Margaret Atwood's Novel of the 60s
Chapter - II

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Margaret Atwood's first novel *The Edible Woman* appeared late in 1969, and during 1970 readers in Canada, the United States and Britain were beginning to ask, 'Margaret Who?' Atwood was known if at all as a young poet who had won an important Canadian Literary Prize, the Governor General's Award, for *The Circle Game* in 1966. By 1985, when *The Handmaid's Tale* appeared, the reviewer in the *London Review of Books* could claim that Margaret Atwood was the most distinguished novelist under fifty currently writing in English, and now thirty eight years on from *The Edible Woman* she is an international literary celebrity whose work has been translated into more than twenty languages and published in twenty five countries. A versatile and prolific writer, Atwood has produced twelve novels, a number of books poetry and short story collections, in addition to an important book of literary criticism and numerous essays and reviews. She has also written two children's books, compiled and illustrated *The Can Lit Food Book*, and is the editor of the *Oxford Book of Canadian Verse* in English and co-editor of the *Oxford Book of Short Stores in English*. She has not, however, written a biography or an autobiography, and
as she said in an interview, deliberately distancing her private self from her public image, 'Do not know that I ever will?'

Atwood's *The Edible Woman* is the first Canadian novel that anticipates the trends of feminism found in the later women novelists such as Doris Lessing Margaret Drabble and Toni Morrison. It is a very highly complex piece of realistic fiction. It has been read and interpreted variously by several scholars and critics. Though the novel was written in 1965, that is at the very beginning of the women's liberation, it appeared only in 1969 at the beginning of 'second wave' feminism. *The Edible Woman* is Margaret Atwood's maiden attempt at fiction writing. As the novel predates the Women's Liberation Movement Atwood rightly describes *The Edible Woman* as 'protofeminist' novel. It shows the influence of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* and Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*. It exposes how even an economically independent woman takes a long time to be conscious of her marginalization as the 'second sex'. It is an indictment of 'male consumption', 'over richness' and 'over decoration' of women in patriarchal, capitalistic, consumer society. Thus, Atwood is chiefly concerned with 'deconstructing' gender politics in *The Edible Woman* as in her other novels.

The title of the novel suggests that the food metaphor plays a dominant part in the evocation of the meaning of the novel
and also that more than food gets eaten in a capitalist and patriarchal society dominated by conspicuous consumption, rationality, and industrialism, where there is no place for the attitudes, desires, beliefs and opinions expressed by the females, the central figures of Margaret Atwood's fiction.

As is the case with Atwood's other heroines, Marian McAlpin, the heroine of *The Edible Woman* is also a sensitive, self reflective and finely articulate female. She uses an artful language, to voice forth the changes that take place in her attitudes and feelings as she journeys through her various associations with several male and female friends and arrives at ways of understanding as to what it means to be a woman. Though the narrative language abounds in various symbols and metaphors it is the food metaphor which is the chief vehicle that serves to put forward the feminist tendencies of the heroine that help her protest against the dehumaning tendencies of society and save herself by rejecting her inauthentic self.

The novel introduces us to the protagonist, Marian McAlpin, a fairly sensible, intelligent young woman, decently liberal in her views and somewhat defensive about her own individuality and her responsibility to others. She is employed in the Seymour Surveys Company, a market research group. She shares an apartment with Ainsley Tewce and the relationship
between them is purely non-obligatory. On weekends, she occupies herself with Peter Wollander, a lawyer, and the relationship is a non-interfering one, based on non-expectations for the future. It suited both because Marian chose not to be close to anyone and because Peter sees marriage as male capitulation and capture. Further Marian has no really strong views on anything. Though she perceives the hypocrisy and unreality of much of society, she accepts it.

Her acceptance of the consumer consumed syndrome as the basis of society seems to stem from her own distance from it, and from a feeling of ineffectuality on her own part — Marian is an instinctive victim never naming her hunters, but knowing who and they are just the same.¹

Her feeling of ineffectiveness makes her think that she has no power to confront and overcome the sources of her oppression, whether they are people like Peter to institutions. Peter, who as the last of his bachelor friends, later proposes to Marian just because it suits him and his values which are well synchronized with those of the plastic society he serves. He rationalizes his sudden surrender to marriage by saying:

A fellow can't keep running around indefinitely. It'll be a lot better in the long run for my practice too, the
clients like to know you have got a wife; people get suspicious of a single man after a certain age, they start thinking you are queer or something.

... And there's one thing about you, Marian, I know I can always depend on you. Most women are pretty scatterbrained but you're such a sensible girl.²

Part and parcel of a 'consumer society', Marian is faced with a choice of being 'edible' to her husband and remaining single as an individual and asserting herself, chooses the latter and thus refuses to be an edible woman. But the choices available to her are limited. She has to confront several issues crucial to her.

"What does it mean to be a woman, what is her situation, and what constitutes feminity?"³

"Through a series of haunting images, a sequence of dream-like hallucinations which flicker through the mind" of Marian, the novel presents a kaleidoscopic picture of her life. To make the picture more real Marian is presented as 'perfect foil to her friends', wherein, owing to her coming into contact with them she learns immensely of women's problems. The dealing as it is with the patriarchal society which has become synonymous with of women especially, the novel presents 'symbolic cannibalism' of women. The novel proves once and for all that financial independence is no independence at all. The awareness of
being subjugated and victimized has to come from within the self of an individual. This is exactly what the novel depicts, the reasons for the suppression of women within and without marriage. *The Edible Woman* is a quest for self-identity by Marina, the protagonist. Facing an identity crisis, she is confronted with various alternatives. The first phase of the problem Marian has to face and overcome is at her place. The company Marian works for has a highly stratified, three tiered hierarchies structure. The top floor is occupied by men and is not accessible to her. The bottom is managed mostly by old housewives and she does not wish to go there.

This disturbing awareness is the direct result of a technologically advanced society which, by its very advancement, forces individuals and is therefore of a general nature. Marina's crisis, however, acquires a feminine colouration, when she looks for alternatives to her present situation. These alternatives are represented in her office colleagues Eurney, Lucie and Millie her friend Clara and her husband Joe, Peter and Ainsley her flatmate.

Peter considers Marian a sensible girl, because she leaves all the major and minor decisions to him. Marian, on the other hand, agrees to the marriage as she sees marriage as a matter of convenience and inevitability, especially after the trauma she undergoes, when she hears about the pension plan in her office.
Given here insights, her constant paranoia, her inner doubts and defensiveness, it is not surprising that she considers marriage as a means of total concealment. It is when she is about to take this extreme step that her body intervenes and confronts her with the reality of the situation. It makes her realize that marriage to Peter means more than protection, that it means death a form of socially acceptable suicide. The rebellion is carried on through the 'body language' in which the body makes it impossible for Marian to eat one thing after the other and it is in this sense that the significance of the good metaphor can be felt.

The first symptoms of anorexia are seen in Marian immediately after she agrees to the marriage proposal made by Peter. When she goes to a restaurant alone with her colleagues, who are all spinsters, she finds it difficult to eat.

Marian was surprised at herself. She had been dying to go for lunch, she had been starving, and now she wasn't even hungry.4

First, her body refuses anything that may at one time have been alive. It begins when she goes to dinner with Peter.

Watching him operating on the steak like that, carving a straight slice and then dividing it into neat cubes, made her think of the diagram of planned cow at the front of one of her cookbooks; the cow all
the different cuts were taken. What they were eating now was from some part of the back, she thought: cut on the dotted line.5

After this, one after the other like a pork chop, the planned cow, the planned sheep are crossed out of her list of eatables.

Whatever it was that had been making these decisions, not her mind certainly, rejected anything that had an indication of bone or tendon or fibre. She has been afraid to try chicken, she had been fond of it once, but it came with an unpleasantly complete skeletal structure, and the skin, she predicted, would be too much like an arm with goose bumps.6

For protein variety and energy for sometime, she realises on omelettes, peanuts and cheese, which also slowly she finds impossible to eat, as she identifies herself with these things also.

The next morning, however, when she opened her soft boiled egg and saw the yolk looking up at her with its one significant and accusing yellow eye, she found her mouth closing together like a frightened Seaanemone, it's living; it's alive, the muscles in her throat said and tightened. She pushed the dish away.7

A pro-feminist to the letter, Ainsley has strong views about the male dominated consumer society. That she becomes a
victim of the self same society is one of the ironies of fate. Ainsley though against marriage does not deny motherhood. She does want to get pregnant, for she would like a child of her own. She thinks that motherhood satisfies one's 'deepest femininity'. Wanting children 'by choice' rather than as a natural consequence of a happy relationship in marriage, she looks out for a perfect male specimen to father her child and finds one in Len, thus partially fulfilling her dream. It does not take her long to realize that such a role as she has chosen for herself would be a difficult one to perform in the patriarchal society and she changes her views regarding matrimony and accordingly gets married to provide the infant a father. Marian, repulsed by Ainsley's cold blooded attitude to men and marriage, thinks it is all wrong.

Clara and Joe present Marian with another alternative, a different facet of love and marriage altogether. Their is a fairly good marriage with three children, Clara is quite content to remain within the bounds of family. But Marian is not unaware of Joe's condescending attitude toward women. Clara, impractical and non-assertive as she is, tends to be rather leaning on Joe and "lets herself be treated like a thing, much to Ainsley's annoyance." In this regard, Marian agrees with Ainsley, for it becomes clear to them that the power of the wife declines as the number of children grows.
Choices and alternatives present by her friends apart, Marian also feels outraged by the attitude adopted by Seymour surveys toward its women employees. The Manager Mrs. Bogue regards the very acts of marriage and pregnancy as offensive and disloyal to the company. Marian refuses to accept the alternatives given to her in Ainsley and Clara. She seeks something different from life. She rather hopes that she would be able to fulfill this yearning for a better life with Peter. Peter in his turn is drawn to Marian because she is unlike the other women of his acquaintance; undemanding and non-aggressive "a girl who wouldn't try to take over his life". When he proposes to her, he gives out his reason as to Marian's suitability as a wife.

"And there's one thing about you, Marian, I know I can always depend on you. Most women are pretty scatterbrained but 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."8

In other words, Peter is trying to fit Marian into a conventionalized, even stereotyped image of a woman passive and dependent. Marian accepted the proposal of Peter and in spite of her unease at the acceptance, tries to defend her choice.
"I'd always assumed through high school and college that I was going to marry someone eventually and have children, everyone does. - - - She's against it on principle, and life isn't by principles but by adjustments. As Peter says, you can't continue to run around indefinitely; people who aren't married get funny in middle age, embittered or addled or something - - - But although I'm sure it was in the back of my mind I hadn't consciously expected it to happen so soon or quite the way it did."9

It is clear that Marian is just echoing Peter's words that "She has ceased to be her true being." Here Marian is accepting the role that is traditionally foisted upon women. It is only after the acceptance of the marriage proposal that she is assailed by serious doubts as to whether she made the right choice. Her relationship with Peter seems to have undergone a sea change and Marian realizes that;

"She had left herself be sold as some kind of a desirable commodity."10

She fails to identify the real Peter underneath all that sophistication and doubts her understanding of his true self. Disliking strongly Peter's manipulation of herself, she identifies him with an anonymous caller who introduced himself to ladies
as a seller of underwear, but whose real identity was not known to anybody.

This was his true self, the core of his personality, the central Peter who had been occupying her mind more and more lately. Perhaps, this was what lay under the surfaces, that secret identity which in spite of her many guesses and attempts and half guesses she was aware she had still not uncovered: he was really underwear man.¹¹

Nauseated by Peter's hunting activities Marian goes off non-vegetarian food. Soon, she finds it difficult to eat anything at all. The more uncertain her relationship with Peter, the more disturbed she becomes and her mental strain weans her away from food and she feels more and more reluctant to eat anything. She fears for her sanity and thinks if things go at the same rate. Soon she would be requiring the services of a psychiatrist, feeling she is becoming mentally unstable. But both Peter and Clara assure her that "She is wonderfully normal," and tell her is nothing more than bridal nerves. The unreality of her situation becomes more evident to her when she agrees to play the part of a meek and submissive fiancé as dictated by Peter. She seeks herself out in all her finery but when she looks up in the mirror she fails to see the rightness of it, as she is unable to
recognize the true Marian behind the glittering facade. Nothing seems to be real anymore.

What was it that lay beneath the surface these pieces were floating on, holding them together? She held both of her naked arms out towards the mirror. They were the only portion of her flesh that was without a cloth or nylon or leather or varnish covering but — even they looked fake, like soft, pinkish-white rubber or plastic, boneless, flexible.¹²

It dawns on her that she is nothing but a saleable commodity wrapped up as a wife. She at once grasps that Peter manipulated her cleverly and made her a puppet in his hands. She recognizes her loss of identity and her ‘edibility’ to Peter. Her sense of victimization becomes acute after she comes across Joe discussing the after effects of university education on women. The conversation provides Marian with a flash of insight. She realizes what she would be expected to do the mantle of a conventional woman, assuming the role of a meek and docile woman, dependent on her husband, allowing him to devour her slowly and ravishingly.

Thus, identifying with lower forms of life, she refuses to eat, which she equates with preying upon first steak and all meats, then eggs, then carrots. She reaches a stage when she is unable
to destroy the lowest form of life. She finds herself unable to clean
the used vessels and the kitchen sink. As Peter begins to gain
control over her in every aspect, her identifications with the
hunted and the consumed reaches the precipitation point. She
comes to the realization that she is powerless to control her own
life. Marian's horror at the act of consuming flesh coincides with
her alienation and detachment from the society. She becomes a
passive figure, just watching the society with shocking clarity
and not playing any active role. She comes to view 'eating' as a
violent action concealed behind the social facade of dining
which also reminds us of the sacrifice of the victim in the Moose
Beer ads. The cook book description of preparing turtle soup
suggests to Marian the deaths of early Christian Martyrs.

You were supposed to keep your live turtle in a
cardboard box or other cage for about a week, loving
it and feeding it hamburger to rid it of its impurities. -
- - - The whole procedure was reminiscent of the
deaths of early Christian Martyrs. What fiendishness
went on in kitchens across the country in the name of
providing food!  

In terms of the ever present food metaphor, Peter is master
chef, and Marian is in grave danger of becoming puff pastry. He
subtly prepares her for the different fillings he will demand of her
for his cultured palate. George Woodcock has rightly described the novel as a "novel about emotional cannibalism," noting the predatory nature of human beings and the necessity to maintain the distances and defences between them in the human society.

We, then, see Marian's revulsion spreading "from the things eaten and the act of eating to the body which lives by ingesting and regurgitation." She begins to view even the women of Seymour Surveys as they celebrate her engagement with detachment.

What peculiar creatures they were; and the continual flux between the outside and the inside, taking things in, giving them out, chewing words, potato chips, burps, grease hair, babies milk, excrement, cookies, vomit coffee, tomato juice, blood, tea, sweat, liquor, tears and garbage.14

Later she discovers that she too is "one of them". And her dream of being trapped in the supermarket at closing time and found in the morning in a Coma, surrounded by overflowing carts suggests both her sense of claustrophobia within, and her identification with, a consumer society where life preys upon life. The idea of consumerism is again in terms of the food metaphors and metaphors of the body human or animal in decay. As the
impending engagement party approaches, Marian becomes more and more aware of her loss of free will and choice. She finds herself lost and she wants to know what she was becoming and what direction she was going to take. Waking up one morning, she finds herself changed and wants to clarify with others like Clara and Peter as to what kind of abnormality had crept into her.

Marian’s presence in the beauty parlour reminds one of the preparation of animals for the sacrifice. She becomes an object. Her hair is decorated “like a cake something to be carefully iced and ornamented.” Later when she gazes into the mirror and sees not herself but the beautiful Egyptian mummy, an iced, frozen, ornamental life, form devoid of life, whose open eyes reveal a ‘serene vacancy’.

Marian stared into the Egyptian lidded and outlinked and thickly fringed eyes of a person she had never seen before.15

In the party, Marian congratulates herself prematurely on having evoked from Peter the image of domesticated male, and begins to dream in Peter’s bedroom.

She opened a door to the right and went in. There was Peter, forty five and balding - - - beside a barbecue with a long fork in his hand. He was
wearing a white chef’s apron - - - but she wasn’t there
and the discovery chilled her.16

She was panic stricken and when Peter pursues her with a camera in hand to capture her picture she gets hysterical and runs away to Duncan hoping to regain control of herself. Then comes Marian’s act of liberation, through the most crucial image of the novel, the cake-woman or the edible woman. Marian takes all pains to make a cake-woman and presents it before Peter to be eaten. The cake-woman is a symbolic representation of the woman. That is what Peter really wants Marian to be. When he refuses to eat the cake, the cake woman, and is horrified at seeing it, it is clear that he does not understand Marian. But what triumphs is Marian’s sense of self-determination her recognition that she was being consumed by Peter and her desire to remain intact as a person. Once Peter leaves her apartment and her life, her body returns to normal metabolism, as she eats the cake herself. With her new consciousness she has a new perspective. She is no longer a status symbol for Peter, once the transference of victim identity she has projected out of food disappears. When Duncan later visits her, she offers the remaining cake to him, which he eats. But much should not be read into this as Duncan is not going to be the substitute for Peter. While Peter is similar to a cannibal, Duncan is "a more insidious
kind of parasite, a lamprey battering on her compassion of feed his monstrous self-pity."

In the critical conversations surrounding Margaret Atwood's first novel, *The Edible Women*, we find evidence of the complex way character may be used to provoke reader participation in the text's organizing fantasy. Because Atwood is contemporary writer who sometimes directs asides to the academic interpreter, as she does in this work, her fiction presents special pleasures and hidden challenges for critic or readers. *The Edible Woman* is, as the author described it, 'protofeminist'. And yet despite the fact that, as Atwood recalls, "there was no women's movement in slight" when does make a strong political statement. For Atwood deploys her female protagonist, Marian, to expose and subvert the ideological constructs that have long defined and confined women. Atwood's novel, then, does have a political agenda.

Subverting the traditional romance plot trajectory with its prescribed ending that insists on marriage or motherhood as the appropriate outcome for the female heroine, *The Edible Women* shows how female passivity and submersion in the traditional wife and mother roles can pose a serious threat to the very survival of the self. Because Marian is depicted as a passive victim. Indeed, one of the central premises of Atwood's narrative is that women are defined by their culture as passive objects for
male consumption. The fact that Peter's grisly hunting story about killing a rabbit prefaces his pursuit of and proposal to Marian underlines the text's view of the sexual hunt as a form of predation. Since patriarchy demands selflessness of the female, to be chosen by a male is also to risk being assimilated. At once Atwood's narrative makes a political statement and provides a psychological assessment of the inherent pathology of the traditional male-female relationship.

Through the imagery of the three layers, Atwood is depicting a metaphoric parallel for the woman's place in patriarchal society. The three layers represent three levels: mind, body and matter. The men are minds; the women are bodies. This is the received categorization in the patriarchal discourse. This hierarchical distribution defines the woman as above the 'matter' but below the 'mind' and Marian, the woman, is faced with the dilemma of what she is to 'become'. As she says:

"I couldn't become one of the men upstairs; I couldn't become a machine person or one of the questionnaire making ladies as that would be a step down."\(^{17}\)

Marian's problem, therefore, is one of 'becoming' which is both a metaphysical and a socio-political problem. At the metaphysical plane, Marian's quest is for a meaningful human identity; at the socio-political level, her quest is to become neither
a man nor a machine but a woman, with an absolute as against a relatively defined identity. Marian gets grooved into the middle pint of the office structure for the whole of her life. Salat rightly says:

Marian’s problematic of ‘becoming’ constitutes and express Atwood’s feminist polemics against restrictive gender roles imposed upon women in paternalist society. - - - The hierarchical world Marian inhabits appropriates her identity and reduces her to being an in-between thing and mindless body.¹⁸

Marian finds herself reduced to the state of a destitute girl. She is extremely melancholic and feels dejected about future. Gradually, she realizes the futility of starving herself to death. She begins to see both Peter and Duncan in their true colours and recognizes her complicity in her victimization. She understands how she has allowed Peter and Duncan to exploit and ‘eat’ her. Marian is made a victim of symbolic cannibalism. As Linda Hutcheon remarks:

"As both a Canadian and woman, Atwood protests any tendency toward easy passivity and naivety; she refuses to allow, women to deny their complicity in the power structures that may subject them."¹⁹
Marian rejects her passivity and refuses to be a victim. She bakes the cake-woman to test and expose the true colours of Peter and Duncan. It is a test 'simple and direct as litmus paper'. Marian explains her objective for creating the cake-women. She bakes the cake-woman in her own image, the surrogate of her own artificial self presented at the cocktail party and Gibson comments:

Marian performs an action, a preposterous one in way, as all the pieces of symbolism in a realistic context are, but what she is obviously making is a substitute of herself.20

She has become a sculptor rather than the lifeless statue erected in the name of beauty. By creating the cake, she would like to symbolize her feelings in the wake of her experiences with Peter and Duncan. Thus, symbolically, the cake woman represents woman as an object for male consumption. It also reveals over-richness and over-decoration visible in the gender system of marriage. This gesture of Marian is at once a complicity and critique of domestic myth. Howells rightly asserts:

"Marian's perception of women's condition and fate as decreed by the feminine mystique so that her cake baking is both a gesture of complicity in domestic myth and also a critique of it."21
Marian may not be the first one to become the victim of Duncan's lust. Deceit is the very breath of his life and with his meticulous planning he exploits many women. Marian's encounter with Duncan shatters her completely. Now, she decides to stop eating altogether until she finds a way out to resolve the crisis and Chaos in which she finds herself. His refusal to eat grows out of her unwillingness to be eaten in turn. Emma Parker rightly says:

"Her non-eating is physical expression of her powerlessness and, at the same time, a protest against that powerlessness"\(^{22}\)

That Duncan, not Marian, has a starved appearance points to one of Duncan's primary functions in the text. Just as the central and longest section of *The Edible Woman* shifts from first to third person narration and thus partially distances readers from Marin's experience of disintegration anxiety, so it partially displaces Marian's anxieties onto the enigmatic Duncan. The fact that readers are forced to decode Duncan also deflects attention away from the anxiety subtending the narrative description of Marian's fragmenting selfhood. An interpretation actively fostered by the text, and one embraced by numerous critics is that Duncan represents an aspect of Marian's self.

In the description of Marian's creation of the cake woman, the novel recapitulates key images used to describe Marian's
transformation into a consumable object. In essence, Marian does to the cake woman what was done to her, thus asserting active mastery over passive suffering. She begins 'to operate' on the cake woman, just as she was operated on at the hairdresser's. She scoops out part of the cake and makes a head with it, that the contents of her head had been 'scooped out' after she became engaged to Peter; and she uses icing to draw in "masses of intricate baroque scrolls and swirls", of hair on her creation, recanting what was done to her when her hair was decorated like a cake.

Atwood's fictional method is what is now recognised as a feminist revision of a traditional genre highlighting the artifice of literary conventions and the social myths they inscribe. There are other divergences from traditional comic patterns here as well. Not only is the artifice of femininity exposed but the party provides the first occasion when the male protagonists speak about femininity from their own perspective, revealing a surprisingly high level of masculine anxiety about this topic. The most devastating attack on the feminine mystique comes from Clara's husband Joe, the philosophy lecturer, who earnestly challenges such mythologising, making a political statement from his personal point of view as a husband and a teacher:
She's hollow, she doesn't know who she is any more; her core has been destroyed. I can see it happening with my one female students. But it would be futile to warn them.23

At last Marian knows that she does not want, and so she escapes from the social script to her unscripted meeting in the Laundromat with Duncan and into their brief liaison in a sleazy hotel. Though the consumer society gulps up, Marian has realigned her body with her head. Marian's release is immediate. No longer isolated and alien, Marian has rejoined society. In her newly found state of freedom, she is prepared to take an active role in her life, find a new home, a new job and presumably, a new boyfriend which is suggestive of the ambiguity behind the ending of the novel. The story of Marian's self-discovery is the frightening vision of struggle for sanity. The proof of her sanity is that Marian has learned to live meaningfully. Atwood has presented a comedy of resistance to social myths of femininity through the discriminating eye of Marian, the champion of feminism. As Howells puts it:

"This is sociology translated into the private idiom of one fiction character."24

The entire book is full of contrasts which are manifested as the choices with which Marian is confronted. She must be either
a victor or a victim, either consumer or consumed. This seems to be confirmed by the technique adopted by the novelist. In part III, the first person voice returns as Marian rejects her role as a victim, transcends her role as a product, and consumes her disembodied self, as she confirms her new identity. This is suggested by her consumption of the cake woman at a crucial point of the novel. In refusing to eat, Marian refuses to be labelled as the victim of a system which treats people as consumer products. But as her anorexia intensifies, she finds herself withdrawing from meat, eggs, and vegetables and finally relies on vitamin pills and thus the boundary between the natural and synthetic begins to disintegrate. Marian’s rejection of food points out, paradoxically enough, that in order to survive one must starve and that by starving one can survive. Her non-eating thus turns into a metaphor of sustenance. Her rejection is also suggestive of her rejection of a culture which tends to exploit women and treat them as edible objects. It is her refusal to eat, once again, which leads to her discovery of the ‘natural’, real and untainted female self.

Once she comes to an awareness of her real self, she rejects both Peter and Duncan in the hope that she will be forced to become productive by relying on herself. So, she is led back to the super market and back to her kitchen to create the cake
which symbolizes the artificiality of her existence which, in turn, is destroyed, when she consumes it. By this act of eating it, she also reaffirms the fact that she still thrives on artifice, she continues to be sustained by the symbol of all that she once was. Much of the ambivalence in the novel results from what Atwood seems intent on suggesting, that people are not what they really think they are, and that 'everything that rises must eventually converge'.

The Edible Woman is viewed often as a contemporary comedy of manners, as a satire on Modern Society, which in the final analysis offers a depressing vision of life, depicting men as propagators and victims of corruption, vice and lust, man, getting caught in this web, deludes himself into believing that his own debased or immoral viewed does participate in comedy of manners which comments on a world where men and women are more faceless non-entities and where the search for true identity only leads to a 'sinking feeling'.
References


5 Ibid., p.155.

6 Ibid., p.156.

7 Ibid., p.165.

8 Ibid., p.89.

9 Ibid., p.102.


12 Ibid., p.229.

13 Ibid., p.159.

14 Ibid., p.171.
15 Ibid., p.228.
16 Ibid., p.250.
17 Ibid., p.20.