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FOOD, EATING, AND NARRATIVIZATION OF IDENTITY IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S *LADY ORACLE*

Abstract

The present paper seeks to explore the significance of eating in the process of identity formation in Margaret Atwood's *Lady Oracle* and its effects upon Joan, the female protagonist of the novel. Based on the findings of Susie Orbach (1946), Joan appears to have developed an ambivalent relationship with food from a very early age. Once she decides to lose weight and turn into what the society has always demanded her to look like, she develops an identity crisis which is reflected in her literary production. There are several barriers in the process of Joan's identity formation that reveal themselves later in her narratives as an author. The focus of this study is to shed light on this problematic process of being a female author coping with nutritional insecurities.

Keywords: capitalist society, narrative, nutritional insecurities, obesity, sexism

The Atwoodian “*Écriture Féminine*”

In her 1975 essay, “The Laugh of the Medusa,” the feminist thinker, Helene Cixous, defines a mode of writing which she calls “*Écriture Féminine*” as the endeavors of female writers to write in their own style and based upon their own linguistic rules/roles in order to separate themselves from the gender-biased patriarchal modes of writing. In this essay she argues that women have always been defined merely through the lenses of the male writers because in the first place, writing has not been regarded as an appropriate job for women to do and thus they have barely had the chance to exhibit the true picture of womanhood and also once they have been able to write, they have preferred to fit their thoughts into the box of the patriarchal conceptions of womanhood. Therefore, Cixous maintains that literature abounds with male-made females who do not manifest the reality and the true identity of women.

Reviewing Clare Johnson’s *Femininity, Time and Feminist Art*, Barbara Franchi (2014) elaborates on different movements in the twentieth century that led to women’s conscious creation of the female body in literary works. By investigating the ways through which women have been represented in former and current literary works, she comes to conclude that women are shown as being muses, gods and models and their existence in the real form of femininity seems to be neglected in literature. She discusses the fact that the temporal difference between the different waves of feminism is not of much importance because what matters is the feminine creation of body and the necessity of informing all fellow female authors about it. Franchi’s argument appears to be in line with Cixous’s explanation of the significance of creating female characters in accordance with realistic femininity. Thus, the preoccupation with the creation of a real-life-like female body seems to be an integral component of feminist thought and for this very reason, several female authors seem to have tried to create what their gender is most in need of. For instance, by putting an obese character at the heart of *Lady Oracle*, Margaret Atwood seems to be successful in creating a character whose existence seems to be in sharp contrast with the male-oriented norms of a female character in a work of art. Her very own existence seems to be an endeavor on behalf of a female author in trying to reject patriarchal literary conventions.

Proposing the concept of “*Écriture Féminine*,” Cixous urges female writers to start creating female characters that truly demonstrate real women not just

on the psychological level, but also on the physical. In other words, she insists that by writing and recreating the true picture of the feminine body and psyche, women can obtain the long-lost identity that they have always been deprived of. Among the female authors, who have strived for creating original female characters based on the reality of womanhood, Margaret Atwood (1939) is an exceptional writer who tries to put the true image of the feminine body at the core of her works. Using “*Écriture Féminine*” in her works and at its best, Atwood has given a voice to femininity in the patriarchal literary convention. By creating female characters with non-conventional body images, she has brought the true image of womanhood to attention and has given a voice to those exceptional women, including the very protagonist of *Lady Oracle*, who would have been disregarded otherwise.

Published in 1976, Atwood’s novel, *Lady Oracle*, does not seem to share the tone of her earlier works and appears to be different somehow from what she has earlier focused on. However, the novel includes a distinct feminist viewpoint and revolves around a female character whose body image seems to be as realistic as possible. Thus, by utilizing the “*Écriture Féminine*” in the novel, Atwood has been successful in giving a voice to the female character of her novel that is in fact the representation of the true image of womanhood. The meta-fictional aspect of the novel has made it an appealing study case especially since it has focused on the life of a female author whose obesity and eating problems influence the way she writes and the ways through which she expresses her fractured identity.

Women, Food, Genre: Proper Atwoodian Tools

Reading Atwood’s novels and short stories, one would realize the amount of stress she has laid upon nutrition. In *Two Solicitudes: Conversations* (1998), she claims explicitly that food can be as significant as most of the prominent themes of literature. For this very reason, several studies have been conducted regarding the role of food in Atwood’s works. For instance, Sean Murray (2014) argues that Atwood discusses food politics in her works and focuses on the systems of eating, consumption, and production in order to investigate the power relations. Chung-Hao Ku (2004), also, explores the power dynamics of eating in Atwood’s *The Blind Assassin* and shows in what manner Atwood has paid attention to food and eating as crucial vehicles of power relations.

Apart from discussing nutrition as a significant element in her works, one other aspect of Atwood's novels, which has made her works a true representation of "Écriture Féminine," is her insistence upon the female body. Sofia Sanchez-Grant (2002) asserts that the body of the protagonists in both *The Edible Woman* and *Lady Oracle* are the main drivers of identity formation. In other words, she believes that the body has the power to form the mind and the identity. The fact that nearly most of all Atwood's protagonists are women, however, has made some critics regard some of them, including that of *Lady Oracle*, as a representative of all women. Shuli Barzilai (2000), for instance, believes Joan Foster to be a Rapunzel-like protagonist who is imprisoned in a tower and the only thing she has to do is to cope with it. In other words, she is a prisoner of the social and the cultural values which she cannot change and has to go along with.

The form of the Gothic genre used in *Lady Oracle* has probably been as eye-catching as having a female protagonist. Edina Szalay (2001) asserts that Joan Foster's fascination with the Gothic genre is not random at all. This genre, in fact, is a legacy from her mother and her aunt and she writes Gothic fiction simply because her life is a Gothic one. Gina Wisker (2016), on the other hand, believes that Atwood is in fact debunking Gothic fiction in *Lady Oracle*. She asserts that Atwood criticizes the type of popular culture that shows women as waiting for a prince to save them. Barzilai (2005), also, describes the novel as an artist-novel which has departed from the male-centered conventional generic models. Barzilai believes that the multiple identities of Joan Foster are results of different social and literary models involved in the story. She argues that Atwood has used the two narrative tools of Gothic fiction and the Bluebeard tale in order to emphasize the multiplicity of identities.

Eleonora Rao (1994) argues that the sort of Gothic fiction that Atwood utilizes is a modern form of the old genre. She asserts that Atwood tries to demonstrate plural subjectivity by means of giving multiple identities to the protagonist of her novel. Coral Ann Howells (1996) regards Atwoodian Gothic as a jokey one which has its own rules and conventions. She quotes Atwood as describing her own fiction as the murderer and the text and the reader as the victim.

Having a first-person narrator whose career as an author reminds the reader of Atwood herself, *Lady Oracle* has also been a proper subject of discussion regarding autobiographical literature. Sherill Grace (1994), however, believes that the narrator of the novel is not exactly Atwood herself. She explains that

although the novel is about an author and the challenges she encounters, it is not an autobiography. It is rather a novel about the practices of writing which might have been experienced by Atwood herself as well. The protagonist of the novel, Joan Foster, is the writer of escape literature and Barbara Hill Rigney (1987) ironically calls her an “Escape Artist” who misuses art to escape reality. She argues that Joan is in fact trying to evade the reality by means of the imaginary worlds she creates.

Lady Oracle opens when Joan Foster has already turned into a famous author who has lost a great deal of weight and is desperately trying to flee from her former obese self by changing her identity into a new one. Returning to the apartment in Italy in which she had formerly lived with her husband, Arthur, Joan decides to hide there and thus escape the fame she has acquired by writing romances and feminist poems. She struggles to run away from her past life by choosing a new name, cutting short her hair, and dyeing it and burying the dresses she used to wear. However, it turns out throughout the novel that she has always failed in all her attempts to evade her past and her former life. In fact, her past accompanies her all the time whether she desires it or not.

In being narrated through flashbacks, the novel conveys a full account of Joan Foster’s life from her early childhood as an obese girl to her adulthood when she becomes a renowned author who suffers from various psychological insecurities. Being named after Joan Crawford, who was a beautiful, fit, American actress, Joan grows up being the constant subject of her mother’s expectations which, in fact, she is never capable of fulfilling. Thus, her unstable relationship with her mother starts when she is still a youngster and continues into her teen years and later affects her entire life although she always attempts to evade its effect.

The Centrality of Feminine Body: An Unreal One

Lady Oracle represents the issues and the concerns of a society in which people’s body image and food choice can determine their later psychological insecurities. According to Susie Orbach, the British social critic, in *On Eating* (2002) good or bad food is merely the endeavor of culture to persuade people to eat in certain ways. Modernized societies control people’s choice of nutrition and thus supervise the way they live. Joan Foster, being the member of such a society, has a constant access to a wide range of food outlets for her psychological unrests. She eats what the society has provided her with, for instance the burgers she

can easily have access to in the Café where she works and ends up being held responsible for what culture itself has done to the way her body looks.

In *Bodies* (2009), Orbach also discusses the centrality of the body in all modern cultures. She believes that as the modern capitalist societies provide their members with numerous opportunities to change and mend their bodies, people have grown ever more concerned with the way they appear. This, in turn, has made people dissatisfied with their looks. Orbach maintains: “The fact that we can transform the body makes it a site of dissatisfaction which can be overcome” (*Bodies* 22). The protagonist of *Lady Oracle* suffers from a life-long dissatisfaction with herself which eventually leads her towards several psychological insecurities. However, she is never thoroughly aware of the sense of self non-acceptance that has been imposed upon her by culture and through her family, her classmates and her lovers. She always feels lonely and desolate, but she can always blame her mother or her schoolmates for not understanding her and seems to be totally ignorant of the anti-obese culture that is behind all these bullies.

Orbach argues that in a world in which the preoccupation with bodies and their meanings increases at a considerable rate, a woman’s body takes the central role as a phenomenon which needs to conform to the norms set by cultural forces the most. In other words, a woman’s body turns into an object suitable for economic and cultural manipulations. Media has turned into a source that defines feminine beauty and in doing so, it excludes fat women. Thus, slim women turn into objects of sexuality that are used in advertisements and TV shows. All other women, who possess different shapes and sizes, are neglected on behalf of the culture and their existence is essentially denied to a level that they can hardly be accepted in the society. Orbach, however, believes that: “these images convey an idea of a body which does not exist in the real world” (*Bodies* 64). These images, in Orbach’s opinion, pretend to represent a reality which is hardly found in the society. Since this false image is manipulated by the media, it comes to affect the public. Joan, like all other women, has always been expected to match the picture of the proper woman and having failed to do so, she has faced serious problems that have in turn, endangered her identity formation.

Joan Foster, being representative of all girls living in a technologized era, has gone through the same struggles that the girls who were interviewed by Jessica Ringrose and others (2018) have. These girls have all been dazzled by the image

of the fit, white, middle-class woman and they regard it as the ultimate goal they would ever want to achieve. The white female teenagers in the interview have come to believe, just the way Joan Foster would, that turning into the media-accepted feminine beauty would simply make them more successful. However, the interview illustrates the fact that marginalized girls from other races were, to some extent, more aware of the fact that they have been ignored by the media. In other words, the interview reveals the bitter truth that girls like Joan Foster, are at a greater risk of falling for the images created by the media.

The media-made picture of perfect femininity, however, is by no means a real one. As Jean Baudrillard explains in his 1981 book, *Simulacra and Simulation*, the postmodernist world is merely a sign system in which images rule people's lives. For instance, the society in which Joan Foster lives, is formed by people's ideas of beauty and the body which are in fact affected by media. Baudrillard believes that most of these images are created to cover up a truth which might not exist at all. In his opinion, these images, which are constructed by politics and media, are in the service of the power as they are the tools through which power can guarantee its own safety. The world in which Joan lives is exactly a postmodern world in which the media-made images of womanhood have replaced the true image of femininity. These images guarantee the safety of the capitalist society and in doing so, they injure the psyche of women who look different and thus lead them towards identity related issues such as: depression, lack of self-confidence and behavioral problems.

Although media has the undeniable power of influencing people's lives by means of false images it is capable of creating, it is probably not the sole cause of women's psychological insecurities in relation to their bodies. Orbach in *Fat Is a Feminist Issue: The Anti-Diet Guide to Permanent Weight Loss* (1978) states that the very first place in which a woman starts to build an uncertain relationship to her identity is within her own family. Orbach believes that mothers are the first people who get to prepare their daughters for their future lives, but as they themselves are the products of a sexist society they can barely produce something better than themselves. She declares:

A tragic repercussion of women's inferior social position is that in the transmitting of the culture from one generation to the next, the mother has the dreadful job of preparing her own daughter to accept a life built on second-class citizenship. (*Fat Is a Feminist Issue* 152)

Thus, women are not only bombarded by the images made by the media, but also are taught to accept being second-class citizens by their own family members. The mothers are the first to push their daughters into a sexist and biased society in which femininity is already shaped or prefabricated. The gap, therefore, in a woman's identity starts from within the family. We see in the novel, as it is to be explained later, how Joan's relationship with her mother and aunt is problematic.

Women, Second Class Citizenship and Later Complexes

Citing *Lady Oracle* as an example of the intricate mother/daughter relationship in *Fat Is a Feminist Issue*, Orbach explicitly explains how this type of relationship can be damaging to the daughter's psyche and how it can result in the daughter's obesity. She believes that Joan has always used her fatness as a means through which she can confront her mother. Orbach declares: "In overfeeding herself, the daughter may be trying to reject her mother's role while at the same time reproaching the mother for inadequate nurturing; or she may be attempting to retain a sense of identity with her mother" (*Fat Is a Feminist Issue* 20). Thus, as Orbach argues, the mother/daughter relationship can end in serious eating complications, the results of which can affect the entire life of the daughter. The eating and dietary issues, therefore, come into the life of the girls from very early stages of their lives.

Since women are forced into believing that they are the second-class citizens of the society, they learn to prioritize others over themselves. They are prepared for a limited number of roles in which they must be ready to sacrifice themselves in order to be proved as successful people. In fact, they are defined by the stereotypical roles they receive from the society they live in. Being a mother, a wife, a lover or a caregiver, Orbach believes, convinces women to learn how to deny their own existence in order to fulfill the expectations their societies impose upon them. These roles, in fact, necessitate upon women a great deal of self-sacrifice and a number of restrictions which women have to act in accordance with. For instance, they learn to deny their own emotions just to avoid being labeled as selfish. By doing so, in fact, they try to reveal how responsible they are towards their roles.

According to Orbach, one primary emotion that women are expected to ignore is anger. This emotion has come to be known as a masculine emotion and

thus necessary for women to avoid. This is, of course, a historical issue. An inspection of Renaissance culture reveals how the women who talked aloud and fought for rights were called shrewish and were severely punished. Interpreting Shakespeare's play, *The Taming of the Shrew*, in "Scolding Brides and Bridling Scolds: Taming the Woman's Unruly Member," Boose (1991) refers ironically to these issues and delineates how Renaissance men were afraid of the power of a woman's tongue and used severe punitive devices like bridles to tame it. Such punitive devices were designed in a way they directly affected the unruly member of the woman that is her tongue which as a phallic symbol challenging men's power. However, anger is one of the many emotions any woman, as a human being, might experience during the day which is, in fact, quite inevitable. Once women find themselves responsible for avoiding such emotions, they search for outlets to express their neglected emotions; the anti-obese culture, paradoxically, offers them food as a way of self-expression.

Thus, according to Orbach, being taught to prioritize others' needs to their own needs on the one hand and having no outlet for their emotions on the other, women start to build an uncertain relationship to food from the very early stages of their lives. Eating is defined as something to be avoided by women through the fit-worshipping media; yet it is the only easily accessible outlet for their emotions. This cultural contradiction has led a great number of women towards eating disorders including compulsive eating, gorging, eating binges, Anorexia Nervosa and Bulimia Nervosa. These behavioral problems, in turn, have been quite damaging to women's self-confidence and psychological health.

Being the exact product of the contradictory culture of capitalist and patriarchal societies, Joan's mother forces her daughter to do things she does not feel comfortable with. Joan is forced into believing that she is not loved if she does not match the image of the type of girl who is admired by the media. At one point Joan exclaims: "I was the kind of child, they would have thought back then in the early months of 1949, who should not be seen in public with so little clothing on" (16). Thus, from the very early stages of her life, Joan starts to realize that the way she looks is not the same as the accepted girl must look like and for this very reason, she is not loved as she should be. Therefore, she starts to develop a defense mechanism by means of eating and gaining yet extra weight.

Narrating her former life, Joan not only reports her tremulous relationship with her mother, but also describes the way other people, including her class-

mates, her teachers and the opposite sex, have reacted to her obesity. For instance, she remembers a memory in which three of the schoolgirls, who were older than her, tied her up on their way to school. In the seventh chapter of the novel, where Joan is a grown-up, she still has nightmares which date back to that traumatic event and remembers how it intensified the way she used to eat: "By this time I was eating steadily, doggedly, stubbornly anything I could get" (25). She also describes the dancing class she enrolled in and remembers how she was forced into not wearing a butterfly costume as she was regarded as a fat girl. In all these cases, Joan has been regarded as a girl whose appearance is totally different from that of the one accepted and for this reason, has been treated biasedly.

All the people who surround Joan and bully her, whether they do it intentionally or unintentionally, are affected by the media. Orbach believes that the modern capitalist world has provided human beings with an image of properness which has in turn made the modern human being dissatisfied with the way she/he looks. Images are, in fact, prior to the reality; that is why, the world we live in is called a symbolic representation by theorists like Lacan. We are living in a symbolic situation. Since majority of people do not match the far-fetched image of beauty, they have faced serious issues including lack of self-confidence; therefore, they are ready to spend their money or even risk their lives to go on diets or undergo surgeries in order to look similar to what media propagates as beautiful. Joan's mother and friends have unconsciously surrendered to the cultural hegemony of their society and blame Joan for not being like them. Joan, however, has not complied with the media-made norms and has to cope with its consequences later.

The society in which Joan lives, the culture she has been brought up in accordance with, her tremulous relationship with her mother and her love life, have led her towards one of the most common nutritional difficulties which Orbach labels as compulsive eating. A compulsive eater takes food as a way through which it becomes possible to free herself from the emotions that torture her. For instance, whenever Joan was bullied by her classmates, she started what Orbach calls the obsession with food and thus ate in an abnormal way and gained extra weight. Her unstable relationship with her mother, also, led her towards eating beyond the necessary needs of her body. In other words, her relationship with the people around her always made her end up turning to food as the sole way of soothing herself, or as Orbach calls it gorging.

At some point in her life Joan works as a waitress in a restaurant. This experience provides her with an opportunity to come into closer contact with food. During this stage of her life, she explores her relationship with food in a way she has never experienced before. She seems to become more aware of the tremulous relationship she has always had with food. She seems to have lost her appetite at this stage of her life and, therefore, her obsession with food seems to grow to a level she explicitly says: “My appetite, usually gargantuan, began to fall off, partly from the effects of being in contact with other people’s food for hours at a time, but partly because at every meal I felt I was being bribed” (38). Working at this restaurant and being in direct contact with food on a daily basis, Joan, consciously, finds out how food and her appetite towards it could directly be related to her emotions, born out of cultural and social dissatisfaction.

Hence, women, Joan being included, start to turn to an abnormal relationship to nutrition as a way of resisting all the pressure culture imposes upon them. In Orbach’s words: “emotional and biological rebellions against a life of food restriction, deprivation and compulsive exercising can produce either anorectic-style responses or what appears to be its opposite out-of-control eating” (*Bodies* 71). Accordingly, compulsive eating and gorging are not the only forms of nutritional rebellion against culture. Some women starve themselves to death and, in their fear of getting obese, they turn out to be afraid of food as well. Orbach, calling this nutritional disorder “Anorexia Nervosa,” explicitly exclaims that: “Anorexia Nervosa is the other side of the coin of compulsive eating. In her rigorous avoidance of food, the anorectic is responding to the same oppressive conditions as compulsive eaters” (*Fat Is a Feminist Issue* 144). Thus, both compulsive eaters and anorectic eaters share a fear of food which problematizes their nutritional intake and leads them towards both physical and psychological difficulties. These nutritional behaviors, according to J. E. Blundell (2017), are pretty significant in knowing and preventing health-related issues because these behaviors of eating determine people’s choice of food and are, thus, closely related to physiology and health.

Thus, not letting women fully express their emotions, the cultural forces of the society lead women towards either compulsive eating or anorexia nervosa which is sometimes also called “Bulimia Nervosa” which is by no means a new phenomenon. Su Holmes (2020) has dealt with the early 1990s Beverly Allitt, the serial killer who was diagnosed with Anorexia Nervosa and argues that the treatment of such nutritional difficulties has been popularized and normalized

on TV without paying attention to the shattered feminine mental state. Once women deal with such nutritional complications, they either get too fat or too thin and in any of these two cases they are not fully accepted by the society. In order to gain the position, they have been deprived of in the society, women start going on diets or undergoing plastic surgeries to turn into the types culture has always demanded them to look like. That is how they fall into the trap of culture once more and yet they do not achieve the social safety they have been looking for.

The Feminine Body as a Sight of Resistance

According to Michel Foucault, who discusses the body as a site through which power is exercised, in his 1975 book, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of Prison*, body is not merely a biological site of study. He also believes that it is a political site through which power continues to survive. Unlike the earlier scholars who believed that power survives through military force, Foucault, discussing the panopticon, explains how each individual becomes his/her own agent of subjection in modern societies and ends up being alienated from him/herself. Diet, being a good example of self-imposed subjection, only assists power and does not benefit the dieter at all. In fact, by turning the dieter into the subject of the power, diet only alienates the dieter and problematizes his/her process of identity formation. This can be the case with Joan, whose identity seems to be fractured after losing weight and turning into a thin woman.

Despite resisting the culture in all the stages of her life, Joan is forced into losing weight at a crucial stage of her life and by her only supportive family member. Narrating her childhood, Joan describes her aunt, whom she calls Aunt Lou, as the only person who has accepted her just the way she is. Aunt Lou is the sole person who encourages Joan to be herself and builds her relationship with Joan with no regards to her body, her shape, her size and her looks. Joan enjoys spending time with her, going to cinema with her and talking to her as she deeply feels being eventually accepted by someone. Having no children, Aunt Lou leaves a considerable amount of money as an inheritance for Joan. Her condition for giving her the money, though, is for Joan to lose weight.

Aunt Lou is probably the most appropriate representative of contemporary capitalist societies. On the surface, she encourages Joan and provides her with everything she is in need of and pretends to be quite heedless of the way she

looks. However, she is the one who demands Joan to lose weight in order to gain what she requires. The contemporary society, which has also fallen into the trap of sexism, acts exactly like Aunt Lou in telling women that if they want social opportunities, they have to adjust themselves to the media-made definitions of beauty. A large number of women opt for changing their looks in order to achieve that goal. Joan, too, decides to lose weight as she is in need of money in order to leave the house and live independently from her mother whose far-fetched expectations trouble her. Thus, Joan loses a great deal of weight and starts a new life; however, evading her earlier life seems to be impossible.

Joan's husband, Arthur, is her only lover who meets her when she has turned into a fit woman. The rest of her relationships occur when she is still an obese woman who desperately tries to live as an independent woman. Once she marries Arthur, she does not want him to know everything about her former obese self. Even when Arthur sees a picture of her earlier years as a fat girl, she denies being in that picture and claims that the young woman in the picture is another aunt of hers. Meeting Arthur, marrying him and trying to hide her former self from him is probably a turning point in Joan's life which eventually affects the way she writes as an author and a poet. Once her marital life with Arthur starts, she declares:

This was the beginning of my double life. But hadn't my life always been double? There was always that shadowy twin, thin when I was fat, fat when I was thin, myself in silvery negative, with dark teeth and shining white pupils glowing in the black sunlight of that other world. (92)

Prior to marrying Arthur and losing weight, Joan tries her hand at writing romances. She gets her books published by a penname and makes a reasonable amount of money. Once she marries Arthur, however, she goes to a church in which she learns a type of writing called "automatic writing" in which the author writes in front of a mirror, with burning candles and her/his eyes being closed. At first Joan does not want to try it but is later tempted to do it. In the one and only endeavor to do automatic writing she creates her only collection of feminist poetry. However, when she becomes a well-known author due to those poems, she thinks that they were not written by her and feels like those poems are totally different from what she has always been writing.

Accordingly, Joan's writings can be classified into two different phases based on the time in which they are written. When Joan was an obese woman, who

had to deal with body shaming, social insecurities and unstable relationship with her mother, she used to write romances which can be categorized into the escapist literature. By doing so, she escapes all the traumas she has ever been through and attempts to create a world in which none of the wounds she has ever had to carry with herself exist. For instance, in one of her romances, the protagonist, who is called Charlotte, is described by Joan as possessing no certain beauty. That is how Joan has escaped the definitions of beauty which she herself has had to tolerate her entire life. During this phase of writing, she also creates female characters that enjoy stable relationships with their mothers quite contrary to what she has personally experienced.

Once Joan loses weight, she turns into a seemingly accepted fit woman and marries Arthur; however, after marriage, her writings change drastically. Through the practice of “automatic writing,” she writes poems related to feminine issues which make her a well-known author. Both phases in her career as an author clearly demonstrate her endeavors to find her true identity; however, she fails in both cases. Through writing and creating female characters and situations that she cannot find in her real life, she opts for narrativizing her identity. She is in search of the true identity which has always been denied on behalf of the society. Being fat, she has been always neglected and propagated against by media. She has psychologically lost a part of her identity which seems too embarrassing to be remembered. By writing in any of these two phases, she looks for a way to obtain her long-denied identity through words.

Conclusion

According to Orbach, who has recorded her consulting sessions with numerous obese women in *Fat Is a Feminist Issue*, women are brought up to become second-class citizens from the very beginning. They are, later, bombarded by the existing false images of femininity and are thus expected to look, act and eat in certain ways. Failing to do what media asks them, women face serious psychological issues that can affect their entire lives. Orbach believes that the Cultural modes of each society struggle to implement their power upon people through the false images in the mass media and thus force people to follow the existing money-making industries in order to first, make more money and boost the economy and second, to lead people towards a kind of self-control which implements power upon them at the lowest cost. In such societies, women are the direct targets of the culture's commandments and are damaged the most.

As long as the social inequality leads women towards a limited number of prefabricated roles, they continue to have a complicated relationship to food. Consequently, obesity will continue to grow considerably, and numerous women will continue to suffer from behavioral problems including over-eating, emotional eating, and eating binges. They will also have to continue coping with the psychological consequences of such complications. Living in a society in which the media-made images of womanhood have come to replace the reality, Joan Foster in *Lady Oracle*, lives a tremulous life in which her unsteady relationship with her mother, her being bullied for being fat in childhood and her adult life as an obese woman lead her towards compulsive eating and when she is eventually forced to lose weight, her identity is barred and she tries to find her true self in the stories and the poems she writes. That is how, therefore, she tries, in a problematized situation that has been made by eating and nutrition, to seek refuge in narration; she designs imaginary characters and situations in which female characters attempt to come to terms with their problematic bodies that have turned into objects of power. The narrativization of identity, therefore, indicates, as we see in the case of Joan, a situation in which the subject attempts to define herself in her imaginary works and endeavors to tell stories through which she shares part of her traumatic past and part of her insecure and anxious present. Yet, she is never fully successful in obtaining what she is in search of in her writings and she continues living an insecure life in which her past haunts her all the time. The only possible way for escaping this identity crisis is to create everlasting and fundamental changes within the capitalist social structure. There should be a system in which the female body and femininity is no longer defined through its connection with food. As long as there are prefabricated and false images of women and femininity, there will be anxiety and insecurity in women.

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HRANA, JEDENJE I NARATIVIZACIJA IDENTITETA U ROMANU *LADY ORACLE* MARGARET ATWOOD

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Rad nastoji istražiti važnost jedenja u procesu oblikovanja identiteta u romanu *Lady Oracle* [*Proročica*] Margaret Atwood i njegov utjecaj na glavnu junakinju Joan. S obzirom na otkrića Susie Orbach (1946.), Joan naizgled od djetinjstva gradi nezdrav odnos prema hrani. Nakon što odluči smršavjeti i postići izgled kakav joj je društvo oduvijek nametalo, zapada u krizu identiteta koja se očituje u njezinu književnom stvaralaštvu. U procesu Joanina oblikovanja identiteta postoji nekoliko prepreka koje se razotkrivaju tijekom njezina narativa, a uži je cilj rada razotkrivanje složenog i problematičnog procesa autorice koja se nosi s prehrambenim dvojabama.

Ključne riječi: kapitalističko društvo, narativ, prehrambene dvojbe, pretilost, seksizam