

## Feminism in Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman*

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### Abstract

Feminism indicates the principles of stand up for the social, political and all other rights of women equal to men. Although largely originated in the west, feminism is manifested worldwide and is represented in various institutions committed to activity on behalf of women's rights and interests. *The Edible Woman* is one of the most excellent novels of Margaret Atwood. The novel gives numerous perceptions since its subjects deal with most delicate and profound composition of society. The novel is more communal novel which approaches major issues of gender roles and relationships in common. The various themes portrayed in the novel are self-discovery, marriage, love, male dominance, societal pressure and loss of self. The author's presupposition of her world view was supported by the illustrative and figurative elements present in the novel.

**Keywords:** Self-discovery, Loss of Self, Male Dominance, Societal Pressure.

In today's world, women are forced to be settled in a secondary place in a male-dominated, consumer society. The woman is considered as the 'Other', 'Second Sex' and 'Marginalized'. She is used like a product for the sexual appetites of male desire. Feminists throughout the world are struggling to correct the cultural stumbling blocks, to efface the gender biased power politics so that women get equal rights in society. Besides, women writers, by speaking up their view point and explaining their world, have been attempting to create new dimensions of space and new vistas of life for women.

This paper apprehends the novel *The Edible Woman* written by Margaret Atwood which reflects the most important feminist issues such as loss of identity, subordination of woman

in the male-dominated, male-chauvinistic society, woman striving to establish an identity of her own, and her being exploited in the vendee society where woman's body is contemplated as a toy, as a consumable item- a symbolic representation of consumerism and consumer problems prevalent in the modern society. Atwood portrays the malicious chaos of male dominance by her deep inspection and by illustration of women characters particularly, accomplishes her wish to disperse her aim as a writer to the suffering mass, to the public and thoughtful people in totality.

The novel aims on the problems faced by women at the work spot, gender inequality, pitfalls of patriarchal system and the unpleasant environment required to be rectified instantly. Atwood put forward a circumstantial debate to inspect woman as colony, her numbness and debilitated act against the male antagonism in the patriarchal discourse, it also describes the weak and defenceless position of Canada against corrosive domination of America.

Atwood, citing to her debut, *The Edible Woman* written in 1969, expresses in the Introduction to the 1979 edition:

*The Edible Woman* appeared finally in 1969, four years after it was written and just in time to coincide with the rise of feminism in North America. Some immediately assumed it was a product of the movement. I myself see the book as proto-feminist rather than feminist: there was no women's movement in sight when I was composing the book in 1965, and I am not gifted with clairvoyance though like many at the time I'd read Betty Friedan and Simone de Beauvoir behind locked doors. (370)

In *The Edible Woman*, Atwood's principal interest is to dismantle the gender politics. She correctly labels the novel as 'Proto-feminist', on the other hand, John Lauber examines it from the outlook of 'consumer society' (20). As the title itself gives the impression, *The Edible Woman* is referring a simple woman, the central character Marian McAlpin, who grows eating disorder called anorexia, afterwards she feels that she is being eaten once she consents to marry her boyfriend, Peter. constantly she sees a different aspect of approach much to her defamation and disappointment.

Marian has a complication. A willing member of the vendee society in which she lives, she instantly finds herself identifying with the things being consumed. Marian's gradual loss of appetite could possibly be ascribed to her denial of the self; one possibly can infer that it could also mean her loss of freedom leading her into chaotic wilderness. she has affected by psychological disillusionment which leads her to develop constant loss of appetite, a physical disorder, developing a sort of anathema to a non-vegetarian food.

Duncan, a vital person whom Marian meets while her survey in Seymour Surveys, correctly figure out that her loss of taking food and physical restlessness, her eating disorders, called anorexia is nothing but her riot against domineering patriarchal society. Hence, Marian realized her own sufferings and possibility to see her true own self in her meeting with Duncan.

Peter Hidalgo in her essay *The Female Body Politic: From Victimization to Empowerment* remarks on Marian's problem of anorexia thus the protagonist Marian's anorexia is an indication of her scare about the future society that oppress woman. In an episode which is impartially common of the feminist novel of 1960's, Marian visits an old classmate, who has now become a wife and mother, and she feels overwhelmed by the purely biological existence of a woman with the three small children. That Marian is still free from the horror of imposed domesticity does not mean that she does not play a 'feminine' role in her work place. The structure of market research Company where she has a job constitutes the power distribution between the sexes: men work on the top floor who deals with the clients have private cabins separately, all of them are the executives and psychologists. Whereas the woman shares a large room and is assumed to grab of human element, the interviewers. Marian, who has a degree in English, her work is to revise the questionnaires designed by the men so that ordinary people can easily understand that. That is, she acts as a messenger and mediator between masculine 'scientific' jargon and the daily encounters of the housewives aimed by market research.

Atwood's congenital critical insight shows the status quo in the vendee society. Marian explains her state as above 'matter' but below 'mind'. As the novel moves on, her interaction with the outside world, with men, we are given to understand that Marian's realization enhances deeply, a sort of awareness of the self, and the simultaneous

apprehension of loss of identity thereby inducing an urge in her to establish her own identity. The title is indicative of the fact that the novel has symbolic overtones of meaning referring to consumerism, cannibalism, sex, woman's body and harrowing exploitation by men.

*The Edible Woman*, which explains of Marian McAlpin's few months of life, is explained in three parts. In Part I, which is explained in the perception of first-person point of view. Peter and Marian gets engaged and she started experiencing an escalating paranoia as she is alienated diversely by her co-workers, friends, work situation, and living arrangement. The lengthy segment of the novel Part II, the narrative suddenly turns into third-person point of view, and Marian becomes anorexic more and more. Her anorexia nervosa is of a distinct nature. she not only loses the ability to eat anything but is also ghosted by the idea that she herself is being consumed. She is ghosted by the idea that she herself is being eaten and she develops the loss of appetite.

At the end of Part III, Marian denies Peter as her life partner and rejects his marriage proposal by giving the 'edible woman' which is she herself bakes and serves to Peter. Finally, Part III outwits Marian's rise from third-person anorexic space; she regains the capacity to partake and feels relieved from the disillusionment and is once again the speaker, the 'I'. Although the novel's consummating move, the baked and served 'edible woman', has generally been regarded as either an indication of her re-insertion into the economic and social machine of capitalism or an act of defiance and freedom. Nevertheless, it is a mirroring of the truth that the protagonist has spotted what is her real self and identity.

As far as Maria is concerned, Peter sees in her a sensible woman and expects her to possess individual thinking. He proposes to her and explains the reason for marrying her. He says:

I can always depend on you. Most women are pretty scatterbrain and you're such a sensible girl. You may not have known this but I've always thought that's the first thing to look for when it comes to choosing a wife (89).

Marian at first looks upon him as a 'saviour from chaos'. Peter, who is a law graduate needs a wife to brag of his compilation of guns, knives and cameras. He always has a view on women that women are inherently preposterous, parasitic and capricious. but he feels that

Marian is different from those typical women and keeps praising to Marian's exquisite qualities like her commonsense, independence and a few different qualities. Peter aims to give Marian an identity which would conform to his norms. She feels burglarized of her identity as a woman which is unbearable to her. She is expected to be different from other women in her behaviour, thoughts, attitudes and actions.

A woman as presented by male gaze, is dependent, emotional and at times choosy, but Marian is expected to be practical and sensible like a man trapped in a woman's body. She experiences a sense of alienation at the loss of female identity which will reduce her merely to victim's position, a saleable product in the consumer market. Her identity as woman is fully based on her sense of community, devoid of such basic identity as a woman would make her unsafe even though she retains other identities like nationality, class, race, political ideology and language. In a patriarchal strategy, primary identity as being a woman is essential to create a space for woman, to defy herself from being thrown into the destroying oblivion in the patriarchal space.

Marian partaking the cake-woman, a substitute of her own-image in suitable of frantic wrath and anxiety of revenge after Peter's denial to ingest, it presents that she would rather rebel and survive than admitting herself to selfish male domination. Emma Parker comments that Atwood demonstrated how consumption is related to power, Atwood profoundly urges women to entitle their selves by incite them to consume their path into the world.

The cake which she bakes is at once a therapy, a solution, self-discovery, a potential symbol of freedom and a leading continuing step forward. Atwood thus comments in an interview with Gibson that the action performed by Marian is absurd one in a way, as all the parts of symbolism in realistic factors are, but what she is clearly making is 'an alternate of herself'.

The evidence of baking the cake as a consummate image for the novel, is either a symbol of Marian's re-entry into the field of consumer capitalism or Marian's liberation from her mental struggle. To Glenys Stow, the cake is undoubtedly, an intended representation of the fabricated femininity which her world has attempted to force and imposed on her and

with the ‘crazy feast’ at the novel’s conclusion ‘Marian outburst of the predicted social pattern’. Sharon Wilson admits that Marian returns to the society that has oppressed and distressed her. He put forth the symbolic agency in Marian’s return by broiling, garnishing, serving, as well as consuming the cake-woman image that she has been constrained to project. Marian declares, to herself and others, that ‘she is not food’.

The protagonist goes through a traumatic journey seeking a possible way for survival, the female will battle as a result of the living corpuscles to be sold in the conjugal market by selfish and greedy male will. Thus, the novel *The Edible Woman* is a delegative fiction aiming upon the themes of female sufferings and struggles grabbed in the chain of unpleasant male domination, being reduced to a consumable object when there is a despicable submission and self-willed subservience on the part of woman. Atwood expresses woman’s complicity in the male hegemony. The novels depicts with the identity. Marian longs to find herself and looks to others in order to grasp a general idea of what that would be. Peter, well, he creates, false ideas in his head as to what Marian is.

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