characters as narrative

focalizers (Choudhury 1). The fact that the voice of the novel's protagonist, Yeong-hye is only heard through italicized segments in the first two sections (her point of view is nearly effaced from the narrative) is indicative of patriarchal culture's mechanism of systemic oppression and exclusion of women, where Yeong-hye is denied "the status of the speaking subject"(Kim 8) and is compelled to silence. Yeong-hye, in the third section, is represented by quoting her words, showing a kind of female solidarity between sisters (Zabel 11). In recalling Yeong-hye's problems and "her own problems and traumatic experiences"(11), In-hye is able to comprehend not only her sister but also herself in a different way. In the first section, the primary interlocutor is Yeong-hye's husband. As the representative of the hierarchal structure, speaking in the first person, Mr. Cheong is crafted "as the determinant of what is considered 'rational', 'true' or 'complete'"(10, 87). However, Mr. Cheong's silence, in comparison with Yeong-hye's, conveyed in his rejection to engage with his wife on the nature of her dreams, "functions as a barrier [and] is used as a strategy of exclusion"(86). On the other hand, Yeong-hye's silence is not understood as a tendency for non-communication but as an alternative form of communication that attests to the deconstruction of "the logical laws of male, Eurocentric, phallogocentric reason"(87).

Mirror imagery is also employed in *The Vegetarian*. Yeong-hye, in the second chapter, "The Magnolian Mark", is reduced to an object by her brother-in-law, who remains unnamed throughout the novel. Yeong-hye is reduced to a passive object of the male/artist's desire or his voyeuristic gaze. Reflecting upon women's representations in films, how their bodies have been imprisoned by the instinctual male imaginary, Mulvey states:

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be- looked-at-ness. (19)

To use a male model, alluded to as J, the brother-in-law paints not only Yeong-hye's body but also his own. Accordingly, the male gaze in Kang's *The Vegetarian* is deconstructed and subverted (Stobie 795).

Dream Sequences is one of the techniques used by Kang in *The Vegetarian*. Dreams are of major significance in the novel since they enkindle Yeong-hye's obliterated memory by continuously "bringing her oppressed trauma"(Kim 4). In fact, what instigates Yeong-hye's dietary habits is her recurring nightmares "which cast meat eating as a murderous act"(Beeston 685). Waking up from a nightmare two months before the dinner party, the middle aged South Korean Yeong-hye is all of a sudden unable to eat meat. Yeong-hye's six dreams, all written in italics, with their grotesques images of violence, have something to do with meat eating. The function of these dream sequences is to unravel Yeong-hye's innermost (socially uncensored) thoughts, feelings and even fears. They, thus, serve as means to translate the protagonist's emotions through her interactions, conflicts and transfiguration. In other words, Yeong-hye is represented through interior monologues or dream sequences that are knitted in the narrative. Yeong-hye's first dream reads as follows:

Dark woods. No people. The sharp-pointed leaves on the trees, my torn feet. This place, almost remembered, but I'm lost now. Frightened. Cold. Across the frozen ravine, a red barn-like building. Straw matting flapping limp across the door. Roll it up and I'm inside, it's inside. A long bamboo stick strung with great blood-red gashes of meat, blood still dripping down. Try to push past but the meat, there's no end to the

meat, and no exit. Blood in my mouth, blood-soaked clothes sucked onto my skin.
(Kang emphasis in the original 18)

In her vigorously violent dream, Yeong-hye finds herself lost in a forest. This sense of loss symbolizes her suffering and confusion about her identity. The forest –"the barn-like building" is a metaphor of the meat-eating society where she is caught up and from which she can't find an exit. Meat, as Yeong-hye symbolically perceives, stands for human capacity for violence, that is manifested in the male characters' mechanisms in disciplining her body. By contrast, plants (vegetables, flowers and trees) come to represent the protagonist's thwarted tendency to have an innocent life. Frightened with blood in her mouth, clothes and hands, Yeong-hye feels that she is imprisoned in this confining carnivorous world:

My bloody hands. My bloody mouth. In that barn, what had I done? Pushed that red raw mass into my mouth, felt it squish against my gums, the roof of my mouth, slick with crimson blood... My face, the look in my eyes...my face, undoubtedly, but never seen before. Or no, not mine, but so familiar...nothing makes sense. Familiar and yet not...that vivid, strange, horribly uncanny feeling. (18)

Looking "into herself through this mirror of meat-eating culture"(Kim 4), Yeong-hye, opposite to her expectations, realizes that the face that she sees is her own face. To say that the face is both "familiar" and "strange" is quite paradoxical, indicative of her pressing perplexity – how difficult it is to admit or acknowledge herself as a meat consumer (Kim 5). Her second dream reads "Dawn of the next day. The pool of blood in the barn... I first saw the face reflected there"(Kang 25). The pool of blood symbolizes life, death and killing. The barn stands for "a slaughterhouse and a butcher's shop"(Kim 4). Thus, "the pool of blood in the barn" is a metaphor for the Korean meat-based (carnivorous) society. According to the Korean society, the consumption of meat is "a basic human instinct"(4) a fundamental principle by which to judge or measure what is normal and abnormal. It is worth noting that Yeong-hye used to cook meat recipes for her husband, or even hack "a chicken into pieces with a butcher's cleaver"(Kang/Smith 24) until her cultural shock in relation to eating meat is expressed in dreams sequence. Yeong-hye's dire suffering is further explained in these words: "*Murderer or murdered...hazy distinctions, boundaries wearing thin. Familiarity bleeds into strangeness, certainty becomes impossible. Only the violence is vivid enough to stick... Intolerable loathing, so long suppressed. Loathing I've always tried to mask with affection. But now the mask is coming off*" (Kang 33). Yeong-hye's words highlight her loathing that she painstakingly "mask[s] with affection" for so long that it becomes impossible to continue wearing it and therefore it is time to break this mask down. Providing insight into her thoughts or mind, Yeong-hye's dreams which are full of violence, blood, coldness, and darkness, depict Yeong-hye through a new lens, a character different from that described by her husband as passive, unremarkable and inattentive(Zabel 70). This interior monologue is foreshadowed by Yeong-hye's imaginary words addressed to her husband, wherein she too expresses her loathing: "*If you knew how hard I've always worked to keep my nerves in check*"(Kang/ Smith 24) that she masks. Yeong-hye recounts the incident of cutting her fingers accidentally with a knife as "[she] was mincing frozen meat"(24): "*Sticking the finger in my mouth calmed me. The scarlet color, and now the taste, sweetness masking something else, left me strangely pacified*"(25).

What is unusual about this incident is that Yeong-hye- while sucking the blood- is "strangely pacified" by its color and taste. When she cuts herself with the "*knife slicing cold into my finger*"(25), Yeong-hye's flesh, having had Carol Adams' notion of violence directed towards women and animals in the background, is mixed together with "the flesh that is

being chopped on the cutting board"(Bernt 22). Talking about the correlation between the "otherness" of women and that of animals, Scholtmeijer notes:

On both scores—the magnitude of abuse and the extent of alienation—the analogue of animal otherness is an idea that can serve to free women from the equivocation that might lead them to collude with their abusers. If the object of feminism is to defeat androcentric culture, then animals offer an ideational model for ontological defiance. Despite abuses up and down the scale, animals have not come over to the side of their oppressors. (232)

In "an act of retaliation"(Bernt 23), that animal or "Yeong-hye" turns into a "shrapnel" that can potentially "tear the consumer apart from inside"(23), an act that is later embodied or enacted through her tendency to tear herself off. Seeking to "liberate otherness" from masculinist ideology, ecofeminist writers attempt to "concretize, affirm, and empower the state of being 'other', which dominant ideology objectifies as a sight of weakness"(Scholtmeijer 233). Yeong-hye's reaction, at that evening before "[she] had the dream"(Kang/Smith 24), to the thought that her husband could have been dead had he swallowed "[a] chip off the knife" in his food is strikingly motivating: *"I gazed vacantly at your distorted face as you raged...Why didn't this agitate me like it should have done? Instead, I became even calmer... Suddenly, everything around me began to slide away, as though pulled back on an ebbing tide. I was alone, the only thing remaining in all of infinite space"*(25).

The vacant gaze of Yeong-hye is, in the words of Beeston, "a tactic of withdrawal from South Korean society that finds its resources in its patriarchal norms"(687). By her question *"Why didn't this agitate me like it should have done?"*, Yeong-hye either means that the thought that her husband could have been dead should have agitated her or that her husband became furious, yelling at her should have agitated her. However, her statement *"[i]f you knew how hard I've always worked to keep my nerves in check"*(Kang/ Smith 24) illustrates that she means the latter (687). Thus, in this infinite world of violence where she feels alienated, everything seem to be *"pulled back on an ebbing tide"* except herself. Grotesque images of violence and killing prevail in Yeong-hye's dreams. Yeong-hye speaks about her transformation, suggesting that in starving herself and refusing to eat animal products, she not only challenges the law of the Korean culture, but also harms her body- that becomes the site of violence, a (no)body, a collection of dangerous weapons- except her breasts- that as she imagines can kill:

Can only trust my breasts now. I like my breasts, nothing can be killed by them. Hand, foot, tongue, gaze, all weapons from which nothing is safe. But not my breasts. With my round breasts, I'm okay. Still okay. So why do they keep on shrinking? Not even round anymore. Why? Why am I changing like this? Why are my edges all sharpening—what I am going to gouge? (39)

Turning violence inward, presupposing the roles of both victim and victimizer, Yeong-hye can't help but feel perplexed at her physical transformation- namely her breasts that begin to shrink. Following a restrictive diet that "literally sharpens her edges"(Bernt 12), Yeong-hye painfully realizes that what she is incising is her own body. Taking on a more symbolic meaning, Yeong-hye's change becomes vivid in these dream sequences. She sheds her earlier reticence and "passivity and move[s] towards a more weaponized version of herself"(12). Like Giselle and Lia, Yeong-hye's transformative process or physical transformation is marked by her undoing her gender and class or what Butler calls the "restrictively normative conceptions of sexual and gendered life"(Undoing Gender 1). Contending that gender is

doing, Butler continues: "[Gender] is a practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint. Moreover, one does not 'do' one's gender alone. One is always 'doing' with or for another, even if the other is only imaginary... But the terms that make up one's own gender are, from the start, out- side oneself, beyond oneself in a sociality that has no single author"(1).

To withstand patriarchal or androcentric oppression, Yeong-hye emulates its very logic. Yeong-hye's silence corresponds to the dominant male precepts for woman to remain silent (Beeston 695-696). Kang, as a contemporary woman writer, in terms of mimicry and parody, both exposes and dismantles women's oppression by the dominant Korean structure. Deconstructing Yeong-hye's silence, Kang confers her protagonist the agency to voice her potential resistance that parallels the potential violence of her body to escape the abuse and the oppression of those who surround her (Bernt 11). Through the reproduction of violence that she envisions in her dreams, Yeong-hye's body becomes a site for self-expression, alienation and final devastation.

The last section of the novel titled "Flaming Trees" is told in the third person from empathetic perspective of Yeong-hye's sister, In-hye. As its title suggests, it focuses on Yeong-hye's metaphorical transformation into a tree. The only dream that differs in its nature from the earlier violent dreams or nightmares in the first two chapters, centers on her becoming a tree. Thoroughly amazed, Yeong-hye realizes that the head of the tree is in the place of its roots. Comparing her crotch to a tree stem. Yeong-hye, using Kang's words, "tr[ies] to root herself into this extreme and bizarre sanity by uprooting herself from the surface of this world"(qtd. in Patrick 31). Through this arboreal imagery, Yeong-hye as "a determined person"(31) attempts literally to uproot herself from the human world of violence. Renouncing meat-eating, she thinks that she is protecting herself but ironically enough she is actually destroying herself (31). Metaphorically speaking, dreaming of trees stands for having "a new family" (Beeston 698). Yeong-hye tells her sister, In-hye who attempts to control her "guilty conscience"(Kang/ Smith 147) that "*all the trees of the world are like brothers and sisters*" (148). Near the end of the novel, In-hye too dreams of trees. The narrator says:

[W]hat those trees she'd seen at the end of the narrow mountain path, clustered together like green flames in the early-morning half-light, had been saying. Whatever it was, there had been no warmth in it. In-hye hadn't been able to find a tree that would take her life from her. Some of the trees had refused to accept her. They'd just stood there, stubborn and solemn yet alive as animals, bearing up the weight of their own massive bodies. (172-173)

The above quoted lines suggest that the flaming trees symbolize not only life but also violence, suffering, infliction and death. Though flaming, the trees are still green and there is "no warmth" in them. Life is so harsh, "frightening" and "merciless". Life is just a heavy burden that one has to bear it off. Otherwise, she like trees will be atrophied or wasted. And that what has happened to Yeong-hye. "Shuck[ing] off the human"(182), Yeong-hye's endeavor to abandon and leave the human world results in the replication of the same violent rhetoric (Stobie 798). And that is what is further emphasized at the end of the novel. Desperately trying to communicate with her dying sister, In-hye whispers to "Yeong-hye's ear": "I have dreams too, you know. Dreams...and I could let myself dissolve into them, let them take me over...but surely the dream isn't all there is? We have to wake up at some point, don't we?"(Kang/ Smith185). Resorting to the first-plural pronoun "we", In-hye though lately, starts to understand her sister. Rather than describing the death of Yeong-hye, the novel ends with In-hye's "protesting gaze"(Kang qtd. in Patrick 27), fiercely looking out

of the ambulance window at the trees (Kang/Smith 185). Raising her head, In-hye catches sight of a black bird flying up into the "summer sunlight", a sunshine or lightness that temporarily blinds her to "follow the bird's flight"(185). The black bird in flight is a metaphor of Yeonh-hye's flight from the human world. Yeong-hye, as Beeston puts it, is like a bird, "soaring ... into the unknown"(699). The roadside trees are described as "blazing, green fire undulating like the rippling flanks of a massive animal, wild and savage"(Kang 185). They are burning bright and waving like the wings of a savage animal. However, In-hye criticizes and condemns these trees (nature/women) for their "silence, refusal to respond... for [their] unspeaking savagery"(Beeston 699). The novel's message becomes clear... that women must speak (here the emaciated body-the refuge to which the novel's protagonist of this study turns to- becomes, taking Butler's notions ahead, a performative text through which she navigates the possibility of escaping the heteronormative and patriarchal structures)(Zabel 71-72), and show solidarity in their fight against male aggression.

Mirror, ghost and dream images are employed in the three novels. They reflect the way hierarchal/ gender oppression has been perpetuated by the Western world. Mirrors as physical objects, are supposed to reflect true images of the self. However, being imprisoned by the Western patriarchal culture, Lia is unable to see herself on her own terms. Mirrors can be seen as symbols of deception and entrapment. Lia's distorted mirror image is created by the Western culture. As such, though Lia, Cassie and Giselle are thin, they come to view themselves as inflated or obese girls.

Again in terms of mirror imagery, Anderson tries to reflect back the Western world distorted thinking and misrepresented/ false realities. With Lacan's "mirror stage" theory in the background, Anderson's idea of mirroring serves as a subversive tool of destruction through which the "Other" is perceived, presented or discerned. Lia's mastery of her body is predicated to her mirror image that strikingly contradicts her self-division and alienation. Her identification with the "mirror image" is crucial to her development without which she can never perceive herself as an autonomous subject. Though confused with the self, Lia's alienating image comes to take the self's position. The outcome is the acquirement of a sense of wholeness as Lacan points out "[t]he mirror stage is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation- and which manufactures for the subject, caught in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality... and lastly, to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the subject's entire mental development"(3). Anderson's exploration of the mirror imagery directly relates to Lacan's formative function of the "ideal I" or "ideal ego". Though haunting as ghost and dream images are, the mirror is used as a powerful symbolic medium for empowerment and self-discovery.

Gilbert and Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) have elucidated how mirrors can be viewed as hostile objects to women. However, the study also shows the positive and empowering side of them. The three novels, through this motif of the ghost in the mirror, depict how the female protagonist comes to terms with her own identity. In terms of ghost and mirror images, the development of Giselle's, Lia's, and Yeong-hye's identities is embodied. The metaphor of the ghost or specter is clear in *Skinny*. What haunts or disturbs Giselle is her companion, the ghost-like figure of her dead father. Kaslik's *Skinny* foreshadows the so called 'spectral turn' of "contemporary literary and cultural criticism"(Blanco and Peeren 62). This interest in ghost or spectral imagery is instrumental. It is an analytical tool that functions as "a paradigmatic deconstructive, the 'shadowy third' or

trance of an absence that undermines the fixedness of ...binary oppositions"(62). Building upon Derrida's theory of deconstruction, Butler thinks that gender is a "performative act" that it cannot be assumed as stable or fixed. Acting simultaneously as both the "no more one" and the "more than one" as Derrida explains in *Specters of Marx* (1994), the ghost figure implies the intricate relationship between the individual's constituted identity and that of the society at large (62). The cultural theorists, ever since the 1990s, have preferred to use terms like "specter" and "spectrality" instead of ghost for the first is etymologically associated with the notion of "visibility and vision"(2).

Skinny anticipates what comes to be known by some cultural theorists as 'spectropolitics', "a politics of or for specters"(19) that negotiates how certain individuals have become subject to social effacement and marginalization. Occupying a liminal space or position like that of the mirror, the ghost becomes a suitable analytical means to problematize binary thinking(Conner 8-12; Blango and Peeren 62), to address and theorize sociopolitical and ethical questions like the effect of socialization processes, the complexities of personal and collective memory, as indicated in *Skinny's* epigraph, the perilous influences of media and fashion industry as clearly manifested in *Wintergirls*, and pernicious normalizing practices pertinent to gender, sexuality and class. Giselle is haunted by her past or familial history. Her trauma, using Caruth's terminology, "is not so much a symptom of the unconscious as it is a symptom of history"(Trauma 5). In her quest to find answers as to why her father did not love her, Giselle concludes that what instigates her personal suffering is the history of her family. As such, Giselle's mode of self-stylization or what Foucault has called "technologies of the self"(Technologies 18) is precipitated by her parents' legacy.

The novels, and in particular *Wintergirls*, examine the female protagonists' interactions with the mirror and how it helps make their transformation as female subjects possible. Mirrors enhance the development of Lia's identity, as she steers between self-deception and self-realization, to finally perceive herself and the world around her. *Wintergirls* shows how Lia frequently reinforces her vulnerable identity through the mirror and the measurement of calories. Imprisoned in a culture that values and even rewards girls for their looks, Giselle and more particularly Lia, envision the mirror as an enemy through which they perceive themselves as either fat (bloated) or thin, "bad" or "good", "demon" or "angel" and "weak" or "strong". In other words, Giselle and Lia consider the haunting mirrors or the ghosts as brutal judges of their self-worth. Mirror, ghost and dream symbolisms are used to convey the meaning of "the other" in relation to notions of social and cultural identity, imprisonment and ecocriticism to maintain a deeper understanding of the female characters' feelings and experiences. These conceptual metaphors within the oppressive patriarchal systems function in multifaceted ways. They stand for the protagonists' double identity, self-deception and mental breakdown on the one hand and self-recognition or discovery on the other.

Discussing the relationship between trauma, dreams and suffering, Caruth explains that "psychic splitting" is one of the most destructive effects of trauma (Trauma 85). Yeong-hye's second dream, through which her repressed memory or trauma (that concerns her dog, Whitey) is brought, is focal to the analysis of Kang's *The Vegetarian*. The dream mirrors Yeong-hye's thought, symbolizing or reflecting back the violence of the South Korean culture that she resists. However, it is quite astonishing for Yeong-hye to realize that the face she sees on the blood pool is her own. Her announcement that the reflected image (face) is both "familiar" and "strange" is an indication of her split identity or its doubleness. Her dream is the impetus that triggers her to first quit meat-eating and then food altogether. The

protagonists' anorexia then is a metaphor for and a manifestation of all that their cultures represent.

It can be concluded that the three novelists go in the direction of creating a textual style wherein form and content relate to each other, for example the employment of ghost/mirror imagery, strike through sentences or blank pages, in *Skinny* and *Wintergirls*; all manifest Giselle and Lia's irreconcilable states of mind, a contest between two contradictory selves. The self is fragmented; one is healthy, the other is anorexic. The protagonists' internal struggle come, to use Clenn's words, "physically to the page"(108). This ambivalence is also true of Yeong-hye's character and is highlighted through dream sequences. Her dreams or nightmares stress her confusion about her identity, her sense of guilt and tendency to transform herself. It is these dreams that encourage Yeong-hye to take the decision of abandoning meat-eating. Embracing women's otherness by intersecting their abuse or oppression to that of nature (animals, plants, etc.), Kang manages to subvert the monosubjective, patriarchal order.

Through the use of metaphorical language, the authors discussed in this study attempt to show "the complex psychology behind relationships to food, and the complex meanings attached to food, eating and being"(Piatti-Farnell and Brien 91). Giselle, Lia and even Yeong-hye, the protagonists of the novels under study, are caught among these conflicting meanings (images) constructed by society through food. Giselle and Lia are aware of the sense of delight and comfort that food provide them with, however, their empowerment is communicated only by resisting that very awareness, rejecting and denying food(Hsin-Chung 47).

Addressing the notion of women's position in Western and South Korean cultures, the study explores how women in general, through the metaphor of the looking glass, are seen or reflected back. Tracing the socio-cultural and political viewpoints, the novels make explicit the relegation of women to an inferior position to men and their resistance to such representation or treatment. As literary discourses about anorexia, these texts have the power to proliferate new images. Ghosts, mirrors and dreams are respectively employed by the three novelists to have an in-depth knowledge of the female protagonists and their feelings. It is important to reclaim the power of these tools. They are not just reflectors of the girls'/women's docility or weaknesses that the Western and South Korean cultures subscribe to them; rather they can be viewed as powerful devices through which their greatness and agency are explored. Much thought has been given to the issue of gender through the employment of these tools.

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