

**Margaret Atwood's *Edible Woman*: Transformation of the
Protagonist from an Innocent Victim to a Matured Victor**

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Abstract:

The *Edible Woman* is taken for study, and to look in depth the manner in which the protagonist reforms herself from an innocent victim to a responsible, experienced and a matured victor. Initially the protagonist is ignorant of her true self and she is not able to face the odds. But

as the story unfolds, the protagonist Marian, slowly and steadily realizes her ability to fight. At last through her struggle Marian gains enough experience and emerges wise and victorious at the end. The story may not have a positive ending but Marian becomes matured and optimistic and thus ceases to be the victim. The authors of this article also attempt to explicate on some predominant feminist issues such as suppression of women in a male chauvinist society, abominable exploitation of woman as a '*plaything*' used for absolute sexual pleasure, '*as a two legged womb*', and as a consumer object of the postmodern world to be enjoyed and thrown denying her even the basic human rights.

Key words: Transformation, victim, victor, feminist issues, edible woman, consumable commodity.

Introduction:

If the characters are the same at the end of the novel as they are at the beginning, then something has gone wrong because novels are about change, living in time.

– Margaret Atwood

In *The Edible Woman* the narrator - protagonist, Marian leads a normal life at the beginning of the story. In fact she is '*abnormally normal*' in many ways .She has a job, a friendly roommate, nice friends and a lover. She has healthy appetite in the beginning. Her lover Peter an upcoming lawyer at one stage proposes to her and they decide to marry. Just because Marian loves Peter and agrees to marry him, he starts taking decisions for her. But in the beginning Marian is ignorant of his monopolisation of her and blindly allows Peter to take decisions for her. In other words Marian is so, innocent that she is ignorant of Peter's consuming nature.

Text:

At the beginning of the novel there is a fine description about Peter .He has been described as '*ordinariness raised to perfection*'. He is a successful person. His appearance, lifestyle, mannerism, and beliefs suggest the same perfection. In their relationship Peter has made some terms which are accepted by Marian though she does not want, for eg .Peter asks www.ijellh.com

Marian to mourn on his best friend Trigger`s marriage ,Marian as expected by Peter pretends to be very upset and convolves him. Peter also decides not to get married but will meet twice a week.

Peter decides to get married as he thinks that bachelorhood after a certain age would have negative implications. So he chooses Marian as the bride as he considers Marian to be docile and concludes that she will behave herself to his satisfaction. In other words he can treat her like a puppet. Marian comes to know that Peter does not love her for her sake but wants to marry her only for the sake of society. He considers Marian as a commodity to be consumed rather than an individual. Soon Marian undergoes numerous changes once she is engaged. She starts suffering from lack of appetite to food. Her stomach slowly and steadily refuses food of many kinds, starting with steak, meat, pork, eggs, vegetables, rice, and cake. Her body encounters many rejections. Marian could recognize that something is wrong within her. She is not feeling hungry as she used to be, yet could not diagnose herself properly. *I wonder if I 'm getting anaemia (EW.125) Her body refuses to consume anything that has been or still is living-or might even seen so (Hutcheon 317).* It is observed that *an unmistakable food phobia in Marian's mind.*

When Len, Peter and Marian meet up at the '*Park Plaza Hotel*', Marian is particularly revolted when she watches Peter describing the '*act of gutting rabbit.*'She fails to realize that how a person could get pleasure in killing of an innocent animal. Again, it is the first time when Marian and Peter are dining in restaurant after their engagement. She sees Peter very neatly slicing the chunk of meat on his place and actually imagines a cow being slaughtered. Marian finds herself unable to eat meat as she connects herself with the subconscious identity of the cow.She finds herself in the position of oppress and this manifests nausea towards food as all food articles shape the common platform for victimization. It is also seen that in the scene of '*shooting*' Marian becomes a victim . Once Peter plans a party and for the sake of Peter she wears a red dress and changes her hair style though she does not like .Later on she finds herself unable to recognize .On the other hand Peter seems to be impressed by her appearance and he takes out his camera in order to '*shoot*' her .Here the word '*shoot*' implies '*taking a picture*' and

a '*metaphorical act of shooting a prey with a gun*'. '*Here while shooting*' Marian thinks that she would die symbolic death and her identity would be erased if Marian were trapped in a shot.

Peter is not the only person to whom Marian feels very closer, Duncan in the other one. Duncan, the English graduate student is a brilliant combination of physical appearances and posture, complacency and complete narcissism. His egotism is revealed in his very first appearance when he *'sat holding the cigarette before him with his hands cupped, like a starved Buddha burning incense to itself (EW 54)*. Marian feels attracted towards him on account of his bizarreness. Her engagement with Peter does not seem to end her attraction towards Duncan. Duncan constantly exhibits himself as a confused child who needs motherly treatment from a compassionate woman. Duncan does not care for Marian's engagement with Peter and treats her as a new listener to sympathize at him. Knowing fully well that this relationship will not lead her to any constructive future, Marian continues to meet Duncan whenever she does not spend time with Peter. Marian fails to recognize Duncan's inner self and accepts him also by his face value. Even his rare advice to her *'I can tell you're admiring my febricity [. . .]. I practise at it, Every woman loves an invalid. I bring out the Florence Nightingale in them. But be careful (EW108)* seems to bore no fruit. She considers him as a patient waiting for her nurse to make him reconcile with the world.

Marian fails to realize that she is being cleverly fooled by Duncan. He projects himself as victim whereas Marian actually is the victim. Her increasing sense of feeling that Peter does not love for her sake but for his own convenience, contributes her growing intimacy with Duncan failing meanwhile to realize that Duncan is just another man consuming her. She feels that Peter or Duncan no longer loves her truly. Instead they have been consuming her and she on her part allows them to do so. Marian has gained valuable experience. The experienced Marian bakes a cake and designs it as a woman much as a projection of herself and asks Peter to come home. When Peter arrives she gives the *edible woman* to him saying:

You've been trying to destroy me, have'nt you? [. . .] You have been trying to assimilate me, But I've made you a substitute [. . .]. This is what you really all along isn't it? (EW 301)

Peter stared at her newly acquired intelligence and goes off never to return back. Once she becomes a much clearer person, she once again starts eating the cake all by herself as her appetite returns to her, thus ceasing to be an edible woman .Prather states thus:

Man has subjugated woman to his will, used her as a means to promote his selfish gratification, to minister to his sensual pleasure, to be instrumental in promoting his comfort ,but never has he desired to elevate her to that rank she was created to fill , he has done all he could do to debase and enslave her mind [. . .] (85).

By baking, decorating, serving and consuming the cake- woman image she has been conditioned to project, Marian announces to herself and others that she is not food. Marian , the protagonist of this novel realizes the same after initial subjugation to Peter and by the end of the novel, Marian undergoes a new experience .In other words, in the **Edible Woman , Atwood `de-constructs Marian`s fictional journey from an adopted posture of self - negation and self - effacement towards one of self - certitude and self assertion (Panther 82)**. Now, Marian becomes a cheerful, healthy person able to lead a much normal and responsible life than before. She learns to accept a future without Peter or Duncan .Thus Marian, the experiencer ceases to be an edible woman .Here it in apt to quote Salat.

Thus Marian achieves a symbolic purification of herself by refusing to eat and her final act of baking a cake in the shape of a woman to offer Peter as a woman –substitute symbolizes her having attained the necessary self-knowledge. Henceforth, it implies, she will not be Peter`s- or – any man`s, for that matter –consumable commodity [. . .]. Marian is finally able to defy Peter`s- the male`s –desire to colonize her and refuses to be a mindless body [. . .]. Marian has finally been able to refuse to be ‘the edible woman’ and she, instead just a woman. (66).

Surely from these traumatic experiences she learns a great deal about life, the process of living, about being human, understands how the female 'will' struggles as a result of the flesh to be sold in the matrimonial market by selfish male willed, superior, egoists and in search of a viable route for survival. Thus in the beginning Marian accepts the condition of her life and decides to cope with the outer situations. But when she realizes that accepting the condition would mean losing her identity and ability to existence and stops being a victim. Commenting on the experience gained by Marian, Rigney states:

Marian knows more than she did in the beginning [. . .] she has come to terms with something, has objectified her situation and apprehended it more realistically. The cake thus serves as a reflection, a way of seeing herself as in a mirror, and it expresses a truth not before perceived. (34)

Conclusion:

Thus at the end symbolically she gives a message to Peter and to the readers that she is no longer an edible woman, and no one takes advantage of her innocence. Marian indeed through her experience has gained knowledge and becomes wise. A cake is a cake an edible, a woman is a woman not edible. The dark voyage downwards and inwards is over. She has returned to life and to consuming.

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